

# The duty of children in Islam

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This paper is about children's obligations to their parents as expected in Islam.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Raheem, "In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."

"Wealth and children are the adornments of the life of this world." – [Qur'an - Surah Al-Kahf, #18 verse 46]

"Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas with Allah! With Him is a great reward (Paradise)." – [Surah At-Taghabun – #64 Verse 15].

Islam considers the Muslim Ummah as one complete institution where a Muslim family unit acts as the core foundation. The intermediate Muslim household comprises of parents and children, insisting to the very fact that the bond between parents and children should be strong enough to keep the Ummah intact. A reader of the Qur'an will understand how a number of verses replete the commandments to children and parents, to ascertain the responsibilities and obligations both relationships have on one another.

Most Muslim parents love their children immensely, but this does not mean that children always return this love.

"Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas with Allah! With Him is a great reward (Paradise)." – [Surah At-Taghabun – #64 Verse 15].

Indeed, the upbringing of children is stated as a 'trial' in our religion. On a number of occasions, the Qur'an stresses on how the upbringing of children can be a trial for Muslims.

Due to the influence of the West, through TV programs, magazines, the music industry and education in state schools, we see an increasing disrespect of children towards their parents. This phenomenon has not only spread in the West, but the West has also exported it to other parts of the world, including the Islamic countries.

I would like to list here what according to Islam are obligatory from children to parents. The established order that parents take care of their children and provide them with emotional and material supplies is not questioned by the majority of

the parents, but conversely that children should show respect for their parents as a compliment for good care is not taken for granted among young people.

In an Islamic family, mutual respect and care must come first. Parents and children in Islam are linked by mutual obligations and mutual arrangements. Allah says (which means): "... No mother should be harmed by her child, and no father by his child ..." [Qur'an Surah Baqarah, #2: verse 233]

The Quran has made it compulsory for the child to treat his parents with all goodness and grace. Every Muslim must show goodness and mercy to his parents throughout their lives.

Is there any exception to that? Yes, if the parents ask their children to associate something with Allah and commit sins, the children should not obey their parents. In all cases, the children should show love and gratitude to their parents. They should always talk to them in a friendly and respectful manner. They must do their best to make them happy, provided they do not disobey Allah.

Allah says: "But if they (both) strive to make you worship with me others of whom you have no knowledge, do not obey them; but behave kindly with them in the world ... "[Qur'an Surah Luqman, #31: verse 15]

The Muslim must **recognize the status of the parent** and know his duties to them. The status of parents in Islam is a status previously unknown to humanity. Allah has placed respect for the parents only one step below the belief in Allah and the true worship of Him.

Allah says (which means): "And your Lord has determined that you do not worship except Him, and for parents, good treatment. Whether either or both of them grow older with you [while], don't say [uff "as much as], and don't ward them off, but speak to them a noble word. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: "My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small." [Qur'an Surah Al-Isra, #17: verse 23, 24]

The Prophet placed kindness and respect for parents just after the prayer that was said in time, since prayer is the foundation of Islam.

"Abdullaah Ibn Mas'ood said:" I asked the prophet which act is most loved by Allah? He said, "Prayer offered on time." I asked him, "What then? He said, "Kindness and respect for parents." ... "[Al-Bukhari and Muslim]

Children need to realize that their happiness in this world and in the coming depends on their parents' satisfaction with them.

Allah is stressing the fact that in the pleasure of parents is the pleasure of Allah if anyone wants to attain it, and that in the happiness of parents is the happiness of Allah. In other words if someone wants to seek Allah's pleasure and happiness, then they should immediately look to their relationship with their parents because

Allah can never be happy or pleased with any Muslim unless the parents are first. This is why we see the famous incident of a great Companion of the Prophet (ﷺ) which elucidates this whole concept of good behavior to parents.

