Halaqa: Wednesday, April 23, 2014

Topic: Responsibility towards parents; Do we have to obey our parents? (part 1)

Responsibility towards parents is an issue that is often discussed in various communities. However, with no clarity about the topic, parents often use it mistakenly.

* How?
  + Parents employ verses in the Quran as justification for actions without first establishing the foundations of belief
* As a result, many children are seen drifting away from Islam

Often heard: It is a rule of the Quran that as Muslims we have to obey our parents

In fact: In the Quran, there is no verse that says you have to obey your parents.

* On the contrary, there are verses that say children should NOT obey their parents under specific circumstances

Quran says: Obedience is ONLY for Allah SWT, for His messenger and for the one who is appointed as a leader amongst yourselves.

While the parents are conveying ‘true information’ as presented in the Quran, the way it is being told is flawed.

* We have to keep in mind that the methodology/purpose of the Quran is to REMIND and WARN
* It is not a book of FORCE

When parents FORCE their children to perform actions in the name of ‘religion’ they are not abiding by the methodology of the Quran.

* In fact, they are enforcing a cultural **tradition** not religion
  + They have failed to understand what God has commanded in the Quran
  + As a result, they have made religion an intermediary to command obedience from their children.

We notice that there is constant change around us. Every generation is given their own set of conditions

* We have to be open to receive the changes in society and should prepare our children for the changes that are to come

The experience I accumulate in my life is for my own self. It is not for me to impose them on my children

* Parents who are imposing their experiences on their children have failed to understand the reality of this (ever-changing) existence
* **Children need to be trained to meet God’s UNIVERSAL expectations NOT their parent’s (limited) expectations**

What parents are doing: Using God’s authority to implement their authority

* If Islamic societies continue as such, it will have dire consequences BECAUSE the children will see through their ‘empty’ claims and reject religion

Analogy: Parent advises child to become a doctor/lawyer/engineer because these jobs are prestigious in the eyes of others in their social circles

* In doing so, parents are following their desires
* If parents thought deeply, they would be aware that the purpose of existence is to worship their Creator
  + Societies definitions of success will not be the yardstick of measurement
* Children will be advised to pursue their **abilities** , **talents** and **passions**
* Why?
  + Those different talents are GIVEN by their Creator
  + When talents are pursued, children excel BECAUSE that is what has been programmed for them
    - Excel not in terms of monetary gains
    - Rather, excel in terms of gaining closeness to their Creator

If the purpose of existence is to WORSHIP our Creator, then our primary reason for any pursuit will be to do that

* We will chose tasks and acts that bring us closer to Him NOT that which will bring us the most money and honor in society

Praying is good (content is correct) BUT parents impose the action with a flawed methodology

* As a society, we have to move away from commanding others and take a path towards providing explanations and evidence
* It requires that society as a whole becomes more knowledgeable about matters of faith.

We need to step away from imposing our societal-influenced desires unto the next generation because it will only bring them further away from the Creator.

Just because it is a GOOD act DOES not mean that the child is convinced about it so that he will choose to follow it

* Children (capable of reasoning) need to be convinced of the actions that we want them to do

**What you say DOES NOT justify the way you say it**

* If you want your child to pray, do not command him to pray
* The reason someone does not pray is because s/he is NOT convinced

Just because I’m your parent does not mean that I can impose an action

* By imposing ‘empty’ commands from the perspective of the children, the child’s faith in religion is being eradicated completely

We have to present God to children in a way that the child feels obliged to obey God (not to obey parents).

* Don’t take shortcuts and use religious claims to command actions
* Foundations have to be built first so that the child will willingly submit

Parents are responsible for setting a good example until the child reaches puberty

* But parents have to be aware that their ‘good’ examples are only valid for their societies
* Parents have to update themselves when they advise their children to be relevant for their time

**Imam Ali (as): Do not force your children to behave like you, for surely they have been created for a time, which is different to your time.**

There is no success in employing ‘force’ regardless of who you are communicating with.

