



Adolescence: A Period of Examination and Success

Publisher(s): Association of Imam Mahdi

www.alhassanain.org/english

Adolescence is a very difficult period no matter where you are born. We have an advantage in helping our youth in these trying times by making use of the teachings of the Prophet sawaws and his Ahlul bayt as.

We live in a world where corruption is available everywhere, all the time. What we can do to help our youth is teach them to view and examine the happenings in life

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Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Note	7
Youth and Turmoil	8
Notes	9
Depths of Existence	10
Note	11
Causes of Emotions	12
Notes	14
Wisdom behind Sentiments and Emotions.....	15
One Incident, Two Opinions	16
A perspective	17
Other perspective	18
Light within Darkness	19
Note	20
Manner of Thinking and Its Effects	21

Introduction

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

و صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْكَ يَا وَلِيَّ الْعَصْرِ أَدْرِكُنَا

The discovery of skills and expertise in the modern era; the vastness and complexities of communications; fierce competition in business; political news and the pomp and splendor surrounding it; weird demands of the new culture; ever expanding needs and desires - all have taken a toll of today's youth and these are the challenges that set them apart from the youths of the earlier times.

The conditions of today are clearly different from that of the past. Earlier, sleeping pills were used only during illness, whereas now the present generation uses them to get normal sleep and illusionary peace. Earlier, elders were respected by the youth who in turn received love and affection. Age and seniority were always given their due respect. However today's generations does not believe in any differences. For them elders and friends - all are the same.

Earlier, youths found peace and comfort in their homes; now every home is riddled with issues and disputes. Add to that the difference in attitudes and approach. Hence, homes are devoid of peace and tranquility. Earlier procuring drugs and intoxicants would entail hardships. Immoral information that corrupted the values and morals of the youths was not easily available. Now there is abundance of these things. In short, destructive and corrupt avenues have become easily accessible. Means of moral corruptions can be found in every nook and corner of the area. This new culture has distanced our youths from education, morals and decorum.

Should we surrender before this new culture? Should we entrust our youths to it and watch their future getting ruined as silent spectator? Or should we use our own intellect and wisdom and save our youths from this destruction and set them on the journey towards perfection.

If there is anything that can deliver our youths from the corruption of morals, it is faith, intellect, and reason. And faith would be effective only when accompanied by intellect and reason. Against this backdrop it is our duty, that we equip our youths with faith, intellect and wisdom.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says,

لا يستعان على الدهر إلا بالعقل

“Nothing except intellect is helpful against the vicissitudes of time.”¹

Note

1. Behaarul Anwaar, vol.78, pg. 7.

Youth and Turmoil

The cause of anger and fury among the youths, their turmoil and sense of despair can be traced to their viewpoints concerning issues and incidents. The problems and issues that confront us every day and make us enraged and upset can bear positive results - but only if they are analyzed without prejudice and in the light of intellect. For example, we face situations where we feel that we are being ignored, face setbacks in life, losses in business, failure in exams, etc.

Difficulties surround us from all sides. This makes us restless. If these issues are analyzed, it will not only rid us of our rage and anger but will be a cause of happiness and over a period of time, we will gain mastery in overcoming them. This will boost the confidence of our youth who will then steadfastly confront these issues and speedily move towards progress and development. Every passing day shall bring in a new success and achievement. The clouds of helplessness shall give a way to a new spirit of living, a life of zeal.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says,

أصل العقل الفكرة وثمرته السلامة

“Reflection is a foundation of intellect and its result is safety.”¹

Pondering over daily problems and analyzing them in the light of intellect, will give new strength and motivation to our youths and it will enable them to protect themselves from anger, anxiety, turmoil, stress, prejudices and save themselves from unnecessary tension. This is because intellect brings to fore the hidden and unknown things and throws light on many obscure realities.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says:

بالفكر تنجلي غياهب الامور

“Reflecting and pondering unveils the hidden affairs.”²

The outlook to issues is very vital. If it is based on sentiments and emotions and considering only their negative aspects it will lead to nothing but anger, dissatisfaction and anxiety thus weakening our nerves. However, if these very incidents were to be viewed in the light of reflection and them stressed and frustrated and will also lead to mental and without prejudice, they would leave a positive impact on our approach. If we deal with matters with patience and decisiveness instead of rage and anger, we would stand to gain immensely.

