

Children and Parental Responsibilities: An Islamic Perspective

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Introduction

All religions have provision for nurturing the life of individual in healthy surrounding and environment. They have some set of teachings or principles that ensure a secure and healthy life for all human beings. In the same manner Islam is also having guidelines for a protective and vigorous life of human beings. It ensures all protection and a healthy environment by giving fundamental rights to individual and reciprocally imposing duties on them. These rights and duties are granted by God, no one can change or withdraw them, if anybody violates these rights will be punished according to the laws of God. Islam gives special attention to vulnerable section of the society like women, children, old age people etc, because weaker section of the society has more possibilities of exploitation or oppression. Children are weaker and unable to survive themselves, their care and maintenance are the responsibility of their parents as an agent of God to take care of the children or trust of God. The duties and responsibilities of parents for their child are start with the conception of the birth of child and continue till the age of puberty. Islam has given detailed guidelines for these responsibilities in view of development of a healthy, well aware of Islamic teachings and responsible person of the society. This paper is critically examining these responsibilities in the light of Islamic guidelines.

Children in Islam

Islam is a religion concerned with justice and respect to all human beings irrespective of religion, gender, age etc., it takes rights and responsibilities of an individual as well society very seriously. It states about the responsibility of each individual to treat all creation with respect, honour, and dignity which begins with loving and obeying the commandments of God and from this respect flow all the manners and high standards of morality that are inherent in Islam. Children are also the creation and gift from God to parents, God expects to all human beings to treat children with kindness and love.¹

¹ Abdul Hai, Mohammad, *A Hand Book of Islam (Din ki Baten)*, n.d., p. 107

Islam considers children are blessings of God to the parents and they continue parents' lives even after their death. They are joys and happiness for parents, fountain of distress and temptation in this world and source of their account of deeds hereafter. Therefore, naturally their care seems sensitive and utmost priority in view of parents' conscious for children's dependency upon them.² Even, being a Muslim, a man should be known about kind treatment with them irrespective of the degree of relatedness, as it is most commendable deed in Islam. Kindness for children is not only a matter of religious importance but also social concern, weather their parents are alive or died, with them or not, they are known or unknown but children are the subject of inclusive care.³

Irrespective of gender Islam gives equal importance and care to the birth of male and female child. As the whole world is consisted of male and female, both are the foundational and functional units in the business of life and play separate and an important role like two wheels of a vehicle. *Quran* speaks "O people, be careful of your duty to your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same substance and spread from these may men and women."⁴ At the time of the emergence of Islam in Arabia women were oppressed and treated harshly, they used to bury their girls child alive. Islam has discouraged and rejected this practice and gives all respect and rights to women.⁵ It regards safeguarding children's rights as important because all human life is sacred to God. It clarifies that children's care and protection is highest priority of their parents and society as well. Parents and society need to ensure their care, not only because children have intrinsic rights, but because Muslims have a duty to be charitable.⁶ Islam guarantees the child's legitimate rights in the family and society both. As Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "*Honour your children and give them good names.*" Islam emphasises to give a dignified life to every child that can only be ensured through a responsible family and society which guarantee a healthy and fearless environment in which children's physical and mental faculties can grow properly. Moreover, their moral and ethical conduct should be developed in a religious environment. An Islamic training imbues them with the fear of God (*taqwa*) that grows them with a firm faith in God leading towards the ultimate aim of Muslim parents of keeping safe their

² Abdul Ali, Hammudah, *The Family Structure in Islam*, America, 1977, pp. 182-183

³ Ajijola, Alhaji A. D., *The Concept of Family in Islam*, Delhi, 1999, pp. 93-96

⁴ *Quran*, Surah an Nisa, 1

⁵ Ajijola, *op. cit.*, p. 43

⁶ Arfat, Shabina, 'Islamic Perspective of the Children's Rights: An overview', *Asian Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Vol-2, no-1, p. 299

children from the hell-fire. *Quran* says: “O ye who believe! Save yourselves and Your Families from a fire whose fuel is men and stones?”⁷

Parental Responsibilities

Children’s responsibilities in Islam are interconnected through family, a social institution. Family is not only help to nurture and nourish children but also considered as first learning school for them where they learn morals and etiquettes to conduct well in family and society, so that they can able to restore Islamic ethical and moral values.⁸

Islam views that the relation in between child and parents is depends upon some principles, the very first is Divine commandment that a child should not cause harm to parents.⁹ Second, that parents should do the same and not harm the child. *Quran* has many specific references about duties of parents to their children this is probably because normally parents need very little advice to get their children to pay attention. Such caring behaviour is expected as a natural behaviour of parents for their children, a social obligation. *Quran* recognizes that parents are not always neglect or overprotect their children, it varies person to person according to the different circumstances, on the basis of that Islam frames other principles and prohibits extreme action against child such as infanticide, especially Islam warns against the killing of girl child.

