THE ROLE OF FAMILY IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

God the greatest has created man and the man’s humanity and attaining the ultimate perfection is subject to correct education and training. All children who come to the world step into the family's life. Family environment both in terms of priority (time and place) and quality is the most important environment that can provide a suitable context for development of material and spiritual talents of the child. Since the man starts his biological process in the family and this institution has a fundamental function in the education of human being, one of the concerns of parents is training children. Therefore in this library study, the purpose is to investigate the role of the family in religious and moral education of the children. Given the existing contents and the debate on the role of family in training children, it can be concluded that the parents and other family members certainly play a major role in the education of their children and through acquiring knowledge and providing a model and style in moral and religious education and other areas put their children in the right path to provide the possibility of their growth and prosperity.

KEY WORDS: role of the family, religious and moral education, children.

INTRODUCTION

God created man and provided his guidance by sending prophets and Holy Scriptures. The need to morality and perform good actions and human inclination toward virtue, happiness and perfection have made God to provide the ways to get these things (Akhavi, 2011).

The man’s humanity and attaining the ultimate perfection is subject to correct education. There are different genetic and environmental factors affecting children’s education among which the family is the basic institution for training children. Family environment both in terms of priority (time and place) and quality is the most important environment that can provide a suitable context for development of material and spiritual talents of the child. The family as a social
institutions and the first center for personality development is the only social system accepted in all religious or non-religious countries (Bakhtiari). Since the human being starts his biological process in the family and this institute has a basic function in educating him, child education is one of the concerns of parents. Generally parents in child education areas are faced with the following questions: to what extent the family plays a role in child education? To what extent is this necessary? Since when should it begin? How is the proper way? What is the Islam's viewpoint on parenting? Who is most responsible in child education? And there are thousands of other questions. We do not claim that all families are successful in child education but we say the more successful family in this area is the one that understands the needs of children more than others and has greater success and competence in meeting them (Ghaemi, 1986). So if parenting is based on religious principles and the principles of psychology and education are considered in child development, parents will be successful in education. Because of the importance of this issue and the emphasis of the religion of Islam and Imams (AS) on child religious and moral education, knowing the role of the family and the religious and moral education of children becomes important. In this study, after the introduction of the concept of family and religious and moral education, the role of family, the education process and other aspects related to the issue are addressed.

Family

Firoozabadi defines the word family as follows: “family is and iron shield and a certain force for a man” (quoted in Sharif Qureshi, 2007). IbnAthir says: Family is the same as his household and tribe as he gets his power through it”. Thus the interpretation and definition of the family is not limited to the man’s family and children but includes his relatives with whom he becomes powerful (quoted in Farzand-WahyabdAhmedi, 2013).

The concept of family is a social unit created by the marriage of a man and woman completed by their born children. Family consists of a set of people with common interests and purposes are linked together under a roof. According to Islam, family consists of persons with civil, legal and spiritual character the core of which is formed by the legitimate marriage of a man and woman. Marriage is a contract in which the parity relationship between men and women is established and afterwards the parties have new rights and duties. Kinship emerges in the shadow of marriage and its members have legal, moral and emotional interface (Ghaemi, 2007).

Religious and moral education

First we discuss the concept of education and then the religious and moral education.

The term “tarbiat” (training) is taken from the root “Raboo” in Arabic (Dehkhoda, 1972). But each scholar has discussed it from a different angle and offered a definition. Some say education is the set of intentional actions or influences of a person (educator) on another person especially the action or effect of adults on children and adolescents to create features (moral and practical) or professional skills (The Theological Seminary and University cooperation office, 1987). UNESCO defines education as: the planned and continuous training to transfer a set of designed knowledge, skills and understanding precious for the whole life (Taneja quoted in Davoudi, 2005). But in a general definition education can be defined as providing the ground to develop the existing talents and actualizing the potentials in human being.
Before examining religious education it is necessary to be familiar with the definition of religion. Religion is a set of beliefs, morals, laws and regulations to govern human society and human development (Javadi Amoli, 1993). According to Allameh Tabatabai religion is a series of practical and moral principles brought by God's messengers to guide human being. Believing in these beliefs and obeying the commands lead to the prosperity in both worlds (Allameh Tabatabai, 1999).