Notes

1. Mizaanul Hikmah, vol. 3, pg. 2462
2. Mizaanul Hikmah, vol. 3, pg. 2462

Depths of Existence

If our youths were to do some thinking and soul searching, they would feel that it is in their very nature and conscience to accept logic and reasoning. If these issues are viewed with an unbiased mind and their causes identified, while keeping sentiments at a distance, then the realities would be crystal clear and their fondness for truth and facts will save them from restlessness. Anger and turmoil would give way to peace and comfort. It is sound thinking and intellect that propels us towards righteous actions.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says:

الفكر يدعو الى البر والعمل به

“Reflection invites towards goodness and putting it into action”¹

If we view incidents only from a single perspective, look the attitudes of people only from one aspect (without pondering on others), expect a certain approach from the people and that too the one favorable to us, expect more from them than their capacities and be inflexible in our approach.... All this will cause an internal upheaval in the youths – making spiritual imbalance.

Having said so, there are some constructive emotions and sentiments that are in harmony with our purpose and aim and they are “positive emotions”. Whereas some are negative and - - deprive us of our energy and thus distance us from our aim and purpose.

Note

1. Sharh Usool-e-Kafi, vol. 8, pg. 177

Causes of Emotions

Let us examine from where these emotions (both positive and negative) crop up and what is their source. If incidents are viewed with wisdom and intellect, positive results would come to the fore, and if they are viewed without wisdom and prudence they will bear negative outcomes. The essence is to see how the youth views these occurrences. This is the very foundation of decision making - how the pros and cons are weighed.

Approaching these very incidents give rise to sentiments. Viewing these incidents negatively and with distrustful attitude would leave a negative impact on our feelings and yield a detrimental blow to our sentiments. This would result in lethargy, restlessness, irate behavior on our part, losing interest in our work and irrational behavior.

If these incidents are viewed with a positive frame of mind and their roots and causes are investigated they will leave a positive impact on us. We would then start off with positive energy, zeal and shoulder our responsibilities in the best possible manner. Thus, our approach would be based on justice, moderation and intellect.

The reflection based on intellect is the basis of moderation in sentiments. True human value is preserved and one obtains the privilege of living an honorable life.

Ameerul Momineen Ali ibne Abi Talib (a.s) says:

حسن ظن راحة القلب و سلامة الدين

“Positive thoughts lead to a tranquil heart and are the safety of religion.”¹

The more powerful and active the intellect of a person the more positive his thinking will be. He (a.s) says,

ظن الرجل على قدر عقله

“Positive thinking is in proportion to one's intellect.”²

Following factors lead to an intelligent approach and thinking:

1. Reasoning should be based on facts and not on rumors.
2. Clearly define one's aim and purpose.
3. Decision should be based on patience, forbearance and courage.
4. Distrustful thinking should be avoided; one should gather facts and consult others before deciding.
5. Decisions should not be based on sentiments and haste.
6. Incidents should be viewed factually and without internal conflicts.
7. Develop an expertise in solving issues by using intellect, wisdom and after consulting others.

Following factors indicate an unreasonable approach to resolving issues:

1. Treating issues with force and stubbornness.
2. Not accepting others' views.
3. Viewing everyone with suspicion.
4. Dealing the issue without weighing the pros and cons.
5. Proceeding on the matter based on prejudice and rumors.
6. Always being critical of oneself and others.
7. Forming premeditated opinion about the problems.

8. Not explaining the aim clearly. Not having an opinion about future.
9. Acting without consulting others.

Our approach and attitude under a particular condition reflect our views. If we ponder, we will find that consciously or unconsciously, we form some conclusions and evidences in our mind and base our decision on the same. This very mental conclusion is the cause of our happiness or the lack of it. It also brings an enthusiasm in us or deprives us of the same; makes us feel energetic while doing our duties or causes narrowness in our hearts.

In short, two different conditions materialize in our minds. Each of them is based on a logical or an illogical view. For instance, if a person has made a loss in business or an adolescent has lost a game or is unsuccessful in some exam, he can have two sets of thoughts:

1. I have failed. This is very humiliating. My honor has been crushed. I will never succeed in my life. This business/ studies are meaningless at present. (Irrational View)

2. I have failed and failure is definitely bad. But defeat can be a stepping stone to success. Lots of efforts do go in vain in this world. Not everyone succeeds in this world on first attempt. If I try again, I can succeed and make good the losses suffered earlier. (Rational View)

A single episode can be viewed from two perspectives. This influences our approach consciously or subconsciously. Our actions reflect our thinking. Our positive and negative views are based on our logical or illogical analysis of the matter. Now the question is “which is the correct view?” Clearly the one based on reasoning, patience, forbearance, facts and consultation will stand out as the correct view.

