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PARENTING - YOUR RETURN GIFT TO GOD

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Author

MAYUR B. NAYAK

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Parenting - Your Return Gift to God

Countless eggs are laid but the mother never looks back. Hundreds of eggs are buried in the soft beach sand, of which hardly a few survive without mother's nursing, whereas only one child is born and the mother gives all her attention to bring it up. The first example relates to the animal/marine kingdom, namely, fish and turtle respectively, whereas the second example pertains to human beings.

The reason for the difference is that lower the strata of evolution, mother procreates out of nature's instinct, whereas higher the strata of evolution, mother procreates and nurses her infant with a sense of responsibility, love and commitment.

Human mind evolves and is constantly evolving. Parenting, therefore, calls for love, care and commitment. Let me share with you my nine years of experience of parenting, which I regard as a journey of growth for both – me and my child.

Parenting – A Challenge in the new millennium

I did not favour the idea of putting my 21-month-old daughter to school ("play group" as it was called), yet gave in to my wife's persuasion. (To me, five years was the right age for schooling.) However, within three months of schooling by

my daughter, I realized my mistake, in that what I learnt at five, she learnt at two. My friends, too, experienced the same with their children. This shows that human mind is evolving and evolving at the faster pace. We are living in the era of information and technology. There is plenty to learn and in many different ways. There is a sea change in the way we learn now compared to what we learnt in the past. I remember when I did my schooling we were taught lessons as statements of facts, i.e. to accept the information as it is. To illustrate, it was taught that “birds can fly” but we were not taught “why birds only can fly and not men”. Whereas today’s study emphasises more on reasoning and thinking. This has widened the horizon of thinking of our wards and we parents perforce need to catch up on that. Studies have revealed that a four or five year old child can learn and understand several languages. Such is the potential of a child provided he is exposed to proper ambience and environment. Therefore, parenting is full of challenges in the new millennium.

Parenting is an Awesome Responsibility

The difference between parenting by animals and human beings is the way they bring up their offsprings. Human beings are bestowed with intelligence and emotions, both of which play a vital role in parenting. However, not all parents understand this; amongst the human tribe, too, it is the sense of responsibility with which parents bring up their child that makes the difference. Children grow up in slum and in the palace, too. We find a vast difference in their attitude,

behaviour, value frame and so on. Thus, environment in which a child grows has a definite and lasting bearing on the child's development and growth, yet the factor which contributes most, in my view, is the values that are inculcated in him by his parents and that's why we, as parents, need to accept that parenthood is not a status symbol but a responsibility to be taken on seriously.

Children by nature are fast learners, be it computers, languages, values and of course, vices. Wrong parenting can mar the career or life of a child. I am reminded of a story here. A thief caught for a bank robbery and a murder was sentenced to death. Asked of his last wish, he desired to see his mother, whom, when he met, bit her ear and said, "I would not have seen this day, had you stopped me on my first thievery as a child, instead you encouraged me to lie and hide". No child is born a terrorist; nor every time it is the fault of parents for a child to go bad. However, if, in the formative years of a child, he is taught good values, it helps him to build good character base. This value frame then acts as an insulation to protect him from worldly temptations or going on wrong track.

The success of parenting lies in the success of a child. Parenting, therefore, is an important task and cannot be left to chance and/or trial and error. Let us not make our children being tested in a laboratory in the different ways of bringing up.

May I therefore, list five crucial lessons, which are important in bringing up a child/children sensibly, sensitively and correctly:-

Lessons for Better Parenting

The first and foremost lesson is “**Correct but not crush**”.

When your child commits a mistake, correct him but in such a way that his self-confidence is not shattered. I have seen many parents scolding their children who have scored less marks in examinations or failed, saying “I knew you were going to fail, you are good for nothing fellow,” This type of censure is dangerous and fatal, for, a child subjected to rebukes in this fashion, will be drained of all his energy and self-esteem, and may be inclined to end his life, which is why, many students attempt to end their lives in sheer frustration after failure in examination.

When I failed in Inter CA for the first time, my parents said, it is all right, work harder the next time. And when I passed the final C.A. examination and stood in the merit list, my success was celebrated by my parents and rightly so, if I may say so.

