

Chapter 5: The Muslim Woman and Her Children

Introduction

Undoubtedly children are a source of great joy and delight; they make life sweet, bring more *rizq* into a family's life and give hope. A father sees his children as a future source of help and support, as well as representing an increase in numbers and perpetuation of the family. A mother sees her children as a source of hope, consolation and joy in life, and as hope for the future. All of these hopes rest on the good upbringing of the children and giving them a sound preparation for life, so that they will become active and constructive elements in society, a source of goodness for their parents, community and society as a whole. Then they will be as (SWT) described them:

(Wealth and sons are allurements of the life of this world . . .) (Qur'an 18:46)

If their education and upbringing are neglected, they will become bad characters, a burden on their family, community and society as a whole.

She understands the great responsibility

that she has towards her children

The Muslim woman never forgets that the mother's responsibility in bringing up the children and forming their characters is greater than that of the father, because children tend to be closer to their mother and spend more time with her; she knows all about their behavioural, emotional and intellectual development during their childhood and the difficult years of adolescence.

Hence the woman who understands the teachings of Islam and her own educational role in life, knows her complete responsibility for the upbringing of her children, as is referred to in the Qur'an:

(O you who believe! Save yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is Men and Stones . . .) (Qur'an 66:6)

The Prophet (PBUH) also referred to this responsibility in his hadith:

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is responsible for his flock. The leader is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock; a man is the shepherd of his family and is responsible for his flock; a woman is the shepherd in the house of her husband and is responsible for her flock; a servant is the shepherd of his master's wealth and is responsible for it. Each of you is a shepherd and is responsible for his flock."¹

Islam places responsibility on the shoulders of every individual; not one person is left out. Parents - especially mothers - are made responsible for providing their children with a solid upbringing and sound Islamic education, based on the noble characteristics that the Prophet (PBUH) declared that he had been sent to complete and spread among people:

"I have only been sent to make righteous behaviour complete."²

Nothing is more indicative of the greatness of the parents' responsibility towards their children and their duty to give them a suitable Islamic upbringing than the verdict of the *'ulama'* that every family should heed the words of the Prophet (PBUH):

"Instruct your children to pray when they are seven and hit them if they do not do so when they are ten."³

Any parents who are aware of this hadith but do not teach their children to pray when they reach seven or hit them if they do not do so when they reach ten, are parents who are sinners and failing in their duty; they will be responsible before Allah (SWT) for their failure.

The family home is a microcosm of society in which the children's mentality, intellect, attitudes and inclinations are formed when they are still very small and are ready to receive sound words of guidance. Hence the parents' important role in forming the minds of their sons and daughters and directing them towards truth and good deeds is quite clear.

Muslim women have always understood their responsibility in raising their children, and they have a brilliant record in producing and influencing great men, and instilling noble values in their hearts. There is no greater proof of that than the fact that intelligent and brilliant women have produced more noble sons than have intelligent and brilliant men, so much so that you can hardly find any among the great men of our *ummah* who have controlled the course of events in history who is not indebted to his mother.

Al-Zubayr ibn al-`Awwam was indebted for his greatness to his mother Safiyyah bint `Abd al-Muttalib, who instilled in him his good qualities and distinguished nature.

`Abdullah, al-Mundhir and `Urwah, the sons of al-Zubayr were the products of the values instilled in them by their mother, Asma' bint Abi Bakr, and each of them made his mark in history and attained a high status.

`Ali ibn Abi Talib (RAA) received wisdom, virtue and good character from his distinguished mother, Fatimah bint Asad.

`Abdullah ibn Ja`far, the master of Arab generosity and the most noble of their leaders, lost his father at an early age, but his mother Asma' bint `Umayy took care of him and gave him the virtues and noble characteristics by virtue of which she herself became one of the great women of Islam.

Mu`awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan inherited his strength of character and intelligence from his mother, Hind bint `Utbah, not from his father Abu Sufyan. When he was a baby, she noticed that he had intelligent and clever features. Someone said to her, "If he lives, he will become the leader of his people." She responded, "May he not live if he is to become the leader of his people alone!"

