

# **The Status of Mothers in Islam**



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Islam believes in an extraordinary worth of a mother, and has drawn the people's attention to this matter in various remarks. It considers the attainment of the last phase of perfection, namely paradise, dependent on the mother's satisfaction, and says "Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers".

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***“And We have enjoined man in respect of his parents-- his mother bears him with faintings upon faintings and his weaning takes two years-- saying: Be grateful to Me and to both your parents; to Me is the eventual coming. And if they contend with you that you should associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, do not obey them, and keep company with them in this world kindly...”(The Quran, 31: 14-15)***

***"And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve any but Him and goodness to your parents."(The Quran, 17:23)***

*"Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers". (Prophet of Islam)*

*"To look affectionately and kindly at one's father and mother is devotion."(Prophet of Islam)*

*"God's satisfaction lies in the consent of parents, and His wrath in their wrath." (Prophet of Islam)*

*"If you wish God to grant you a long life, make your parents happy." (Imam Sadiq)*

*"Heaven lies beneath the feet of mothers."*

The above utterance which is a quotation from the Seal of the prophets, is a badge of honour granted to mothers, and if we place all the words, written or spoken, about the position of a mother on one scale and the above sentence on the other scale, the utterance of the Holy Prophet will definitely tip the balance in its favor.

In glorifying the position of a mother, Islam has not confined itself to advice, injunctions and a series of verbal counsels, but as a legislator, it has also regarded the command and prohibition by a mother as something obligatory to follow in some cases.

For example when a case which is recommended by God comes across the prohibition by a mother, children are advised to follow their mother's order. If an offspring wishes to observe a recommended fast for the sake of a spiritual reward or undertake a religiously recommended trip, but his mother forbids it, it is incumbent upon him to obey his mother; and if he disobeys her in this respect, he does not only fail to get a spiritual reward, but his refusal to obey also means committing a sin.

Another case, in which a mother's order is respected even in comparison with God's command, is when an obligatory divine order comes across a mother's prohibition, on the condition that the action concerned does not fall within the imperative and obligatory injunctions such as daily prayer, or the fast of the month of Ramadhan.

In such a case, obeying a mother's order is prior to God's command. For example, if there is a question of jihad (holy war), those who are able to fight the infidels, must take part in the battle, but if a young man possesses all the qualifications for participation in the holy war, except that his mother does not allow him to go (on the condition that his non – participation causes no damage to the Muslims), he can abstain from participation in the war solely because of his mother's prohibition, and decide to stay by her side.

A man came to the Noble Prophet of Islam, saying: "O, prophet of God! I am young and vigorous, and ready for action and service, and wish to go to the battle-front for the advancement of Islam, but my mother does not let me leave her and go to war."

The Noble Prophet said: "Go and stay with your mother. I swear to the God Who chose me as prophet that the spiritual reward which you receive for serving her even one night and making her happy with your presence, is greater than a one-year long holy war."<sup>1</sup>

Islam considers a respect for parents and observance of their rights to be the greatest duty of the people after the divine injunctions. The Quran says in this connection:

أَنْ أَشْكُرَ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيْكَ

***"Be grateful to Me and to both your parents." (31:14)***

Here God Almighty, immediately after referring to His own right, speaks about the right of parents.

A man came to the Seal of the Prophets and said: "O Prophet of God! Guide me, to whom should I be good in order to benefit completely from my good deed?"

He said: "Be good to your mother." He asked: "Next to her?"

The Prophet repeated: "Be good to your mother." He said again: "And next to her?"

The Prophet answered: "To your mother."

The man said: "To what other person should be good?"

The Prophet said: "To your father."<sup>2</sup>

A man asked Imam Sadiq: "What is the favour that God has ordered in the Quran to be shown to parents?" The Imam answered: "It means that you should adopt a fine and admirable way in your association with them and not compel them to ask your help in time of need, but rather try to meet their needs before they ask you."