Birth of Child

Islamic *shariah* attends childhood with care long before birth it urges the mother to safeguard her foetus and do all she can to prevent a termination of pregnancy. Abortion should never be practiced; the destruction of a child either before or after birth is rank heartlessness, a heinous crime and extreme cowardice. It brings disaster both in this world and in the hereafter. *Quran* mentions it: “Kill not your children, for fear of want. We shall provide substance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin.”¹⁰

According to the Islamic commandments parents cannot kill their children. It is incumbent on parents to save their child’s life as each life is sacred and having equal importance in the eyes of God. An infant has right to take birth by legitimate means. Islamic *shariah* recognises that foetus has right to live from the moment of his/her presence in the mother’s womb. *Quran* says: “Do not kill your children because of poverty we will provide

⁷ *Quran, Surah at Tahreem, 6*

⁸ Dr. Kauther, Zeenat, *Family System in Islam*, Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), 1999, p. 7

⁹ *Quran, Suarh al Baqarah, 233*

¹⁰ *Quran, Surah al Isra, 31*

for you and them.”¹¹ At another place it says that “killing a soul is like killing all humanity and saving a life is like saving all humanity”.¹² Majority of Muslim jurist decide that after foetus takes shape and gets alive, its abortion becomes *haram* or illegal, now the abortion is considers as killing of a soul which declared as grave sin in Islam fourteen centuries ago. Islam emphasises on intensive care at the time of pregnancy, medical science is also giving instruction for the special care of pregnant woman. The pregnancy period and first two years after birth are very important in order to make child’s future health, growth and development of brain which leads the future intellectual social and emotional life of the child. But during this crucial time child is totally dependent on their parents; therefore, parents are responsible for future physical and psychological wellbeing of their child.¹³ The foetus has the right to be protected against being subjected by its mother to any kind of harm, such as malnutrition. It is the duty of mother; she should take proper and healthy diet during her pregnancy and after pregnancy till breast feeding to her child.¹⁴ She needs to take rest because the early three months after conceive of child required special care and nutrition. It is the right of a children to get proper and balanced nutritious diet in the womb of mother. Parents should be able to provide the needs of their coming child. After birth the needs of children are increase and vary in different stages of the development accordingly. Due to this reason Islam makes it obligatory upon husband to take care of his pregnant wife and provide healthy food as per the requirement of the diet of a pregnant woman as well as medical care and sustain both wife and child. It is the duty of husband to bear all expenses of wife and child without any failure. He is also responsible to provide psychological care to his wife particularly during pregnancy time because every act, thinking or intake effects the development of the foetus in the womb. Even if his wife is not able to suckle her child due to any reason so the father of child is also responsible for arranging another woman to feed his child and for bearing the expenses of this woman.¹⁵ Not only father but both parents are responsible to provide utmost protection by performing their duties for their child, they should avoid everything may cause harm to their child’s health and growth. It is incumbent upon a mother to abstain herself from unhealthy food that may cause harm to the health of expected child and avoid medicines

¹¹ *Quran, Surah al An‘am*, 151

¹² *Quran, Surah al Ma‘idah*, 32

¹³ Ali Muhammadi, Nasrollah, Parents’ Role Before and During Infancy: An Islamic Perspective, *Iranian Journal of Neonatology*, 2017, December, 8 (4), pp. 65-66

¹⁴ *Children in Islam (Their Care, Upbringing and Protection)*, Al Azhar University in cooperation with the UNICEF, 2005, p. 11

¹⁵ Miftahur Ridho, Islamic Perspective on Child Protection, *Lentera*, Vol-IXX, No. 2, December 2015, p. 194

during pregnancy. She should avoid the contact to diseased person having infectious disease.¹⁶ Sometimes, continuous marriages in blood relations causes physically weak and mentally ill children, and transferred hereditary diseases to later generations. According to a statement of Hazrat Umar (RA) the marriage with cousin should avoid it causes frail and weakness in the coming generations.¹⁷ However, it was a specific statement for certain families or tribes. It is also medically proved if first cousin marriages continue over several generations.

