**FAMILY**



**20.132.** Order your family and community to establish the Prayer, and be diligent in its observance. We do not ask you to provide for Us; rather, it is We Who provide for you. (So, all your worship is for your own benefit. ) And the (desired) outcome is in favor of piety and righteousness.(1)



**65.7.** Let him who has abundant means spend accordingly; and whoever is granted his provision in (narrower) measure, let him spend out of what God has granted him. God does not charge a soul with a duty except in what He has (already) granted it (of capacity to discharge that duty). God will bring about, after hardship, ease.(2)



**30.21.** And among His signs is that He has created for you, from your selves, mates, that you may incline towards them and find rest in them, and He has engendered love and tenderness between you. Surely in this are signs for people who reflect.(3)

**HADITH**

**167.** Abu Hafs Umar ibn Abi Salama Abdul Asad, may Allah be pleased with him, the stepson of **the Messenger of Allah**, said, “I was a child under the guardianship of the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, and my hand would go around in the dish. The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said to me, ‘Boy, say the Name of Allah the Almighty and eat with your right hand and eat what is in front of you.’ That became the way I ate ever afterwards.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, At’ima, 2; Sahih Muslim, Ashriba, 108).(4)

**168.** Ibn Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, say, ‘All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock. An imam is a shepherd and he is responsible for those in his care. A man is a shepherd in respect of his family and is responsible for those in his care. The woman is a shepherd in respect of her husband’s house and is responsible for those in her care. The servant is a shepherd in respect of his master’s property and is responsible for what is in his care. All of you are shepherds and each of you is responsible for his flock.’” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Wasaya, 9, Ahkam, 1; Sahih Muslim, Imara, 20).(5)

 **163.** Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As, may **Allah** be pleased with him, reported that the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “It is sin enough for a man that he neglects someone whom he is supposed to feed.” (Sunan Abu Dawud, Zakah, 45). (6)

**165.** Abu Hurayra, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “The upper hand is better than the lower hand. Begin with your dependents. The best **sadaqa** is that given by the wealthy. Anyone who refrains (from asking), Allah will spare him the need to and anyone who seeks to be independent, Allah will give him **independence**.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Zakah, 18). (7)

**PRACTICING GOOD CONDUCT IN THE FAMILY**

**Good character** is not only taught but can also be caught. Being a person of good character can best be achieved by learning what is good and bad, observing the limits set by God in the Scripture, witnessing good conduct in daily life, and emulating personal examples. To this end, modeling good character, especially in the family, is essential in raising children with character.

**Morality, manners, and social life** are learned in the family first. A healthy, ordered family life is necessary, as love and respect can be witnessed best in such a family. **Good character** characteristics can be gained and developed in the family. A child who learns respect for the grandmother and grandfather, obedience to the father and mother, and decent behavior toward those of their own generation within the family will have these positive traits when they enter society at large.

With that introduction, let us take a look at good conduct in the family.

**TREATING CHILDREN WITH COMPASSION**

As is well known, **daily prayers** and fasting are among the most essential **pillars of our faith**. But in both these practices, we can clearly see compassion for children, both in the religious guidelines and in the example of the Prophet’s life. While **performing daily prayers** has the highest priority in worship for the  Prophet, he never refrained from being kind to children, even while praying or leading  the  congregational prayers. For example, the Prophet’s granddaughter Umama would come to the mosque to play and climb on the Prophet’s shoulders and back as he led the prayers. When he went to prostrate he put the child down, and when he straightened up he took her up on his shoulders again.22 Sometimes he wished to lengthen the congregational prayers, but if he heard a child crying at the back of the mosque, he would change his plans and shorten the prayers out of compassion for the child and the feelings of the mother.23

