

## Child is the Father of a Man

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### Abstract

From my time as a child where my father didn't ever remember the class I was studying in to my time as a parent where I was sitting in my son's classes more than he was, is quite a generational leap and not a very smooth one at that, but a huge learning nevertheless. My child has helped me evolve as a parent and as a person that I am and that I will be. The journey as a parent is actually the destination at each step since we discover the joys, frustrations and innovations required to cope with the new age parenthood. Welcome to my journey as a new born parent.

I belong to a generation where the involvement of fathers in the child rearing was so limited that each time in a family gathering if someone asked my father about the class in which his children were studying, he had to call out to one of us to confirm. From there to becoming a father in a day and age where the level of involvement of fathers in child rearing is virtually in competition with mothers, is a great generational leap. I'm a father of a 7 year old boy and these last 7 years, as far as being a father is concerned, have been like a new life all together.

Child is the father of Man – William Wordsworth had used this expression in his famous poem 'The Rainbow', the expression became more famous than the poem itself. I have a different take on the interpretation from what Mr. Wordsworth used it for. I feel that there are so many emotions, aspirations and situations that new parents face when a child enters their life that it's like a new birth for them too. Also, parents re-live the childhood a second time along with their child. The real meaning of being a parent only dawns when one becomes one. Did that change anything for me? Well, it made me revisit every concept of life, made me a more realized soul for sure, I realized my limitations and also my limitlessness.

I've enjoyed my parenthood the maximum any parent can. I've tried being as hands on as I could be. At each step I was aware of the food that my child had to be fed, health issues he faced, medicines to be given, time he woke up at night and how much milk would have to be fed to him. I even enjoyed making milk for him whenever he woke up as a new born in the

middle of the night. Till he was one year old, he would wake up several times each night and we had to feed him, change his nappies, play with him or generally pet him back to sleep. It wasn't easy and used to be very frustrating especially after a tough day at work or if there's a tough day ahead but the love for your child and the sense of duty as a parent is more overpowering than anything else. We were told things would change when he would turn one and they did change dramatically because he started to sleep through the night very soon and so could we. But the struggles of each stage are different and more complex than the previous one, so are the frustrations and joys. I've enjoyed galloping around my apartment complex with my son on my back giggling uncontrollably, requesting the horse to go faster and for one more round. I've enjoyed playing hide and seek with him, where every time he would hide, he would call out to make things easier for me and if we were playing in a large group then too, he would let the seeker also know where we were hiding, just so the seeker knows that he is hiding. I've immensely enjoyed wrestling with him where he wins every time and sometimes, as a concession, he lets me win too. I've most thoroughly enjoyed discovering children's literature which I hadn't read when I was a child. I am amazed to see what a wonderful treasure it is and how enjoyable and profound each of those books is. Now I enjoy making pan cakes for him, read out at night to him and go out for a treat with him. I play with my child more as a friend, but that doesn't always take away the ego of being a parent, to whom the child should listen and comply. Despite the decision to not make our

child a compliant child, I used to frequently be frustrated at his dissents and challenge to my authority. I've had few emotional outbursts as a result of that, even when he was a mere toddler, where I ended up shouting at him. I regret that a lot but I realized that I was a new parent and despite the decision of bringing him up in a certain way, I was much trapped in a mould of my own upbringing, the social conditioning, societal expectations and certain image of a father.

Despite being in a joint family set up, which has its own advantages, I have realized that the struggles and joys of being a parent are very individualistic. What sort of a person you want your child to be, what sort of life, discipline and concessions you want to give your child are ultimately the decisions which rest with parents alone, especially if you wish to remain involved in the child rearing. Being a parent makes one reflect upon the person you are, the life you've had, the values you have, influences that have been upon you and whether you would like your child to grow up any differently from what you've become. These are deeper and profound issues which only a parent has to reflect upon and confront. There are influences which would prevail upon the child in Indian family set up, which you can't do much about but there are influences and pressures which you would have to withstand and shield your child from, those you have to filter and decide as parents. I credit my involvement, my enriched experiences to the discussions I've had with my wife about each aspect of parenthood. Her background in psychology and education helps us lay every aspect relating to child rearing thread bare and pick up the best we can. I may still not be perfect but I've enjoyed the experience much more than I would have had I not been so involved as a parent.

Also, as parents we tend to doubt what we are doing, get worried if rather than doing any good in bringing up the child the way we've decided to, we may be causing more damage to the child in some way. Child rearing at some level is full of experiments, these are all experiments that one does during the course of bringing up a

child. But such doubts and worries get answered through the results that we see in our child's behavior on account of such experiments. It's also good to find likeminded parents and see what they do, their struggles, growth trajectory of children of the same age group. Discussion over issues with other parents also help put doubts in the mind to rest. Inputs from our own family members and parents also help but at the end of the day one must have faith and belief in one's own decisions and go with the flow.

The biggest challenge however which no previous generation has ever faced has been on account of Covid-19 Pandemic. Since March 2020 schools have been closed and for the first time, we have all realized the importance of school as a space not just for kids but for parents as well. We have all talked about schools being temples of learning and the important role it plays in shaping a child's future but never before did we realize that school time is the time which lets kids do peer interaction, which is so important for their growth and development and also for sanity of parents since that time away at school gives us time to pursue our life tasks, for which we should eternally be grateful to schools. To keep a child of 3-7 years engaged in smaller family units with no other kids around is a task which is difficult to manage and also not very healthy for the child on account of too much adult interaction. There have been several tomes already written on the ill effects of online education on children but there hasn't been much investigation on the effects which online schooling has had on the parents. In our house the ill effect of it came to such a head that we decided to discontinue the online schooling of our son and take up home schooling instead. I was constantly not just losing my cool but I was not able to adjust to the fact that a child who is otherwise very bright was not interested in online classes at all. The effort which as parents we were putting in was immense, it was bound to take its toll. Children who would usually be in school for 5-6 hours were now with parents all the time, constantly vying for attention. Teachers who would otherwise be responsible for children now needed full time cooperation of parents in not just making kids sit in the classes but to help

them in their learning, to gather material for arts, craft and project classes, to upload images of work done in class and homework done later. Those classes which required maximum efforts for parents to gather material were the classes which were most enjoyable for kids but those took the maximum toll on all working parents. My son was not just getting disinterested in the classes but he was losing interest in every other learning process which he otherwise enjoyed, including art and craft. Several times we heard one or the other parent losing their cool during the classes and I'm sure we were also heard

losing it some of the times. Since the time we have stopped online classes, there is not just peace in the family but interest of my child in everything is back to where it was.

In these last seven years, my child has grown taller, learnt a lot of things and is picking up fast but so am I. I have lived a second childhood, have also come a long way from what I was, to what I am as a parent and as a person. Therefore, for me my son is the father of the Man that I am and that I am going to be.