Islam gives right to child to have legitimate birth from parents who are legally married. The birth without marriage deprives child from a dignified life. When the child's parents are unknown the child suffers. He/she loses the affection of parents and blood relatives and remains unknown for its own identity. Preservation of lineage is also commanded by Islam. Every child has right to know his or her lineage. Islam abrogated child's adoption and do not recognise it as parenthood. In case of no parents, other parents may not claim parenthood by way of direct or indirect adoption of child. Because parenthood is only belonged to real parents through legitimate (*halal*) pregnancy. Islam allows procreation only after marriage; therefore, lineage of a child is only track from real parents. On the other hand, *Quran* says, that the adopted child is not the real offspring, adopted child is only the brother in faith and the client of fellow Muslim. *Allah has not made for a man two hearts in his interior. And he has not made your wives whom you declare unlawful your mothers. And He has not made your adopted sons your [true] sons. That is [merely] your saying by your mouth, but Allah says the truth, and He guides to the [right] way. Call them by [the names of] their fathers; it is more just in the sight of Allah. But if you do not know their fathers- then they are your brothers in religion and those entrusted to you...*¹⁸ Even an orphan should know his identity that who is he? who are his parents? And from his lineage comes? Therefore, every parent has responsibility to keep legal relation.

Name and Aqiqa

Everybody gets call with his/her name throughout the life, its meaning should good as it effects psychologically to the person. In Islam a child has right to get a good and beautiful name with good meaning through parents. A hadith mentions, verily, you all will call with

¹⁶ Children in Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 16

¹⁷ Ibn al Athir, *Al Nihayah fi Gharib al Hadith wal Athar*, Qahira, Egypt, 1893, p. 230

¹⁸ *Quran, Surah al Ahzab*, 4-5

your names on the day of judgement, therefore, acquire beautiful names¹⁹ with good meaning. Before Islam people had various names with different meanings. After coming of Islam Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to give good and beautiful names to children. He sometimes changed previous names and gave new names. He said the dearest names to Allah are Abdullah and Abd al Rahman.²⁰ A child should get name on his birth otherwise till his *aqiqah*. *Aqiqah* is a sacrificial ceremony performs on the seventh day after child's birth. The ceremony of *aqiqah* symbolises that the new-born baby brings happiness in the family. It is a way to show respect to the creature of God and thanks to God. This sacrificial ceremony performs on account of child to get Allah's blessings for him. According to *shariah* two goats are sacrifice for baby boy and one for baby girl. It is an expression of gratitude to Almighty Allah for His blessings and wish to bless in future.²¹

Feeding

Newly born child has right to get feed by his mother up to two years. As newly born child is not able to eat anything, God enables his mother to feed him through breastfeeding which has enough nutrients as per the requirement of the physical development and mental growth of a child. Child does not need any other food or water during feeding period. World Health Organization reported that exclusive breastfeeding is defined as giving no other food or drink, not even water. It has required vitamins, minerals and medicines for child and consider as a perfect food for a baby's health and growth. Medical science says only six months of breastfeeding are enough for healthy growth of an infant,²² however, Islam extends this period up to two years. *Shariah* makes father responsible to provide feeding to his child by either mother or foster mother. *Quran* mentions that: *Mother may breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing. Upon the father is the mother's provision and their clothing according to what is acceptable. No person is charged with more than his capacity. No mother should be harmed through her child and no father through his child. And upon the father's heir is a duty like that of the father. And if they both desire weaning through mutual consent from both of them and consultation, there is no blame upon you as long as you give payment according to what is acceptable. And fear Allah and know that Allah is Seeing of what you do.*²³

¹⁹ Sunan Abu Dawud (Daif), Hadith: 4948, <https://sunnah.com/>

²⁰ Sahi Muslim (Sahih), Hadith: 2132, <https://sunnah.com/>

²¹ Abbasi, S. M. Madni, *Islamic Manners*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 132