Allow me to quote Abraham Lincoln who had written to the headmaster of his son’s school:-

“Teach my son to learn to lose and also to enjoy winning” and further added,

“ In school teach him it is far more honourable to fail than to cheat.”

The Second important lesson is, “**Hold but not possess**”.

Hold your child close to your heart but do not own him, that is to say, do not be possessive about him, more so, as he grows up. Accept the individuality of your child. As Khalil Gibran puts it, “your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.”

It simply means that you are just an instrument - a trustee or a guardian until the child stands on his feet. He can draw upon or from you in case of need but it would not be fair to bind him with mindless expectations. Mothers generally are very much attached emotionally, more often than not, coming in the way of growth and independence of their children. Mahatma Gandhi was refused permission to go abroad by his mother, but was allowed to do so after a written assurance of good conduct by him and what he achieved by going aboard is history, which testifies to independence of thought and action within a moral framework.

The third important lesson is: “**Inspire but not impose**”

It means inspire your child through your conduct and not impose your ideas or ideals on him. A child is influenced by the act of his parents – i.e. imitating the way his parents behave, talk, walk, relate so on and so forth.

A survey on suicide cases by children revealed that quarrels between parents was the most responsible cause. As parental quarrel before impressionable minds not only leads to depression but also to suicidal tendency. Therefore, your behaviour plays a vital role in the upbringing of your child.

You should live a life that inspires your child to inculcate good values and habits. My father never imposed his ideas or ideals on me. But as I grew up, watching him I unconsciously adopted his value frame, modified to suit emerging circumstances as I went about my life.

Wherever there is need, you could direct your child but never dictate. Many parents force their children to become doctor, chartered accountant or an engineer without understanding or appreciating their inclinations, needs and aspirations, as they try to achieve through their children what they failed to accomplish in their lives. This is patently wrong, for, your child is not here to fulfill your dreams but his. Any patterning is hazardous. To quote Khalil Gibran, “You may give your love to your children but not your thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.” (*Emphasis supplied*).

The fourth important lesson is **“Lead but not lift”**

Many over-concerned parents have the habit of doing homework for their children, attending to daily routine and even feeding them at an advanced age. One of my friends was a victim, in that being the only son, he was so pampered that he remained childish mentally, even after he grew up physically. Here, I can do no better than quote Abraham Lincoln, who wrote to the headmaster of his son’s school: “treat my son gently, but do not cuddle him because only the test of fire makes fine steel.”

So help lead your child through ups and down of life, but let him be given the liberty to fight his own battle in order to enable him emerge as a strong individual and with character.

The fifth and final lesson is **“Devote Time, not just Wealth”**.

Devotion of time to your child is of utmost importance. As a child, he needs your hugs and kisses, as an adolescent he needs your understanding and as an adult he would need your enlightened guidance. For doing all this, your physical presence is vital. It was Jijabai, mother of Shivaji, who showed him the way all through his life, which eventually made him Chattrapati.

Parenting – A Learning Curve

Parenting to me, is full of joy and learning. Responsible parents have open mind and therefore, not only they strive to be better parents through conscious efforts but they also learn a great deal from their children.

We need to learn a lot from our children, especially those vital qualities of life, which we have lost in the process of growing up. Important amongst them are curiosity, creativity, spontaneity and enthusiasm for life. When I look at my daughter who is about nine years old, I find her with all these qualities and I am sure all parents will share my experience in this behalf.

It reminds of a beautiful poem written by Mattie A. Adair:-

I took a child by the hand
To lead her on her way;
I told her of the love of God
And taught her how to pray.
And as I searched for better ways
Her guide and help to be,
I found,
as we walked hand in hand
That she was leading me.

Summation

I would say that becoming parent is a biological accident but being a successful parent is an art. We need to master this art through conscious and constant effort in the interest of both our children and ourselves. We need to learn from the wisdom of past, technology of the present and from a vision of the future.

You are what God made you and your tribute to God shall be what you make yourself to be, worthy of His new thought, for every creation or creature has potential to be great. In a world where many denied of children, there cannot be a better gift than a 'child' to us. Therefore, it is our duty to inculcate in our children...

More of values than knowledge

More of wisdom than vices

More of kindness than cruelty and

More of patriotism than fanaticism

And if we do this we shall truly be better parent of better children and that will be our appropriate return gift to God.