272027 - Guidelines on teachers hitting students, and the ruling on a father hitting his grown-up son

the question

I heard that `Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) frequently hit his sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, when they made mistakes in grammar (I do not remember whether this was when reciting Quran or not). I also heard that it is permissible to hit children after the age of twelve years, if they do not pray. But children may be mistreated by their parents or those who raising them. Could you tell us if it is true that it is permissible to hit children for making mistakes in grammar or for not praying after the age of twelve (or the age of puberty)?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We are enjoined to call and instruct children to pray when they reach the age of seven years, and to smack them if they do not pray once they reach the age of ten, as Abu Dawud (495) narrated from `Amr ibn Shu`ayb, from his father, from his grandfather, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Tell your children to pray when they are seven years old and smack them (lightly) if they do not pray when they are ten, and separate them in their beds.” Classed as authentic by al-Albani in *Sahih Abi Dawud*.

This indicates that it is permissible to smack them if they do not pray, even if they have reached the age of twelve, so long as they have not yet reached puberty.

But when the child reaches puberty, does his guardian have the right to smack him if he does not pray or in other cases, by way of disciplining him?

There is a difference of opinion regarding that among the jurists. Some of them said that it is permissible and others said that it is not allowed.

The scholars differed regarding this issue. Some allowed it and some disallowed it.

In the story of the loss of `A'ishah's necklace and the prescription of tayammum, she said: ... the people went to Abu Bakr as-Siddiq and said: Don't you see what `A'ishah has done? She has detained the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and the people where there is no water, and they have no water with them. Abu Bakr came when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was resting with his head on my thigh and he had fallen asleep. He said: You have detained the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and the people where there is no water and the people have no water with them. Abu Bakr scolded me and said what Allah willed that he should say, and he started to poke me with his hand on my side, and nothing prevented me from moving away except the fact that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was resting on my thigh. Narrated by al-Bukhari, 334.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Al-Fat-h*, 1/433:

This indicates that a man may discipline his daughter, even if she is grown-up and married and living away from his house.

That also includes disciplining anyone he has the right to discipline, even if the judge does not give him permission. End quote.

Al-`Iraqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Tarh at-Tathrib*, 2/97:

This indicates that a man may discipline his son by words, actions or hitting, even if he is an adult, or his daughter is a grown, married woman; and this is the correct view. End quote.

Ibn Muflih (may Allah have mercy on him) said in *Al-Furu`*, 9/328:

The apparent meaning of their words is that a child may be disciplined, even if he is grown and

married, living in a separate house, because of what `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said about the incident when her necklace broke, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made the people stay in a place where there was no water: Abu Bakr scolded me and said what Allah willed that he should say, and he started to poke me with his hand on my side. Furthermore, Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated: "Do not prevent the female slaves of Allah from attending the mosques of Allah." His son Bilal said: By Allah, we shall surely prevent them. He berated him severely and struck him on the chest.

Ibn al-Jawzi said in *Kitab as-Sirr al-Masun*:

You should be gentle with your child, discipline him and teach him, and if there is a need to smack him, he may be smacked and made to develop the best of characteristics and avoid the worst. End quote.

Among the scholars who disallowed hitting an adult child are the Shafa`i scholars; they regard that as being the more correct view.

It says in *Tuhfat al-Muhtaj* (9/197):

The father and grandfather may discipline the small child, one who is insane, and one who is legally incompetent, in order to make them learn and correct their misbehaviour.

Some scholars said that the more correct view is that they do not have the right to hit their adult child, even if he is legally incompetent, which is to be understood as referring to one who is foolish and negligent, who can dispose of his own affairs but is careless. The same applies to the mother. End quote.

Secondly:

With regard to what you mentioned about `Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) hitting his children for making mistakes in grammar, we could find no report about that.

If it is true, then perhaps it was something mild, such as smacking the back of the child's hand

with the palm of his hand, so as to alert the child to the mistake, and so on. There is nothing wrong with that, because the teacher has the right to smack the student, if need be.

In *Hashiyat ash-Shirwani* (1/450), it says: Some of the scholars said that if a parent smacks his child, that should not be done more than three times. This also applies to the teacher.

The correct view is that it should be done as much as is necessary, even if it is more than three times, on condition that it is not painful. End quote.

In *Al-Mawsu`at al-Fiqhiyyah* (13/13), it says: The teacher may smack the child whom he is teaching for the purpose of discipline. By examining the comments of the jurists, it becomes clear that they limited the teacher's right to smack the child he is teaching and imposed restrictions on that, some of which are:

a.. It should be done in the manner that is customarily used for teaching in terms of the number of smacks, the way in which they are done, and the part of the body to which they are done, which the teacher knows are safe; he should smack with his hand, not a stick; and he has no right to go beyond three smacks…

1. That should be done with the permission of the child's guardian, because smacking a child when teaching is not something common; rather smacking is to be done if the child misbehaves, so it is not part of teaching. The fact that the guardian has sent the child to the teacher to teach him does not necessarily mean that he has given him consent to smack him. Hence the teacher has no right to smack the child unless he has explicit permission to do that.

It was narrated from some of the Shafa`is that there is consensus that it is permissible to smack the child without the permission of his guardian.

1. The child should understand the discipline, therefore the teacher does not have the right to smack a child who does not understand the purpose of smacking.

Al-Athram said: Ahmad was asked about teachers smacking children. He said: [That is permissible]

to a degree commensurate with their misbehaviour, but the teacher should try hard not to smack the child. If the child is very small and does not understand, then he should not be smacked. End quote.

It is also stipulated that the smack should be for the purpose of discipline, and should not stem from a desire for vengeance or anger, and it should not result in worse consequences, such as the child or student being put off and no longer wanting to learn.

And Allah knows best.