

Part 1: The Need for Self-Awareness and Self-Care

To effectively fulfil the role of a nurturing caregiver requires one to be physically fit, and emotionally, mentally and spiritually sound. When women are physically unfit and exhausted, emotionally drained and disturbed, mentally occupied and stressed, and spiritually disconnected and weak, they will not only be UNable to do *tarbiyah* of their children, but are likely to seriously harm their well-being, often with consequences that last a lifetime. Usually, women are unable to meet their own child-rearing goals not because of a lack of vision or understanding or will, but rather because of their own compromised physical, emotional, mental and spiritual state, which prevents them from acting on what they know, despite the best of intentions. Consider the following scenarios:

You are angry with your mother-in-law's constant criticism, frustrated by your husband's negligence, and exhausted trying to keep up with your list of things to do (and never quite managing to complete it!). You have a splitting headache, your mind is full of negative thoughts, your heart brimming with negative emotions, plus you are getting late for your Maghrib *salah*. At this time your 2-year old breaks a glass while trying to drink water (because he wants to do everything himself), and you reach out and smack him, furious at having to clean up the mess on top of everything else. Or your 6-year old asks you to play with him, and you yell and tell him to go away because you have no time to waste on playing with him. Or your 10-year old asks you for help with home-work, and you lash out and tell him that he would be able to do it himself if he had been paying more attention in class. Your children are scared, they feel hurt and unloved, they feel stupid and lose confidence in themselves, and next time they think twice before reaching out to you for help. You regret your behavior soon thereafter, but the damage seems to be done, and you feel worse than before.

If you find yourself in situations similar to these more frequently than you would like, you need to take a step back and become more **aware** of yourself, and start taking better **care** of yourself.

What is Self-Awareness?

Becoming self-aware involves:

- Getting in touch with how you are really **feeling** (e.g. stop telling yourself that you are happy because everyone keeps reminding you of how lucky you are, and recognize that you are frustrated because of some unfulfilled personal goals)
- Being honest about what you are really **thinking** (e.g. stop feeling pressurized to echo the views of others on a particular issue and recognize that you have a different opinion)
- Identifying what is stressing you and making you unhappy

- Recognizing what truly makes you happy and satisfied
- On the basis of the above, ascertaining what you **need** to do for yourself- to feel better, to act in ways that are in line with your views, and to reduce stress and be a happier, more satisfied person (whether it's an opportunity to learn, more time to for personal *ibadah*, a trip to the doctor, or more occasions to meet people).

What is Self Care

The true meaning of self-care is to invest in fulfilling one's own physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs, to place one's own name in the list of people whose health, happiness and success matters.

It is NOT self-indulgence or selfishness, but rather aims at better enabling ourselves to fulfil the different roles and responsibilities that Allah ﷻ has placed upon us, to fill our own cups in order to be able to keep pouring from it. This can be understood by the analogy of how airlines teach passengers, in case of an emergency, to put on their own oxygen mask first, before attending to anyone around them, even their own children. This is absolutely critical in order for a person to be able to respond to the highly stressful situation and take the correct decisions. Unless we take care of our own well-being, we will not be able to tend to those who are dependent on us for theirs.

The journey of increased self-awareness and improved self-care leads us from first **healing** the wounds we have inflicted on ourselves, or allowed others to inflict on us, to **thriving** in whatever aspects matter to us, to eventually **nurturing** those around us, and thus being agents of positive change in the world we live in.

This three-step process takes place at multiple levels. At the physical level, for example, we heal our bodies by investigating any pain or other signs of illness that we have so far ignored and getting necessary treatment for it, by eating truly nourishing food, by getting enough sound sleep, by managing our weight and building strength and stamina. *Also, we heal ourselves by changing our perceptions about our physical appearance so that we are no longer neglecting and harming our bodies, or our ourselves emotionally, to meet unachievable standards imposed on us by others.* We thrive physically when we optimize our health, become physically fit, and feel confident about the way we look. We are now in a position to serve others and take care of those dependent on us, and fulfil our professional, social or civic responsibilities, without letting our bodies become a limitation to the achievement of our goals.

Similarly, the healing, thriving and nurturing must take place at the emotional, mental, and spiritual levels, to undo years, sometimes decades, of neglect, and prepare ourselves for success in this world and the next. In our new series, **Heal Thrive Nurture**, we hope to encourage and assist you in your own individual journeys of self-awareness and self-care, and we hope and pray that Allah ﷻ puts benefit in it for us all.