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Lesson 35: Family Life In Islam (3)

1. Parents' Status

(A) Father

In the Islamic family system, the father is considered as the head of the family. Whenever some people form a group, they must also have a leader. For example, a soccer team needs a captain who would make sure each player follows their plan properly; a school needs a principal; a government needs a ruler. "Family" is a group of people; and, therefore, it also needs a leader whom we call as "the head of the family".

As the head of the family, it is the father's responsibility to provide the necessities of life for his dependants: his children, his wife (and elderly parents, if they are needy).

What are the necessities of life? Food, dress, shelter, furniture, and whatever a person normally needs to live a respectable life.

The rights which a father has over his children are of three types:
● Spiritual & Emotional: to love one's father, and to deal with him in a humble, kind and merciful manner.

● Physical: to cheerfully bear any hardship you may face in taking care of him; to talk gently to him; not to raise your voice or hands above his; and not to precede him in any way.

● Financial: to fulfill his needs before he asks you for it.

Imam Zaynu 'l-`Abidin (a.s.) said: "It is the right of your father to realize that he is your root and you are his branch; and that without him you would have been non-existent. Therefore, whenever you find in yourself anything that is likeable, remember that your father is the basic means of that gift [of Allah] to you. And be thankful to Allah and grateful to your father accordingly."

(B) Mother

In Islam, the mother is a substitute head of the family. In many Muslim societies, the father works outside the house, whereas the mother is in charge inside the house.

As mentioned earlier, it is the father's duty to provide the necessities of life for the children. If the father is dead, then it is the duty of the grandfather to provide for his grandchildren. Only when both, the father and the grandfather, are dead the duty of providing the necessities of life for the children fall upon the mother.

A mother's basic duty towards her children is to love, nurture and train them as best as she can so that they may grow up as healthy and good Muslims. That is why it is said that, “Paradise is at the feet of the mothers.”

The three types of rights mentioned for the father, equally apply for the mother also. Rather in some ways, the rights of mothers are superior to that of fathers.

Hakim bin Hizam asked the Prophet, “O Messenger of God, to whom should I do good?” The Prophet said, “Your mother.” Hakim asked, “And then who?” The Prophet again said, “Your mother.” Hakim asked the saem question for the third time, and the Prophet again answered that “Your mother.” When Hakim asked the fourth time, only then did the Prophet say, “Your father.”

Why is so much importance given to the rights of mothers? Imam Zaynu 'l–`Abidin (a.s.) says:

“It is the right of your mother that you should appreciate that she carried you [in her womb] as nobody carries anybody, fed you the fruits of her heart which nobody feeds anybody, protected you [during pregnancy] with her ears, eyes, hands, legs, hair, limbs, [in short] with her whole being, gladly, cheerfully and carefully. She patiently suffered all the worries, pains, difficulties and sorrows, till the hands of God removed you from her and brought you to 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...Therefore, you must remain thankful to her accordingly, and you cannot do so except by the help from Allah.”

2. Parents’ Rights in the Qur’an

As the children step into adulthood, parents proceed towards old age. The children, in their childhood, need the protection of their parents; and the parents, in their old age, need the kindness of their children. Allah, *subhanahu wa ta`ala*, says:

“If We grant long life to any, We cause him to be reversed in nature (i.e., from strength to

***weakness*)*."* (*36:68*)**

The three types of parents' rights mentioned earlier are based on the following verses of the Qur'ān:

Your Lord has decreed that you should worship no one but Him and that you should ● be kind to your parents; ● and if one or both of them attain old age in your life* [*and become angry with you for some reason*]*, then do not even say to them 'Oh'* [*in contempt*]*, nor should you repel them. Instead, you should address them in respectful manner. ● And out of kindness, behave with them humbly. ● And* [*pray for them by*] *saying 'My Lord! bestow upon them Your mercy just as they cherished me in childhood.' (**17:23–24**)

In many verses, the Qur'ān has combined the kindness towards the parents side by side with the worship of Allah. ***"Worship Allah and join not any partner with Him and do good to parents…"*** (**4:36**)

In verse 17:23, it says: ***"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you should be kind to parents…"***

Obedience to the parents is a mirror of obedience to Allah. For example, in verse 31:14–15, Allah says:***"And We enjoined on man* (*to be good*) *to his parents…Show gratitude to Me and to your parents. To Me is your return. And if they strive to make you join in worship with Me things of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them; yet bear them company in this life with fairness and consideration."***

The last sentence means that you should be kind to your parents even if they are non–Muslims; however, you should not obey them if they ask you to do anything against the teachings of Islam.

