Studying child rearing strategies according Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh during the outbreak of COVID-19

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Abstract---Disciplining children in the family results in human growth and excellence. Imam Ali ibn Musa al-Reza’s (AS) upbringing method represents a dimension of his lifestyle. This research intends to study Imam Reza’s (AS) specific child rearing method, or Sireh, with a descriptive-analytical approach and to explore the basis of this method, as well as how it can be used during the outbreak of COVID-19. Through examining the hadiths and narrations that refer to Imam Reza’s Sireh in child rearing, both directly and indirectly, the following are among the most important disciplinary methods that can be utilized during the outbreak of COVID-19; 1. Belief education, 2. Religious education, 3. Scientific education, 4. Sex education by encouraging children to marry, 5. Psychological education by praising children, 6. Moral education through good behavior within the family, 7. Emotional education by expressing love and affection, 8. Personality education with mutual respect; 9. Physical education with child care; 10. Social education under parents’ supervision and 11. Intellectual education.

Keywords---Imam Reza (AS), Sireh, Child Rearing, COVID-19.

Introduction

Today, the world is witnessing an epidemic of a contagious virus called Corona, first reported in China (Dehshiri, 2020, p.16). The epidemic has not come to an end yet and has spread on a global level (Azizani, 2016). With mass outbreaks
and deaths, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a state of emergency, and has recommended the use of masks and quarantine, which has greatly changed peoples’ lifestyles (Zolfaghari, 2020).

During the outbreak of the virus, the relationship between humans and God, with themselves, with other human beings, and with nature has changed. During this period, governments imposed more restrictions to protect public health, one of which is teleworking and quarantine at home. During this home quarantine, parents are able to spend more time with their children and educate them to prepare for tomorrow. In this article, we aim to use a descriptive-analytical method to investigate child rearing during the outbreak of the coronavirus according to Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh.

**Statement of the Problem**

Raising a child has always been a critical concern for parents. Understanding how a correct upbringing can help form a dynamic and prosperous society is very important. In responding to the question; “what are the criteria to raise our children”, we find the clear answer in education. Certainly, God Almighty, the creator of humans, has refered to the Quran and the Ahl al-Bayt as the basis of human education.

In addition to general methods of discipline used by other leaders, Imam Reza (AS) has a specific Sireh, which we will take advantage of in this study to provide answers for the best and most important strategies in child rearing and see how these strategies can be used during the outbreak of COVID-19.

**Background**

Here, we refer to some research examples which are in line with the present article:

1) “Lifestyle: The charter of Life from Imam Reza’s (AS) perspective” (Poor Amini, 2014)
2) “Imam Reza’s (AS) Moral and political Sireh in an Islamic lifestyle” (Salman Goli, 2019)
3) “A view on lifestyle from Imam Reza’s (AS) perspective” (Hosseinzadeh, 2019).

None of the mentioned research have dealt with child rearing based on Imam Reza’s (AS) perspective during the outbreak of the Coronavirus, which distinguishes this study from previous research.

**Significance of the study**

According to the necessity of family formation, we recall a hadith by Imam Reza (AS), quoted from Imam Baqir (AS): “A woman asked Imam Baqir (AS): May God bless you, I am a “motebatilah” woman. The Imam said: What do you mean by motebatilah? She replied; it means that I will never marry. The Imam asked: Why? She responded: I wish to gain virtue and dignity. The Imam said: revoke from this decision, if one finds virtue in remaining unmarried, Fatemeh would be more virtuous than you” (Mardani, 2010, p. 66).
According to this hadith, the Infallibles (AS) give great importance in forming a family and raising children. During the pandemic, parents spend more time at home and have more time in raising and disciplining their children. Therefore, recalling the strategies of Razavi child rearing according to Imam Reza (AS) is of great importance. This article seeks to explain this matter.

Research Method

This Library research attempted to analyze the data through a descriptive-analytical method. Then, after extracting Imam Reza’s (AS) desired hadiths, they were classified within the framework predicted in the research, and by referring to various sources, strategies for child rearing, according to Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh were extracted.

