

# From Seed to Cedar by Fethullah Gülen

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This book by Fethullah Gülen offers a comprehensive guide on various responsibilities, from providing advice to families on child-rearing to emphasising the family's significance in society, addressing state officials, and highlighting the crucial role of teachers in children's lives.

Fethullah Gülen is a Turkish scholar, preacher and opinion leader. Gülen has been characterised in English-language media as an imam who advocates for a tolerant version of Islam, highlighting the values of altruism, social solidarity, and education. He is also recognized as one of the most significant figures globally. Fethullah Gülen is a very prolific writer, and he has seventy-five books. Around a hundred books about him have been written from Turkish and foreign sources.

At the centre of this book are the parents. Although there are calls made to teachers and government officials, the primary audience is the parents. It points out the importance and sensitivity of child-rearing, the essential considerations in this matter, and indicates that states which do not focus on this issue will eventually face failure.

If we need to give some short details about chapters in the book, these are:

- what is marriage and why is it important to choose a good partner in raising well educated generations
- what is a family and its importance for the society and children
- sensitivity in manners: being able to a role model parent
- the aspects of discipline: not leaving the child unattended

These sentences underline the importance of the family while also making a call to state officials: "The family is the most important pillar of society. The strength of this pillar means the strength of the nation and the state. Therefore, this fundamental pillar of the nation and the state should never be left without a project or plan." Additionally, "Anyone who wants to be a parent should know the basic principles of psychology and pedagogy to a certain level and must learn ways to raise good generations." Here, it

is clearly emphasised that states can implement legal regulations that require prospective parents to undergo courses in education, health, home economics, etc., as a condition for a marriage licence. Moreover, families are advised to have as many children as they can properly raise and educate.

Fethullah Gülen reminds us that imitation is essential in children's lives, and they copy everything good or bad around them, offering the following advice: families should not leave children unattended but closely monitor them. They should know the books their children read and their friends, even determining these in advance. Furthermore, they should choose the barbers, tailors, or shopping places for their children and not allow their pure minds, open to all kinds of data, to be polluted. Additionally, parents should be very careful in their dialogue and behaviour around their children, bringing the conversation to the values they want to instil in them.

Although there is much current propaganda about leaving children and young people free and not interfering much with them, Fethullah Gülen's statements are quite interesting and are the advice many families seeking a way out are looking for.

Gülen also states that the most fundamental structure that makes up society is the family and that a well-mannered society depends on the well-mannered upbringing of children in the family. Therefore, couples should reconsider their relationships through the filter of reason and logic, as children cannot receive the necessary upbringing in a troubled family environment and will grow up feeling orphaned despite having parents. Sometimes, they may even grow up hostile, insensitive, and emotionless towards their parents and society.

## Preparing the Environment for Upbringing

For children to be raised perfectly, the environment must also be perfect. Yes, every child is shaped by their environment and, in a sense, is considered a child of that environment.

According to Fethullah Gülen, the environments that influence a child, in order of importance, are:

- Home
- School
- Peer group
- Classroom friendships
- Other places they visit and shop

Gülen stresses that in a corrupted environment, a child will inevitably be corrupted, and once such an event occurs, it is impossible to go back and correct the situation.

## **Instilling a Sense of Gratitude in Children**

We should teach children the sense of gratitude from an early age, a period when the things we tell them will remain in their memory, mind, and heart for life. It is essential to ensure children develop this sense. If they come from a religious family, they should be taught to thank the Creator for the blessings they receive, or at least to express gratitude to people.

## **Compassion**

According to Fethullah Gülen, the most important thing children should fear is not threats or punishment, but rather losing the compassion of their parents. In his own words: "If a child perceives their father's stern expression or notices the warm face of their mother clouding over, it will act as the greatest deterrent to bring them into balance. However, it is very important for the child to trust you and believe that you share their pain and suffering.

Therefore, if they cry, try to cry with them sincerely, or at least share their sorrow. Thus, you will become more exalted in their eyes, and the words you speak and stories you tell will have a lasting effect on their hearts."

## **Authority**

It is crucial that there is no lack of authority within the home. Without an authority that ensures harmony, administrative chaos will prevail, and the children will remain confused.