If we ponder a lot everyday but base our analysis on incorrect foundation and illogical thinking - as discussed above- the result too would be foolish, thereby making our lives difficult. Holy Quran elaborates this beautifully:

و يجعل الرجس على الذين لا يعقلون

“...and He casts uncleanness on those who will not understand.”³

The youth must understand that all their discomfort and restlessness, anger and impatience are a result of their manner of thinking. Whenever any incident is not viewed in the light of intellect, the results too would be negative.

If our youths reform the thinking and base their decisions on intellect and reasoning instead of sentiments, they will experience happiness in their lives. When surrounded with problems, we must view the situation in the light of intellect and not base our opinion on haste and impatience. Only then we would be treading the path of religion and following its teachings.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says

انما يدرك الخير كله بالعقل و لا دين لمن لا عقل له

“Surely all goodness is obtained through intellect and there is no religion for the one without intellect”⁴

Notes

1. Ghurarul Hikam, pg. 453, H. 5322
2. Ghurarul Hikam, pg. 72, H. 1078
3. Surah Yunus, 10, verse 100
4. Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 74, pg. 160

Wisdom behind Sentiments and Emotions

It may be asked “Why Allah has placed emotions & sentiments in our existence when they are so (negatively) influential on us?”

Firstly, it is Allah - Who in his infinite wisdom has placed these emotions in our existence. In their absence we would never endeavor to protect ourselves from dangers. These fears, apprehensions and feelings of insecurity protect our lives from dangers, shame and hopelessness. It is these emotions that safeguard our lives. What is important is how we channelize them.

Today’s youth generally judges the personalities on the basis of sentiments. It is entirely possible that a person may have evil and negative sentiments and emotions and thus he may analyze everyone accordingly. Yet this does not mean that the youth will always remain that way. There is a very strong possibility that the adolescent - after revisiting his thoughts - may change his views and after seeking repentance may rectify himself.

If the youth were to utilize these emotions under the supervision of intellect and religion, they will scale heights of human perfection. On the contrary, if these very emotions are to gain an upper hand on the youths, they would fall in the abyss of moral degradation. Hence we must decide our approach before acting on our emotions.

For example, if someone does not respond to our salutation we should not judge him in anger. On the contrary, we should give him the benefit of doubt - Perhaps he did not hear me; perhaps he was lost in his thoughts or was in hurry; this is not our last meeting..... Viewing the same incident would negatively affect our physical and mental health. Viewing this incident constructively would provide means for our safety.

On this basis, it is essential to view the incident in the light of intellect. It should be noted that viewing incidents negatively would have a disturbing effect on our mind and soul thereby causing mental illness. As a result, the personality of our youths will be crushed under pessimism. This disease cannot be cured by thinking but by deliberation, pondering, and a change in approach.

One Incident, Two Opinions

What influences the youth is not the incident but how they view and analyze it. It is the way the issues are tackled that influences us- and not the issues themselves.

A perspective

- I have been unsuccessful in my task and have been defeated.
- Whoever faces defeat can never be successful.
- Conclusion: I can never be successful in my life.

Other perspective

- I have been unsuccessful in my task and have suffered losses and defeat.
- Success follows every defeat. Defeat is a prelude to success.
- Conclusion: I can be successful in my life.

What is common in both views is the realization of defeat. Definitely, a loss has been suffered. However, the subsequent stage, on which the outcome is dependent, is different. In the former case, defeat is taken as permanent, which is against the realities of the world. There is no person in this world that has always been successful. Success and defeat go hand in hand. We must - rather than accepting defeat - act courageously and confront the issues unwaveringly. Defeat does not close the door of success. One can only succeed through courage and decisiveness.

The youth who subscribes to the former view of life, loses courage in no time and becomes disheartened. All this badly affects his manner, ethics, language, etc. However, the youth very well knows that cynicism and pessimism is illogical, irrational and incompatible with the realities of life. Therefore, Islam does not subscribe to such irrational approach.

It has been mentioned that Islam advocates reflection and pondering. The Holy Quran at several places has emphasized (the importance of) reflection and deliberation. The religion of Islam desires that we should base our lives on intellect and reflection rather than sentiments and emotions. This approach will save us from psychological illnesses.

Our youths should avoid viewing unpleasant incidents negatively if they wish to lead a successful life. They should endeavor to find success in setbacks and hope from pessimism and hopelessness.

Light within Darkness

It themselves has been already mentioned that the opinion about incidents affect us more than the incident.