Concepts

Here we review the basic concepts of this research:

The Concept of Education

The Terminology of Education

Education or “Tarbiat” roots from the word “rabava”, meaning to increase, grow or provide a means of growth (Farahidi, 1410 AH, 8, p. 283; Ibn Manzoor, 1414 AH, 14, p. 305). It also means purification (Rashtouti, 1403 AH, 1, p. 386); But “Tarbiat” from the root “Rababa” means leading to spiritual perfection (Mustafavi, 1426 AH, 4, p. 35). In this case, education not only allocates to quantitative growth, but also includes qualitative growth (Sanei, 1996, p. 11).

Education in Concept

Morteza Motahhari defines education as follows: “education means nurturing; That is, to actualize and cultivate inner talents that are potentially present in a subject, therefore, education is true only for living beings, such as plants, animals, and human beings. Hence, education must be in accordance to nature and inheritance” (Motahari, 1994, pp. 56-57).

Al-Ghazali, a Sunni scholar, says: “To educate means to prevent from evil morals and replace them with righteous morals” (Al-Ghazali, 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 52-53). Khajeh Tusi, a Shiite scholar, says: “Education is chiasmus through which the highest human degrees and the lowest reach their complete rank” (Khajeh Tusi, Bi Ta: p. 107) Some define education as: “raising by removing obstacles and providing the grounds for growth and flourishing talents and the realization of hidden forces” (Ragheb Esfahani, p. 184; Mostafavi, 4, p. 20).

The Concept of Sireh

The terminology of Sireh

Sireh is the infinitive of “Sir” which refers to flowing and moving (Ibn Faris, 1404 AH, 3, p. 120). According to Ragheb Isfahani, Sir means moving on the ground, walking on the ground and mobilization (Ragheb Esfahani, 1950, p. 276)
Therefore, scholars explain *Sireh* as; “a method, tradition, religion, approach, behavior, way and attitude. (Zamakhshari, 1979, p. 317).

**Sireh in concept**

“Sira” on the root of “Fi’la” is a behavioral state; that is, a specific type of human movement and behavior (Ibn Malik Andalusi, 1969, 178, p. 16). According to the meaning of Sireh, it can be said that the study of Sireh means to study behavior; or the knowledge of principles, criteria and methods that a person inherits in behavior and actions. Therefore, the study of Sireh is in fact a methodology.

**Imam Reza (AS)**

Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja'far (AS), known as Imam Reza (148-203 AH), is the eighth Shiite Imam and a descendant of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Imam Reza (AS) began his Imamate in 183 AH and ruled for 20 years. He lived in Medina (Saudi Arabia) before moving to Khorasan (Iran). After arriving in Khorasan in 200 or 201 AH, Ma'mun (Abbasid Caliph) created debates between him and the elders of religions and sects in order to question his position and knowledge, which resulted in the Imam’s confession of superiority. Imam Reza (AS) was killed by Ma'mun at the age of 55 in Tus, at the end of the month of Safar in 203 AH. His holy shrine is now located in Iran (Saduq, 1378 AH: Vol. 2, p. 172).

**Definition of the key terms**

In this section, we describe the key terms in this research.

**Child rearing**

Education refers to a “regular and continuous activity which helps in physical, cognitive, moral, social, and emotional development and generally leads to development and flourishing of talents, in which the results appear in the subject’s personality, especially in behavior” (Haji Dehabadi, 1998, p. 12). Therefore, the purpose of education is continuous, regular and comprehensive where the results are transparent in a child’s behavior.

**Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh**

By Sireh, we mean the sayings, actions and methods of Imam Reza (AS) who, relying on Islamic beliefs and values, has been able to cultivate latent talents in all dimensions with the aim of flourishing and establishing moral virtues as well as eliminating moral iniquity.

**Strategies for child rearing according to Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh during the outbreak of COVID-19**

Parents have the most central role in the formation and development of personality and emotional, behavioral and moral characteristics in children (Panahi, 2009). Parents constitute a large part of their children’s lives and children inevitably imitate their parents’ behaviors. Hence, Imam Reza (AS) emphasizes on the role of parents in creating moral values: “Moral values are the
reasons of purity and virtue inherited within a family. A person with an honorable family inherits virtues and good qualities. Good morals are the reason for good inheritance (Heydari, 2014).

