

He Finally Became a Realist

M.Sami Mufti

When I said to him, ‘Son tell me about the problem that you are facing. I have heard that when you are outside your home you are a happy-go-lucky youth, full of life, a teenager with hopes and desires but as soon as you enter the house it seems as if you are in great discomfort. What is it that has control over your mind?’ Perhaps stifling his anger and hissing, he spoke, ‘I wish I could emit fire from my nose and mouth, like dragon.’ He had stepped out of the house after being scolded by his mother for being careless about his studies. I had spoken to this boy before but this day I realized that the boy that I thought to be a mere child was now actually a young man. He had entered the period of puberty. The physical and emotional changes that take place during the teenage years, along with societal chaos had occupied his mind like a big junkyard. He had to really watch what he says, lest his parents get wind of the changes taking place in him.

Hearing this teenager’s comments reminded me of my own teen years. I realized that this is the time when a child needs the most guidance. Seeing how sensitive the whole matter was, I resolved to make things better. Who could be worse than a teacher who is presented with such a perfect opportunity to train a child and still doesn’t avail it?

Then I spent some time with this teenager. We had several proper sessions. I also met him outside the college, in the school library, took him out to the park, or shopping. Through all of these excursions I kept trying to explain to him that the only way to solve these problems is through dialogue. After several conversations he finally started to open up. After several sessions he finally started to tell me about himself in some detail.

To summarize what he said to me, he was fed up of his mother’s (in his opinion) unnecessary strictness. He shared all his problems with a girl. He could not determine the

exact nature of his relationship with this girl; he wasn't sure if this was just a Platonic friendship or if this friendship was the harbinger of a tale of love. Seeing his friends do so, he too wanted to start smoking. He liked the idea of smoking with his friends, only for the sake of 'style'. Because both his parents are religious, god-fearing people, he feels immense moral pressure on himself. He wants to be left free and that no one should ask him what he is doing, where he is coming from or where he is going. His academic performance had been slipping down further and further, for the last three years or so, but he was not bothered about it; he didn't like to be made to reflect on the consequences of his actions.

When I gave some thought to his father I felt that he was like that merchant who had no clue that his merchandise he had purchased was melting away like ice. If he doesn't take good care of his stuff, then one day the merchant will lose his principal investment too. Children are to provide support to their parents in the future. Parents invest in their children and hope that in the future the children won't abandon them in their old age.

When I spoke to his mother I told her about the responsibilities of a parent. I told her how delicate these flowers, these children are and how easily they can wilt due to the negligence of the gardener. She was aware of the seriousness of the whole issue, but being an emotional mother, she wasn't quite aware of the solution.

I continued to meet with this teenager, encouraged him to express himself, gave him the confidence that what he said was safe with me, so he could tell me anything and everything that came to his mind, good or bad, moral or immoral. I laid great stress on having confidence in one's own self. I assured him that all the problems that seemed so

colossal to him today, would seem insignificant in the years to come. I told him that all he had to do now was to express whatever thoughts he had, and that time was not an issue, I would be there for him whenever he needed me.

I helped him view his relationship with the girl in a normal light. I told him there was nothing wrong with being a friend to her, nothing that he had to be ashamed of or be secretive about. I told him that he had to keep it a secret only because the society we live in takes a negative view of such things. There is a big difference between something being disliked according to the values of one society, and it being a crime. I explained to him that just like he had friends in primary school with whom he had now lost contact, then in middle school he made friends, some of whom he left and some had left him by now, in the same way this girl was also one such friend in his life with whom he should not make any life long commitments, nor should you declare that he will be friends with her for the rest of his life. Just like when your friends separated from you, you didn't think they had cheated you or been disloyal to you, in the same way if she leaves you, you should not think of her as insincere and likewise, help her understand that if you part ways with her she shouldn't think that you were cheating her.

When that boy saw that I gave importance to who he was, that I acknowledge his personality, he started to pay heed to what I said. Thus I continued to descend deeper into his being and his awareness continued to grow. Then he went and told his friend about these facts of life too. One evening he told me that he had finally been able to make the girl understand and now she doesn't label his change of attitude as disloyalty.

The next step was to encourage the teen to focus on his studies. Being naturally intelligent, he did quite well in his Cambridge (A Level) exams.

As the choices he was making in life had changed, his relationship with his parents improved too.

Today he is a young man, full of aspirations yet seeing the world in the light of reality.

The author is associated with the Musab School System, Johar Town, Lahore