113462 - Should Middle School Students Be Encouraged to Offer Regular Sunnah Prayers and Witr?

the question

We are a committee working out educational goals for study circles at the intermediate (middle school) level. We have set the following goal: The student should regularly offer regular Sunnah prayers and the Witr prayer, or the student should be encouraged to offer the regular Sunnah prayers and Witr prayer. We hope that you can give us your opinion on this goal from a shar'i (religious) point of view, and also from an educational point of view, and whether it is appropriate for this stage.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It is not possible to object to such sublime goals. Encouraging people to do acts of obedience and worship is something that parents and educators should pay the greatest attention to, for their children and students. If there are any shortcomings on the family's part in this regard, then educators should encourage their students with regard to that in which the families have fallen short. We do not only approve of encouraging these students to offer regular Sunnah prayers and Witr; rather we also approve of encouraging them to observe naafil fasts, honour their parents, help the needy, and remove harmful things from the road. We agree with encouraging all that is good and warning against all that is evil and bad.

It was narrated from al-Rubayyi' bint Mu'awwidh ibn 'Afra' said: On the morning of 'Ashoora', the Messenger of Allaah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) sent word to the villages of the Ansaar around Madeenah, saying: "Whoever started the day fasting, let him complete his fast, and whoever started the day not fasting, let him complete the rest of the day (without food)."

After that, we used to fast on this day, and we would make our children fast too, even the little

ones in sha Allaah. We would make them toys out of wool, and if one of them cried for food, we would give (that toy) to him until it was time to break the fast.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (1960) and Muslim (1136)

The fast mentioned in this hadeeth is one of the naafil fasts.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Whoever neglects to teach his child what will benefit him, and pays no attention to him, has mistreated him in the worst way. In most cases, the corruption of children results from their parents and parental neglect of them, and their failing to teach them the obligatory duties of Islam and the Sunnahs (recommended acts). So they neglected them when they were young, so they grow up unable to benefit themselves or their parents. End quote.

Tuhfat al-Mawdood bi Ahkaam al-Mawlood, p. 229

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al-'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Allah has enjoined fasting on every Muslim who is accountable, is able to do it, and is not travelling. With regard to the small child who has not yet reached puberty, fasting is not obligatory for him, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The Pen has been lifted from three," and he mentioned, "the child until he reaches puberty." But his guardian should tell him to fast when he reaches an age at which he is able to do so, because this is part of disciplining him and training him to observe the pillars of Islam. We see some people who leave their children and do not instruct them to pray or fast. This is wrong, because he will be accountable for that before Allah, may He be blessed and exalted. They claim that they do not make their children fast because they feel sorry for them and out of compassion towards them. But the one who truly feels sorry for his child and feels compassion towards him is the one who trains him to develop good characteristics and do righteous deeds, not the one who fails to discipline them and give them a beneficial upbringing. End quote.

Majmoo' Fataawa al-Shaykh al-'Uthaymeen (19/19,20)

We encourage you to urge the youth in the intermediate level to offer the regular Sunnah prayers. Indeed we would ask you to do more, namely encouraging them to do good in general, to beware of sins and evil, and to give them an upbringing from an early age that will be most beneficial for them by Allah’s leave; falling short in that or neglecting it will lead to a great deal of corruption.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

One of the things of which the child is in the greatest need is paying attention to his attitude, for he will grow up in the way that the educator accustomed him to from an early age, be it stubbornness, anger, argumentativeness, being hasty, being influenced by whims and desires, foolishness, being temperamental and greed. Then when he grows up it will be difficult for him to deal with these characteristics, and these attitudes will become deeply rooted in his character. Hence you find that most people have bad attitudes and behaviour; this is because of bad upbringing. End quote.

Tuhfat al-Mawdood, p. 240

We ask Allah to guide and help you.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 103526

And Allah knows best.