There are various definitions of religious education that in some definitions religious education is the set of willful and purposeful behaviors to train valid statements of each religion to other people so that those people are committed to its teachings in practice (Davoudi, 2005). In another definition the religious education is any purposeful activity to create, understand and believe in religious knowledge and strengthening it and the orientation to values and religious norms and adherence to laws and religious orders and it provides the context for religious identity and religiosity in the trainee in all aspects (Sadeghzadeh, 2001). According to Bagheri (2001) religious education, development and strengthening religious beliefs, moods and emotions and adherence to religious rituals and religious practices is to fulfill a religious character.

Moral education is one of the components of the religious education and considers ethics as the component of religious education. However the term moral is defined as the temperament, innate nature and inner nature and denotes moral education in terms of race, formal training or implied principles in or out of school. Another definition moral education is to provide a context for the actualization of human nature goodness, discovery and succeeding of moral conscience so that relying on natural motifs he would discover the virtues. The moral education monitors the spiritual and moral aptitude including internal reform and self-purification and prior to intellectual training (quoted by Akhavi, 2011).

**The importance of religious and moral education**

In today's world, human behavior is shaped in the form of behavior technology and genetic engineering, human moral life is threatened by instable value systems and dissolution of the dissolution of sanctities principles and religious beliefs are taken away and replaced by mechanical and borrowed mechanical thinking, the man is faced with internal and external crises that religious knowledge crises is above all. The only way out of these crises is to return to Islam and the Quran with deep love (Karimi, 1995). And this approach should be considered since childhood so that it is institutionalized inside human being. In a study conducted by Shamshiri and Nozari (2011) with the subject of religious education of children damages, the most significant damages are the lack of attention to the religious principles, lack of attention to personal experience, ignoring the principles of nature and the lack of faith-based education programs that indicate the necessary attention to the religious and moral education. In this regard Imam Sajjad (AS) in the area of family education says: Your child is entitled to know that his existence is because of you and the bad and good in this world is related to you and you should know that you have responsibility in training him and you are responsible to train him in the best way possible and you should lead him to God. The important point is that he says you are responsible to train him in the best way and not be satisfied with minimal training, so he continues: Train your child such that the good effect of your training leads to his social beauty and perfection or train him such that he could live with dignity in different tasks and lead to your
beauty and perfection (Mazaheri, 2009). Religious and moral education is the criterion for individual and social life and spiritual growth. This education leads to the development of conscience in child and if the education is based on corrects thinking; it leads to the growth and development of children. Religious and moral education is the life foundation and leads to the growth and evolution of human life and to become a righteous child. And as the Prophet (PBUH) says the parents’ best gift to their child or the most valuable heir inherited by him is politeness and good education (Fazeli, 2011). There are groups among the approaches that look negatively at religious and moral education. Many educators consider the value based and moral education implying a hypocritical, artificial and unnatural behavior. Some consider it as a lack of individual freedom and an obstacle to building a democratic society. Some believe that there is not enough coordination and coherence between the religious and moral education and its goals and often leads to indoctrination (Sajadi, 2000). In general it can be concluded since the dawn of mankind, there were actors for his education and thus in family area, the children's education is the parents’ responsibility and its violation is followed by liabilities on parents. On the other hand in order that the child would follow the path of happiness and his talent are flourished and the society moves toward prosperity, the importance of parenting becomes clear.

The time of child education

Since according to psychological studies and religious teachings environmental and genetic factors are effective in the inception of the human embryo, it is necessary to plan for the future of children and their healthy education at the time of choosing the spouse and even earlier than that (Ghaemi, 1995). Accordingly, the Prophet (PBUH) prohibited people from marrying the wrong wives and considers their children ruined and lost. Experiments in this field confirms the fact that the human being in prenatal period is sensitive to the environment and surrounding sounds and he is affected by mother and her speech mentality. And because of the parental effect on children Islam suggest the parents to have Halal mild and food during the intercourse and pregnancy. However there are controversies among scientists about the learning time of the religious and moral education. Some of them are against any religious education before puberty and some with an emphasis on children educability believe that religious and moral education of children can be presented to them in simple words (Bashari, 2002). John Locke believes than the religious and moral education of young children should be started before puberty. He says: the idea of God can be presented to children since childhood and love and respect for God can be institutionalized in their minds in childhood (Ghaemi, 1995).

