The IDEAL MUSLIMAH
The True Islamic Personality of the Muslim Woman
as Defined in the Qur'an and Sunnah

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The Ideal Muslimah

Chapter (3)

The Muslim Woman and Her Parents

She treats them with kindness and respect (birr)

One of the main distinguishing characteristics of the true Muslim woman is her respectful and kind treatment of her parents. Islam encourages respect towards and kind treatment of parents in many definitive texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah; any Muslim woman who reads these texts has no choice but to adhere to their teachings and treat her parents with kindness and respect, no matter what the circumstances or the state of the relationship between daughter and parents.

She recognizes their status and knows her duties towards them

From her reading of the Qur'an, the Muslim woman understands the high status to which Allah (SWT) has raised parents, and that it is a status which mankind has never known except in Islam, which has placed respect for parents just one step below belief in Allah (SWT) and true worship of Him. Many ayat of the Qur'an describe pleasing one's parents as coming second only to pleasing Allah (SWT), and confirm that treating parents well is the best of good deeds after having faith in Allah (SWT).

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good, to parents . . ; (Qur'an 4:36)

So the Muslim woman who truly understands the teachings of her religion is kinder and more respectful towards her parents than any other woman in the world; this does not stop when she leaves the home to marry and start her own family, and has her own, independent, busy life. Her respect and kindness towards her parents are ongoing and will remain an important part of her behaviour until the end of her life, in accordance with the Qur'anic teaching which has enjoined kind treatment of parents for life, especially when they reach old age and
become incapacitated and are most in need of kind words and good care: Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one of both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say, 'My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.' (Qur'an 17:23-24)

The Muslim woman whose heart has been illuminated with the light of Qur'anic guidance is always receptive and responsive to this divine instruction, which she reads in the *ayat* that enjoin good treatment of parents. So her kindness and respect towards them will increase, and she will be even more devoted to serving them. She will do her utmost to please them, even if she has a husband, house, children and other responsibilities of her own:

Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good - to parents . . . (Qur'an 4:36)

*We have enjoined on man kindness to parents . . .* (Qur'an 29:8)

And We have enjoined on man [to be good] to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him . . . (Qur'an 31:14)

Anyone who looks into the Islamic sources regarding the kind treatment of parents will also find plenty of Hadith that reinforce the message of the *ayat* quoted above and reiterate the virtue of kindness and respect towards one's parents, as well as warning against disobedience or mistreatment of them for any reason whatsoever.

`Abdullah ibn Mas`ud said: "I asked the Prophet (PBUH), `Which deed is most liked by Allah (SWT)?' He said, `Prayer offered on time.' I asked him, `Then what?' He said, `Kindness and respect towards parents.' I asked him, `Then what?' He said, `*Jihad* for the sake of Allah (SWT).""¹

The Prophet (PBUH), this great educator, placed kindness and respect towards parents between two of the greatest deeds in Islam: prayer offered on time and *jihad* for the sake of Allah (SWT). Prayer is the pillar or foundation of the faith, and *jihad* is the pinnacle of Islam. What a high status the Prophet (PBUH) has given to parents!

A man came to the Prophet (PBUH) to "make bay`ah" and to pledge to undertake *hijrah* and *jihad* in the hope of receiving reward from Allah (SWT). The Prophet (PBUH) did not rush to accept his bay`ah, but asked him, "Are

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¹ Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi
either of your parents alive?" The man said, "Yes, both of them." The Prophet (PBUH) asked, "And do you wish to receive reward from Allah (SWT)?" The man replied, "Yes." So the kind-hearted and compassionate Prophet (PBUH) told him, "Go back to your parents and keep them company in the best possible way." 

According to a report narrated by Bukhari and Muslim, a man came and asked the Prophet (PBUH) for permission to participate in jihad. He asked him, "Are your parents alive?" The man said, "Yes," so the Prophet (PBUH) told him, "So perform jihad by taking care of them."

In the midst of preparing his army for jihad, the Prophet (PBUH) did not forget the weakness of parents and their claims on their children, so he gently discouraged this volunteer and reminded him to take care of his parents, despite the fact that he needed all the manpower he could get for the forthcoming jihad. This is because he understood the importance of respect and kind treatment of parents, and knew its position in the overall Islamic framework that Allah (SWT) has designed for the well being and happiness of mankind.

