

The Procedure for Shaping Character



What are the factors that influence the shaping of character?

The primary factor that determines every person's character is their **environment**.

The environment consists of three aspects that will influence an individual's character:

- Physical Environment
- Social Environment
- Inner Speech

Additionally, the effect of the environmental factors is coloured by the individual's unique perception of their environment.

- Physical Environment (the material world around us)
- Social Environment (Interpersonal Communication)
 - Direct Human Interaction:
 - Parents
 - Family
 - Friends
 - Teachers
 - Surrounding people

- Indirect Human Interaction (Man-made communication media)
 - TV
 - Video
 - Internet
 - Music

- Inner Speech
 - Inner speech refers to the things that we say to ourselves with our thoughts and our feelings.
 - Inner speech has an important role in determining our individual actions.
 - Inner speech arises from the accumulated life experiences stored in our Total Past Learning History (TPLH), and is a big factor in how we perceive all things.



Inner speech plays a special role in our ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong, and in exercising the free will granted us by Allah.

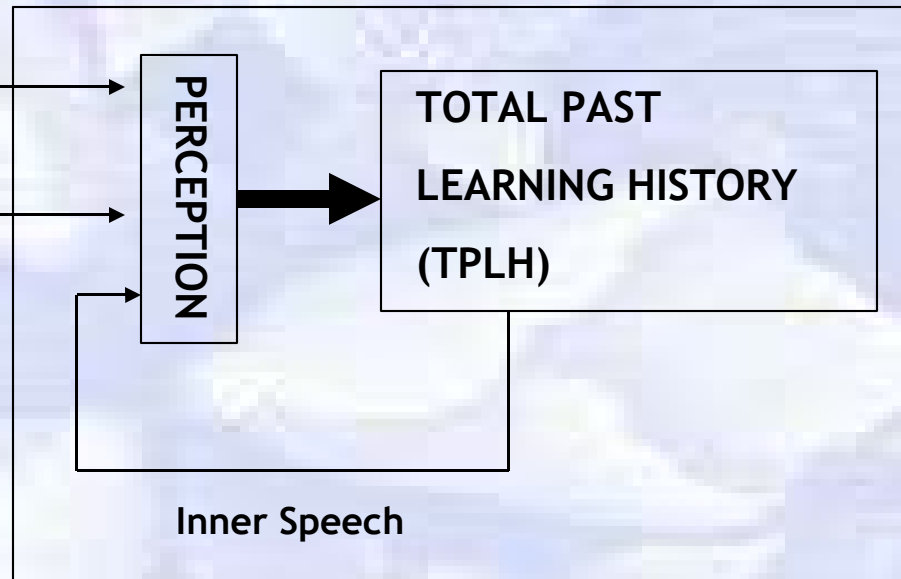
The Shaping of Character

Three Environment Sources:

1. Physical Environment

2. Social Environment

3. Inner Speech



Perception

- Perception interprets all information received by our five senses and acts as a filter. This filter is not objective, it is always coloured in some manner.
- Every individual's perception is different because it is influenced by unique environmental factors (physical, social and inner speech) and by the Total Past Learning History (TPLH) of that specific individual.

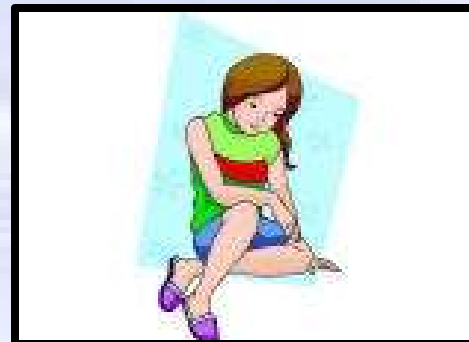
The following example illustrates different perceptions towards cigarette smoking:

- A smoker may see smoking as pleasurable, stylish and status enhancing.
- A non-smoker may see smoking as foul smelling, endangering health, and a waste of money.
- Parents need to help their children develop an Islamic perception, so they see the world from an Islamic point of view no matter what the circumstances.



Parents have to ensure that their children's Total Past Learning History (TPLH) is positive.

- ❑ A child's character development depends on their exposure to either positive or negative influences.
- ❑ All such exposure, whether positive or negative, will be imprinted in the child's mind as part of their Total Past Learning History.
- ❑ The Total Past Learning History determines a child's character and behaviour, and is influenced by the previously mentioned three environmental factors, of which social interaction and inner speech are the most important.
- ❑ Our Total Past Learning History will determine our personality, thoughts, words, actions and everything else about who and what we are.
- ❑ Our aim is to ensure only positive messages are written in our children's Total Past Learning History so that our children can become excellent individuals.



Our responsibility as parents is to mould positive characteristics/traits in our children.

Examples of positive traits are:

- Loving Allah
- Compassion towards our fellow men
- Mutual respect
- Consideration of others
- Courtesy and good manners
- Avoidance of conflict and aggression towards others
- Hardworking at their studies
- Perseverance in any endeavour
- Honesty in all matters



How should we act with our children in order to ensure positive messages are written in their Total Past Learning History?

