

Shaping Islamic Education to Build Muslim Youth for the Challenges of 21st Century Life

4. Nurturing a Yearning for Jannah

Muslim children today live in a consumerism obsessed materialistic world that is trying to create Paradise on earth for them, with dazzling temptations and pleasures galore, many of which go against their Deen. In this capitalism dominated world, the pursuit of possessions, desires, and enjoyment as well as living for the here and now with little consideration for what happens after death, has become the environment that surrounds our young. Faced with this reality, which seeks to mesmerize individuals with the glittering illusion of this Dunya, and which may prevent our youth from fulfilling their Islamic duties, it is absolutely vital that we create in our children, a yearning for Jannah and an understanding of how little the pleasures of this life are compared to the next, as well as a constant awareness of the temporary nature of this world and the true meaning of success and failure.

We need to make them truly appreciate how this life is like a piece of ice left out in the sun – it will soon melt and vanish, while the Hereafter that Allah (swt) has set aside for us is for eternity. Allah (swt) says,

﴿أَعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُوَ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَمًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعٌ الْعُرُورِ﴾

“Know that the life of this world is only play and amusement, pomp and mutual boasting among you, and rivalry in respect of wealth and children. (It is) like vegetation after rain whose growth pleases the farmer but then it dries up and you see it turning yellow; then it becomes dried up and broken down; and in the hereafter is a severe chastisement and (also) forgiveness from Allah and (His) pleasure; and the life of this world is nothing but a deceiving enjoyment.” [Al-Hadid: 20]

﴿وَفَرِحُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَاعٌ﴾

“...and they rejoice in the life of the world, whereas the life of this world compared with the Hereafter is nothing but a brief passing enjoyment.” [Ar-Rad: 26]

So, the joys of this life are nothing but a fleeting, deceiving enjoyment. Do we therefore really want to sacrifice the eternal delights of Paradise due to the fear of losing a few temporary moments of pleasure in this life which may keep us away from fulfilling all our duties to our Rabb?

Furthermore, creating a yearning for Jannah requires much more than just building an understanding of Jannah and Jahannum in our children. Nor can it be built by focusing more on the punishments of Hellfire when they neglect their Islamic duties or overstep its limits – although they should be aware of this too. Rather, it requires us to consistently and repeatedly discuss with them the abundant evidences in the Qur’an and Sunnah that describe the amazing delights of Jannah, when trying to motivate them to do the Islamic obligations and keep away from its prohibitions without faltering. This is especially important when they find certain Islamic actions difficult to do, or lapse in adhering to them as all of us do at times. We need to make them aware that they will be given everything that their heart could ever wish for, and their minds could ever imagine, and more Insha Allah if they are consistent and steadfast upon their Islamic duties! For example, Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا﴾

“And when you look there [in Paradise] you will see a delight [that cannot be imagined], and a great dominion.” [Al Insan: 20]

﴿يَعْبَادِ لَا خَوْفَ عَلَيْكُمُ الْيَوْمَ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ * الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ * ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ أَنْتُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُكُمْ تُحْبَرُونَ * يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِصِحَافٍ مِّنْ ذَهَبٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ وَفِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِيهِ الْأَنْفُسُ وَتَلَذُّ الْأَعْيُنُ وَأَنْتُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ * وَتِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ * لَكُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ كَثِيرَةٌ مِّنْهَا تَأْكُلُونَ﴾

“(It will be said to the true believers of Islam): 'My worshippers! No fear shall be on you this Day, nor shall you grieve. (You) who believed in Our ayat (proofs, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) and were Muslims. Enter Jannah, you and your wives, in happiness.' Trays of gold and cups will be passed round them; (there will be) therein all that their inner-selves could desire, and all that eyes could delight in and you will abide therein forever. This is the Paradise which you have been made to inherit because of your deeds which you used to do (in the life of the world). Therein for you will be fruits in plenty, of which you will eat (as you desire).” [Az-Zukhruf: 68-73]

The Sahaba (ra) asked the Prophet (saw) what Paradise was built from, and he (saw) replied,

﴿لَبِنَةٌ مِّنْ فِضَّةٍ وَلَبِنَةٌ مِّنْ ذَهَبٍ وَمِلَاطُهَا الْمَسْكُ الْأَدْفَرُ وَحَصْبَاؤُهَا اللَّوْلُؤُ وَالْيَاقُوتُ وَتُرْبَتُهَا الرَّعْفَرَانُ مَنْ يَدْخُلُهَا يَنْعَمُ وَلَا يَبْئَسُ وَيُخَلَّدُ وَلَا يَمُوتُ لَا تَبْلَى ثِيَابُهُمْ وَلَا يَفْنَى شَبَابُهُمْ﴾

“Bricks of gold and silver and mortar of fragrant musk; its pebbles are pearls and rubies, and its soil is saffron. Whoever enters it is blessed with joy and will never be miserable; he will remain there forever and never die; his clothes will never wear out, and his youth will never fade away.”

