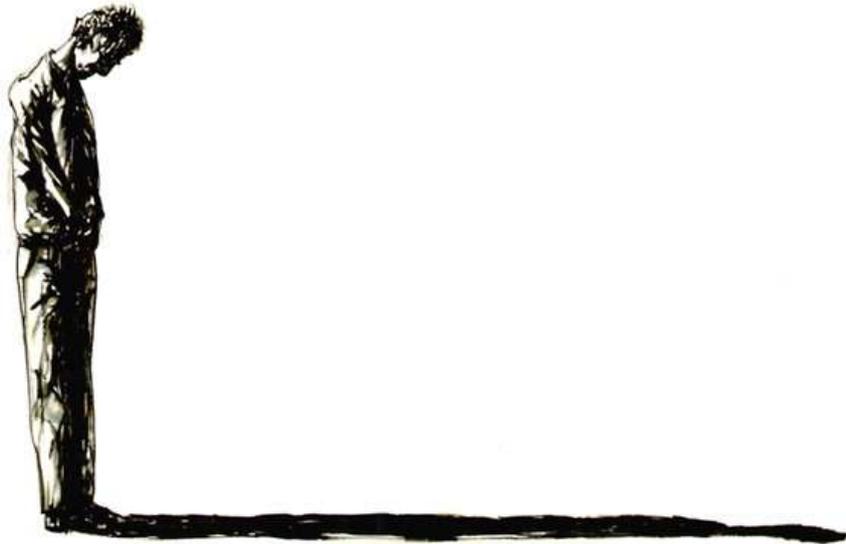


The Goodness of Guilt



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Guilt is the mechanism **by which the conscience is trained**. It is good to feel bad when you do wrong. The fallacy of the postmodern psychological thinking is this – the way you help a person to conquer guilt is to heap lots of praise and “feel good” on the poor individual! This seems logical because since someone is already feeling bad about the misbehavior, why “rub it in” and worsen the situation?

When a child misbehaves, it is not due to certain genetic flaw that must be overcome with a lot of sweet reasoning! It is within his nature to misbehave – it is his default mode! What guilt does is that it signals a lack of coherence in his soul – something doesn’t “click”. As a child, he may not know it yet but when Johnny pinches the little sister, you can be sure of that certain look in his eyes i.e. that guilty look! Effective parenting takes place when we deal with the misbehavior head on as it is and not reason it away with sweet self-esteem talk – “Oh, Johnny is just going through a phase, he will grow out of it, he’s tired etc...” Well, if children just grow out of their misbehavior, today’s teenagers should be the most well-behaved bunch on planet earth! The reality is that they behave as if they are from out of the earth.

When guilt is present, it is indicating that we as responsible parents ought to take the following three steps :

Step 1 : Appeal to the conscience

State plainly the misdemeanour of the misbehavior and why it is wrong. The key is to state it plainly like a police officer – read out the charge. Do not attempt to reason or sweet talk. Whether the child accepts it or not – now, that’s another matter. The important thing is to “rub it in” and state the charges as it is. If it is bullying – don’t call it by any other name. The rule of thumb is this : the younger they are, the less reasoning is required. It might not “click” now, it will later.

Step 2 : Enforce the consequence

For children who are 6 and below, a light and controlled spanking may in order. There needs to be association between pain and misbehavior – why? This is because their moral faculty is not yet fully developed – so their sense of guilt is relieved by the loving administration of the rod. The key is to for parents to be both authoritatively loving and lovingly authoritative. Love without the rod is a sentimental love which leads to rebelliousness later in life. *Guaranteed*.

For the older kids, removal of privileges provides the pain factor. Mind you, it must be a significant privilege. Going to bed without dinner will not work if your daughter is used to fasting twice a week! For my family, the Saturday movie night is a big deal – so, it really causes a strong association – early to bed on Saturday is almost a life sentence!

Step 3 : Carry out Restitution

There is no such thing as a “victimless” crime. Inevitably, there are parties affected by any misbehaviors. If something is stolen, it has to be returned (with interest and increased quantity). If something mean is said, a letter of apology should be written. If someone is offended, a hand-made card or kind gift is in order. Guilt is that mechanism to warn us that a bridge of relationship has collapsed and it needs to be mended in a *practical* way. Just saying “sorry” is not enough. If the action caused the pain, it takes a greater action to eliminate it. That’s just how life goes. The earlier the child accepts it, the less of a brat he will grow up to be.

So, are you interested in training your child for good character? Then welcome guilt as your partner! It is not about making the child feel bad only – it is about guiding the child to face the guilt head-on and overcome it with forgiveness, repentance and restitution. Now, that is what the conscience of every child needs.

Think about it.

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