Our undue expectations from this world are the cause of our problems. For instance, a youth wishes everything should happen as per his thinking. "I should do what I wish; everybody should treat me the way I like; my life should consist of all good things; I should not commit any mistakes in my life; if people do not co-operate with me then I am unfortunate and not worthy of their honour; I should never fail in life..."

The youths tend to view the world in this manner." All my tasks should get fulfilled quickly without facing any problems and having to struggle for it; I should avoid tasks demanding patience and courage; I cannot tolerate hardships and difficulties; I cannot bear failure, etc." Needless to say this manner of thinking will bring about anger, irate behavior, bad manners, impatience and lethargy in the youth. It will retard their progress and deprive them of the ability to view facts objectively.

At this point, a change in attitude and an impartial and positive thinking can bring about a pleasant and a very evident change in their lives and act as a lamp within the gloom of darkness. This change is not a huge task. It only requires courage, decisiveness, patience and reliance on Allah. Incidents need to be viewed under the light of intellect. It is only through intellect that we can control the conditions and problems of the world.

Ameerul Momineen (a.s) says:

لا يستعان على الدهر الا بالعقل ولا على الادب الا بالبحث

*"During the vicissitudes of the time nothing is helpful except intellect and through consultations one can reform his etiquettes and manners."*¹

Youths are requested to change their lives from the one based on emotions and sentiments to the one based on intellect and experience the resulting effects and peace of mind. It will rid them of stress and tension. This positive experience will primarily influence the life of the youth. This positive thinking would convert their limitations into strength.

If - for instance - he was not invited by his friend to a certain programme & since he is not aware of the reasons of not being invited, he will not resort to negative thoughts. He will not feel that he is not loved by the people. "I have no friends" and similar such thoughts will not crop up in his mind. If he is not invited, it does not mean that relations have been severed for life. Possibly, it was in his interest that he was not invited. Occupy yourselves in some work rather than being sad and to allow such incidents dominate you.

Note

1. Behaarul Anwaar, vol. 75, pg. 7

Manner of Thinking and Its Effects

Several thoughts which are not based on intellect affect the lives of the youths and we must fight against them. We shall cite a few of them:

1. Everyone should like my work and accept my views.
2. I should always succeed and never face setbacks.
3. If the work is not as per my liking it is worthless.

These thoughts cause misfortune and bitterness in the lives of youths. This is not caused by external factors but conditions that exist within us. It is obvious that every work cannot be as per our wishes. Hence, we should find an appropriate solution instead of being remorseful. If we think that all tasks should be carried out exactly the way we wish - failing which we will be depressed, it will create restlessness in us and distance us from realistic thinking. If we think that:

1. I should be free of all errors and mistakes or I will not be successful: This thought will create turmoil in the youth and will affect his ability and his will power. He will be a victim of inferiority complex, deem himself worthless and feel insecure and lazy.

2. Everyone should love and respect me. If it is not so then I am not a good human being: This will bring about anger, hatred, irate behavior and bad manners in youths.

All my friends, colleagues and near and dear ones should take care of me and provide me with means of comfort. They should accept all my views at once. I cannot tolerate more than this. In short everyone should be at me beck and call. This feeling will deprive the youth from the ability of facing failures, strain his heart and he will be dissatisfied with his conditions. He will always repent and feel lazy and inactive.

Are any of the above thoughts based on intellect? These inappropriate demands and emotions have a very profound effect on the behavior of our youths and causes mental illnesses in them.

Mental stress, inferiority complex and the behavior of others destroys the personality of youths and deprives them from creativity. It is necessary under such conditions that the youths reform their sentiments and impractical demands. He should eschew thinking that is not based on intellect; investigate the causes of his restlessness and treat them. Following things will be useful in this endeavor:

1. Do not be hasty while forming an opinion and making decision.
2. Do not view yourselves and others in the light of the work done by you or others.

“Since people do not respect me, I am not a nice person.” Do not make the results of actions as a criterion for people being good or bad. The results should purely be based on our efforts. Expect from people as per their capacity. Experience, efforts and hard work, piety and forward thinking can be taken as criteria for actions being righteous or otherwise.

Do not criticize or reproach others. If need arises, be critical about the work and not the person, for mistakes can be rectified. It is the work which is bad not the person and do not hurt him. Give benefit of doubt to others.

If we change our thinking from being irrational and unreasonable and forego inappropriate demands, we will find rest and peace, relief from stress and our lives will be pleasant.