God says:

لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ

***"By no means shall you attain righteousness until you spend benevolently out of the assets you love." (3:92)***

If your parents cause you uneasiness, you should not make them uneasy, and if they beat you up, you should not hurt them. You should pray for them and throw nothing but a look of kindness and affection at

them. Your voice should never be raised above theirs, and you should never walk ahead of them.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth Imam says:

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ أُمِّكَ، فَإِنَّ تَعْلَمَ أَنَّهَا حَمَلَتْكَ حَيْثُ لَا يَحْتَمِلُ أَحَدٌ أَحَدًا، وَأَعْطَتْكَ مِنْ ثَمَرَةِ قَلْبِهَا مَا لَا يُعْطِي أَحَدٌ أَحَدًا، وَوَقَّتَكَ بِجَمِيعِ جَوَارِحِهَا، وَلَمْ تَبَالِ أَنْ تَجُوعَ وَتَطْعَمَكَ، وَتَعْطَشَ وَتَسْقِيكَ، وَتَعْرِى وَتَكْسُوكَ، وَتَضْحَى وَتُظْلِكَ، وَتَهْجُرَ النَّوْمَ لِأَجْلِكَ، وَوَقَّتَكَ الْحَرَّ وَالْبَرْدَ، لِتَكُونَ لَهَا، فَإِنَّكَ لَا تُطِيقُ شُكْرَهَا إِلَّا بِعَوْنِ اللَّهِ وَتَوْفِيقِهِ.

*"It is your mother's right towards you that you should remember that she carried you in her womb for several months and nourished you with the sap of her life. She employed all her essence to keep and protect you. She did not care if she herself went hungry, while you were fed to satiety; or to go thirsty herself, while your thirst was quenched; or to have no clothes, while you were well-covered; or to stay in the hot sun, while you were sheltered; She ignored her sweet sleep and tolerated the pain of sleeplessness for your sake. She protected you against the heat of summer and cold of winter. She bore all that pain in order to have you, and you may have her. You should know that you are unable to thank your mother appropriately unless God helps you and grants you the favour and ability to repay her."<sup>4</sup>*

The rights which have been determined in Islam for a mother, and some examples of which have already been mentioned, are due to the pains she has borne in developing the life and body of her offspring, so that after tolerating such back-breaking pains, she may offer a well-bred human being to the society.

Naturally, only such a mother, who performs her motherly duties perfectly, and brings up a useful and competent individual with her overall efforts, can enjoy these rights.

A mother who, for the sake of self-indulgence or for the purpose of attending dance parties or centers of debauchery and nightly revelry, evades her duty of educating her offspring and puts him or her in charge of a nursery or kindergarten, is, in fact, committing an unpardonable injustice towards her offspring, and thus she cannot expect to benefit from a mother's rights and position.

In appearance, the life of children in a kindergarten is fine and pleasant. Their clothes are clean and pretty, their hair is well combed, their school is managed in accordance with hygienic rules, and the rooms are well-equipped and built with due regard to technical criteria. Their beds have clean sheets, and their food is prepared under a proper program. The children get sufficient playing time and timely sleep. In short, a great deal of their physical and psychological inclinations is satisfied.

But there are also other emotions and desires in a child which the social environment of a kindergarten cannot satisfy. The particular caresses which create joy and exhilaration in a child can be provided only in a mother's lap, not in a kindergarten. A child, living among a hundred other infants, has a non-independent life, and consequently he cannot acquire the personality and personal independence which are desired by a human being.

At home, every movement and gesture of a child, and his play and laughter draw the attention of the parents. The child learns much from this attention, and gets much pleasure from it, whereas in the school environment, an infant, surrounded by a hundred other infants, resembles a wave breaking and disappearing amidst a hundred other waves.<sup>5</sup>

To educate a child requires constant care, and this can be provided by parents alone, since it is they and especially the mother who, at the commencement of the child's life, recognize those physical and psychological characteristics and aptitudes of the child whose training is considered the goal of education.

The blunder committed by the present-day society is to replace the family hearth and mother's lap by kindergarten and elementary schools. The mothers who send their children to the nurseries in order to free themselves for undertaking office jobs, following their whims, engaging in their own literary and artistic activities or spending their time on playing bridge or going to movies, are actually extinguishing the family hearth where their children may learn many things.