Imam Reza (AS) positions parents in a high level regarding their role in educating and disciplining children and states that the father is the distinguisher between right and wrong and the mother the most necessary right of every human being (Razavi Doust, 2015). He states that their role in educating and shaping the children’s personality is undeniable. Here, we refer to ways of raising and disciplining children during the outbreak of coronavirus based on Razavi teachings:

**Belief education**

Belief education is a process that leads to the creation and deepening of Islamic beliefs, i.e., monotheism, justice, prophecy, Imamate and resurrection, flourishing and perfection. In other words, it is a set of inner acceptance actions from the instructor to the instructed (Arafi, 2013, p. 49). In the following, we refer to two cases of religious education and education; theism and resurrection.

**Theism**

God-centeredness or theism means “the orientation of all human actions and behaviors towards divine criteria and standards”. This refers to God-centeredness in the field of education. Imam Reza (AS) says: “The first step towards faith is monotheism and acknowledgment of the oneness of God” (Atardi, 1406 AH, vol. 2, p. 159). The Covid-19 pandemic is the best opportunity for parents to encourage their children’s belief in God Almighty through their words and deeds.

**Resurrection**

Imam Reza (AS) introduced Imam Mahdi (AS) at every possible opportunity. He says: “Mahdi is the fourth of my generation through whom God cleanses the earth from any oppression. People are skeptical of his birth, and he is in absence, and with his emergence, the earth will shine with his light and he will establish justice among people, so no one will ever be oppressed” (Atarodi, 1406 AH, vol. 1, p. 223).

Awaiting his arrival is practical, that is, according to Imam Reza (AS), about the generation who live like the Imam of their time and try to create the Mahdavi culture in the society. This awaiting is desirable and desired by Imam Reza (AS). Therefore, parents should try to appreciate the opportunity of quarantine and develop the belief of resurrection within their children.
Religious education

Religion is concerned with all aspects of human life. Beyond meeting material needs, religion directs many human desires and gives meaning to life. Generation education and discipline is a very sensitive and important issue that has been given great importance in Islam. The most important point in Razavi teachings is religious education.

About inviting children to pray and familiarizing them with the ritual of worship, Imam Reza (AS) says: “Boys should be accustomed to prayer from the age of seven”† (Ibn Baywiyyah, 1413 AH, 3, p. 436) The Holy Quran should also be introduced in different ways within the family. Imam Reza (AS) says: “Take advantage of the Quran in your homes, that if the Quran is recited in your homes, life difficulties will pass easier and sustenance will increase”‡ (Hor Ameli, 1409 AH, 6, p. 200). During quarantine, children are more likely to spend time with their parents; thus, parents should teach their children about ablution, prayer, reciting the Quran and other worship rituals.

Scientific education

Imam Reza (AS) says: “The knowledge of life comes from ignorance, the vision in the eyes comes from darkness and the strength of the body comes from weakness”§ (Tusi, 1414 AH, p. 487). During quarantine, both parents and children should use the Internet, which is a bank of information on different sciences, to increase their scientific level. It should be noted that counselors and psychologists recommend that children enter the Internet under their parents’ supervision so they do not accidentally enter inappropriate cyberspace. We advise parents to use suitable books that do not cause harm like the Internet, in order to educate and strengthen their children’s scientific potentials.

Sex education by encouraging children to Marry

It has been narrated from Imam Reza (AS): “A man came to Abi Ja’far (AS) and my father said: Do you have a wife? “No, I do not desire a wife, I have the world and everything in the world, and I spend the night without a wife”. Then my father said: “Two rak’ats of prayer for a married man is better than praying the whole night and fasting the whole day for a single man”** (Atarodi, 1406 AH, vol. 2, p. 256).

