

Teachings of Islam on Family Life

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The Holy Quran says:

“And when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: You shall serve none but Allah. **And do good to (your) parents, and to the near of kin** and to orphans and the needy, and speak good (words) to (all) people, and keep up prayer and give the due charity.” (2:83)

“... righteous is the one who believes in Allah, and the Last Day, and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and **gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin** and the orphans and the needy and the traveller and to those who ask and to set slaves free and keeps up prayer and gives the due charity...” (2:177)

“And serve Allah, and do not set up any partner with Him, and **be good to the parents and to the near of kin** and the orphans and the needy and the neighbour of (your) kin and the alien neighbour,” (4:36)

In these verses, it has been made one of the **fundamentals** of Islam to do good to “the near of kin” (*zil qurba*), and parents have been specially mentioned. It has been mentioned along with worshipping only Allah, keeping up prayer, and paying the zakat.

But it will be noticed that, in all cases, needy persons and neighbours are also mentioned. Therefore Islam has kept a balance by mentioning our duty to non-relatives at the same time. Otherwise, nepotism would be practised in society, where people favour only their own relatives, even at the expense of those who are not their relatives.

In the well-known verse of the Holy Quran recited at the marriage ceremony, it is said:

“O people, keep your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind), and spread from these two many men and women. And keep your duty to Allah, by Whom you demand one of another (your rights), **and (to) the ties of relationship**. Surely Allah is ever a Watcher over you.” (4:1)

Marriage is the institution whereby *ties of relationship* are created, i.e. the couple have children, they become brothers and sisters, they have parents and grand-parents, uncles and aunts, etc. Here Muslims are instructed to keep their duty to Allah as well as their duty to the ties of relationship (*arhām*). A person's ties of relationship require from him duties towards relatives in the material, emotional, moral and spiritual sides of life. The closer they are related, the greater is a person's duty. Of course, these duties are mutual and reciprocal. A person has duties towards others, and others owe him duties towards him. This is what binds them together.

This verse also indicates that each person has rights. What is one person's duty towards another, it is the other's right from him. People do demand their rights from relations. Principally this happens between husband and wife, and between parents and their offspring. The Quran here teaches that when you demand rights from others, bear in mind your own duty to Allah. In other words, demand only your just and fair rights, and make sure you are giving them their rights.

This verse mentions "men and women" being spread from one pair of parents. Whatever it may mean scientifically, what it is pointing out is that you have ties of relationship to the whole of humanity. Of course, our ties are closer with those who are nearer to us than those who are further away. This nearness would be in terms of family relationship, or in terms of belonging to the same community, or the same religion, or the same country. Naturally, we spend more time with those who are near to us in any respect than those who are further away, and our rights and obligations in regard to them are greater. But it must never be forgotten that we have ties of relationship to the whole of humanity.

Once Hazrat Maulana Abdul Haq Vidyarthi had to make a statement in a dispute between a relative of his and one who was not a relative, whom he did not even know and had never met. He said: As a Muslim I have to regard the other party as my relatives as well; if I wrongfully favour my relative, I am still harming my relatives, who are the other party.

The Quran says:

"O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for Allah, **even if it is against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives** — whether he is rich or poor, Allah has a better right over them both." (4:135)

So, while the Quran prescribes the doing of the utmost good to relatives, yet we are forbidden to depart in the least from truth and justice.

Prophets and their relatives

There are examples in the Quran of how prophets and other righteous people dealt with their relatives. Abraham prayed:

"My Lord, make me keep up prayer and (those) from my offspring (too), our Lord, and accept my prayer. Our Lord, grant me protection and my parents and the believers on the day when the reckoning comes to pass." (14:40–41)

The first part of his supplication shows that when we wish our offspring to follow Islamic teachings, such as keeping up the *salaat*, we must start by setting an example of doing the same ourselves: "**make me** keep up prayer and **those from my offspring**". The second part of the supplication, for the forgiveness of (deceased) parents, again shows that we must start by asking forgiveness for our own selves: "grant **me** protection and **my parents**". We are alive and have the opportunity to make ourselves deserving of Allah's forgiveness through our deeds. The deceased

ones can only benefit from our prayers; they cannot change their deeds. We plead for them before Allah that He may look at their good deeds and ignore their shortcomings. If we, in practice, emulate their good deeds, then it increases the worth and reward of these deeds for them with Allah.