When the mother of Sa`d ibn Abi Waqqas objected to her son's embracing Islam, she told him: "Give up Islam, or I will go on hunger strike until I die. Then you will feel shame before the Arabs, as they will say that he killed his mother." Sa`d told her, "You should know that, by Allah (SWT), even if you had a hundred souls, and they left your body one by one, I would never give up Islam." Then Allah (SWT) revealed an ayah which the Prophet (PBUH) recited to the Muslims, in which Sa`d was rebuked for the harshness of his reply to his mother:

But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice [and consideration] . . . (Qur'an 31:15)

The story of the devoted worshipper Jurayj, which was told by the Prophet (PBUH), is a vivid illustration of the importance of respecting one's parents and being quick to obey them. One day his mother called him whilst he was praying, and he wondered, "My Lord, my mother or my prayer?" He chose to continue his prayer (rather than answering his mother). She called him a second time, but he continued praying and did not answer her. Then she called him a third time, and when he did not respond she prayed to Allah (SWT) not to let him die until he had
seen the face of a prostitute. There was a prostitute in that locality who had committed adultery with a shepherd and become pregnant. When she realised that she was with child, the shepherd told her: "If you are asked about the father of the baby, say it is Jurayj, the devoted worshipper." This is what she said, so the people went and destroyed the place where he used to pray. The ruler brought him to the public square, and on the way Jurayj remembered his mother's prayer and smiled. When he was brought forth to be punished, he asked for permission to pray two rak‘ahs, then he asked for the infant to be brought forth and whispered in his ear, "Who is your father?" The infant said, "My father is so-and-so, the shepherd." The people exclaimed "La ilaha illa-Allah" and "Allahu akbar!" They told Jurayj, "We will rebuild your prayer-place with silver and gold!" He said, "No, just rebuild it as it was, with bricks and mortar." Concerning this story, which is reported by al Bukhari, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "If Jurayj had sound knowledge, he would have known that answering his mother was more important than continuing his prayer." Hence the fuqaha' suggested that if one is praying a nafil prayer and one of one's parents calls one, one is obliged to stop one's prayer and answer them.

The duty to treat one's parents with kindness and respect sunk into the consciousness of the Muslims, so they hastened to treat their parents well both during their lives and after their deaths. There are many reports and Hadith that indicate this, for example the report that describes how a woman of Juhaynah came to the Prophet (PBUH) and said: "My mother made a vow (nadhr) to perform Hajj but she did not perform Hajj before she died. May I perform Hajj on her behalf?" He said, "Yes, go and perform Hajj on her behalf. If you knew that your mother had a debt, would you not pay it off for her? Pay off what is due to Allah (SWT), for Allah (SWT) has more right to be paid off."

According to a report given by Muslim, she asked, "She owed a month's fasting, so may I fast on her behalf?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Fast on her behalf." She said, "She never performed Hajj, so may I perform Hajj on her behalf?" He said, "Perform Hajj on her behalf." She is kind and respectful towards her parents even if they are not Muslim

The Prophet (PBUH) raised his teachings to a new peak when he enjoined his followers to treat their parents with kindness and respect even if they were adherents of a religion other than Islam. This is clear from the Hadith of

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Asma' bint Abi Bakr al-Siddiq (PBUH), who said: "My mother came to me, and she was a mushrik at the time of the Prophet (PBUH). I asked the Prophet (PBUH), 'My mother has come to me and needs my help, so should I help her?' He said, 'yes, keep in touch with your mother and help her.'"  

The true Muslim who understands the meaning of this Qur'anic guidance and the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) cannot but be the best and kindest of all people towards his parents, at all times. This is the practice of the Sahabah and those who followed them sincerely. A man asked Sa`id ibn Musayyab (RAA): "I understood all of the ayah about kindness and respect towards parents, apart from the phrase 'but address them in terms of honour.' How can I address them in terms of honour?" Sa`id replied: "It means that you should address them as a servant addresses his master." Ibn Sirin (RAA) used to speak to his mother in a soft voice, like that of a sick person, out of respect for her.

**She is extremely reluctant to disobey them**

Just as the Muslim woman hastens to treat her parents with kindness and respect, she is also afraid to commit the sin of disobeying them, because she realises the enormity of this sin which is counted as one of the major sins (al-kaba'ir). She is aware of the frightening picture which Islam paints of the one who disobeys her parents, and this stirs her conscience and softens any hardness of heart or harsh feelings that she might be harbouring.

Islam draws a comparison between disobedience towards one's parents and the crime of associating partners with Allah (SWT), just as it establishes a link between true faith in Allah (SWT) and respectful treatment of parents. Disobedience to one's parents is a heinous crime, which the true Muslim woman is loath to commit, for it is the greatest of major sins and the worst of errors.