Parents need to teach young people the correct culture of marriage and matrimony. During the Coronavirus outbreak where parents spend more time at home, fathers should teach their sons and mothers should teach their daughters about life skills and marriage so they enter marriage with sufficient information and knowledge.
Psychological education by praising children

Praising and gift giving is very effective in educating children. If the encouragement and praising is appropriate, it motivates the children and prepares them for bigger accomplishments. Praising is the language or basis of progress and success. (Najafi, 2007, p. 29).

Imam Reza (AS) believes that gift giving is the source of happiness and bliss. He quotes the Prophet: “my generation will be happy as long as they are friendly to one other and exchange gifts” (Ibid). If parents understand the importance of gift giving, they will utilize this technique with their children’s psychological education. Families should take advantage of the opportunity of staying home and spend more time and effort in disciplining and encouraging their children.

Moral education through good behavior with the family

The more the family has warmth and friendship, the sweeter and happier life will be. Imam Reza (AS) advises to good behavior in the family and between spouses: “The best people in terms of faith are ones who have the best behavior with their families, and I am most kind to my family” (Mardani Nokadeh, 2012 AH, p. 66)

According to this hadith, good behavior with the family, children and spouse indicates the degree of faith, so the better the relationships, the higher is the level of faith.

Ibrahim Ibn Abbas says: “I have never seen a person superior to Imam Reza (AS). He never stretched his legs nor slouched in front of his companions. He did not insult his servants, he did not laugh loudly, and always sat at the dinner table along with his servants and subordinates” (Erbil, 1421 AH, vol. 2, p. 247).

If parents want to see their children behave properly, they must treat their spouse well. If a man disrespects his wife, the children will also disrespect their mother, therefore they will lack moral education. During quarantine, parents should take the opportunity to educate their children on a moral level.

Emotional education by expressing love and affection

Love is the cure of many sufferings and pain and it is the best solution to many problems and inconsistencies of education and discipline. Everyone needs love, but children are in more need of love from their parents and others. One way to correct children’s misbehavior is to show them affection. During the Coronavirus outbreak, children need love more than ever in order to cope with the psychological issues resulting from the fear of the disease.

Imam Reza (AS) used this method in various ways. Sometimes he verbally showed his love for his son, Imam Javad (AS), when he hugged and kissed him; “بابی انت و امی”. Abasalat says: “When Javad (AS) came to his father’s bedside at the time of his martyrdom, Imam Reza (AS) stood up and went to him. He put his arms around his neck, pressed him tightly to his chest, kissed him between his eyes, and spoke to him” (Ghorbani, 2010, p. 76) Yahya San’ani says: “I went to see
Imam Reza (AS) in Mecca while Imam Javad (AS) was sitting on his lap and Imam Reza (AS) was feeding him bananas. (Majlisi, 1421 AH, 50, p. 10). These narrations are only a part of Imam Reza’s (AS) love for his only child. He is a role model in showing affection and love.

**Personality education with mutual respect**

Undoubtedly, all human beings value themselves according to their values and dignity. Every human being loves himself and wishes to be respected by others. Respecting and honoring one’s children is one of the most effective ways of education. An effective factor in personality education is mutual respect among family members. Honoring personality is a natural need and every person tries to achieve respect and honor (Ghaemi Amiri, 2004, p. 95).

Imam Reza (AS) had a lot of respect for his son Imam Javad (AS) and used this method of education in raising him. Muhammad ibn Abi Ibad says: “Imam Reza (AS) always used a nickname when calling his son: “Abu Ja’far wrote this to me and I wrote to him, even though Imam Javad (AS) was an only a child, Imam Reza (AS) respected him greatly and responded to his letters with eloquence and kindness” (Majlisi, 1421 AH, p. 221).

According to Razavi teachings, if parents desire transcendency in their child’s personality, they should select a meaningful name for their child because otherwise, their name will embarrass them later in life. Thus, parents should take advantage of the opportunity of staying at home during quarantine to carefully search names, and choose a suitable name that will make their children proud and give them a transcendent personality.

