

Mothers

The Old Testament in several places commands kind and considerate treatment of the parents and condemns those who dishonor them. For example,

“If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death.”(Lev. 20:9)

And

“A wise man brings joy to his father but a foolish man despises his mother.”(Proverbs 15:20).

Although honoring the father alone is mentioned in some places, e.g.

“A wise man heeds his father’s instruction.”(Proverbs 13: 1)

The mother alone is never mentioned. Moreover, there is no special emphasis on treating the mother kindly as a sign of appreciation of her great suffering in childbearing and suckling. Besides, mothers do not inherit at all from their children while fathers do. [1](#)

It is difficult to speak of the New Testament as a scripture that calls for honoring the mother. On the contrary, one gets the impression that the New Testament considers kind treatment of mothers as an impediment on the way to God. According to the New Testament, one cannot become a good Christian worthy of becoming a disciple of Christ unless he hates his mother. It is attributed to Jesus to have said: *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters -- yes, even his own life -- he cannot be my disciple.”(Luke 14:26)*

Furthermore, the New Testament depicts a picture of Jesus as indifferent to, or even disrespectful of, his own mother. For example, when she had come looking for him while he was preaching to a crowd, he did not care to go out to see her:

“Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’ ‘Who

are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.’”(Mark 3:31–35)

One might argue that Jesus was trying to teach his audience an important lesson that religious ties are no less important than family ties. However, he could have taught his listeners the same lesson without showing such absolute indifference to his mother. The same disrespectful attitude is depicted when he refused to endorse a statement made by a member of his audience blessing his mother’s role in giving birth to him and nursing him:

“As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’ He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’”
(Luke 11:27–28)

If a mother with the stature of the Virgin Mary had been treated with such discourtesy, as depicted in the New Testament, by a son of the stature of Jesus Christ, then how should an average Christian mother be treated by her average Christian sons?

In Islam, the honor, respect, and esteem attached to motherhood is unparalleled. The Qur’an places the importance of kindness to parents as second only to worshipping God Almighty:

“Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, And that you be kind to parents. Whether one or 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 honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: ‘My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they cherished me in childhood.’”
(17:23–24)

The Qur’an in several other places puts special emphasis on the mother’s great role in giving birth and nursing:

“And We have enjoined on man to be good to his parents: In travail upon travail did his mother bear him and in two years was his weaning. Show gratitude to Me and to your parents.” (31: 14)

The very special place of mothers in Islam has been eloquently described by Prophet Muhammad (S):

“A man asked the Prophet: ‘Whom should I honor most?’ The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother’. ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother’. ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your mother!’. ‘And who comes next?’ asked the man. The Prophet replied: ‘Your father’” (Bukhari and Muslim).

Among the few precepts of Islam which Muslims still faithfully observe to the present day is the considerate treatment of mothers. The honor that Muslim mothers receive from their sons and daughters is exemplary. The intensely warm relations between Muslim mothers and their children and the deep

respect with which Muslim men approach their mothers usually amaze Westerners.[2](#)

Female Inheritance

One of the most important differences between the Qur'an and the Bible is their attitude towards female inheritance of the property of a deceased relative. The Biblical attitude has been succinctly described by Rabbi Epstein:

“The continuous and unbroken tradition since the Biblical days gives the female members of the household, wife and daughters, no right of succession to the family estate. In the more primitive scheme of succession, the female members of the family were considered part of the estate and as remote from the legal personality of an heir as the slave. Whereas by Mosaic enactment the daughters were admitted to succession in the event of no male issue remained, the wife was not recognized as heir even in such conditions.”[3](#)

Why were the female members of the family considered part of the family estate? Rabbi Epstein has the answer: “They are owned --before marriage, by the father; after marriage, by the husband.”[4](#)

The Biblical rules of inheritance are outlined in Numbers 27:1-11. A wife is given no share in her husband's estate, while he is her first heir, even before her sons. A daughter can inherit only if no male heirs exist. A mother is not an heir at all while the father is. Widows and daughters, in case male children remained, were at the mercy of the male heirs for provision. That is why widows and orphan girls were among the most destitute members of the Jewish society.

Christianity has followed suit for a long time. Both the ecclesiastical and civil laws of Christendom barred daughters from sharing with their brothers their patrimony. Besides, wives were deprived of any inheritance rights. These iniquitous laws survived till late in the last century.[5](#)

Among the pagan Arabs before Islam, inheritance rights were confined exclusively to the male relatives. The Qur'an abolished all these unjust customs and gave all the female relatives inheritance shares:

“From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large --a determinate share.”(4:7)

Muslim mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters had received inheritance rights thirteen hundred years before Europe recognized that these rights even existed. The division of inheritance is a vast subject with an enormous amount of details (4:7, 11, 12, 176).

The general rule is that the female share is half the male's except the cases in which the mother receives equal share to that of the father. This general rule if taken in isolation from other legislations concerning men and women may seem unfair. In order to understand the rationale behind this rule, one must take into account the fact that the financial obligations of men in Islam far exceed those of women (see the “Wife's property” section).

A bridegroom must provide his bride with a marriage gift. This gift becomes her exclusive property and remains so even if she is later divorced. The bride is under no obligation to present any gifts to her groom. Moreover, the Muslim husband is charged with the maintenance of his wife and children. The wife, on the other hand, is not obliged to help him in this regard. Her property and earnings are for her use alone except what she may voluntarily offer her husband. Besides, one has to realize that Islam vehemently advocates family life. It strongly encourages youth to get married, discourages divorce, and does not regard celibacy as a virtue.

Therefore, in a truly Islamic society, family life is the norm and single life is the rare exception. That is, almost all marriage-aged women and men are married in an Islamic society. In light of these facts, one would appreciate that Muslim men, in general, have greater financial burdens than Muslim women and thus inheritance rules are meant to offset this imbalance so that the society lives free of all gender or class wars. After a simple comparison between the financial rights and duties of Muslim women, one British Muslim woman has concluded that Islam has treated women not only fairly but generously.⁶

¹. Epstein, op. cit., p. 122

². Armstrong, op. cit., p. 8.

³. Epstein, op. cit., p. 175.

⁴. Ibid., p. 121.

⁵. Gage, op. cit., p. 142.

⁶. B. Aisha Lemu and Fatima Heeren, *Woman in Islam* (London: Islamic Foundation, 1978) p. 23.

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