The growth rate of those children who live under the care of their family is greater than those who stay in a boarding school among the children of their own age-group.

A child very soon lays the foundation of his own physical, mental and emotional characteristics within the framework of his environmental conditions. Consequently, he learns little from his fellow-children, and does not show proper growth when he is lowered to an obscure position in the school.<sup>6</sup>

Such mothers do not only damage the happiness of their children, but also deal a blow on the body of the society, and furthermore they fail to benefit from such children. A child who has not learnt the lesson of affection from his mother, and his emotions are not boosted in her lap, cannot be expected to show affection in subsequent years.

1. Al-Kafi, Vol.2. P. 130

2. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 74.

3. Al-Kafi, vol. 2.

4. Makarem Al- Akhlaq, of Tobarsi. Vol. I, P.486; Risalat al-Huquq, Right 22: The Right of the Mother.

5. A child from the viewpoint of Heritage and Education, Vol. I. P.267.

6. Undiscovered Man, 260.

Great personalities of the world owe their success mainly to the mothers who have duly performed their

serious duties and played their fundamental role in building up their children. The great genius of Islam, the late Haj Sheikh Murtadha Ansari, wept bitterly at the death of his mother, knelt by her corpse and shed tears of sorrow. One of his learned pupils said in consolation and sympathy: "It is not fitting that you, with such a high scholarly position, should act so restlessly and shed tears on an old woman's death."

That great man raised his head and said: "It seems that you are still unaware of the lofty position of a mother. I owe my position to the proper education given to me by this mother and to her hard work. It was she who laid the foundation of my progress and led me to my present position as a scholar."

This is the example of a mother's influence on her offspring, and there have been many mothers whose efforts have contributed to the progress of great scholars. Edison not only failed to show any talent in childhood, but also seemed to be quite stupid since he had an excessively large head. His relatives and acquaintances thought him to be suffering from mental aberration. The strange questions he asked them from time to time, too, confirmed this supposition of theirs. Even at school, which he did not attend for more than three months, he was nicknamed 'stupid' owing to his repeated questions to the teacher.

So, one day he returned home in tears and narrated the matter to his mother. She took his hand and they returned to the school. Addressing the teacher, she said: "You don't know what you say. My son is more intelligent than you. The trouble lies in this same fact. Now I will take him back home and undertake his education myself, and will show you what talent is hidden in him!" Such was the strange prediction of that mother! Thenceforth she did as she had promised, and undertook his education.

A friend of Edison's family writes in this connection: "Sometimes while passing by Edison's house I noticed Mrs. Edison and her son sitting in the vestibule, while she was engaged in teaching him".

This place served as a classroom, and he was the only pupil there. His gestures and movements were like his mother's, and he loved her very much. When she spoke, he listened attentively, as if she was an ocean of knowledge.

As a result of his mother's efforts, Edison managed, even before the age of nine, to read the masterly works of such writers as Gibbon, Hume, Plato, and Homer. This wise and intelligent mother also taught him geography, history, arithmetic and ethics. Edison attended school only for three months, and all he had learnt during childhood was through his mother. She was a true teacher in every sense of the word, since her care was not only for his education, but also to discover his natural talents and develop them. In later years, when Edison rose to the height of fame, he said: "In childhood, I realized what a fine figure a mother is. When the teacher called me 'stupid', she defended me. I determined seriously to prove that she was not mistaken about me." He also said: "I shall never lose the effects of my mother's education. If she had not encouraged me, I may not have become an inventor. In my mother's opinion, if those who went wrong after attaining adolescence had been educated and taken care of sufficiently, they would not have become useless parasites in society. The experiences she had gathered as a teacher, taught her

many secrets of human nature. I had always been careless, and if it had not been for her attention, I would, in all probability, have deviated from the proper course. But her steadfastness and goodness were the powerful factors that checked me from deviation and error. 1

Smiles says: "A model and example are the most important factor in a child's moral education. If a person wishes his children to have fine qualities, he should definitely provide them with fine models. But the model that is constantly before their eyes, is the mother."2

Mothers can, with their personality, sympathy and efforts, lay the foundation of a happy life for their children and train them for future, whereas frivolous and selfish mothers, with their wrong acts, drag their children towards distress and misfortune.