Psychoanalytic studies show that the start of religious sense in children goes back to the months before the beginning of the fourth year and it appears even in two to three year old children. Children are interested in prayer and religious hymns since the age of three and enjoy repetition and reading prayers collectively. Since the age of four they ask about the world and most importantly the creator of the world. This stage is the natural age to accept the existence of God. In this regard, Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) says: Teach the term “there is no god except Allah”¹ to the child at the age of 3, introduce Muhammad (PBUH) at the age of 4 and turn him to Qibla and teach him how to prostrate on the ground turned at 5. At the age of 6 teach him how to bow, prostrate on the ground correctly and at the age of 7 teach him how to say prayer and

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ablutions” (Quoted by Bashari, 2002). Khademi (1991) when analyzing the elementary school students understanding of religious concepts concluded that there is a relationship between children's cognitive development and religious thinking and children’s understanding of the religious concepts grows and this growth is obtained in different stages until the child is capable of resolving his mental contradictions in this area and is able to achieve an abstract thought. Therefore in general it can be concluded that due to child is affected by the surrounding environment it is necessary to take steps to increase knowledge and awareness of parents seeking religious and moral education of children at the time of spermatogenesis and teach the child the religious concepts based on his understanding.

Factors affecting the religious and moral education of children

There are various factors affecting the religious and moral education of children and in this study two effective cases are addressed.

- The knowledge of parents and their adherence to be a role model in moral and religious issues

Children model their parents and people around them all their works and through mimicking them they grow and develop their educational structure. The only trusted role models of children in this age are their parents and match their behavior according to them as much as possible (Abbasi, 1992). Thus, the behavior model has a significant role in organizing children’s character and behavior.

Child’s observant eyes take images of all scenes of family life especially parenting behavior like a camera and learn lessons of optimism, hope, trust and kindness. Therefore if parents care about the religious orders, they affect the mental and religious aspects of the child (Amini, 1989).

Therefore parents should obtain a deep understanding of the basic principles of Islam in the first place and adhere to moral dos and don’ts and perform the orders they offer their children to obey because children pay attention to their parents’ action more than what they say. Imam Sadiq (AS) says: Direct people with you behavior and actions rather than your words (Majlesi, 2006). It is proved in psychology that humans learn many behaviors, norms and orientation by observing the behavior of others (Schultz & Schultz, translated by SeyyedMohammadi, 2011).

Parenting style

Families adopt parenting methods based on the characteristics they want their children to have. Baumrind (1971, 1991 quoted in Berzonsky, 2004) has presented three parenting styles based on accountability and urging of parents. They are authoritative parenting (parents are both accepting and expected), autocratic (parents are expected but not accepting) and permissive (parents are accepting but not expected). Later a fourth type which is repulsive in terms of accountability and urging was added by other researchers (Slicker, 1998).

Baumrind studies showed that children with authoritative parents obtained high scores in self-confidence and self-control compared with children of other parents (Slicker, 1998).

Multiple longitudinal and sectional research results indicated that authoritative parenting style is the most efficient method in positive development of children (Buri, Louiselle,
Misukanis & Mueller, 1998 and Rohner quoted in De Roos, 2004). Also studies such as Sherkat & Darnell (1993) showed that the authoritarian parenting style leads to giving credit to inertia and obedience by children.

Hoge, Petrillo & Smith (1982) also reported that value transmission is strongly influenced by family, religious beliefs and agreements between family members and values are slowly transmitted in families that there is poor communication between parents and children. Also Clarck, Vertington & Denser (1998, quoted in De Roos et al, 2004) showed that parents, who support their children while controlling them, have children with the same religious and moral values. But parents who support their children without controlling them or the parents who do not either control or support their children have children with different religious and moral values.

