

Lesson 2: The Role of the Mother

Every society is made up of blocks of family units. The stronger each block is, the stronger the structure of the society. Families are thus the building blocks upon which rests the fate of society. For the development of good families, the mother plays a vital role. Many women today have aspirations of progress in their careers, and degrees in various fields.

However it is indisputable that the most important achievement of a mother is the raising of sensible, virtuous children who will then move on to build other strong blocks for society. It has been said that it is easy to bear children but it is difficult to raise them well. In that lies the challenge for all mothers.

Islam's respect for the Mother

A Muslim mother has a valued and dignified role. Her contribution is acknowledged and appreciated. Her unparalleled gifts to the child have been aptly described by Imam Zaynul 'Abidin (a) in *Risalatul Huqooq* – The Chapter of Rights.

It is the right of your mother that you should appreciate that she carried you [in her womb] the way nobody carries anybody, She fed you the fruits of her heart which nobody feeds anybody. She protected you [during pregnancy] with her ears, eyes, hands, legs, hair, limbs, [in short] with her whole being, gladly, cheerfully, and carefully; suffering patiently all the worries, pains, difficulties, and sorrows.

Till the hand of God removed you from her and brought you into this world. Then she was most happy, feeding you forgetting her own hunger, clothing you even if she herself had no clothes, giving you milk and water not caring for her own thirst, keeping you in the shade, even if she had to suffer from the heat of the sun, giving you every comfort with her own hardships; lulling you to sleep while keeping herself awake.

The foundation of the family is laid with the decision to marry, and the importance of the mother is evident in Islamic teachings beginning with marriage, conception and then child rearing. The following points illustrate how Islam sanctifies the role of the mother

Emphasis on choosing a good wife

Islam advocates choosing of a wife based on moral characteristics. The Holy Prophet says: *Marry into a decent family, for genes have effects*. He is also reported to have encouraged Muslims to marry virtuous women in order to have virtuous children. He has condemned those who look only for wealth and /or beauty when choosing a spouse.

Respect in this world

A mother commands great respect from her family. She is to be obeyed, and venerated. The Qur'anic verses which talk about the rights of parents include the mother. However the Holy Prophet (S) has enjoined goodness to the mother even before the father. A man once came for advice to him, as to who he should be good to. The Prophet (S) advised him to do good to his mother again. Three times the man asked, and three times the Prophet (S) told him to do good to his mother. At the fourth time, the Prophet (S) told him to do good to his father. This well-known story clearly illustrates the position of the mother in Islam.

Respect in the Hereafter

The famous hadith of the Holy Prophet (S) says: *Jannat lies under the feet of the mothers*. A woman came to the Holy Prophet (S) and asked why going for Jihad was not obligatory on women. She was afraid that women were barred from achieving the great reward for those who fought and died in the way of the Almighty.

The Prophet (S) explained to her that a woman was a fighter in Allah's way from the time she became pregnant up to the time she delivered, and from the time she began breast-feeding till the time she stopped. If she died during that period, her position would be that of a martyr. To raise a virtuous child is one of the greatest good deeds. It continues to bring reward even after death.

Holy Qur'an on the Mother

Allah says in Sura Luqman:

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 eternal coming. (31:14)

And in Sura Ahqaf He says:

And We have enjoined on man doing of good to his parents; with troubles did his mother bear him and with troubles did she bring him forth; and the bearing and the weaning of him was thirty

months. (46: 15)

In both the above verses, although both parents are mentioned, the mother is singled out as she bears a greater responsibility and ultimately a greater reward.

Two mothers are mentioned by name in the Qur'an. When Bibi Maryam, the mother of Nabi Isa (a) suffered the pangs of childbirth, she wished she was dead. She was all alone and worried about what was about to happen to her. At that time Allah consoled her and told her not to grieve. She was provided with fresh dates and water. She was also told to fast for three days by abstaining from talk, and Allah made the baby talk to prove that he was a miraculous baby (19:23–26).

The mother is shown concern and consideration for her state. Allah does not abandon her, or reprove her by telling her that she is privileged to give birth to a Prophet. Although that was true, motherhood entails great difficulty, a fact recognized by the Qur'an.

Another mother mentioned by the Qur'an is the mother of Prophet Musa (a). When she was told to put her baby in the river, she was given an assurance that the baby would be returned to her. Allah knows the love of the mother, and knows it is difficult to give away one's child.

When the baby was picked up by Firawn's wife, he refused to suck the milk of any foster mother. Prophet Musa's sister then suggested that they try her mother. Mother and baby unite, and Allah's promise was fulfilled. (Sura TaHa 37–40, Qasas 7–13)

Qualities of a Mother

A good mother has outstanding qualities. No one can replace her in the life of her children. The following are some of the things which make her so unique.

1. A deep love for her children

A mother's love is unmatched. Whether young or old, healthy or handicapped, troublesome or obedient, the child is still beloved to the mother. This love may be displayed in various forms. Sometimes children misinterpret scoldings and rebukes to be a sign of lack of love. It is important to assure the child that he is always loved, even when his behavior warrants disciplinary measures. Such a child becomes confident and happy, and will never seek solace elsewhere. The love of the mother becomes a source of happiness and peace at home. Children feel attached to the home because of the mother.

2. Sacrifice and dedication

A mother gives up a great deal for the sake of the child. She gives up her time, her sleep, her pleasures etc. to ensure that the child is all right. As Imam Zaynul 'Abidin(a) says in his book Risalatul Huquq (mentioned earlier), nobody comes even close to doing what a mother does for her child. That is why he

says that it is only with help of the Almighty that one can thank the mother for all her sacrifice and efforts.