Will Durant says in a discussion of the profound effects of parents' deeds upon their children: "The best house, the best school and the best of everything else lie a place where there is less command. It can clearly be seen how, without punishment and command, a child may be led to behave well. If this free method produces no effect in some cases, it is because we parents ourselves do not follow the orders we give to our children. We give an order for moderation, but we go to excess in eating and drinking. We recommend kindness, but we ourselves quarrel in others' presence. We warn our children against eating sweets or seeing films full of fight, but secretly indulge in them ourselves until the child finds out our secret one day. We teach mildness by way of coarseness, and politeness through rudeness. We expect humility from a child, but wish to show ourselves invincible like the gods. However, children learn our ways and deeds, not our words, and their worry and rebelliousness are due to the fact they imitate our past acts. Show me your children, and then I can say what kind of a fellow you are. If you expect good manners from your children, be polite yourself, and if you expect cleanness, be clean yourself.

Nothing else is necessary. Even if in violent anger you show intensity and use rude words, you will keep alive in his mind those rude words through imitation. Good behaviour can be taught only through models and examples, and by means of constant forbearance. This is, of course, a hard task which requires a new self-education. This is how our children educate us."3

Islam explicitly declares that one of the main causes of deviation in children is the deviation of parents themselves. The prophet of Islam asserts that every child enters the world with a chaste nature which is ready to accept mono theism and moral virtues, but it is the parents who drag their children with adverse education towards perversion and corruption and sometimes towards infidelity and dualism.4

It is on account of this undeniable influence of the parents on the spirit of children that the exalted leaders of Islam have made many recommendations to parents, and have greatly valued their efforts.

The Holy Prophet of Islam says: "Respect your children and teach them proper manners so that you may receive divine favour and salvation."5

Elsewhere he says: "If you train your children in good manners and proper education, it is better than

offering a part of your wealth every day in the way of God."<sup>6</sup>

Another narration quoted from the Seal of the prophet, says: "When someone departs this world, his record of deeds is sealed, and he cannot have access to the world except for three things:

- 1- If he has performed good deeds in life and has always brought benefit to people.
- 2- If he has left behind some knowledge for people to benefit from.
- 3- If he has left behind honest children who will pray for him.<sup>7</sup>

When parents perform their duties improperly educating their children, they can benefit completely from their rights as parents, and enjoy the advantage of having good offspring. Here, Islam addresses the offspring and makes recommendations to them about properly treating parents.

Imam Sadiq says: "Kindness and benevolence to parents are an evidence of a person's godliness, since no religious devotion benevolence to parents are an evidence of a person's godliness, since no religious devotion pleases God as much as respecting parents."<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Prophet says: "A look of affection by an offspring at the parents is considered a religious devotion."<sup>9</sup>

The Sixth Imam says: "If you wish God to grant you a long life, please and satisfy your parents."

The Seal of the Prophets says: "God's satisfaction lies in the satisfaction of parents, and his wrath in their anger."

Imam Baqir, the Fifth Imam, says: "There are four things the possession of which will provide a person with a house in heaven through God's favour:

- 1- Taking care of orphans and providing refuge for them.
- 2- To have compassion for the disabled and helpless.
- 3- To have a kind heart and good conduct towards parents, and
- 4- To be lenient towards inferiors and servants.<sup>10</sup>

Benevolence to one's mother is the atonement of sins. Islam considers benevolence to one's mother a useful way of expiating one's sins, and regards goodness to her as a means of salvation for the sins and winning God's consent.

