

RELATIONSHIPS



Pinnocchio is a well-known children's story. Gepetto is an Italian woodcarver who creates Pinnocchio the puppet. Pinnocchio is a jovial character getting up to all sorts of boyish mischief. The story grips our attention as Pinnocchio moves from one adventure to another. We identify with the parental care and the concern of the father 'Gepetto' as well as with the waywardness and the unclear direction of the boy. At one point in the story, lost in self-doubt, Pinnocchio turns to his maker 'Gepetto' saying, "Papa I'm not sure who I am. But if I'm alright with you then I guess I'm alright with me."

This innocent remark embodies a profound truth about relationships. Relations with oneself, with one's maker and with others. Human beings are social animals depending upon each other for psychological and physical support from the time of birth. We need nurture, 'tender loving care' in order to survive. The mother is there to provide this warmth, food, joy and sensitive care. The maternal love not only gives security to the child but a role model too.

The mother shows unreserved love and kindness as well as over-flowing generosity, her patience with her child is a wonderful example of self-sacrifice. These moral characteristics are given real meaning by the mother. This helps the child to relate to his/her surroundings. This is the horizontal axis of relations with our fellow humans, parenting being central to it. Good parenting not only nurtures but also builds trust of other humans, a vital ingredient for a cohesive community and peaceful society.

Professor Richard Whitfield says "In our ever-growing materialistic society we are giving less and less emphasis to parenting. Girls who would be mothers and boys who would be fathers are not given encouragement to view those roles as prime career tasks needing their active collaborative involvement."

Pinnocchio said, "But if I'm alright with you then I guess I'm alright with me." For the believer, human relationships have two axes, horizontal axis described above with parents as well as other humans and the vertical axis being the relationship with the Maker. What do we believe about Him? What is the nature of our relationship with Him? These are the twin pillars of community cohesion and good human relations.

In Islamic studies, the science of human relations is called Akhlaq or morality and the relationship with the Divine is through worship, a lot of emphasis is put on these two. When asked, "What is religion?" The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Good character." The man repeated this question several times, each time he ﷺ gave the same answer. Finally the Messenger ﷺ said, "Have you not grasped it?" (Mundhri) On another occasion he ﷺ was asked, "What is bad luck?" He ﷺ replied, "Bad character." (Abu Dawud) The Messenger ﷺ was once asked, "Which is the best deed?" He ﷺ said, "To have good character." (Zabidi) One of the beautiful Prophetic prayers is, "O Lord you have made me beautiful make my character beautiful as well." (Ahmad)

The second pillar is worship. This is not just adoring, singing the Lord's hymn and glorifying Him but living according to His commands. Ibadah is devotion, love and compliance with the Divine teachings. A Muslim demonstrates these through the daily five prayers, fasting in Ramadhan, giving charity and once in a life time doing Hajj.

"Surely the one who has purified himself and remembers his Lord is the most successful." (Surah Al-Lail)