Mu`awiyah was unable to instil his cleverness, patience and skills in his own son and heir, Yazid, because the boy's mother was a simple Bedouin woman, whom he had married for her beauty and because of the status of her tribe and family.

Mu`awiyah's brother Ziyad ibn Abi Sufyan, who was a prime example of intelligence, shrewdness and quick-wittedness, was similarly unable to pass these qualities on to his son `Ubayd-Allah (SWT), who grew up to be stupid, clumsy, impotent and ignorant. His mother was Marjanah, a Persian woman who possessed none of the qualities that might entitle her to be the mother of a great man.

History records the names of two great men of Banu Umayyah, the first of whom was known for his strength of character, capability, intelligence, wisdom and decisiveness, and the second of whom took the path of justice, goodness, piety and righteousness.

The first was `Abd al-Malik ibn Marwan, whose mother was `A'ishah bint al-Mughirah ibn Abi'l-`As ibn Umayyah, who was well-known for her strength of character, resolution and intelligence. The second was `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz (RAA), the fifth of the *khulafa' al-rashidun*, whose mother was Umm `Asim bint `Asim ibn `Umar ibn al-Khattab, who was the most noble in character of the women of her time. Her mother was the righteous worshipper of Allah (SWT) whom `Asim saw was honest and truthful, and clearly following the right path, when she refused to add water to the milk as her mother told her to, because she knew that Allah (SWT) could see her.

If we turn towards Andalusia, we find the brilliant, ambitious ruler `Abd al-Rahman al-Nasir who, having started life as an orphan, went on to establish an Islamic state in the West, to which the leaders and kings of Europe surrendered and to whose institutes of learning the scholars and philosophers of all nations came to seek knowledge. This state made a great contribution to worldwide Islamic culture. If we were to examine the secret of this man's greatness, we would find that it lay in the greatness of his mother who knew how to instil in him the dynamic spirit of ambition.

During the `Abbasid period there were two great women who planted the seeds of ambition, distinction and ascendancy in their sons. The first was the mother of Ja`far ibn Yahya, who was the *wazir* of the *khalifah* Harun al-Rashid. The second was the mother of Imam al-Shafi`i: he never saw his father who died whilst he was still a babe in arms; it was his mother who took care of his education.

There are many such examples of brilliant women in our history, women who instilled in their sons nobility of character and the seeds of greatness, and who stood behind them in everything they achieved of power and status.

She uses the best methods in bringing them up

The intelligent Muslim woman understands the psychology of her children, and is aware of their differences in attitudes and inclination. She tries to penetrate their innocent world and plant the seeds of noble values and worthy characteristics, using the best and most effective methods of parenting.

The mother is naturally close to her children, and she endears herself to them so that they will be open with her and will share their thoughts and feelings with her. She hastens to correct them and refine their thoughts and feelings, taking into account each child's age and mental level. She plays and jokes with them sometimes, complimenting them and letting them hear words of love, affection, compassion and self-denial. Thus their love for her increases, and they will accept her words of guidance and correction eagerly. They will obey her out of love for her, for there is a great difference between sincere obedience that comes from the heart, which is based on love, respect and trust, and insincere obedience that is based on oppression, violence and force. The former is lasting obedience, strong and fruitful, whilst the latter is shallow and baseless, and will quickly vanish when the violence and cruelty reach extreme levels.

She demonstrates her love and

affection for them

The Muslim woman is not ignorant of the fact that her children need her warm lap, deep love and sincere affection in order to develop soundly, with no psychological problems, crises or complexes.

This sound upbringing will fill them with optimism, trust, hope and ambition. Thus the caring Muslim mother demonstrates her love and affection for her children on every occasion, flooding their lives with joy and happiness and filling their hearts with confidence and security.