A man went to the Noble Prophet of Islam and said: "O, prophet of God! I have sinned much in life and committed every wicked act. Is the door of repentance open to me, and will God accept my penitence?" The Prophet said: "Are any of your parents alive?" He said: "Yes, my father is alive." The Prophet said:

"Then go to him and be good to him (so that your sins may be forgiven." He bade farewell and went out. Then the prophet said: "I wish his mother were alive!" What he meant was that if his mother were alive to receive her son's goodness, his sins would be forgiven sooner.<sup>11</sup>

Another Islamic narration says: "A man came to the Prophet of Islam and said: "O, Prophet of God, I was granted a daughter by Go. I brought her up till she reached the age of maturity. One day I dressed and adorned her and then took her to a well and threw her into it. The last word I heard that innocent girl utter, was: 'O, dear father!' Now I am penitent of what I have done. How can I expiate my sin? What should I do to compensate that sin?" The Prophet said: "Is your mother alive?" He said: "No". The prophet asked: "Is your aunt alive?" He said "Yes". The Prophet said: "She is tantamount to a mother. Go and be good to her; then your sin will be expiated."<sup>12</sup>

1. The Power and Position of Women in History, P. 267.
2. Ethics by Samuel Smiles P. 51.
3. Pleasures of Philosophy, Will Durant, P. 198.
4. Safinatul Bihar, Vol . 2, P. 373.
5. Makarem ul-Akhlaq, P. 255.
6. Makarem ul-Akhlaq, P. 255.
7. The Way of Perfection, Ahmad Amin, P. 144.
8. Misbah al-Shari'a, P. 48.
9. Kashaf ul-Ghama, P. 243.
10. Kisal al-Saduq, Vol. I, P. 106.
11. Bihar Al-Anwar. Vol,74, P.82.
12. Safinatul Bihar, Vol. 2, P. 687.

In Islam a mother's anger and dissatisfaction with an offspring are regarded as the means of his misfortune and destruction.

In some Islamic narrations, it has been explicitly said that those who maltreat their parents, will never even smell the perfume of heaven, nor attain happiness.

A young companion of the prophet had fallen ill and was confined to bed. The Prophet went to visit him and found him seriously ill and approaching the last moments of life. The prophet said to him: "Confess to the uniqueness of God and say 'there is no God but Allah'."

The young man stammered and could not utter the sacred phrase. The prophet asked a woman who was present: "Has this young man a mother?" She said: "Yes, I am his mother." The Prophet asked: "Are you dissatisfied with him?" She said: "Yes, but I have not been on speaking terms with him for six years." The Prophet requested her to forgive the son's errors. She said: "O prophet of God! I will do so for your sake." Then the Prophet turned to the young man and said: "Now utter the phrase 'there is no God but Allah.'" The young man now gave a free tongue to the rightful words and uttered them.<sup>1</sup>

Imam Sadiq says: "He who wishes to pass easily through the agony of death, should act benevolently towards her kinsmen, and treat his mother kindly. Then the agony of death will become easy for him to bear, and in life he will not suffer from indigence."<sup>2</sup>

A man asked the Prophet a point about goodness to one's parents. The prophet repeated his recommendation three times for kindness to parents but made a mother's right prior to a father's.<sup>3</sup>

1. Amali Al-Tousi, Vol. 1, P. 62 .
2. Amali Al-Saduq, P. 234.
3. Al-Kafi, Vol.2, P. 162.

A man called Zakaria Ibn Ibrahim says: "I was a Christian who embraced Islam and made pilgrimage to the House of God. I had the honour to visit Imam Sadiq and tell him that I was recently converted to Islam from Christianity. The Imam asked: What advantage did you find in Islam to embrace it ? I quoted this verse of the Quran which says:

مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِنْ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَهْدِي بِهِ مَنْ نَشَاءُ مِنْ  
عِبَادِنَا

***"You did not know what the Book was, nor what the faith was, but We made it a light guiding thereby whom We please." (42:52)***

The Imam said: "Thus God guided you to Islam and illuminated your heart with its light." Then he prayed for me to receive more guidance. Then I informed him that my parents and relatives remained Christian, and my mother was blind. Would it be proper for me to live with them and have relationship? The Imam asked: 'Do they eat pork?' I said 'no'. Then the Imam said: 'There is nothing wrong in your association with them,' and added: 'Take care of your mother and be benevolent to her, and when she passes away, you yourself can arrange her burial.'