- By rewarding them for every positive (good) action that they do.
- By rewarding them for refraining from every negative (bad) action.
- By giving calm and gentle feedback about any wrong that is done and kind instruction on the right way to do things.

This procedure is called DIRECTED POSITIVE INFLUENCE!

- Directed positive influence means ensuring children are rewarded every time they do something good or when they refrain from doing something prohibited, as well as pointing out their mistakes in a caring manner when they do something wrong.
- In this way children will be encouraged to do more and more good things, and will leave the bad alone. They will do this because they will come to love what is good and despise what is bad.

What kinds of REWARDS are to be given?

- Attention
- Respect and Appreciation
- Words of praise
- Words of encouragement
- Words of thanks
- Mentioning the good deeds performed by our children
- Showing care and compassion in our words and actions
- Bringing our children along on walks or trips
- Giving presents (only occasionally)



Note: Children can be taught to reward themselves using their own inner speech (this is very important).

THE ROLE OF INNER SPEECH: THE STORY OF YUSUF

Yusuf came from a small village and was raised with lots of care, compassion and with strong religious teachings. While waiting for his final exam results from high school, he went to visit his aunt in Kuala Lumpur (but this could happen in almost any big city in the world) and was taken by his cousin to a birthday party. This party involved only teenagers, and there was loud rock music with dancing. Suddenly, a group of young men brought out a carton of beer, and started distributing bottles to all who were present. Yusuf was offered a bottle of beer which he refused, but his new found friends kept on offering it to him.

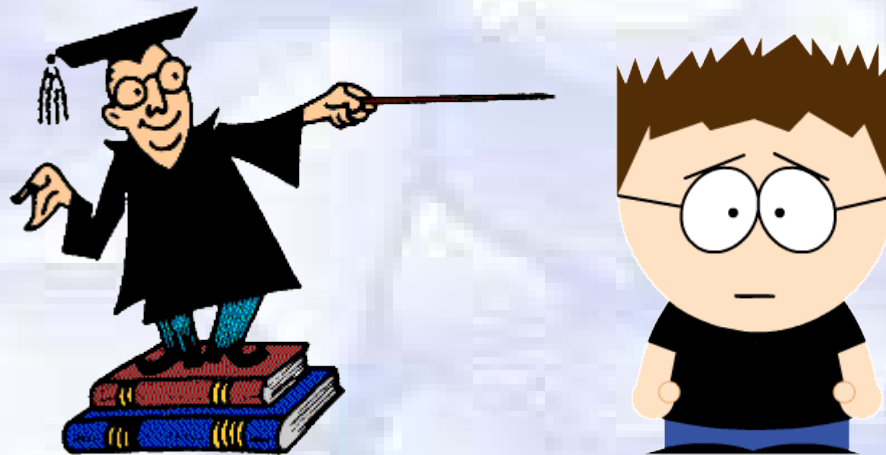
“Relax, man.... Just give it a taste. It’s not like we’re gonna get drunk. We’ve all tried it before, and nothing bad happened.”

Yusuf said to himself (with his inner speech), *“Alcohol is definitely haram, and I must be strong in my stand on this. Let them call me old-fashioned if they want, but I will not let this offer of temporary pleasure shake my conviction. It doesn’t matter if they will not befriend me. Perhaps I should leave this party. Even before this, I was already uncomfortable with all the dancing and open flirting that’s going on here.”*

Yusuf persuaded his cousin – who himself did not imagine that the party would be like this – to leave with him. On the way home, Yusuf said to himself with his thoughts, *“I’m very proud of myself for not being easily influenced away from what I know is right. May Allah always keep me on the straight path”*

Please notice from the example above that Yusuf used positive inner speech in two separate instances:

- In assuring himself that he would not be pressured by his peers into doing something wrong.
 - In giving himself a reward in his mind after he had successfully refrained from committing any wrongs.
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- Inner speech can influence someone's actions in either a positive or negative manner. It all depends on the Total Past Learning History and that individual's own perception of their circumstances.
 - Educating children from an early age to be Allah's Representative on earth (Khalifah Allah) will ensure the development of positive inner speech.



laws of learning



Just as Allah has made it His Law (**Sunnatullah**) that all events, natural phenomena, and creatures should obey the laws of physics, chemistry and biology, He has also made it His Law (**Sunnatullah**) that a child's character will be developed according to the Laws of Learning.

❑ **The Laws of Learning explain how all learning takes place, including the development of character:**

- Every action or trait, whether good or bad, is developed through either the giving of reward or the applying of punishment.
- Giving a reward after any action will increase the likelihood that the action will be repeated in the future. Both the frequency of the action, as well as the whole-hearted willingness to do that action, will increase. (This principle should be given much weight in the molding of a child's character.)
- Applying punishment after any action will decrease the likelihood of that action being repeated in the future. (But, besides having serious negative side effects, punishment will often lose its effectiveness in the long run.)
- Reward will thus shape an individual's positive character much better than punishment.
- The best process for shaping character is through small rewarded steps that move progressively towards any goal (i.e. attaining good character). This is called the **SHAPING PROCESS**.
- Every small achievement should ideally be reinforced positively through the giving of reward.
- This **SHAPING PROCESS** can be made even more effective by helping our children learn to reward themselves through their inner speech.

SHAPING PROCESS



AN EXAMPLE OF SHAPING

The Objective: Your child is to keep his bedroom neat and orderly. This objective can be achieved through the following small steps (rather than requiring it all at once) that the child is rewarded for performing:

- ❑ Step 1: Towels are to be hung up to dry and dirty clothes are to be put into a laundry basket; do not allow clothes to be scattered on the floor.
- ❑ Step 2: The bed is to be made up every morning and the floor swept.
- ❑ Step 3: Dust is wiped and the books are neatly stacked on the desk.
- ❑ Step 4: The room is decorated
- ❑ Finally, the whole room is always neat, clean, and orderly

When each step is successfully completed, the child is given a reward in the form of words of encouragement, appreciation and occasionally some little treat, such as an ice-cream.



SUMMARY FOR PARENTS

- ❑ Parents should discuss the goals they are working toward with their children so that the goals may be clearly understood and agreed upon.
- ❑ Involve the whole family in understanding the Laws of Learning so that they can be shared, practiced, and cooperation gained from all parties to help achieve the goals.
- ❑ It is important for parents to reinforce these good behaviours and traits through directed positive influence.
- ❑ Parents have to realize that good behaviour does not spontaneously happen but must be a continuous and carefully planned part of family life.
- ❑ The continuous effort to develop good character in your child must be carried out through small rewarded steps (shaping) that lead towards the final objective.
- ❑ The application of the Laws of Learning can be seen simply in the, "Chicken Story".



APPLICATION OF THE LAWS OF LEARNING: CHICKEN STORY

This true story illustrates how the Laws of Learning can be applied to train a chicken.

Objective: To train a chicken to stand on its right leg only, turn a full circle hopping on that one leg to the right, peck a red button on the wall of the cage and have a bite of food.

Problem: It is difficult for us to train the chicken to do the above because we cannot communicate with it. But with knowledge of the Laws of Learning, this seemingly impossible task can be achieved in less than 10 minutes.

Situation: A hungry chicken, a cage, and a food tray with chicken feed that pops up when the chicken presses the red button or the trainer presses a separate button.



Method: In this experiment, REWARD is given in the form of food.

Stage 1:

At the beginning, we observe the chicken's behaviour. Usually a chicken will not stand still, and will be constantly lifting one foot or the other and pecking at random. The first time the chicken lifts its left foot up, we will reward it with food by raising the food tray. After that, if its left foot is lifted up, it will be rewarded with food only if its left foot is lifted higher than it was the time before. The chicken will quickly associate this action of lifting its left foot higher and higher with the availability of food. At the end of this stage, we will have a chicken that is standing constantly on its right leg. From this stage onwards, no more food is given until the chicken begins turning to the right as described in Stage 2.

Stage 2:

Now every time the chicken, while standing on its right leg, turns further to the right, it will be rewarded with food. It will be only a matter of time before the chicken, while standing on its right foot, will turn its head to the right, and be rewarded. When it can turn its head no further, it will begin hopping to the right until eventually its body has turned in a full circle and it is standing on one leg facing the red button on the cage wall.

Stage 3:

When the chicken then pecks at the red button it will cause the food tray to be raised so it is again rewarded by food. The objective has now been fully achieved. Now the chicken is only rewarded with food when it performs all the actions in sequence, i.e. standing on its right leg, making a full turn to the right, and pecking the red button. Because every time the chicken completes that series of actions it will be rewarded with food, the chicken will continue to perform those actions over and over again.

What can be learned from this experiment?

- ❑ A task that is seemingly impossible in the beginning can be easily achieved by correctly using the knowledge of the Laws of Learning.
- ❑ A complex task can be taught in small stages.
- ❑ Every action that is followed by a reward will reinforce that action, and result in it occurring more often in the future.
- ❑ At every stage we need a specific goal; completing all the small goals in each stage will lead towards successfully attaining the final, larger objective.

Making these methods applicable to our children

- ❑ Prepare a suitable objective.
- ❑ If the objective is complex it has to be broken down into small stages.
- ❑ A reward is given for every small step toward the goal that occurs in each of the stages.
- ❑ When this procedure is carried out carefully, we can help our children achieve any positive goal; and, the positive traits learned will be permanently imprinted in our children.

Summary for Parents

- ❑ Prepare a specific objective for whatever you wish to achieve.
- ❑ Pay attention to the positive/good behavior exhibited by your children.
- ❑ Don't pay too much attention to the negative/bad behaviour exhibited by your children, but gently remind them of better ways to do things.
- ❑ Give a reward for every positive act performed by your child that is a step along the path to the positive objective they are working toward, and continue doing this until that specific objective is achieved.
- ❑ Children need lots attention from their parents.
- ❑ At every moment, our children's development is being shaped by their environment, including what they are learning from their parents.