**Physical education with child care**

Physical health, proper nutrition and providing comfort for children is a great task that God Almighty has entrusted to parents. Taking care of children is important throughout their entire lifetime, especially during infancy when the infant is weak and needs more care and attention in the new environment. During the pandemic, this task becomes even more important.

Imam Reza’s (AS) sister, Hakima, says: “When Imam Javad’s (AS) mother was going into labor, Imam Reza (AS) called me and said: stay by her side during her pregnancy and during delivery. Then he put a lamp in the room and closed the door. During labor, the light went out and she became upset. Imam Javad (AS) was born with something as thin as a cloth around him, its light lit up the whole room and we just watched. I hugged her and she separated the cloth. Imam Reza (AS) entered the room. He took the baby and put him in the cradle and told me: “Hakima, take care of my son’s cradle”‡‡ (Majlisi, 1421 AH, 10, p. 10).

‡‡ يا حکیمة إلزمی مهده
Social education under parental supervision

Attention to independence and self-reliance is an important part of education. A child’s excessive dependence on parents is not desirable, especially in adolescence and youth, because the child might be deprived and helpless when the parents are deceased. Therefore, parents should create the ground for self-reliance and social education, while providing their children with proper supervision.

An important point in Imam Reza’s (AS) Sireh was paying attention to his son’s self-reliance. He knew that his son would take on the great responsibility of leading the Islamic society as a teenager, and by delegating the responsibilities to Imam Javad (AS), he would strengthen his management and leadership abilities. Imam Reza (AS) entrusted Imam Javad (AS) with his affairs when he was in Medina. Even though he was only a teenager, he managed this responsibility well. Hanan ibn Sadir says: “... as a teenager, Imam Javad (AS) was in charge of Imam Reza’s (AS) affairs in Medina and he ordered and commanded the servants while none opposed him” (Atarodi, 1406 AH, vol. 2, p. 159).

Abi Nasr Bazanti says: “In a letter from Imam Reza (AS) to Imam Javad (AS), it is said: “Aba Ja’far, I have been informed that the servants lead you out from the small gate, and this is because of their stinginess so no good will come from you to others; [My child], I ask you to enter and exit only through the big gate. When leaving the house, take some gold and silver with you and give them to anyone who asks. Do not give less than fifty dinars to the men who ask you for kindness. It is up to you if you want to give more. Do not give less than twenty fifty dinars to the women who ask you for kindness. Gift and grant them and do not be afraid of poverty from God” (Klini, 2002, 4, p. 43).

Intellectual education

Educating the intellectual dimension and developing the talent of logic and reasoning is one of the most important aspects of child rearing. Teaching logic can be very effective when the child reaches adulthood. Therefore, parents should try to appreciate the moments of quarantine and staying home to educate their child with logic and reason and keep them away from superstitions.

Banan ibn Nafi narrates that one day, Mamun, the Abbasid caliph, came across Imam Javad (AS) where he was playing with children. The children were terrified of Mamun and left the playground and only Javad (AS) stood there. Mamun asked him: “Why didn’t you run away with the other children? He said: I did not do any wrong to run away out of fear and the road is not narrow to be widened for you. Cross wherever you want”. Mamun asked in surprise: “Who are you?” Imam Javad (AS) replied: “I am Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Musa ibn Ja’far ibn Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Hossein ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (AS) ... (Majlisi, 1421 AH, 50, p. 56).

Conclusion

In this article, we dealt with Imam Reza’s (AS) educational Sireh. After examining the concept of raising a child and the Sireh of Imam Reza (AS), we found hadiths and narrations that directly and indirectly refer to child rearing in Imam Reza’s
(AS) practical Sireh, including, 1. Belief education, 2. Religious education, 3. Scientific education, 4. Sex education by encouraging children to marry, 5. Psychological education by praising children, 6. Moral education through good behavior within the family, 7. Emotional education by expressing love and affection, 8. Personality education with mutual respect; 9. Physical education with child care; 10. Social education under parents’ supervision and 11. Intellectual education. These are some of the most important educational methods according to Imam Reza (AS) that can be used by parents during the outbreak of Coronavirus and home quarantine.

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