When I returned from my pilgrimage to Mecca and reached Kufa, I showed such kindness to my mother in accordance with the Imam's command. I fed her myself, arranged her clothes, combed her hair and served her in many ways.

When she noticed the change in my behaviour, she said: "My son, in those days when you professed our religion, you did not behave in this way. What is the reason for so much affection since you have embraced Islam?"

I said: "A descendant of the Prophet has commanded me to act in this way."

She said: "Is he your prophet?"

I said: "No! There will come no prophet after ours. He is a son of the prophet."

She said: "These commands are those of all the prophets, but your religion is better than mine. Guide me to become a Muslim."

I taught her the way of Islam, and she became a Muslim, and performed the noon, afternoon, evening and night prayers, but she' felt sick in the middle of the night. I stayed by her bed and nursed her.

She said: "My boy! Repeat for me the Islamic words of faith" I did so, and she confessed to all of them, and passed away the same night.

Next morning, her funeral ceremony was performed by a group of Muslims according to Islamic rites, and I recited a prayer to her corpse and buried her with my own hands.<sup>1</sup>

1. Al-Kafi, Vol.2, P. 16, Bihar Al-Anwar, Vol. 74.

A point to mention here is that for some years, December 16 has been chosen as "Mother's Day", when certain ceremonies are held every year. Newspapers publish articles about it on that occasion, poems are composed, and gifts are given to mothers by their children.

This is, of course, a fine thing, but it is not enough to hold such ceremonies and offer gifts in appreciation of a mother's efforts. Attempt should, however, be made to enlighten mothers about their grave responsibility and make them realize that the management of a family and upbringing of children are among the greatest and the most worthy occupations, compared with which no other job is so significant.

According to Napoleon, a mother rocks the cradle with one hand and the world with the other. As we have already said, the worthy toils and efforts of a mother may bring up such a child who may produce a great upheaval in the world.

Mothers should try to offer society honest and well-educated children, and take special care about their faith and belief, since experience has shown that a faithless offspring is not only useless for his parents but is also sometimes harmful and dangerous.

We have often read in publications many accounts of youths who have beaten their mother or father or have even killed them.

Why so? Experience tells us that there is no reason for such offenses and crimes but lack of faith and absence of a spiritual basis to rely on. If parents wish to have a worldly and eternal benefit from their children, they should pay full attention to their religious affairs and beliefs in the same way that they take care of their health and education.

Children, too, should become deeply familiar with their duties towards their parents, and remember that an offspring's true happiness depends on the heart-felt consent of the parents.

If writers, orators and poets adopt such an attitude towards "Mother's Day" and acquaint mothers and their children with their basic duties, we may then say that they have rendered a service and performed their obligation.

A mother's death is an irreparable loss, but the order of Creations according to the wisdom of God, demands that every living creature should one day leave this world.

One should remain contented and submit to the will of God and his own destiny. But there are certain duties that children must perform after their mother's death if they desire their own happiness.

In other words, the right of parents does not cease with their death, and this right must be observed by their children after the death of their parents.

The Fifth Imam says: "An offspring may be benevolent to his parents during their life time, but he may not repay his debt to them after they die, nor pray for their salvation, and forget them altogether. In such a case, this offspring will be included by God in the category of those who misbehave towards their parents"<sup>1</sup>

What can be concluded from these and other Islamic narrations is that if a father or a mother has incurred a debt, their offspring should make an effort to repay this debt and pray for their salvation.

He should offer alms in their name, feed a needy person to gladden their soul, take care of and caress an orphan, and perform similar charitable acts. The reward of such deeds will be given to the parents as well as their children and God will bless and favour them for such benevolent and charitable deeds.<sup>2</sup>

1. Al-Kafi. Vol.2. P. 130.

2. Al-Kafi. Vol.2. P. 127.

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