The true Muslim woman is compassionate towards her children, for compassion is a basic Islamic characteristic, one that was encouraged by the Prophet (PBUH) in word and deed as Anas (RAA) tells us:

"I never saw anyone who was more compassionate towards children than the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). His son Ibrahim was in the care of a wet-nurse in the hills around Madinah. He would go there, and we would go with him, and he would enter the house, pick up his son and kiss him, then come back."⁴

The Prophet's compassion and love towards Muslim children included little ones at play. He would flood them with his compassion and affection. Anas (RAA) reported that whenever the Prophet (PBUH) passed by a group of boys he would smile fondly and greet them.⁵

An example of the Prophet's enduring wisdom with regard to the upbringing of children is the hadith:

"He is not one of us who does not show compassion to our little ones and recognize the rights of our elders."⁶

Abu Hurayrah (RAA) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) kissed al-Hasan ibn `Ali. Al-Aqra` ibn Habis said, "I have ten children and I have never kissed any of them." The Prophet (PBUH) said: "He who does not show mercy will not be shown mercy."⁷

The Prophet (PBUH), this great educator, always sought to instil the quality of mercy and compassion in people's hearts, and to awaken their potential for love and affection, which are the most basic of human characteristics.

One day a Bedouin came and asked the Prophet (PBUH), "Do you kiss your sons? We do not." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "What can I do for you if Allah (SWT) has removed mercy from your heart?"⁸

`A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) reported:

"Whenever Fatimah came into the room, the Prophet (PBUH) would stand up, welcome her, kiss her and offer her his seat, and whenever he came into the room, she would stand up, take his hand, welcome him, kiss him and offer him her seat. When she came to see him during his final illness, he welcomed her and kissed her."⁹

The Prophet (PBUH) praised the women of Quraysh, because they were the most compassionate of women towards their children, the most concerned with raising them properly and making sacrifices for them, in addition to taking good care of their husbands. This may be seen in the words narrated by Bukhari from Abu Hurayrah (RAA), who said:

"I heard the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) say: `The women of Quraysh are the best women ever to ride camels. They are compassionate towards their children and the most careful with regard to their husbands' wealth"¹⁰

In the light of this guidance, the true Muslim woman cannot be stern towards her children and treat them in a rough or mean fashion, even if it is her nature to be grim and reserved, because this religion, with its enlightenment and guidance, softens hearts and awakens feelings of love and affection. So our children are a part of us, going forth into the world, as the poet Hittan ibn al-Mu`alla said:

"Our children are our hearts, walking among us on the face of the earth, if even a little breeze touches them, we cannot sleep for worrying about them."¹¹

Parents should be filled with love, affection and care, willing to make sacrifices and do their best for their children.

Undoubtedly the wealth of emotion that the Muslim mother feels for her children is one of the greatest causes of her happiness in life. This is something which has been lost by Western women, who are overwhelmed by materialism and exhausted by the daily grind of work, which has caused them to lose the warmth of family feelings. This was vividly expressed by Mrs. Salma al-Haffar, a member of the Syrian women's movement, after she had visited America:

"It is truly a shame that women lose the most precious thing that nature¹² has given them, i.e. their femininity, and then their happiness, because the constant cycle of exhausting work has caused them to lose the small paradise which is the natural refuge of women and men alike, one that can only flourish under the care of a mother who stays at home. The happiness of individuals and society as a whole is to be found at home, in the lap of the family; the family is the source of inspiration, goodness and creativity."¹³

She treats her sons and daughters equally

The wise Muslim woman treats all her children fairly and equally. She does not prefer one of them over another in any way, because she knows that Islam forbids such actions on the part of the parents, and because of the negative psychological impact that this may have over the child whose sibling is preferred over him. The child who feels that he is not treated equally with his brothers and sisters will grow up with complexes and anxiety, eating his heart out with jealousy and hatred. In contrast, the child who grows up feeling that he and his siblings are treated equally will grow up healthy and free from jealousy and hatred; he will be content, cheerful, tolerant and willing to put others before himself. This is what Islam requires of parents and urges them to do.

Bukhari, Muslim and others report that the father of al-Nu`man ibn Bashir (RAA) brought him to the Prophet (PBUH) and said, "I have given this son of mine a slave I have." The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Have you given each of your children the same?" He said, "No." The Prophet (PBUH) told him, "Then take the slave back."

According to another report:

"The Prophet (PBUH) asked, 'Have you done the same for all your children?' [My father] said, 'No,' so the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Fear Allah (SWT) and treat all of your children equally.'"