We find that the Qur'ān and hadith has emphasized more on the rights of the parents than the rights of the children. Why?

The fact is that the parent's heart is the fountainhead of the love for the child; this affection becomes the life–blood of the parents. The Qur'an has alluded to this instinctive parental love in several places. On the other hand, children especially when they are no longer in need of parental care, do not feel so much love for the parents. We are not speaking about respect. Here the talk is about instinctive love; and experience is a reliable witness to confirm this observation. Allah, *subhanahu wa ta`ala*, says: ***"Your parents and your children, you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit."*** (**4:11**)

It is a known fact that signposts are not needed on a road going straight; but at a crossroads where several routes branch out, one cannot expect to get onto the right path without a guide or a sign–post. It is for this reason that Islam does not emphasize in so many words those aspects of life which are taken care of by human nature itself. It is where the hold of natural instinct is loosened that Islam extends its helping hand and leads man onto the right path by telling him what he is expected to do. It is for this

reason that Islam did not emphasize the rights of children so forcefully; but full emphasis was given to the rights of the parents.

3. Importance of Silatu ’r-Rahm

The importance of *silatu 'r-rahm* can be seen from the following verses of the Qur'an and the ah□dith of the Prophet and his Ahlu 'l-bayt.

The Positive Aspect

Allah, *subhanahu wa ta`ala*, says: Say to them: “Whatever of good (wealth) you spend, it is for your parents, the near relatives, the orphans, the poor and the estranded traveller.” The primary recipients of your charity should be your parents and your relatives if they are needy.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) said, “Some people go on an evil path and commit sins, but they behave gently with their relatives. Because of their *silatu 'r-rahm*, their wealth is increased and their lives are prolonged. How much more would have been their reward if they had been good people?” Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said, “The reward of charity is increased ten times; and the reward of lending is increased eighteen times; and the reward of doing good to a believer is increased twenty times; and the reward of doing good to a relative is increased twenty four times.”

Imam Husayn (a.s.): “Anyone who desires to prolong his life and his livelihood, then he should have strong ties with his relatives.” There are many other ahadith on silatu 'r-rahm. The rewards of silatu 'r-rahm in this world can be summarized as follows:

- prolonging of life;
- increase in livelihood;
- prosperity in family and home;
- last moments of death will be eased.

The Negative Aspect

Allah, subhanahu wa ta`ala, says: ***“Those who break their covenant with God…those who sever the relationship which Allah has ordered to be joined, and those who do mischief on the earth—they are the (real) losers.”*** (***2:27***) In another verse, after describing the same acts, He says: ***“…on them shall be the curse, and they shall have a terrible home (in the hereafter).”*** (***13:25***)

On the basis of these verses, severing the ties with one's relatives is counted among the major sins in Islam.

Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said, “I seek protection of Allah from the sins which hasten death.” Someone asked, “O' Amir al-mu'minin, is there any sin which hastens death?” The Imam said, “Yes; and this is the severance of relationship. Indeed, when the members of a family remain united and help each other, then Allah gives them livelihood, even if they be drinkers of liquor. And, indeed, when members of a family separate from each other and sever relationship with one another, then Allah deprives them (of their livelihood) even if they are pious.”

The Methods of Silatu 'r-Rahm

How should we do silatu 'r-rahm? Silatu 'r-rahm, as mentioned earlier, means keeping strong ties with one's relatives. There is no one way of doing silatu 'r-rahm. For example, in one hadith, the Prophet said, “Do silatu 'r-rahm even if it is by saying *salm*.” *Silatu 'r-rahm* can take different forms: ● not giving any trouble to one's relatives; ● dealing with relatives on the basis of love and Islamic ethics; ● participating in ones’ relatives' sorrow and joy; ● helping them financially.

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This lesson is based on `Allamah Sayyid Sa’eed Akhtar Rizvi's
The Family Life of Isam (Revised Edition, 1980)
with additions and modifications made for this course.

Question Paper on Lesson 35

Question 1: [10 points]
True or False:
(a) The father is the leader of the family without any responsibilities.

(b) A mother's basic duties towards her children is: to love, nurture and train them as good Muslims.

(c) In showing kindness to the parents, the rights of mother and father are equal.

(d) The Qur'n has emphasized more on the rights of the children rather than the rights of the parents.

(e) Silatu 'r-rahm can affect our lives in this world.

Question 2: [20 points]
How did the statement of Imam Zaynu ’l-‘Abidin about the mother affect you personally? Write your thoughts in a short paragraph.

Question 3: [20 points]
Explain the ways and methods by which you would do silatu 'r-rahm in today's modern and busy lifestyle of the West.

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