CHAPTER V

PARENTAL CARE AND HEALTH IN CHILDHOOD
Until the advent of Islam, the Arabs practiced infanticide and killed their daughters whom they considered to be a liability and a sign of weakness. But Islam strictly forbade this practice and called it a great sin. Al'Quran proclaimed that the Almighty Allah provides sustenance for his creation and no one else has the authority to kill anyone else for fear of poverty and thus interfere in the biological phenomena of life and death.

1. Bani-Israil : 31
2. Al-Takwir : 8-14
that are found in the mothers' milk. Indeed there is no substitute for mothers' milk and the child needs to be put to the breast so that the mother may nurse the baby and the child may make the best possible start in life. A survey made in England showed that while 2 to 3 percent of the 844 breast-fed infants died within one year, 12.1 percent of the 140 bottle-fed babies died during the same period (Kimball, 1952).

Modern researches have shown that the infant who gets certain basic requirements in its diet is much more healthy than the infant who is ill-fed during childhood. It is also an established fact that no child is born rickety for rickets is a disease which results from malnutrition. If the mother nurses her child, the baby will make the best possible start in life. This is why the ever merciful Allah has made the milk of every species with certain essential constituents which are necessary for the development of the young ones. The milk of a woman contains specific nutrients required by the baby and, therefore, the order which has been revealed in the Holy Quran reminds us of the great favour Allah has done to us in ordaining that:

(1) "Mothers shall give suck to their children two full years." (Latif, 1969)
The baby cannot digest starch and therefore, no food which contains starch is proper for an infant. This could be the reason that even savage mothers, long ages ago used to breast-feed their children for at least two years and realized that their milk was the only perfect food for their babies. Our Holy Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) has also remarked that "it is better for the mothers to continue suckling for thirty months".

The wisdom of the above sanction of the Holy Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) may be explained in the light of the scientific investigations that have been made so far. Human milk does not contain much starch at its early stage but contains a valuable sugar which keeps the baby warm and healthy. The baby does not suffer from gastrointestinal troubles; gains more consistently, has lower allergies, a longer natural immunity to diseases and notably fewer skin diseases and digestive disorders (Lake, 1964). Breast-feeding also plays an important role in the psychological development of both the infant and the mother.

The importance of breast-feeding becomes still more clear when we find that:

i) It is clean and free from bacteria.

ii) Its composition varies during the first few weeks according to the need of the infant.

1. Bukhari-al-Jami-al-Sahih, Kitab Nafqat
iii) Proteins found in the mothers' milk are more soluble than caseinogen which is found in the milk of other animals.

iv) The curd produced in the stomach of a baby is less dense and easily digestible.

v) Antibodies present in mothers' milk induce a kind of immunity from diseases.

As stated in the 'Indian Express' of October 17, 1984, breast-feeding is best because colostrum (first milk) has the best composition of proteins, minerals, and vitamins which a newborn needs. It is hundred percent pure, perfectly formulated, always at the right temperature and easiest to be digested by the baby. Its anti-infection and anti-allergic properties safeguard the health of the baby.

The above description makes it clear that mothers' milk is not only advantageous for the baby but is also a great source of satisfaction to the mother. However, Quranic injunctions are for the benefit of mankind and no one is burdened beyond his capacity. If therefore, there arise conditions which make nursing by mother impossible, substitute feeding by employing a foster mother is permissible. And so we recite:

(1) وان اردتم ان تشرفعوا ولدكم
فخِّبنا جناح عليكم
"But if you choose to have a nurse for your child, no blame shall rest on you." (Latif, 1969)

Those who cannot afford to have a foster mother for their children, may feed them on the milk of a cow or a goat because

1. Al-Baqarah : 233
the constituents of such milk are essentially the same as that of the human milk except that it contains more casein and less sugar. It is, therefore, necessary that water and sugar be added to it to bring it as close to human milk as possible.

While providing supplementary foods to the baby, it is especially important to be certain of the cleanliness of the supply. One possible adequacy of human and cows' milk is mitigated vitamin D. This can be obtained by exposing the child to sunlight or by providing him vitamin D concentrates. The parents have, therefore, to pay special attention to hygiene in childhood. The room where the child lives should be well ventilated and airy. There should be as little dust as possible. In matters of clothing the 'golden mean' which Aristotle advocated more than two thousand years ago should be observed. They should be provided with abundance of clean, absorbant, loose clothing and every care should be taken not to chill children to death.

Child welfare is therefore, the absolute responsibility of the parents. They have to treat them kindly, make them comfortable and teach them good manners for according to the teachings of Islam, they are the test of one's doings. The Holy Prophet (may the peace and blessings of Allah be on him) was very fond of children and likened them with the fragrance of the heavens (Wajidi, 1979).