Synopsis of the Friday Sermon delivered by Ameer Mustapha Elturk on Oct 17, 2008

The Ten Commandments (Part 2)

The second command that appears immediately next to the right of Allah (SWT) is the right of parents. “Your Lord has decreed that you should worship none but Him, and that you should show ihsan (kindness) to your parents…” (al-Isra’, 17:23). The word ihsan used in the context of this Qur’anic ayah means to be sincere in action toward the benefactor and loved person. A person who is loved is treated kindly and compassionately. Allah (SWT) is commanding us in this ayah to be good to our parents.

The rights of parents being mentioned just after the rights of Allah (SWT) underscores the importance of this subject, which has been repeatedly emphasized in the Qur’an. A few examples should suffice to bring home this point. “Remember when We made a covenant with the tribe of Israel: ‘Worship none but Allah and be good to your parents...’” (al-Baqarah, 2:83). “Worship Allah and do not associate anything with Him. Be good to your parents…” (al-Nisa’, 4:36). “Say: ‘Come and I will recite to you what your Lord has made haram for you: that you do not associate anything with Him; that you are good to your parents...’” (al-An’am, 6:151). These Qur’anic injunctions are understandable. Allah (SWT) first created us in the form of spirits (arwah) and then made our parents responsible for bringing us into this world. This in itself is sufficient reason to owe them everything including our lives.

What are the rights of parents, particularly when they reach old age? Allah (SWT) says, “...Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say ‘Ugh!’ to them out of irritation and do not be harsh with them but speak to them respectfully” (al-Isra’, 17:23). If we just ponder over the stages of our lives from birth to death, we observe that we are born weak and helpless; then we gradually grow strong till we reach full physical, intellectual, and emotional maturity, and then we start growing old, reaching sometimes an age when we become infirm, senile, and forgetful. This phenomenon is explained in the Qur’an: “…We make whatever We want stay in the womb until a specified time and then We bring you out as children so that you can reach your full maturity. Some of you die and some of you revert to the lowest form of life so that, after having knowledge, they then know nothing at all” (al-Hajj, 22:5).

It is reported that Mujahid ibn Jabr (d. 722 CE) said, “If the parents grow old and end up urinating and answering the call of nature on themselves, do not feel disgusted or say ‘Ugh’ to them; rather remove the urine and feces from them without feeling disgusted, just as they used to do when you were young.” Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 1201 CE) reports that Abu Hurairah (RA), used to carry his mother after she became old and blind so that she could answer the call of nature and bring her back when she was finished.

Unfortunately, living in the West, we are getting influenced by the western culture where there is no such bond between the parents and children; and incidentally, it is both ways. The parents can’t wait for their children to reach the age of eighteen when they are relieved of taking care of them. Similarly, the children can’t wait to leave home and start living independently away from their parents. A family structure not based on mu-
tual love, affection, understanding, and spirit of sacrifice soon gets disintegrated. This phenomenon on a macro scale contributes to social and moral decadence of the society.

Alhamdulillah, we have clear instructions in the Qur’an and the Sunnah regarding the mutual relationship between parents and children. Regarding treatment of parents by their children, the Qur’an says, “Lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy, and say: “My Lord, have mercy on them as they cared for me in childhood” (al-Isra’, 17:24). Being humble and merciful to our parents is a duty incumbent upon us. While both parents deserve our best treatment, yet our mothers enjoy a still higher status in this regard as is evident from the following hadith: A person came to Allah’s Messenger (SAW) and asked, “Who among the people is most deserving of a fine treatment from me?” He said: “Your mother.” The man again asked, “Who next?” “Your mother,” the Prophet (SAW) replied. The man asked, “Who is next?” The Prophet (SAW) said again, “Your mother.” The man again asked, “Then who?” Thereupon the Prophet (SAW) said, “Then your father, then your nearest relatives.” We can appreciate this Prophetic tradition when we realize the agony of childbirth a mother undergoes and all other hardships and sacrifices she goes through in bearing and rearing of children. Allah (SWT) describes Maryam (AS)’s travail when she was about to deliver ‘Isa (AS).