At the time of the Prophet (ﷺ), there was a young man named Alqamah. He was very diligent in obeying Allah by engaging in prayer and fasting and spending in charity. Then he fell ill and his illness became serious. His wife went to the Prophet and said, "My husband, Alqamah, is on his deathbed. I therefore came to tell you, Messenger of Allah, about his condition." The Prophet (then) sent for Ammar or Suhaib and Bilal, and told them to go to him (Alqamah) and have him repeat the Shahadah. Thereupon they went to him and found him in the agony of death. They asked him to say, "La illaha illa Allah," but his tongue was unable to pronounce it. At that, they came and told the Messenger of Allah that he was unable to repeat the Shahadah.

The Prophet asked, "Is either of his parents alive?" He was told, "Messenger of Allah, his mother is, but she is very old." The Prophet sent her a message that if it was convenient for her (that is, if she was able to go out), she should come to him; otherwise she should stay in her house and the Prophet would come to her.

The Prophet's messenger came to her and informed her of the Prophet's message. She said, "May my life be a ransom for him, it is my pleasure to go to him!" She then stood up, leaning on her walking stick, and came to the Prophet and greeted him. The Prophet returned her greeting and said to her, "Umm Alqamah, tell me the truth, for otherwise Allah Most High will reveal the truth to me! What is the situation concerning your son, Alqamah?" She replied, "Messenger of Allah, he prays much, fasts a great deal, and spends a great amount in charity." The Prophet said, "And what about yourself?" She said, "Messenger of Allah, I am angry with him." He said, "Why?" She replied, "Messenger of Allah, he has preferred his wife to me and has disobeyed me." Then Allah's Messenger said, "Umm Alqamah, surely your anger has prevented Alqamah's tongue from pronouncing the Shahadah."

He then turned to Bilal and said, "Bilal, go out and collect a quantity of firewood." She said, "Messenger of Allah, what do you plan to do?" He replied, "I will burn him in front of your eyes." She said, "Messenger of Allah, he is my son! My heart cannot bear your burning him in front of me!" He said, "Umm Alqamah, Allah's punishment is more severe and more lasting! Therefore, if you want Allah to forgive him, be reconciled to him. By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, the prayer, fasting, and spending in charity (which he has done) are of no benefit to Alqamah as long as you are angry with him! Thereupon she said, "Messenger of Allah, I call upon Allah Most High and His angels and the Muslims who are present to be my witnesses that I am pleased with my son Alqamah." Allah's Messenger

said, "Bilal, go to him and see whether he is now able to say, "La illaha illa Allah" or not. It may be that Umm Alqamah is saying something for my sake which is not in her heart."

Thereupon Bilal went, and while entering the door he heard Alqamah saying, "La illaha illa Allah." (Concerning this), Bilal remarked, "It is surely true that while Alqamah's mother was angry with him his tongue was tied, and now that she is pleased with him his tongue is freed." Alqamah died the same day. The Prophet came to him and gave the order for his washing and shrouding, and then prayed the funeral prayer for him and buried him. He then stood by the side of his grave and said, "You company of Muhajireen and Helpers, if anyone favors his wife over his mother, Allah and His angels and all the people curse him! Allah does not accept his spending (in charity) and his uprightness unless he repents toward Allah, the Glorious and Majestic, and reconciles with her and attains her pleasure, because Allah's pleasure consists in her pleasure and Allah's anger consists in her anger."

Therefore, this incident clearly outlines the pleasure and happiness of parents is paramount for a successful life in this world as well as the Hereafter, and also a peaceful death in the proper Islamic manner. That is why the Prophet (ﷺ) informed us in a hadith that severing ties with one's parents is one of the major sins, which Allah will never forgive unless the parent themselves first forgive, as was highlighted by the incident of Alqamah that once his mother forgave him, so did Allah.

Thus, we see in the above verse that Allah prohibits children to break off bondship from their parents when they grow older, as that is when they need us the most. Also, the verse imbibes an awareness in children, that as parents grow older they become more grumpy and irritated quickly, as well as tend to lose patience more frequently. Thus, the verse orders every child to lower their "wings" of mercy towards their parents in order to cooperate with them in difficult times. It is amazing that the Qur'an refers to every child possessing "wings" of mercy, so as to imply that true obedience is achieved whence someone lays their wings in the path of someone they love and cherish.