The Quran contains an example of a father preaching goodness to his son, but also of a son preaching to his father. The first example is that of Luqman who starts by saying:

“My son, set up no partner with Allah. Surely setting up partners (with Him) is a grievous wrong.” (31:13)

and he goes on to give his son the most beautiful moral instructions including:

- “bear patiently whatever befalls you”
- “do not turn your face away from people in contempt, nor go about in the land exultingly. Surely Allah does not love any self-conceited boaster”
- “lower your voice (when talking to people). Surely the most hateful of voices is braying of donkeys”.

In the story of the sacrifice of Ismail, we read that Abraham said to his son:

“My son, I have seen in a dream that I should sacrifice you: so consider what you think.” (37:102)

Abraham asked for his son’s opinion. He didn’t say: God has commanded me to sacrifice you, so I am going to do it. The son replied:

“My father, do as you are commanded; if Allah please, you will find me patient.” (37:102)

So the attempted sacrifice was with the willing consent of the son.

Abraham is said to have preached *to his father* as follows:

“why do you worship something which does not hear, nor see, nor can it avail you at all? To me indeed has come the knowledge which has not come to you; so follow me, I will guide you on a right path. Do not serve the devil. Surely the devil is disobedient to the Beneficent.” (19:42–44)

This shows that a son may preach the true religion to his father.

Story of Joseph

This story, related in chapter 12 of the Quran, is one of jealousy within a family followed by forgiveness. Ten of the twelve brothers were jealous of the other two, Joseph and Benjamin. They left the boy Joseph in a well in a wilderness to his fate, and told the father Jacob that he had been eaten by a wolf. Jacob said: I will exercise patience because I don’t believe you.

It so happened that Joseph was picked up by some passing travellers and sold in Egypt. There, after suffering many difficulties and imprisonment on a false charge, eventually his righteousness and ability were recognised by the king who made him minister in charge of finance. Many years later, there was a drought and food shortage. Food was rationed by the government. Joseph's bad brothers came to get corn, and he recognized them but they did not. Without disclosing his identity, he still helped them. He could have extracted his revenge. I will skip over the other details of the story, and just say that later on when the brothers were reduced to begging him for help, he revealed to them who he was. They then admitted to him:

“Allah has indeed chosen you over us, and we were certainly sinners.” (12:91)

Joseph said to them:

“There is no rebuke or blame against you this day. Allah may forgive you, and He is the most Merciful of those who show mercy” (12:92).

Incidentally, it was in these same words that the Holy Prophet Muhammad forgave his enemies, the leaders of the Quraish, when they were presented before him for meting out judgment at the conquest of Makkah.

Later, when the ten brothers of Joseph asked their father Jacob to pray to God to forgive them, he said: “I shall ask forgiveness for you of my Lord. Surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful” (12:98).

Without harming the ten brothers, Joseph made them conscious of their wrong-doing by his good actions and noble behaviour towards them.

Leadership can only pass to sons if they are worthy

It says in the Quran:

“And when his Lord tried Abraham with certain commands he fulfilled them. He said: Surely I will make you a leader of people. (Abraham) said: And of my offspring? My covenant does not include the wrongdoers, said He.” (2:124)

Abraham was made a “leader” of people because he fulfilled Allah's commands when he was tested by Him. Since Abraham was given the mission to preach Allah's commands to people, he was appointed to this position after he had proved that he himself obeyed those commands fully and in the most perfect way. This shows that in Islam a leader must first of all himself observe those laws which he commands his followers to obey. Then Abraham asked Allah if the leadership bestowed upon him would be inherited by his sons and progeny after him. Allah replied that His promise will not cover such of his offspring as are wrongdoers. Therefore, it is a principle in Islam that someone's sons or progeny cannot inherit his high spiritual rank, or the blessings bestowed upon him by Allah, merely by their descent and birth unless they are worthy of it *in their own right*.

The Quran goes on to say:

“And who forsakes the religion of Abraham but he who makes a fool of himself. And certainly We made him pure in this world, and in the Hereafter he is surely among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, Submit, he said: I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds. **And the same did Abraham command his sons, and (so did) Jacob:** My sons, surely Allah has chosen for you (this) religion, so do not die except as submitting ones. Or were you witnesses **when death visited Jacob, when he said to his sons: What will you serve after me?** They said: We shall serve your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac, one God only, and to Him do we submit.” (2: 130–133)

Fathers are mentioned here, i.e. Abraham and Jacob, as exhorting their sons to submit to Allah. The sons affirmed that they would do so. Thus they became spiritual sons, as well as being physical ones. May Allah enable us to pass on our heritage of the service of Islam to our progeny, and may He enable them to accept this responsibility, ameen.

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