Additionally, when a child is afraid of one parent, they should be able to seek refuge with the other, ideally in the mother's embrace. This balance allows the child to find fear and awe or compassion and mercy in the father, and the opposite in the mother. However, if family life lacks this unity, and both parents have their own separate authorities, the children will grow up insensitive, emotionless, harsh, and lack of direction.

## **Introducing Exemplary Behaviours and People**

One of the most effective ways to instil good qualities in children is by introducing them to the life stories of past or present individuals who can serve as role models. This is particularly important for educators. While children should learn good behaviour, using examples of notable figures

from history will have a more lasting impact. When children know that the stories told by their elders really happened, they will aspire to be like the heroes in those stories and will remember them even when they grow up.

Additionally, Gülen's observations include: "In the future, those who will dominate the world will not be the nations with technological superiority but those who take the institution of marriage seriously and know how to elevate their generations to humanity. Nations that cannot take the issues of marriage and childbirth seriously and fail to take care of their generations with their own upbringing philosophy are doomed to perish in the ruthless gears of time, if not today, then tomorrow. The first school of children, whose souls are as bright as mirrors and whose minds record as quickly as cameras, is their own home, and their first educators are their mothers. Raising mothers as good educators, without wasting them here and there, is the most important foundation for the existence and permanence of a nation. Those who want to predict the future of a nation will be 100% accurate if they look at the upbringing given to that nation's youth."

### **Weaknesses of this book**

This book provides general parenting advice but does not address the individual differences of each family and child. In contrast to modern family structures, which advocate for more freedom for children and child-centered parenting, and emphasise the individuality of each child, this book focuses more on culturally normative parenting. This might appear to some readers as an old-fashioned approach to child-rearing. Additionally, the book discusses traditional parenting methods and does not emphasize scientific studies and research in psychology and pedagogical sciences. Consequently, some of the advice may seem outdated and challenging for parents to implement.

### **Topicality**

Although this book may seem outdated, it provides very valuable advice to modern parents and educators when read carefully. For example, in one part of the book, Gülen states that children should be disciplined not with punishment but with the fear of losing their parents' trust or love. He suggests that parents share their child's emotions, and if necessary, sit and cry with them during intense emotional moments.

In another part of the book, there is timeless advice: couples planning to become parents should go through certain training and take pedagogical/

psychological courses. He invites government officials to create projects to implement this.

The book emphasises qualities that every parent would want to see in their child, such as compassion and respect. It discusses the benefits of children learning to say 'thank you' from a very young age.

Although not a pedagogue or psychologist, Gülen points out that children are inclined to imitate everything they see around them. He advises families to be mindful of their behaviour and words around their children. Even though he does not base this on scientific studies, we now know that this is true.

Lastly, the book discusses the importance of having a single authority figure at home, so the child understands the balance within the household. It emphasises the importance of role-sharing between mother and father, which we also know is crucial from today's studies.

## The ten basic principles of good parenting

There are some books which might have similar content but I want to share one example from Laurence Steinberg, Ph.D. His book, *The 10 Basic Principles of Good Parenting* offers some similar ideas with this book. Here are some of them;

- What you do matters: Parents' actions have more effect than their words. They should be a good role model for their child.
- Be involved in your child's life: Parents should be actively engaged with their child's education, hobbies and social activities. They should know the child's worlds. It means they should know, child's teacher, friends, interests etc. Also, parents should provide guidance and supervise activities.
- Be consistent: Child's misbehaviour is the result of inconsistent parents because their rules change everyday. Dr. Laurence says, "the most important disciplinary tool is consistency" here.

## Conclusion

This book offers effective, heartfelt advice to teachers who interact with children, children themselves, states trying to provide an environment conducive to education, and especially to families, who are the most influential. It contains excellent advice that everyone, especially devout families, should take to heart and emphasises the topics of family, school, and children.

I believe that parents from any nation, whether religious or not, can benefit from this book.

Anyone who objectively examines its content will grasp the valuable lessons it offers and appreciate the sincere thoughts expressed for raising strong future generations. To conclude with Gülen's words: "We are the fruit of those who came before us; the next generations will be the result of our efforts."

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