According to a third report:

"The Prophet (PBUH) asked, 'O Bishr, do you have any other children?' He said, 'Yes.' The Prophet (PBUH) asked, 'Will you give a similar gift to each of them?' He said, 'No.' So the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Do not ask me to witness this, because I do not want to witness unfairness.' Then he added, 'Would you not like all your children to treat you with equal

respect?' [Bishr] said, 'Of course.' The Prophet (PBUH) told him, 'So do not do it.'"¹⁴

So the Muslim woman who truly fears Allah (SWT) treats all her children with equal fairness, and does not favour one above the other in giving gifts, spending money on them, or in the way she treats them. Then all of them will love her, will pray for her and will treat her with kindness and respect.

She does not discriminate between sons and daughters

her affection and care

The true Muslim woman does not discriminate between her sons and daughters in her affection and care, as do some women who are not free from the effects of a *jahili* mentality. She is fair to all her children, boys and girls alike, and cares for them all with compassion and love. She understands that children are a gift from Allah (SWT), and that Allah's (SWT) gift, be it of sons or daughters, cannot be rejected or changed:

(. . . He bestows [children] male or female according to His Will [and Plan], or He bestows both males and females, and He leaves barren Whom He will: for He is full of knowledge and power.) (Qur'an 42:49-50)

The Muslim woman who is truly guided by her religion does not forget the great reward that Allah (SWT) has prepared for the one who brings up daughters and takes care of them properly, as is stated in numerous *sahih* hadith, for example the hadith narrated by Bukhari from `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her) in which she says:

"A woman came to me with her two daughters and asked me (for charity). She found that I had nothing except for a single date, which I gave to her. She took it and divided it between her two daughters, and did not eat any of it herself, then she got up and left with her daughters. The Prophet (PBUH) came in and I told him what had happened.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever is tested with daughters and treats them well, they will be for him a shield against the Fire of Hell."¹⁵

According to another report narrated by Muslim from `A'ishah (May Allah be pleased with her), she said:

"A poor woman came to me carrying her two daughters. I gave her three dates to eat. She gave each child a date, and raised the third to her own mouth to eat it. Her daughters asked her to give it to them, so she split the date that she had wanted to eat between them. I was impressed by what she had done, and told the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) about it. He said, "Allah (SWT) has decreed Paradise for her because of it," or, "He has saved her from Hell because of it."¹⁶

Abu Hurayrah (RAA) reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Whoever has three daughters, and shelters them, bearing their joys and sorrows with patience, Allah (SWT) will admit him to Paradise by virtue of his compassion towards them." A man asked, "What if he has only two, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Even if they are only two." Another man asked, "What if he has only one, O Messenger of Allah?" He said, "Even if he has only one."¹⁷

Ibn `Abbas (RAA) said:

"The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: `Whoever had a daughter born to him, and he did not bury her alive or humiliate her, and he did not prefer his son over her, Allah (SWT) will admit him to Paradise because of her."¹⁸

The Prophet's compassion extended to females, and included sisters as well as daughters, as is seen in the hadith narrated by Bukhari in *al-Adab al-Mufrad* from Abu Sa`id al-Khudri, who said:

"The Prophet (PBUH) said: `There is no-one who has three daughters, or three sisters, and he treats them well, but Allah (SWT) will admit him to Paradise."¹⁹

According to a report given by al-Tabarani, the Prophet (PBUH) said:

"There is no one among my *ummah* who has three daughters, or three sisters, and he supports them until they are grown up, but he will be with me in Paradise like this -" and he held up his index and middle fingers together.²⁰

No wise mother complains about bringing up daughters, or prefers her sons over them, if she listens to the teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) which raise the status of daughters and promise Paradise as wide as heaven and earth and the company of the Prophet (PBUH) to the one who brings them up and treats them properly!