Abu Bakrah Nufay` ibn al-Harith said: "The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) asked us three times, 'Shall I tell you the greatest sins?' We said, 'Yes, O Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'Associating partners with Allah (SWT) and disobeying one's parents.'"
Her mother comes first, then her father

Islam has encouraged respect and kindness towards parents. Some texts deal with the mother and father separately, but taken all together, the texts enjoin a healthy balance in children's attention to their parents, so that respect to one parent will not be at the expense of the other. Some texts further confirm that the mother should be given precedence over the father.

So, as we have seen, when a man came to give bay`ah and pledge to take part in jihad, the Prophet (PBUH) asked him, "Are either of your parents alive?" This indicates that the Muslim is obliged to treat both parents equally well. Similarly, Asma' was ordered to keep in contact with her mushrik mother.

A man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him, "O Messenger of Allah (SWT), who among people is most deserving of my good company?" He said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Your mother." The man asked, "Then who?" The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Then your father." This Hadith confirms that the Prophet (PBUH) gave precedence to kind treatment of one's mother over kind treatment of one's father, and the Sahabah used to remind the Muslims of this after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). Ibn `Abbas, a great scholar and faqih of this ummah, considered kind treatment of one's mother to be the best deed to bring one closer to Allah (SWT). A man came to him and said, "I asked for a woman's hand in marriage, and she refuse me. Someone else asked for her hand and she accepted and married him. I felt jealous, so I killed her. Will my repentance be accepted?" Ibn `Abbas asked, "Is your mother still alive?" He said, "No." So he told him, "Repent to Allah (SWT) and do your best to draw close to Him." `Ata' ibn Yassar, who narrated this report from Ibn `Abbas, said: "I went and asked Ibn Abbas, 'Why did you ask him if his mother was still alive?' He said, 'Because I know of no other deed that brings people closer to Allah (SWT) than kind treatment and respect towards one's mother.'"
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Imam Bukhari opens his book *al-Adab al-Mufrad* with a chapter on respect and kindness towards parents (*birr al-walidayn*), in which he places the section on good treatment of the mother before that on good treatment of the father, consistent with the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH).

The Qur'an evokes feelings of love and respect in the heart of the child, and encourages him or her to treat parents well. It refers to the mother being given precedence because of pregnancy and breast-feeding, and the pains and trials that she suffers during these two stages, in a most gentle and compassionate way. It recognizes her noble sacrifice and great tenderness and care: And We have enjoined on man [to be good] to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: [hear the command]: `Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is [your final] Goal.' (Qur'an 31:14)

What supreme teaching! What humane, compassionate direction: "Show gratitude to Me and to your parents." Showing gratitude to parents for what they have done for their child comes second only to showing gratitude to Allah (SWT), and is one of the best righteous deeds. What a high status this religion gives to parents!

Ibn `Umar saw a Yemeni man circumambulating the Ka`bah, carrying his mother. The man said to him, "I am like a tame camel for her: I have carried her more than she carried me. Do you think I have paid her back, O Ibn `Umar?" He replied, "No, not even one contraction!"

Every time `Umar ibn al-Khattab (RAA) saw the reinforcements from Yemen, he asked them, "Is Uways ibn `Amir among you?" - until he found Uways. He asked him, "Are you Uways ibn `Amir?" Uways said, "Yes." `Umar asked, "Are you from the clan of Murad in the tribe of Qaran?" Uways said, "Yes." `Umar asked, "Did you have leprosy, then you were cured of it except for an area the size of a *dirham*? Uways said, "Yes." `Umar asked, "Do you have a mother?" Uways said, "Yes." `Umar said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say: `There will come to you with the reinforcements from Yemen a man called Uways ibn `Amir of the clan of Murad from the tribe of Qaran. He had leprosy but has been cured of it except for a spot the size of a *dirham*. He has a mother, and he has always treated her with kindness and respect. If he prays to Allah (SWT), Allah (SWT) will fulfil his wish. If you can ask him to pray for forgiveness for you, then do so.' So ask Allah (SWT) to forgive me." Uways asked Allah (SWT) to forgive Dr. Muhammad Ali Al-Hashimi
him, then `Umar asked him, "Where are you going?" Uways said, "To Kufah." `Umar said, "Shall I write a letter of recommendation for you to the governor there?" Uways said, "I prefer to be anonymous among the people." 

What a high status Uways reached by virtue of his kindness and respect towards his mother, so that the Prophet (PBUH) recommended his Sahabah to seek him out and ask him to prafor them!