A good mother places the needs of the child, both physical and emotional needs, first. This is an important point to keep in mind, especially in these modern times. Women today are deluded by society into making their own careers and jobs more important than their homes. The home will always remain a woman's most valuable work and that may require all types of sacrifices. It is not really a sacrifice, but is an investment which will reap great dividends.

3. Protection and security

A mother always tries to safeguard the child from danger and difficulties. However some mothers tend to be over protective. It is wise for the child to learn to face some problems in life, according to his age and circumstances. A coddled child will be unable to face the realities of the world when he grows up, a world which will not be as considerate of him as his mother.

The role of the Mother

A window of the child to the world

When a baby is born, he is totally unaware of the outside world. The mother plays an important part in introducing him to the world. The outlook that the child will form towards life depends a lot on the mother. His attitude, his views – religious or otherwise– his perspective on life and its goals, will all be gained from her. Eventually he will mature and perhaps form his own changed views, but the initial years and what he learns in them will always have a lasting impression on his mind.

Model for the child

Since the mother is the most important person in the life of a child, she is greatly revered. Her habits and behavior become a model for the child. Whatever the child observes from her, such as her housekeeping habits, her manners, her relationships with others, the way she spends money, and in general her lifestyle, will all undoubtedly affect the child's character. A mother is said to be better than a hundred teachers. Her emotional strengths and weaknesses are an example for the child, and will be followed for many years to come even though all of it may not be worthy.

People have been reported to be following their mother's ways even when they know the mothers were wrong. It is almost like an unconscious reaction, and it takes effort to behave differently. Thus mothers have an important task of setting forth a good example. It may seem difficult, even impossible.

Many mothers think it too great a burden to be acting near perfect all the time, even in the familiarity of their own homes. However it is a good training. What mothers will change in themselves for their children will become a habit, and will lead to a real change. It is not perfection that Islam demands from mothers, but a willingness to accept the responsibility of modeling good acceptable behavior.

Many great people remember their mothers and the role they played in nurturing their greatness. Sayyid ar-Radhi, the compiler of *Nahjul Balagha*, mourned the death of his mother greatly. He wrote a poem for her in which he says:

O Mother! I cry and shed tears for your separation hoping that perhaps the burning drops of tears coming out of my sorrowful eyes may melt and remove the mountain of sadness from my heart.

O Mother! You were such a precious jewel and valuable pearl that for getting you released from the plundering enemy's hand I would have sacrificed everything in my possession as your ransom. But Alas! The death has snatched you away from my hand and nothing can be taken back from its deadly claws.

O Mother! If all the mothers of the world would have been righteous like you, indeed the children of the world would not have required the presence of their fathers.

O Mother! All are witness that you were an honorable and noble lady because you have handed over decent and noble children to society. [1](#)

Shaykh Mutaza Ansari, a great Shi'a Jurist also wept bitterly at the death of his mother. One of his scholarly pupils reproached him, saying it did not befit a learned scholar to agonize so much over the death of his mother. The Shaykh replied: It seems you are not aware of the high status enjoyed by a mother. The proper training given by this mother of mine to me, and the numerous hardships borne by her for my sake elevated me to this position. The initial training given by her to me paved the way for my making all this progress and acquiring this high status in the world of knowledge.

Strengths of a Mother

The following qualities need to be acquired by all mothers.

Awareness of responsibility

Motherhood is a career, and those who take it up must try and excel at it. It is the duty of every mother to look into better techniques and strategies of parenting. A wide variety of material is available, both Islamic and secular. Although Islamic material may not be abundant in English, many secular books and magazines are published about parenting. Reading these from time to time helps increase awareness and vision. When a mother reads about problems that parents face, she is comforted by the fact that she is not alone. That is very reassuring as often parents assume they are the only ones having difficulties. Also, reading about solutions used by other people, or advice given by psychologists etc. helps broaden the choice of possible tactics in dealing with children.

Setting clear goals

A mother has to know what she expects from her children, and then explain that to them. It is not

enough to want good children. The children must know what exactly is expected from them, and what the mother wants them to do. Sometimes a mother tells the child to lay the table properly.

Because it has not been explained to the child what properly means, he does it the way he thinks it right. The child may consequently be blamed for being sloppy, lazy etc. for not setting the table right. The frustration and heartache could have been avoided if the child knew exactly what was expected from him, rather than a vague order to lay the table.

The same can be applied to all chores, behavior with others, academic achievements etc. The mother must have definite goals of what she wants, and make them clear.

Encourage children according to their potential

Each child comes with his own distinctive potential. The Holy Prophet (S) has said: *Human beings are like mines of gold and silver*. Children have abilities that could lead to great achievements. Some show skill and interest in a certain area, while others prefer a different one.

Apart from not trying to compare children with one another, a good mother tries to bring out the best in each child. She makes the child develop his skills in whatever area he is good at, as well as remedy the weakness in each child. If one child is very shy, for example, the mother should not demand that he socialize and interact with others the way his siblings do.

Some mothers unwittingly put their children through a great deal of embarrassment and humiliation.

The child must be taught to overcome his shyness. Some books on shyness may help. Or the mother could give practical suggestions of what the child could talk about to others. A mother's gentle guidance can remedy many a flaw and weakness in the character of the child.

Wise Words

1. Fortunate is the person whose mother is chaste and virtuous.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a)

2. Each one of you is a guardian (shepherd), and each one of you is responsible for his charges . . . so the man is a guardian over his family, and is responsible for them. A woman is a guardian over the family of her husband and his children, and she is responsible for them.

Holy Prophet (S)

1. Excerpts from Meeting the Pious, Ash-Sharif ar-Radi