In the Muslim family, and in the true Islamic society, girls are protected, loved and respected. In the warm bosom of her parents -especially her mother - a girl will always find protection and care, no matter how long she stays in the home of her parents, brothers or other family members who should support her, whether she is married or not. Islam has guaranteed girls a life of protection, pride and support, and has spared them from a life of humiliation, need, want and having to earn a living, such as is the lot of women living in societies that have gone astray from the guidance of Allah (SWT). In those countries, a girl barely reaches the age of eighteen before she leaves the comfort of her parents' home to face the hardships of a life filled with difficulties and risks at the time when she is most in need of protection, compassion and care.

There is a huge difference between the laws of Allah (SWT), which came to bring happiness to mankind, and the imperfect man-made laws which cause nothing but misery.

It comes as no surprise that in the West, as a result of these materialistic laws, we see armies of promiscuous young men and hordes of unfortunate, miserable, unmarried young mothers, the numbers of which are increasing exponentially day by day.

She does not pray against her children

The wise Muslim woman does not pray against her own children, heeding the words of the Prophet (PBUH) who forbade such prayers lest they be offered at a time when prayers are answered. This was stated in the lengthy hadith narrated by Jabir in which the Prophet (PBUH) said:

"Do not pray against yourselves, or against your children, or against your wealth, in case you say such words at a time when Allah (SWT) will answer your prayer."²¹

Praying against one's own children is not a good habit. No mother does so at a time of anger, but she will regret it later on after she has calmed down. I do not think that a mother who has truly

sought the guidance of Islam would lose her mind and her equilibrium to such an extent that she would pray against her own children, no matter what they did. Such a woman would not allow herself to indulge in something that is done only by foolish, hot-tempered women.

She is alert to everything that may have

an influence on them

The smart Muslim mother keeps her eyes open as far as her children are concerned. She knows what they are reading and writing, the hobbies and activities they pursue, the friends they have chosen, and the places they go to in their free time. She knows all of this without her children feeling that she is watching them. If she finds anything objectionable in their hobbies, reading-materials, etc., or if she sees them hanging around with undesirable friends, or going to unsuitable places, or taking up bad habits such as smoking, or wasting time and energy on *haram* games that teach them to get used to trivialities, she hastens to correct her children in a gentle and wise manner, and persuades them to return to the straight and narrow. The mother is more able to do this than the father, because she spends much more time with the children, and they are more likely to open up and share their thoughts and feelings with her than with their father. Hence it is quite clear that the mother has a great responsibility to bring up her children properly and form their characters in a sound fashion, in accordance with Islamic principles, values and traditions.

Every child is born in a state of *fitrah* (the natural, good, disposition of mankind), and it is the parents who make him into a Jew, a Christian or a Magian, as the Prophet (PBUH) said in the *sahih* hadith narrated by Bukhari.

There is no secret about the enormous impact the parents have on the personality and psychological development of their child from the earliest years until the child attains the age of reason.

The books that children read should open their minds and form their personalities well, giving them the highest examples to follow; they should not corrupt their minds and extinguish the light of goodness in their souls.

Hobbies should help to develop the positive aspects of a child's nature and reinforce good tastes, not encourage any negative tendencies.

Friends should be of the type that will lead one to Paradise, not to Hell; they should influence a child in a positive way and encourage him to do good, to strive to improve himself and to succeed, not drag him down into sin, disobedience and failure. How many people have been brought to the slippery slope of destruction and perdition by their friends, whilst their mothers and fathers were unaware of what was to their own children! How wise are the words of the poet `Adiyy ibn Zayd al-`Ibadi concerning friends:

"If you are among people, then make friends with the best of them.

Do not make friends with the worst of them lest you become as bad as he is.

Do not ask about the man, but ask about his friends, for every person is influenced by his friends."²²

The true Muslim mother takes notice of her children's books, magazines, hobbies, school, teachers, clubs, media interests, and everything that may have an impact on their personalities, minds, souls and faith. She intervenes when necessary, either to encourage or to put a stop to something, so that the children's upbringing will not be affected by corruption or sickness.

Successful upbringing of children depends on a mother who is alert and intelligent, and understands her responsibility towards her children, so that she does a good job and raises children who will be a boon to their parents and society in general. Families that fail to raise their children properly usually do so because the mother does not understand her responsibility towards her children, so she neglects them and they become a source of evil and a torment to their parents and others.