With respect to what have been discussed above it can be concluded that the use of authoritative parenting style due to a strong relationship between parents and children and the warm family atmosphere leads to easier acceptance of the values of the parents (including religious values) and commitment to those values among children. And when the parents and children are both supportive and have sufficient control on their children, children participate in parents’ religious debates properly.

Religious and moral education methods

Religious and moral education methods obtained psychologists’ studies that can be used by parents can generally be summarized in the following cases:

1) Reinforcing desired behavior: when the child or adolescent does something right, parents should strengthen it. Many children try to say greetings first and perform appropriate religious rituals. In such cases parents and educators should strengthen them verbally and behaviorally.

2) Removing inappropriate behavior: If a child showed an inappropriate behavior it should be quitted, ignored and treated such that the behavior is removed. To remove undesirable behavior undesirable behavior should not be adopted and the child should not be physically punished.

3) The behavior practice: One should perform religious behavior and ask the child or adolescent to practice it. But first the child should watch and model it.

4) Involving children in educational activities and collective practices and performing artistic activities that have a religious content as well as teaching the Qur'an and knowing its content… (Ahmadi, 1996)

The main concern of family in educating children
Today, with the passage of time and life modernization the communication between family members is not like earlier times. Although schools and other educational centers are responsible for training children, families are faced with main concerns in educating children. Some of the main religious and moral education concerns faced by family are as follows:

1- The reduced physical presence (quantitatively) of parents in the families, 2- excessive parents’ employment outside the home and reduced relationship with children, 3- excessive tiredness caused by parents’ employment and the resulting negative impact on the relationship with children, 4- increased children demand from parents and the inability of parents in providing these demands and the resulting frustrations caused to children and natural shame for parents on a frequent basis, 5- reduced effective presence of parents along children (qualitatively) and ultimately the loss of mental and emotional interfaces between them, 6- pale atmosphere of intimacy and affection between parents and children due to the aforementioned factors, 7- reduced verbal communication between parents and children (human communication) and the emotional alienation development, 8- Parents’ complaining about children’s failure to understand each other, 9- parents’ ignorance of dynamic generation’s pains and concerns, 10- The lack of parents’ adequate emotional support of children in moments of solitude and desolation because of these factors, 11- Families’ lack of participation in collective events such as prayer, 12- lack of adequate and effective partnership with schools and other education-related fields and 13- The paradox of parents in parenting children putting children in a two-way deadlock… (Sharafi, 2008)

Literature

The conducted studies confirm a significant relationship between parents and religious and moral education.

Hunzburger (1985) generally indicated that the consistency of religious beliefs between children and mothers was 43% and with fathers was 48% and as the child-parent relationship quality increases and agreement is made in religious and moral debates and the transfers and education of religious and moral values is done better. In this context several studies showed similar results and it has been reported that the similarity between religious beliefs and moral principles in parents and children refers to child-parent relationship and as the relations are stronger, the adoption of education and religious and moral beliefs of children is higher and it is more similar to that of their parents’ (Hoge, Petrillo& Smith, 1982). So if parents play an important role in the development and religious education of children, there can be a relationship between their religiosity and relationship with their children. Hunzburger (1985) concluded in his report that parents are the best predictors of their children’s religious attitudes. Also Allport, Gillespie & Young (1948 quoted by Argyle, 2000) in a study the samples of which included two-thirds of Harvard and Radcliffe students, asked questions about the religious education of students. The results showed that 67% of total samples had obtained their religious training from their parents.