There is another important narration which demonstrates clearly the extent of **Prophet Muhammad’s** consideration for children. This was conveyed by ‘Abdullah ibn Shaddad from his father: “God’s Messenger came to us for the evening prayers one day. He carried one of his grandchildren, Hasan or Husayn. He put the child on the floor and went to the front (to lead us). Then he recited the opening *takbir* and began the prayers. During the prayer, he stayed prostrated for a long time. (Since it was so long) I picked up my head and looked. What did I see! A child had climbed on the Prophet’s back while he was prostrating, and was sitting there. Immediately I prostrated again. When the prayers had finished, the people asked him, ‘O Messenger of God! The prostration was so long, we thought something had happened to

you, or perhaps you were receiving revelation?’ He answered, ‘No! Neither of these things happened. My child had climbed on my back. I thought it inappropriate to hurry him to get off before he was ready to (I waited until he got down before continuing).’”24

This compassion for children in Islam is not limited to prayer times. When we look at fasting (in the month of Ramadan, when all believers are required to fast), there are important exceptions for mothers and children. For example, as a mercy from God to women and their children, pregnant or nursing mothers are given legal allowance not to fast.25

Again, another important principle is that children under the age of puberty are not obligated to observe the fast. They are also exempted from the obligation of the other acts of worship until they reach the age of puberty and discretion.26 Normally this age is considered to be fifteen years old.27

One of the most serious wrongs that can be done to a child is for the parents to curse the child—even if it only happens “by mistake” due to impatience on a rare occasion. The danger of this type of curse is that even when the bad words slip out of a person’s mouth, they are a form of prayer. Jabir relates, “The Messenger said, ‘Do not pray against your own souls, do not pray against your children, do not pray against your servants. Do not even pray against your possessions. For if you pray at the time when prayers are accepted, God may accept your prayer.”28

Once in a war zone, some children were caught between the enemy lines and were killed. When the Prophet heard about this, he was grief stricken. The solders, seeing this, asked him, “O Messenger of God, why are you so disconsolate? Were not these children of the enemies of God?” He answered, “Even if they were children of the enemy, they were human beings. Weren’t the most pious among you the children of the enemy at  one  point?  You must take the utmost care never to kill children. By God every life is created with a nature that is open to faith and Islam.”29

One day when he was being affectionate to his grandchildren, a Bedouin came into the Prophet’s presence. When this man, who was devoid of compassion for his children, saw the scene, he could not hide his surprise and said, “I have ten children, and I have never kissed any of them.” The Prophet answered, “If God Almighty has extracted all the mercy from your heart, what can I do? Those who have no mercy will be shown none.”30

Anas ibn Malik recounted, “The Prophet used to join us children and, smiling, banter with us.”31 Anas also recalled, “I served God’s Messenger for ten years. I swear before God, he never once lost his patience with me. He never asked me, ‘Why did you do that? You should have done it another way.’”32

**RESPECT**

The dictionary definition of “respect” includes “the feeling that arises from holding someone in high esteem which inspires conduct

that shows the person they are valued”; “valuing someone and desiring not to disappoint them”; “a type of love which causes one to act with care and propriety around someone, and treat them with altruism.” Thus, the meaning of respect is connected with love, which explains  why the most common  word  occurring alongside “respect” is “love.” The bonds of brotherhood between members of a community are strengthened by love and respect. The secret of success also lies in loving and respecting others.

It is a sign of respect to **the Creator** when we respect and love other people simply because they are human. To love only those who think as we do is not sincere love for humankind; it is selfserving, and can even be a form of idolatry of the self. Likewise, it is not true respect to show deference to people only according to their rank or position. One who does not love everyone does not deserve to be loved; if one is constantly reviling the poor and unfortunate, they will lose the right to expect love and respect from others. According to a narration from Abu Musa, the Prophet said, “To show respect to an old **Muslim** with

white hair, to a *hafiz* (a person who has memorized the Qur’an)

as long as they recite and live by the **Quran**, or to a righteous ruler all manifest true respect for God.”33

It is part of *adab* to let older people speak before young people in daily conversations or situations. The following hadith exemplifies this tradition. Abu Yahya of the Ansar related, “Abdur Rahman ibn Sahl went with Muhayyisa ibn Mas’ud to Haybar. They separated from one another to take care of their individual business. Then they came to Medina. Abdur Rahman and Muhayyisa, the sons of Mas’ud, went into the Prophet’s presence. When Abdur Rahman wanted to talk, God’s Messenger told him, ‘Let older people speak.’ For Abdur Rahman was the youngest of the brothers.”34 Therefore it is important to give elders the chance to speak first, out of respect for  their experience and  wisdom. Younger people should speak when spoken to or when asked a question, instead of monopolizing the conversation.