Sometimes ignorant people say that in Islam women are humiliated and seen as nothing. But nothing is less true. In Islam, **the mother has special status in the family.**

The children must be kinder and more grateful to their mothers since they took greater pains in their upbringing. That is why the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) emphasized that it is the mother who has the first claim on the child's care and attention.

Once a companion asked the Prophet (ﷺ) as to whom he should show more kindness. The Prophet replied: "Your mother." He asked who comes next and the

Prophet again replied: “Your mother.” He asked the Prophet yet again who comes next. The Prophet replied: “Your mother.” When the companion asked for the fourth time, only then did the Prophet reply: “Your father.”

It is also the **child's duty** to take care of its parents if it is capable of doing so. The Qur’an summarizes the whole thing in a master concept called Ihsaan, which indicates what is right, good, and beautiful (ie, show them kindness, compassion, gratitude, reverence and respect, pray for them, and support them financially when they need it.)

As parents grow old their energies also decline. So it is the duty of children to help their parents in any household chore in which they can help. Sons can help in lifting heavy things, cleaning home, arranging things etc. Children can help in mother’s household work—cooking, washing, cleaning, serving food etc. With good children such help should come automatically, not when asked for. Whenever you see your mother or father doing something extend a helping hand to her/him without their asking. This is what Islam expects from children.

I would like to refer to the verse that shows the meaning of obedience and gratitude to parents: Allah says: “And we have dedicated man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [growing her] in weakness after weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and your parents; for me it is the [ultimate] destination.” [Qur’an Surah Luqman #31: verse 14]

And what if one has parents with many defects? Far from showing signs of displeasure, the children must pray for them saying, as Allah teaches us in the verse (which means): “... My Lord and Sustainer! Be kind and have mercy on them as they cherished, nurtured and sustained me in childhood.” [Qur’an Surah Al-Isra, #17: verse 24] We must continue praying for them **even after they die**. Such prayer will be regarded as a continuous charity as the Prophet (ﷺ), told us.

The children must take great care not to react to what their parents have to say. If they say or do anything which is not liked or approved of by the children, then they must show patience and tolerance instead of giving vent to their anger. The children must scrupulously try to refrain from disobeying their parents since the Prophet (ﷺ) regarded this as one of the grave sins.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He is not of us who does not have mercy on young children, nor honor the elderly" (Al-Tirmidhi).

Narrated Abu Hurayrah: Allah's Apostle (ﷺ) said: Let him be humbled into dust; let him be humbled into dust. It was said: Allah's Messenger, who is he? He said: He who sees either of his parents during their old age or he sees both of them, but he does not enter Paradise. (Sahih Muslim).

Narrated Abdullah ibn Umar: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said: The finest act of goodness is the kind treatment of a person to the loved ones of his father after his death (Sahih Muslim).

Conclusion: In Islam, children are expected to obey and respect their parents, because which child does not want his own children to respect and obey him later? This is also a necessity to maintain order in the family and in the community. Disobedience, rude behavior, ingratitude, and a selfish attitude toward parents have never produced balanced, mature adults.

I would like to conclude with the words from the Gospel: “Do not be misled: God is not one to be mocked. For whatever a person is sowing, this he will also reap. ” [Galatians chapter 6, verse 7]

To say, if you behave badly with your parents you will also only harvest problems in your later life and Allah is strict with the offenders.

And Allah knows better

Valenciennes (France), 8<sup>th</sup> of Ramadaan 1441 H

Footnotes:

1. **صلى الله عليه وسلم** = peace and blessings be upon him. It is a custom for Muslims to give honorific blessings each time they say or hear the name of the Prophet Muhammad to send blessing and peace upon him. ('Alayhiṣ-Ṣalātu was-Salām)