

THE MUSLIM FAMILY

The family plays an important role in the life of a Muslim and is a foundation of Islamic society. A family unit is highly valued. The peace, stability and security it offers is seen as essential for the spiritual growth of Muslims. They are encouraged to look after elderly members of their community, in particular those of their immediate family. Hence the reason why most Muslims live in extended families.

Parents and Elders

Caring for parents is considered an honour, blessing, duty and an opportunity for great spiritual growth. Allah (God) asks that we not only pray for our parents, but act with limitless compassion, remembering that when we were helpless children they gave priority to us over themselves.

"Oh Lord have mercy upon my Parents, as they nurtured me when i was small" [Ch17:v24]

When they reach old age, Muslim parents are treated mercifully, with the same kindness and selflessness. There are no 'old people's homes' in Islam. Serving one's parents is a duty second only to prayer, and it is their right to expect it. It is considered despicable to express any irritation when, through no fault of their own, the old become difficult.

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and be kind to parents. If either one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say 'uff' (an expression of annoyance) to them or chide them, but speak to them in terms of honour and kindness'. [Ch17:v23]

Women

Islam sees a woman, whether single or married, as an individual in her own right. She has the right to own and dispose of her property and earnings. The status of a woman once married or as a mother is highly elevated in Islam. Mothers are particularly honoured. The Hadith (teachings or sayings of the Prophet, Peace Be Upon Him) states that

'Heaven lies under the feet of mothers' [Ahmad, Nasai]

Wife

"The most perfect in faith amongst believers is he who is best in manners and kindest to his wife." [Abu Dawud]

A marriage dowry must be given to the bride by her husband for her own personal use. No woman can be forced into marriage, she can choose her own partner. What ever help she offers in the home, Allah (God) will reward her in full on the day of judgement and the help should be appreciated by the husband. Both men and women are expected to dress in a way which is modest and dignified; the traditions of female dress found in some Muslim countries are often the expression of local customs.

Children

Children are seen as the mercy and gift from Allah (God). It is stated in the Qur'aan that it is Allah (God) who brings about the birth of a child when and as He wills. Children in Islam are considered as *'the coolness of the eyes'*. They have certain rights owed to them by their parents which include giving the child a good name, teaching them right from wrong etc. The care, upbringing and welfare of young children are the responsibility of the whole family, including extended family members. During the pre-Islamic period in many places around the world boys were considered superior to girls and received better treatment. This stigma is still prevalent in some cultures and countries even today, however Islam abolished this notion in areas where Islam was accepted.

The Qur'aan very much condemns such practices:
"Lo! Evil is the Treatment they pass on" [Ch16:v58-59]

Parents are encouraged to invest their time, energy and finance into their children. Allah (God) promises that any good deed done by the children, Allah (God) will write for the parents an equivalent reward.