Hunsberger & Brown (quoted by Spilka et al., 2003) in a study conducted on 878 students of psychology in Sydney, reported that the students have considered parents as the most important factor in improving religious education and beliefs.
Others like Francis and Gibson (1993) and Francis and Brown (1991) concluded that although many factors such as parents, schools, peers, religious institutions, books and… are potentially effective in religiosity and religious socialization of children, but parents are the most important factor in the religious education of children. Maccoby (1992) also believes that although parents are not the only people effective in socializing children, parents are considered as the most important factor and in this context the emotional aspects of the relationship between parents and children has the highest importance. Some researchers such as Cornwall and Thomas (1990, quoted by Spilka et al., 2003) consider the effect of parents on their children religiosity are a personal religious community. Sherkat& Darnell (1999) also believe that parents are effective on children’s religiosity and its maintenance. The researchers believe that parental influences on parenting is not only through their position but also through the transmission of values and providing a conducive social environment and of course parental support is the most important factor in achieving the best education. Also Hunsberger (1976, quoted by Spilka et al., 2003) with a study of various Catholic and Protestant students showed that the relationship between religion and religious practices accepted at home was correlated with the acceptance of religious education at the University at +0.44 level. In domestic studies Shahabizadeh (2004) and Saghizadeh and Mazaheri (2007) showed that parents are the main factor in religious and moral education of children and as the parents are richer in this regard their children will have more developed religious and moral education. In this regard the studies conducted by Kirkpatrick (1994, 1998 and 1999) that has entered child-parent attachment relationship into the realm of religion by Bowlby theory, opened another window to this field. Kirkpatrick (1992) believes that religion can be conceptualized as an attachment process in which the religious beliefs and attitudes act based on attachment system in humans. This biological behavior system forms a relationship between the child and care providers and enables children to feel safe in the presence of the attachment image and be safe as much as possible so that they could explore their surroundings. Based on the early experiences of attachment the child develops emotional cognitive schemas related to interpersonal relationships that this evolution could be coupled with a supernatural attachment image later. In fact, religious faith could somehow open a window to adult attachment processes (Khaninzadeh et al, 2005). Kirkpatrick & Shaver (1992) concluded in their study that people who had secure attachment had higher levels of religious commitment and more positive vision of God than avoidant attachment patterns. They also concluded that adults from non religious families with avoidant attachment relationships were more religious than other attachment patterns. Although according to these researchers the results show that God and religion can act as a compensation for people with avoidant attachment history and God is considered as a substitute attachment figure, in the revised adaptive hypothesis Granqvist (1998) believes that child accepts the degree of religiosity of the care provider as the securely attached children are more likely to accept the behavioral system and religious beliefs of their attached care giver and adapt to it (Granqvist&Hagekull, 1999).

Conclusion

Based on the content of the present study as well as the results obtained by other studies some points are obtained and direct families’ attention to them. These points are as follows:
1- The need for the moral and religious education of children in childhood even though their education should be started before the birth; but the concepts should be presented to children based on their development and their understanding and educate them based on their age.

2- Parents are the only trusted models in childhood. The child tries to adapt his behavior based on their behavior as much as possible. So if parents pay attention to the religious orders and pray, they affect the mental and religious aspects of children. Since the child mimics essentially, Parents and other family members should be careful about their behavior and not act contradictory.

3- Parenting styles are associated with children’s religious development. Type of family atmosphere and parents’ relationship with children are effective in increasing or reducing religious beliefs so that in families with autocratic or repulsive parents children are more alienated in obtaining religious values from parents. But in parents with authoritarian style that there is closer relationships between the and children, children participate in religious discussions more properly. Among the educational methods of parents, the authoritative parenting style is the closest approach to the commands of Islamic education. Because the Islamic texts and traditions are focused on the constructive interaction between parents and children and are ordered to treat their children with love and affection because the language of relationship with children is the language of love and it is not possible to educate anyone with violence.

4- For religious and moral education of children in addition to obtaining knowledge from different sources, it is necessary to help children in exercising religious and other tasks to have a positive model by observing others in the field of religion and ethics. Also other encouragement methods should be used in this way.

5- Today, families are faced with many challenges in parenting their children. As the time passes and both parents pass most of their time outside the home for their job and they have less physical and emotional presence, they should consider this problem more and try to have more quantitative presence along their children as much as possible and highlight this presence qualitatively.

6- And the last conclusion is that education, training and education of children are important matters. This is primarily the responsibility of parents and family members and then the task of schools, educators and other authorities. So all authorities should be a proper model in the absence of constraints and threats in this area with equipping themselves by moral and religious knowledge to help their growth and prosperity.

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