* There is no coercion in religion

*لاَ إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ*

“Let there be no compulsion in religion…” Baqara (2): 256

We should never underestimate the capacity of children to understand their parents

* As modern psychology shows, whenever an adult experiences issues, psychologists always try and uncover childhood memories because they leave an impact
* Even with toddlers, parents should be careful of how they impart religious lessons
* The child will grow up and remember that they were ‘bribed’ to adopt religious practices
* You may be able to ‘cheat’ your child BUT you will not able to convince your child by commanding them

An indirect way of commanding children: “If you don’t obey your parents, you will go to hell”

* It is worse than forcing your child by hitting him
* Fear (threats) can never convince. It only distances.

If I do not educate myself about the reality of existence (which is constantly changing), I will return to ‘culture’

* This is why we see many young parents adopting the methodology and perspectives of their parents

We have to disassociate ourselves from our cultural background and understand God’s religion with respect to the current condition we are in.

* Always update yourself with the Quran
* If the Quran is the speech of God for all people of all times, it should provide guidance across generations
* That is why we have to keep studying the Quran and seek guidance from it

Our guidance is within the Quran NOT within culture

* If we really educate ourselves with the Quran, we will find our own ‘rights’ for our own condition

We have to educate our children with respect to their conditions

* Life is never static

We have to keep renewing our faith

‘On Children’ by Kahlil Gibran

*Your children are not your children.*

*They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.*

*They come through you but not from you,*

*And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.*

*You may give them your love but not your thoughts.*

*For they have their own thoughts.*

*You may house their bodies but not their souls,*

*For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,  
which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.*

*You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.*

*For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.*

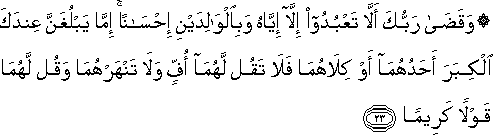
*You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.*

*The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite,  
and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.*

*Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;*

*For even as He loves the arrow that flies,  
so He loves also the bow that is stable.*

**017.023**



**And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him, and to parents, good treatment. Whether one or both of them reach old age [while] with you, say not to them [so much as], ‘”uff,” and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.**

1) The prime reminder: Worship no one except HIM

* Worship means accepting authority and following what He says

2) This is followed by: Be kind and good mannered to parents

* There is no contradiction between worshipping your Creator AND being kind to parents
* You can be kind to your parents without necessarily obeying everything they say
* If you have to reject what they are saying, do it kindly
* Good treatment DOES NOT EQUAL obedience

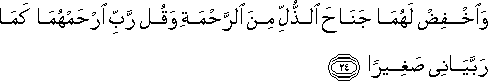
How to be kind without obeying?

* The cultural history that we have been exposed to integrates obeying as part of being kind
* A common train of thought is the following: Kindness = making others happy= obeying what they want
* Therefore perform an action just to make them happy
* One reason for the seeming convergence of kindness and obedience is the lack of true, convincing, belief in the Creator
  + If we are firm in our belief about the Creator, there is no room to obey anything else
* We are being reminded in this verse to be respectful to our parents even if we disagree with them
  + The disagreement (in matters of religion) should be expressed in ‘noble words’ and not with hurtful language.

3) Take care of your parents when they are old

* But that does not mean you have to obey them in matters of religion
* We have to help them AND be kind in matters that they are physically in need of

**017.024**

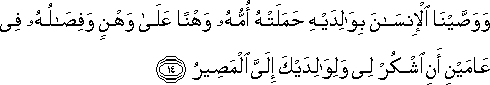


**And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, “My Lord, have mercy upon them as they brought me up [when I was] small.”**

When they get old and need your help, speak to them with a generous language and lower to them the wing of humility out of MERCY

* We ask our Lord to have mercy upon them
* We learn from each other that we are constantly in need of being taken care of
* Family ties DOES not mean plain obeying
* It means community and being there for each other

**031.014**



**“We have enjoined upon man kindness towards his parents: his mother bore him by bearing strain upon strain, and his utter dependence on her lasted two years: be grateful towards Me and towards your parents. [ and remember that] with Me is all journeys’ end.”**

**Children are an opportunity to re-live your own childhood**, but this time through using your free choice. That is why parenthood is a new opportunity to make progress in our life experience as far as our comprehension of the Word of God is concerned, within new conditions.

* We have to grow with our children NOT impose our thoughts on them
* We are given a chance to experience babyhood from a different perspective
* Through children, parents are given a second opportunity to refresh their world-view because they have to raise children in a different condition from that which they were raised