Lastly, Samura ibn Jundab, a Companion who was a child during the Prophet’s life, recalls the following: “I was a child during the time of the Prophet and I memorized whatever I heard when he was teaching. The only thing that kept me from speaking in the gatherings was that there were older people there.”

**Treating the Elderly with Respect**

**In Islam**, the general rule is that those who are older than us should be respected, and those who are younger than us should be loved. In addition, it is commendable to care for those who have fallen on hard times. In fact, God’s help reaches us through those people who need our help; our subsistence and sustenance may be increased for the sake of the adults and children whom we support.35

The basic rule of respect for elders is even more important between family members. An example is the extra respect due to mothers and fathers. It is not proper to call our parents by their first names. Below are some of the hadith of the Prophet on this topic:

“If any young person shows respect to an older person because of the age difference, God will appoint someone to show him similar respect when he himself grows old.”36 This hadith informs us that young people will be rewarded for respecting elders and will be shown respect as they themselves grow old. Young people who perceive the elderly as a burden should think about this.

“Those who do not show mercy to younger people or show respect to older people are not of us.”37 This hadith summarizes the relationship between younger and older people in a clear and succinct manner. The Prophet said, “To have **respect** for an older Muslim with graying hair shows one has respect for God.”38

In order to develop feelings of respect towards elders the following issues should be focused on:

1. In all the **family** business of a household, the father and mother should be considered the authorities. This behavior encourages the internalization of respect for elders. A hadith says, “Blessings are to be found next to your elders.”39
2. The respect and reverence shown by parents to their own mother and father (i.e., the children’s grandparents) serve as a great lesson to the children. If a child’s mother and father are always loving and compassionate, the child will be more aware of the duty and obligation to respect their parents and other elders. People develop this awareness over a long time and through habit. A child needs to see how to obey and respect elders over and over again to absorb this lesson. Otherwise it would be difficult—sometimes even impossible—to expect the desired result to come by simply teaching rules that are not practiced. God’s Messenger expressed the critical need in a society for young people to maintain respectful attitudes and behavior toward those who are older than themselves: “If there were not whitehaired elders, suckling babies, and grazing animals among you, calamities would have rained

down on you like a flood.”40

**Kissing the Hands of the Elderly and Esteemed People**

We show our respect for older persons and scholars by kissing their hands. We know from narrations that the Companions kissed the hand of the Prophet.41 God’s Messenger said, “Our elders are a blessing. Those who do not respect elders and show compassion for youths are not of us.”42 Children usually kiss the hands of all their elders; after puberty, young people should kiss the hands of their mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and older siblings.

It is accepted that kissing the hands of **Islamic scholars** is *mubah*, or “acceptable,” if it is done out of respect or piety, but it is unacceptable to kiss someone’s hand for worldly reasons. Just as it is forbidden for members of the opposite sex to hold hands in

**Islam**, it is also objectionable to engage in flattery or sycophancy, or to bow before others. There is some disagreement regarding whether a son-in-law should kiss the hand of his mother-in-law or a daughter-in-law the hand of her father-in-law. There is no harm in kissing the hands of elderly women as a sign of respect. What is important here is that kissing a person’s hand is performed as a sign of respect.