The Prophet (saw) also said, as reported by Abu Hurayrah (ra),

﴿يَقُولُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَعَدَدْتُ لِعِبَادِي الصَّالِحِينَ مَا لَا عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ وَلَا أُذُنٌ سَمِعَتْ وَلَا خَطَرَ عَلَى قَلْبِ بَشَرٍ﴾

“Allah, the Exalted, has said: 'I have prepared for my righteous slaves what no eye has seen, nor any ear has heard, and the mind of no man has conceived.'” Then he (saw) recited,

﴿فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُمْ مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

“No person knows what is kept hidden for them of joy as a reward for what they used to do.” [As-Sajdah: 17]

We should also create an awareness in our children that the short-lived pleasures of this world are nothing compared to the unimaginable lasting delights that await the righteous Believer in Jannah. Allah (swt) said,

﴿أَرْضَيْتُمْ بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا مِنَ الْآخِرَةِ فَمَا مَتَّعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا﴾

“...Are you pleased with the life of this world rather than the Hereafter? But little is the enjoyment of the life of this world as compared with the Hereafter.” [Al-Taubah: 38]

And the Prophet (saw) said,

﴿وَاللَّهِ مَا الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مِثْلُ مَا يَجْعَلُ أَحَدُكُمْ إِصْبَعَهُ هَذِهِ - وَأَشَارَ يَحْيَى بِالسَّبَابَةِ - فِي النَّيْمِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ بِمِ يَرْجِعُ﴾

“The life of this world compared to the Hereafter is as if one of you were to put his finger in the ocean and take it out again then compare the water that remains on his finger to the water that remains in the ocean”.

He (saw) also said,

﴿إِنَّ مَوْضِعَ سَوْطٍ فِي الْجَنَّةِ لَخَيْرٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا فِيهَا﴾

“The space taken up in the Hereafter by something as little as the whip of one of you is better than the whole of this earth and what is on it.”

Alongside discussing these vital concepts with our children, we need to encourage them to reflect deeply on the great loss we incur if we buy this life in exchange for the next by neglecting the duties of our Deen, for we are trading in the lasting delights of Jannah for the short-lived pleasures of this Dunya. This is surely the worst of all exchanges and an

immeasurable loss that we make. What greater regret can there be than this? Indeed, one of Shaytan's greatest deceptions is magnifying the lures and pleasures of this life in our eyes such that we are distracted from the delights of Jannah in order that we neglect the Commands of our Rabb (swt). Allah (swt) says,

﴿أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ﴾

“O mankind! Verily the Promise of Allah is true. So let not this present life deceive you, and let not the chief deceiver (Shaytan) deceive you about Allah.” [Fatir: 5]

However, we also need to empathise with the great challenges that our young face in holding onto their Deen today, which are often more intense than those that we as parents or teachers ever faced growing up. We need to recognize this and express this to our youngsters. But alongside this, we should remind them that securing those amazing rewards in Jannah does not come easy, for Allah (swt) will test us in our belief to see if we are true to Him (swt) as believers and worthy of being the dwellers of Jannah. Therefore, it involves at times great struggle and sacrifice of our personal interests and desires in order to fulfill our duties to Allah (swt) and to keep to His Limits. But just a moment spent in Paradise will make us forget even the severest difficulties or hardships we faced in this life in holding fast to our Deen. In the following beautiful hadith, the Prophet (saw) warns us not to become distracted by the deceiving enjoyment, temptations or fears of this life that keep us away from the obedience to our Lord (swt). He (saw) said,

«يُؤْتَى بِأَنعَمِ أَهْلِ الدُّنْيَا مِنْ أَهْلِ النَّارِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَيُصْبَغُ فِي النَّارِ صَبْغَةً ثُمَّ يُقَالُ يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ هَلْ رَأَيْتَ خَيْرًا قَطُّ هَلْ مَرَّ بِكَ نَعِيمٌ قَطُّ فَيَقُولُ لَا وَاللَّهِ يَا رَبِّ . وَيُؤْتَى بِأَشَدِّ النَّاسِ بُؤْسًا فِي الدُّنْيَا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ فَيُصْبَغُ صَبْغَةً فِي الْجَنَّةِ فَيُقَالُ لَهُ يَا ابْنَ آدَمَ هَلْ رَأَيْتَ بُؤْسًا قَطُّ هَلْ مَرَّ بِكَ شِدَّةٌ قَطُّ فَيَقُولُ لَا وَاللَّهِ يَا رَبِّ مَا مَرَّ بِي بُؤْسٌ قَطُّ وَلَا رَأَيْتُ شِدَّةً قَطُّ»

“On the Day of Judgement, from amongst all those destined for Hell, a particular man, the richest man in the world, will be brought forth and cast into Hell for a moment. Then he will be taken out and will be asked, ‘O son of Adam, have you ever known the good things of life? Have you ever seen comfortable days?’ And he will reply, ‘By God, O Lord, never.’ Then from amongst all those destined for Paradise, one who has suffered the most in the world will be brought forth and will be allowed to enter Paradise for a moment. Then he will be taken out and asked, ‘O son of Adam, have you ever seen suffering? Have you ever experienced hardship in your life?’ He will reply, ‘By God, no. I have never suffered. I have never undergone hardship’.”

Hence, just one moment in the Fire would suffice to make the one who had all the comforts and pleasures of this worldly life forget all the enjoyment he may have had in this world, while one moment in Jannah would be enough for the one who has known nothing in life but hardship to forget all the suffering he may have endured in this Dunya.

Another important concept linked to the yearning for Jannah that needs to be built within our children is the correct view of success and failure in this life. In this materialistic world, success and failure are defined upon securing certain things in this dunya, for instance a good job, wealth, a respectful profession, high achievement in education, beauty, and the likes. Being influenced by this view, may lead our youth to focus their time and efforts on acquiring these things at the expense of their Deen, or abandon certain Islamic duties or limits if they hinder the fulfillment of certain aspirations they have in life. Therefore, we need to nurture within our young an understanding and deep appreciation of the true view of success in life, which is securing the Pleasure of Allah (swt) and His unimaginable rewards rather than chasing after the high-status or pleasures in life or what society views as success which may lead them to compromising their Deen or not giving it the importance and place it deserves in their life. This is alongside guiding them to realise that true failure is to lose the opportunity of the short time that we have on this earth to do the actions that will gain us a high station in Jannah, or to neglect the Commands of our Rabb which will lead us to the Fire. This is not to say that they should not have worldly aspirations or seek to do well in education and financially, for Allah (swt) encourages the believer to seek His bounties in this world He created. Rather, it means not to measure their success or failure in life according to

it or become consumed by it, for Allah (swt) says,

﴿وَرِضْوَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ﴾

“...the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah. That is the supreme success.”
[At-Taubah: 72]

However, as parents, teachers, and a Muslim Ummah, it is important that we first truly appreciate the correct Islamic view of success and failure for ourselves as well as all the Islamic concepts that we seek to build within our children. We need to ask ourselves sincerely, what do we truly want for our children? Do we see Islam and Islam alone in all its aspects – spiritual, moral, social, and political as the only means of guaranteeing them ultimate success in this life and the next? Or are there other values, ideas, and traditions that are not based upon Islam that we shape our own views, actions, outlook on success and aspirations for ourselves and our children upon that causes us to compromise our Deen, creating mixed messages and confusion in the eyes of our youth, and even resentment in their minds towards Islam?

For example, how can we build a mentality in our youth that ultimate success is gaining the Pleasure of our Rabb and entering the Gardens of Jannah, if we accept for them to compromise their prayers, their Islamic dress and other Islamic obligations in order for them to succeed in education or secure employment or a high-flying job, leading them to believe that what really matters is status, wealth and acquiring the things of this life? Or how can we nurture our youth to understand that standing up for Islam and against injustice is one of the greatest actions in the eyes of Allah, when we are fearful of encouraging them to speak up for their Ummah in Palestine, Syria and across the world, or against attacks on their Deen, or in support of the Shariah or the System of Allah - the Khilafah out of fear that they will be viewed as an extremist and come under the radar of oppressive governments or that it may affect their education or employment opportunities. If we present confused messages and double standards to our youth through our own views, words and actions then how will we establish a firm understanding of true success in their minds or a yearning for Jannah, seeing it as the ultimate prize they desire.

Having consistency in our words, actions and aspirations, as well as nurturing a yearning for Jannah and the correct view of success within our children will Insha Allah raise them to be youth who constantly fix their sights on securing the unimaginable rewards of the Hereafter. This will Insha Allah guard them from surrendering to the temptations of this life which violate their Deen, and enable them to accept the regulations that Islam places upon their lives and the fulfilment of their desires, even if it affects the aspirations they may have or curb certain types of enjoyment. It will also Insha Allah help them to hold steadfast to their Islamic duties and indeed excel in them, regardless of the difficulties or pressures they face to compromise them, for they will not allow the hurdles of this life keep them away from the unimaginable eternal rewards in Jannah. Furthermore, it will make them Muslim youth who have an appreciation of the value of time, striving to use it wisely in a productive way that is pleasing to their Rabb (swt) and that will gain them more rewards in the Hereafter rather than squandering it in time-wasting activities.

The great Sahaba Uthman bin ‘Affan (ra), once said, *“Allah (swt) gave you this world to request the Akhirah, and did not give it to you for you to rely upon, for this world ends and Akhirah is everlasting. So let not that which ends make you disregarding, nor keep you busy from that which lasts. Choose to seek that which lasts over that which ends, for this world will be cut off and our return is to Allah.”*

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