

# Nurturing Believers

## Parenting Advice for Muslim Mothers

### Part 1: What is *Tarbiyah*?

Most of us grew up knowing that one day we would get married, and then we would become mothers. And each of us knew just what kind of a mother we wanted to be. We would feed our children only healthy meals, and would never raise our voices at them, and we would be their best friends. And we would never, ever show them cartoons just to occupy them; instead we would do arts and crafts activities with them or take them to the park. And then we became mothers. And as our children grew older, our standards kept lowering, and we saw ourselves moving further and further away from the ideal we had set for ourselves. We were not the mothers we wanted to be, and our children were not turning out to be the children we had dreamed of.

Our fundamental mistake is that we assume that just because we become mothers, good parenting will come to us instinctively. However, this is far from the truth. This is because the parenting we do only with our insight is actually a reflection of our innate flaws and weaknesses; indeed our children are like our book of deeds, reflecting back to us our own deficiencies. Thus, we must not rely on our instincts to guide our parenting; rather we must gain the knowledge and learn the skills and adopt the methods that will allow us to engage productively with our children, so that they do not become victims of our mistakes.

To begin with, I ask you to think about the following fundamental question:

#### What is our role as mothers?

The reason we need to think about this is because most of us today are serving merely as caretakers of our children. We protect them, make sure they are clean and well-fed, that they sleep and wake up on time, that they complete their home-work and prepare for tests and perform well at school. We try our best to make sure they don't embarrass us when others are around, that they don't make too much noise, and the more ambitious of us hope that they will obey the commands that we issue them. Those of us for whom *deen* is important, teach them *masnoon* (prophetic) *duas* and short

surahs when they are young, and try to get them to perform their prayers on time when they are a bit older.

Most of us **raise** our children, we **discipline** our children, but is this the same as doing their ***tarbiyah***? What is the difference between raising and disciplining children, and doing their *tarbiyah*?

Raising the young has to do with fulfilling their physical needs, protecting them, feeding them, and preparing them to fend for themselves.

Disciplining has to do with making children conform to certain standards of behavior that have been set for them.

*Tarbiyah*, on the other hand, has to do with shaping the hearts and minds and personalities of children. It includes the following:

1. Not only expecting them to give importance what *we* believe is right, but filling *their* hearts with love for what is true and good and right, and hatred for what is false and evil and wrong
2. Not only making them obedient to us, but nurturing their relationship with our and their Creator, so that they become His obedient slaves
3. Not only telling children what is right and wrong, but rather making them understand ***why*** this is so
4. Not only protecting them artificially and temporarily from the negative influences around them, but enabling them to make the right choices
5. Not only pointing out their mistakes but teaching them ***how*** to do things differently
6. Making children realize the consequences of their actions and instilling a sense of responsibility in them, not only for their actions, but also their words
7. Understanding the potential in each child and bringing out the best in them
8. Making sure that our children are not like twigs flung around by the changing tides of circumstances, but like oak trees standing firmly on their principles, who are the ones to turn the tide of circumstances.

The ultimate *Murabbi* is Allah (swt), and He has, in His infinite wisdom, delegated the task of *tarbiyah* in this world to parents. And from parents, this responsibility rests mostly on the strong shoulders of mothers. The earlier we recognize this responsibility and learn the ways to fulfil it, the less damage we inflict on our children. The same is true for all women- teachers, aunts, caregivers of any sort- who interact with children and can have an impact on their personalities.

***Coming up next: Why is it Important to do Tarbiyah of Our Children?***