While heeding the warning of God’s Messenger, “Do not stand up as the Persians stand up for each other,” the elder should not desire to have his or her hand kissed, but the youth should try to kiss the hand of the elder person; an older person should not expect a show of respect, but the younger should not neglect to do so. It is also to be noted here that members of various communities would come and ask the Prophet questions and he would answer all their questions. Tirmidhi relates that two people of the Jewish community in Medina came to ask the Messenger a question and they kissed his hand.43

To show respect for scholars and holy people, and so on, one may kiss their hands or perform *musafaha*44 with them. There is no objection either way, for we should respect real knowledge and God-consciousness. However, it would be wrong for a person to consider themselves to be holy and thus expect their hand to be kissed. It is also permissible for the hands of other older people to be kissed out of respect for their piety. But prostrating in front of scholars or other people is not permissible. To do so, or allowing this to be done, is a sin as it borders on a kind of idol worship. For this reason **Muslims** should not perform such actions.

# THE VALUE OF FAMILY TIES

“Know your relatives to maintain family bonds with (sila al-rahm ). Surely, maintaining family bonds results in love between relatives, increase in wealth and lengthening in one’s life.”
(Tirmidhi, Birr, 49; Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Musnad, 2:374)

The relationship between **Prophet Adam and Prophet David** must be one of the greatest examples of the extension of one’s lifespan. Prophet Adam bequeathed forty years of his own life to Prophet David, who thought his own lifetime was too short to achieve what he needed to; thus Prophet David’s time on this earth was extended by forty years, increasing his lifespan to eighty years. Although this event is not mentioned in the Qur’an, it is related by the most important hadiths sources like Bukhari and **Muslim**.
From the early periods, the subject of transfer of a person’s lifetime to another as a consequence of relevant prayers was a recognized phenomenon between saintly people; however, such a thing can only be realized given that there is conformity between the spiritual worlds of the people in question, that the prayer is perfectly sincere, for God answers the supplication in the same way it was asked for. Perhaps, a similar case of sincere devotion can be realized when the rights of relatives are observed and in this way the Permanent Existent One, **God Almighty** may extend the lifetime of that person.
Another reason why the Giver of Life, extends one’s life could be the possibility of rendering the deeds of that person more fruitful as if he or she lived a longer life; if the reward in the **Hereafter** depends on the deeds and good actions one has performed in this physical world then the longer the term, the greater its harvest in the permanent realm. For instance the Night of Power is recognized by all Muslims to be greater in reward than a thousand months of worship; if a believer manages to tap into the Divine Mercy during this night they will be rewarded as if they have lived on the earth for more than eighty years. This could be God’s way of increasing good deeds, acts of charity and the lives of sincere believers.
Another possibility why family relations are considered to prolong one’s life is perhaps proportional to the importance given to family ties. This undoubtedly is a highly esteemed principle in Islam but in modern times, unfortunately has become widely neglected.
It is very important to regularly visit family members in turn, beginning with close family, mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, grandparents and then aunts and uncles. In the recent times respect for the nearest of kin, like one’s own mother or father has unfortunately dropped to regrettable lows. When after receiving the first revelations of the Qur’an the Prophet told his wife Khadija: “I fear for myself,” the intimate companion and beloved wife of the Prophet answered, saying: “Do not fear; by God, He will never humiliate you. You maintain the family bonds, you bear people’s burdens, and you help the destitute.” It is quite clear by her statement and also by a similar statement made by her cousin Waraqa ibn Nawfal that during that period family relationships were of significant importance.
When the noble Prophet was being oppressed by the unbelievers, Abu Bakr said: “O Messenger of God! One like you, who helps the poor and maintains family bonds, does not deserve this!” Again when he was seeking protection from the Quraysh for his fellow Companions, Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, mentioned family bonds in his appeal.
All these different scenarios and contexts are revealing of the strong custom of family ties. Throughout history, the likes of similar reports about kinship demonstrate the eminent role that families played across many different civilizations. In earlier times sons and daughters would live along with their parents and children in the same home; this practice of extended family settings are still the norm in some parts of the world. Since family is the basic unit of society, the greater the bond and affection between them, the stronger and healthier the society is.(8)

**References**

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