All of this indicates the high status to which Islam has raised the position of motherhood, and given the mother precedence over the father. At the same time, Islam has given importance to both parents, and has enjoined kindness and respect to both.

A woman may enjoy a life of ease and luxury in her husband’s home, and may be kept so busy with her husband and growing children that she has little time to spare for her parents, and neglects to check on them and treat them well.

But the true Muslim woman is safe from such errors, as she reads the recommendations of the Qur'an and Sunnah concerning parents. So she pays attention to them, constantly checking on them and hastening to treat them well, as much as her energy, time and circumstances permit, and as much as she can.

**She treats them kindly**

The Muslim woman who has embraced the values of Islam is kind and respectful towards her parents, treating them well and choosing the best ways to speak to them and deal with them. She speaks to them with all politeness and respect, and surrounds them with all honour and care, lowering to them the wing of humility, as commanded by Allah (SWT) in the Qur'an. She never utters a word of contempt or complaint to them, no matter what the circumstances, always heeding the words of Allah (SWT): 

**Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be kind to parents. Whether one of both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in**

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terms of honour. And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: `My Lord! Bestow on them Your mercy even as they cherished me in childhood.' (Qur'an 17:23-24)

If one or both parents are deviating from true Islam in some way, the dutiful Muslim daughter should, in this case, approach them in a gentle and sensitive manner, so as to dissuade them from their error. She should not condemn them harshly, but should try to convince them with solid proof, sound logic, wise words and patience, until they turn to the truth in which she believes.

The Muslim woman is required to treat her parents well, even if they are mushrikin. She does not forget that she is obliged to treat them well in spite of their shirk. Although she knows that shirk is the worst of major sins, this does not prevent her from treating her parents well according to the uniquely tolerant shari`ah of Islam: And We have enjoined on man [to be good] to his parents: in travail upon travail did his mother bear him, and in years twain was his weaning: [hear the command], `Show gratitude to Me and to your parents: to Me is [your final] Goal.' But if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice [and consideration], and follow the way of those who turn to Me [in love]: in the End the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth [and meaning] of all that you did. (Qur'an 31:14-15)

Kindness and respect towards parents is an important matter in Islam, because it springs from the strongest of human ties, the bond of a child to his or her mother and father. But this bond, great as it is, must come second to the bonds of faith. If the parents are mushrikin, and order their son or daughter to join them in their shirk, then the child must not obey them. There is no obedience to a created being in disobeying the Creator; no other bond may supersede that of faith and belief in Allah (SWT). However, children are still obliged to honour and take care of their parents.

The Muslim woman is kind and respectful towards her parents in all circumstances, and she spares no effort to make them happy, as much as she can and within the limits of Islam. So she checks on them from time to time,
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offers her services, visits them often and greets them with a cheerful smile, a loving heart, delightful gifts and words of kindness.

This is how she cares for them during their lives. After their death, she shows her love and respect by praying for them, giving charity on their behalf, and paying off whatever debts they may owe to Allah (SWT) or to other people.

Treating parents with kindness and respect is one of the essential attitudes of Muslim men and women. This noble attitude should be ongoing and should continue, no matter how complicated life becomes, no matter how high the cost of living rises, and no matter how many burdens or responsibilities a person has.

This attitude is an indication of the rich emotions that still exist in Muslim lands, *al-hamdu-lillah*, and it is proof of the gratitude which Muslim men and women feel towards the older generation which has made so many sacrifices for them when they themselves were most in need of kind words, consolation and a helping hand.

This attitude will protect a person, man or woman, from hard-heartedness and ingratitude. What is more, it will open to them the gates of Paradise.
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Footnotes:

1. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 2/176, Kitab al-salat, bab fadl al-salawat al-khams.
2. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Riyad al-Salihin, 191, bab birr al-walidayn.
3. See Riyad al-salihin, 191, bab birr al-walidayn
4. This child is one of the three who spoke in the cradle. The other two are 'Isa ibn Maryam (Jesus the son of Mary) and the child who was with his mother among the people of al-Ukhdud (the ditch). [Author]
7. Sahih Muslim, 8/25, Kitab al-siyam, bab qada’ al-sawm ‘an al-mayit.
8. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 13/13, Kitab al-birr wa’l-silah, bab silat al-walid al-mushrik.
9. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 13/15, Kitab al-birr wa’l-silah, bab tahrim al-'uquq.
10. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 13/4, Kitab al-birr wa’l-silah, bab birr al-walidayn.
13. See Sahih Muslim, 16/95, Kitab fada’il al-sahabah, bab min fada’l Uways al-Qarani.