Children would not become a source of evil if their parents, especially the mother, knew their responsibility and took it seriously.

She instils good behaviour and attitudes in them

The Muslim woman tries hard to instil in her children's hearts the best qualities, such as loving others, upholding the ties of kinship, caring for the weak, respecting elders, showing compassion to little ones, deriving satisfaction from doing good, being sincere in word and deed, keeping promises, judging fairly, and all other good and praiseworthy characteristics.

The wise Muslim woman knows how to reach her children's hearts and instil these worthy qualities, using the best and most effective methods, such as setting a good example, coming down to their level, treating them well, encouraging them, advising and correcting them, and being compassionate, kind, tolerant, loving, and fair. She is gentle without being too lenient, and is strict without being harsh. Thus the children receive a proper upbringing, and grow up open-minded, mature, righteous, sincere, good, able to give and prepared to make a constructive contribution in all aspects of life. Not surprisingly, the Muslim mother's upbringing produces the best results, for she is the first school and the first teacher, as the poet said:

"The mother is a school: if you prepare her properly, you will prepare an entire people of good character, The mother is the first teacher, foremost among them, and the best of teachers."²³

Footnotes:

1. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 10/61, Kitab al-imarah wa'l-qada', bab al-ra'i mas'ul 'an ri'atihi.
2. Reported by Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, 1/371, bab husn al-khulq.
3. Reported by Ahmad, 2/187, and by Abu Dawud with a hasan isnad, 1/193, Kitab al-salat, bab mata yu'mar al-ghulam bi'l-salat
4. Sahih Muslim, 15/75, Kitab al-fada'il, bab rahmatih (r) wa tawadu'ih.
5. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 12/264, Kitab al-isti'dhan, bab al-taslim 'ala'l-subyan.
6. Reported by Ahmad, 2/185, and by al-Hakim, 1/62, Kitab al-iman; its isnad is sahih.
7. (Bukhari and Muslim), Sharh al-Sunnah, 13/34, Kitab al-birr wa'l-silah, bab rahmah al-walad wa taqbilihi.
8. Fath al-Bari, 10/426, Kitab al-adab, bab rahmah al-walad wa taqbilihi.
9. See Fath al-Bari, 8/135, Kitab al-maghazi, bab maraduhu (r) wa wafatuhu; Abu Dawud, 4/480, Kitab al-adab, bab ma ja'a fi'l-qiyam.
10. Fath al-Bari, 6/472, Kitab ahadith al-anbiya', bab qawlihi ta'ala, 45-48 min Al 'Imran.
11. Abu Tammam, al-Hamasah, 1/167.
12. In fact it is Allah Who gives these things, not nature. This expression is one of the effects of Westernization. [Author]
13. From an article by Salma al-Haffar in the Damascus newspaper al-Ayyam, 3/9/1962.
14. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 8/296, Kitab al-'ataya wa'l-hadaya, bab al-ruju' fi hibbah al-walad wa'l-taswiyyah bayna al-awlad fi'l-nahl.

15. (Bukhari and Muslim), See Sharh al-Sunnah, 6/187, Kitab al-zakah, bab fadl al-sadaqah 'ala'l-awlad wa'l-aqarib.
16. Sahih Muslim, 16/179, Kitab al-birr wa'l-silah, bab al-ihsan ila'l-banat.
17. Reported by Ahmad, 2/335 and al-Hakim, 4/176, Kitab al-birr wa'l-silah. He said: its isnad is sahih.
18. Reported by al-Hakim in al-Mustadrak 4/177, Kitab al-birr wa'l-silah. He said: its isnad is sahih.
19. Reported by Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad, 1/162, bab man 'ala thalatha ihkawat.
20. Reported by al-Tabarani in al-Awsat with two isnads; the narrators of the first isnad are rijal al-sahih. See Majma' al-Zawa'id, 8/157.
21. Sahih Muslim, 18/139, Kitab al-zuhd, bab hadith Jabir al-tawil.
22. See Adiyiyy ibn Zayd al-'Ibadi: al-Sha'ir al-Mubtakir, by the author, pp. 171-172.
23. Diwan Hafiz Ibrahim, 282. Published by Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyyah.