

Chapter 6 – Divine Mandate

Table of Contents

Previous – Chapter 5, Respect and Obedience

Chapter 6 – Divine Mandate

Many religious people, Christian and not, consider the practice of spanking to be divinely mandated. They'll quote scriptures or religious leaders in the attempt to support that belief. If you believe without a doubt that spanking is required by your god, then you likely won't care what I have to say. That's fine; feel free to skip to the end. For everyone else, perhaps we can shed some perspective on things.

Perspective

In December 2000, Lisa Haddock wrote of her responses from several religious leaders in the New Jersey area to the question, "According to your religious tradition, under what circumstances can a parent strike a child? How far can a parent go when correcting a child's behavior?" She received the following (abbreviated) responses:(26)

Rev. Steven R. McClelland, pastor, First Presbyterian Church,

"He who spares his rod hates his son" was never meant as an endorsement of corporal punishment. The rod mentioned in Proverbs is the same rod mentioned in Psalm 23, "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." This rod was the round end of a shepherd's staff used to keep a sheep from wandering off in the wrong direction and getting hurt. It is analogous to a concrete divider on a highway separating the right and left lanes in order to prevent collisions. In this day and age there is no theological or psychological need to use corporal punishment. When parents hit children, they show that they have lost control of their tempers. As a result, their children are filled with fear.

He goes on to recommend time-outs instead of spanking, but it is my position that even time-outs are as unnecessary and counter-productive as spanking.(27) His interpretation of the rod is shared by Samuel Martin who wrote an entire book examining the original meaning of these passages from the Bible, titled *Thy Rod and Thy Staff, They Comfort Me*.(28)

The Rev. Kobutsu Malone, Buddhist priest, Engaged Zen Foundation,

I can only speak from the perspective of a simple Buddhist priest. Working over the years with my own children, students, prisoners, and my fellow human beings, I have learned that any form of punishment, be it corporal or psychological, is counterproductive. It is uncivilized and serves no purpose other than to perpetuate oppression.

The practice of punishment involves the deliberate infliction of physical or emotional pain by one person who has power over the other. It instills fear, creates trauma, and damages the punished as well as the punisher. The net result is humiliation and degradation for the giver and the receiver.

Each time we are punished, we are taught that punishment is acceptable. Out of fear, we modify our behavior in the presence of our oppressor. When our punisher is no longer present, we feel resentment. In time, these feelings can turn into hatred for ourselves and others and lead to depression and alienation. When these feelings are directed outwardly, we oppress others. We come to believe: "I was punished; therefore it is justifiable for me to punish another." We, in effect, have learned to become the oppressor. We pass on the cycle of violence to our families, our children, and our society.

Inflicting pain after a child has misbehaved does not change the original event nor does it educate the individual. Communication, education, restraint, and discipline are the only effective means for parents to direct and guide their children. Punishment, corporal or otherwise, is unacceptable and inexcusable, because it destroys any possibility for real healing and learning.

He mirrors my own thinking as presented throughout this booklet. Spanking and punishments ignore root causes and are ineffective at educating children on the proper

means to meet their desired ends, their needs.

Rakesh Chhabra, M.D., Hindu Samaj,

The Hindu religion is based on the concept of kindness and non-violence (ahimsa). Ahimsa means not causing harm to any living being through words, deeds, or thoughts.

Corporal punishment is violence, and it is not sanctioned by Hindu tradition or scriptures. Spanking teaches children that violence is acceptable. It will make them violent with their peers, siblings, and their own children. It also makes them more stubborn and aggressive. They may tell lies or manipulate others to get away from the punishment. It may also decrease their self-esteem.

Instead of corporal punishment, the Hindu religion recommends using words, explanation, and personal example to motivate and change the behavior of children. Children are considered to be a form of God, according to Hindu tradition, and should be treated with love and respect.

I really love this. I am quite unfamiliar with Hindu religion, but this makes it sound quite compatible with both my parenting and political philosophies.(29)

Mohammad Moutaz Charaf, Dar-UI-Islah Mosque,

Islam recognizes that each child differs in disposition, level of understanding, and cleverness. So in Islam, we can teach children by a variety of means, such as talking, reasoning, explaining, relating stories, setting good examples, being consistent in expectations, offering encouragement and rewards, and sometimes by distancing ourselves from them.

He goes on to recommend a light spanking, not while angry, in order to protect the child from a dangerous situation. I believe I adequately addressed that concern in Chapter 3.

The rest of the responses do encourage spanking as a matter of divine mandate, not as a matter of wisdom or effectiveness in meeting all the needs of the child.

Divine Mandate

If you truly believe that the practice of spanking or the punishment of children in general is a commandment from the divine, then you must weigh that against everything I've written in this booklet so far. Why would such a practice be required if it is ineffective and counter-productive in raising loving and compassionate children? Perhaps it's just a test of faith, although it seems unfair that our children, our children's children, and so on, should be the ones to suffer for the beliefs of caretakers.

How about, for those who believe spanking is a divine mandate, you relate with your children in such a way so as to prevent even the need to follow this mandate? Meet their every psychological and biological need as a preventive measure. We as caretakers, religious or not, should be committed to doing this anyway. Surely a god wouldn't require we spank our children for nothing, right? And when our children make mistakes, as immature and ignorant beings are wont to do, they'll trust us to help them make things right and learn a better way.

As mentioned at the beginning of this booklet, the practice of spanking and other forms of punishment was abandoned in my family in 2011. My oldest, a son, was five years old, and had been spanked since he was three. A friend and mentor of mine at the time introduced me to Alfie Kohn's *Unconditional Parenting*.⁽³⁰⁾ Reading it caused major doubts in me that my parenting methods were ideal or compatible with my values.⁽³¹⁾ My wife and I decided to stop spanking and punishing our son, and instead find a better way to address the issues that prompted punishment. We found them throughout many books and all over the Internet.⁽³²⁾ While we still have a lot to learn about the best way to raise our kids, we're confident that the tools of violence and fear are completely unnecessary and counterproductive to raising healthy, loving, and compassionate humans. I hope that this booklet is enlightening and causes you to likewise abandon the unnecessary and counterproductive practice of spanking. Godspeed!

(26) Read "Should Parents Spare the Rod When Punishing Kids?" by Lisa Haddock at <http://skyler.link/jrspankingreligion>

(27) Read "The Case Against Time-out" by Peter Haiman at <http://skyler.link/ncptimeout>

(28) Read "Thy Rod and Thy Staff, They Comfort Me" by Samuel Martin at <http://skyler.link/thyrodthystaff>

(29) Read "The Philosophy of Voluntarism" by the author at <http://skyler.link/evcphilosophy>

(30) Available in several formats at <http://skyler.link/amznunconditional>

(31) Read "The Values of a Voluntarist" by the author at <http://skyler.link/evcvalues>

(32) See the Resource page at Everything-Voluntary.com at <http://skyler.link/evcresources>, and the Gentle Guidance

article archive at The Natural Child Project at <http://skyler.link/ncpguidance>

Next – Further Reading