The only caveat to obeying one’s parents is when they ask one to do something, which results in the disobedience of Allah (SWT). In this case, they should not be obeyed. This can be understood from the Qur’anic ayah, “We have instructed man to honor his parents, but if they endeavor to make you associate with Me something about which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. It is to Me you will return and I will inform you about the things you did” al-‘Ankabut, 29:8). We are further informed that even under such a predicament, the parents have to be honored and taken care of in the worldly life. “We have instructed man concerning his parents. Bearing him caused his mother great debility and the period of his weaning was two years: ‘Give thanks to Me and to your parents. I am your final destination. But if they try to make you associate something with Me about which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. Keep company with them correctly and courteously in this world…” (Luqman, 31:14-15). We learn from the Sirah of the Prophet (SAW) that he had advised Asma bint Abu Bakr (RA) to show respect and kindness to her mother who was a mushrikah (polytheist) at the time when she had visited Asma (RA) in Medina. This further goes to explain that even if one’s parents are non-Muslims, still they deserve one’s help and kindness in mundane matters.

While good treatment of parents is regarded as one of the most virtuous acts, mistreating them is one of the major sins (kaba’ir) in Islam. According to a hadith, “In the good pleasure of the father lies the good pleasure of the Creator and in his displeasure lies the displeasure of the Creator.” Making our mothers and fathers angry with us is making Allah (SWT) angry with us. On one occasion, when the Prophet (SAW) was asked about the big sins, he said, “Associating partners with Allah (SWT), being defiant and disobedient to one’s parents, killing someone without a just cause, and giving a false testimony.” It is reported that a man leaving his parents crying, came to the Prophet (SAW) pledging himself to go to jihad with him for the sole purpose of seeking the pleasure of Allah (SWT) and the abode of the hereafter. The Prophet (SAW) declined his request and asked him to go back to his parents and make them happy just as he had made them cry. There is no doubt that Islam lays the foundation to maintain good relationship between us and Allah (SWT) through our parents.

It may be mentioned here that rights of parents do not end with their death, but remain in force even after they are deceased. This is made clear through a hadith according to which the following rights of parents continue to be operative even after their death: To pray for them, to ask Allah (SWT) to forgive them, to fulfill the promises and covenants that they left unfulfilled, to be kind to their friends, and to keep the ties of kinship intact.

We are aware of the problems that often crop up when parents marry their sons and daughters. The phenomenon of the suspicion and conflict that takes place between mother in law and daughter in law or father in law and son in law is too well known to be elaborated. What is to be done? Allah (SWT) gives us the solution.
Under no circumstance should anyone do injustice; neither to one’s parents nor to one’s spouse. A hadith tells us, “Your body has a right over you, your eye has a right over you, your wife has a right over you, and your visitor has a right over you.” Allah (SWT) knows what goes on within the recesses of our minds and souls and He knows the truly righteous people. “Your Lord knows best what is in your selves. If you are righteous, He is ever-forgiving to the remorseful” (al-Isra’, 17:25).

Obviously, if there is something taking place in family life that is at variance with the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (SAW), then all proper measures should be taken to mend matters. The Prophet (SAW) said, “He who amongst you sees something evil should modify it with the help of his hand; and if he has not strength enough to do it, then he should do it with his tongue, and if he has not strength enough to do it, (even) then he should abhor it from his heart, and that is the least of faith.”

There is a need to maintain justice under all circumstances and at all cost. Allah (SWT) explains this in different ways, such as, “O you who believe, be upholders of justice, bearing witness for Allah alone, even against yourselves or your parents and relatives. Whether they are rich or poor, Allah is well able to look after them. Do not follow your own desires and deviate from the truth. If you twist or turn away, Allah is aware of what you do” (al-Nisa’, 4:135). In another ayah, we have, “O you who believe, show integrity for the sake of Allah, bearing witness with justice. Do not let hatred for a people incite you into not being just. Be just. That is closer to taqwa. Have taqwa of Allah. Allah is aware of what you do” (al-Ma’idah, 5:8).

The reason why we behave the way we do is that we are far away from our deen. We are either living with the legacy of the culture back home, and clinging on to it, or we are deeply influenced by the dominant culture of the West. Either way we stand to lose. Islam is the only way. It teaches us through divine instructions how to keep the bond of love, affection, and compassion within the family.