²² <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/breastfeeding>

²³ *Quran*, Surah al Baqarah, 233

Maintenance

Maintenance means to spend own earning on others for fulfilling their needs and necessities. A child's maintenance includes nourishment, health, education, training and this sustainable life has a right of every child. The Islamic *shariah* charges father for responsibility of maintenance to his children even after he does not have the custody of his child. He is the one who is liable for the maintenance of not only his children but also entire family, having responsibility of his parents, wife as well his children. A man is responsible to sustain the livelihood of his children according to his financial condition and condition of child. A male child is entitled to claim maintenance until he gets puberty, however female is entitled to claim her maintenance till her marriage even she gets married after getting puberty.²⁴ Abu Hurairah narrated that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "A dinar which you spend for the sake of Allah, a dinar which you spend on freeing a slave, a dinar which you give in charity to a poor person and a dinar which you spend on your family- the greatest of these in reward is that which you spend on your family".²⁵ At another instance Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "The best dinar which a man can spend is a dinar which a man spends on his children, a dinar which he spends on his riding beast for the sake of Allah, and a dinar which he spends on his companions for the sake of Allah."²⁶ In the light of above *ahadith* it can be observed that Islam encourages a sustainable and organized life bearing by the head of the family through lawful means. On the other hand, if a child is an orphan, he is the responsibility of grandparents and if they are also died so blood relatives (uncle and aunts) are responsible for the maintenance of child. These relatives bear this responsibility according to the priority of being entitle to inherit from the child.²⁷

Training and Education

Islam declares that a proper training and education is the right of every child must be fulfilled by parents. Training or *tarbiyah* means to acquaint children with essential worldly as well as religious knowledge with moral teachings aiming to make them responsible and useful people of the society in general and devoted Muslim in the sight of Allah in particular. On the other hand, children have rightful to know the purpose of their life and right way to get it. The parents bearing responsibility to provide proper training for their children in the

²⁴ Arfat, Shabina, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-304

²⁵ *Sahih Muslim*, (*Sahih*), Hadith: 995, <https://sunnah.com/>

²⁶ *Ibid*, Hadith: 994

²⁷ Arfat, Shabina, *op. cit.*, p. 304

absence of all immoralities such as backbiting, lie, injustice, rudeness, disrespect etc., as parents are the mirror for their children their words, acts and behaviour reflect in their children, they need to abstain them from all evils. Impeccability of parents' character assures the children of noble character and morals. Moreover, they must be aware that children are their trial in the world because they (children) are the blessings of God and a believer is accountable to what God blessed him and gets reward or punishment accordingly. As *Quran* says: “*And know that your wealth and your children are only a test and that with Allah is a great reward.*”²⁸

Parents are liable for educating their children to fill their hearts with Islamic knowledge includes faith or *Iman*, performance of religious duties such as *salah*, *zakat*, fast etc. and worldly knowledge which allows their children to develop intellectual strength and getting a sustainable and reputed life. *Quran* emphasises the importance of knowledge and education various times, such as the very first revelation (first five verses of *surah Alaq*)²⁹ having significance of knowledge. On various instances Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) stated the value of knowledge and education to make a person ignorant to knower. A hadith mentioned that “seeking knowledge is a duty upon every Muslim.”³⁰

Education provides development and discipline in one's life. It broadens one's view regarding life, helps to understand the truth of the world that it is not only about life and death but everyone came in this world with a certain purpose. An educated person himself search a right way to get the universal goal of life and make people aware about it. Education is the prerequisite for a civilized society. *Quran* encourages teaching and education as a foundation stone for upbringing of children. Moreover, it considers the best time for education is childhood and it is the responsibility of parents that what a child will become in his life. It says: “*Can those who have knowledge and who do not have are equal?*”³¹

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “Every child is born with a true faith but his parents convert him to Judaism or to Christianity or to Majestic, as an animal delivers a perfect baby animal. Do you find it mutilated?”³² Another hadith mentioned where Prophet

²⁸ *Quran, Surah al Anfal*, 28

²⁹ *Quran, Surah al 'Alaq*, 1-5

³⁰ *Sunan Ibn Majah (Daif)*, Hadith: 224, <https://sunnah.com/>

³¹ *Quran, Surah al Zumar*, 9

³² *Sahih al Bukhari (Sahih)*, Hadith: 1385, <https://sunnah.com/>

Muhammad (PBUH) said: “There is no gift that a father gives his son more virtuous than good manners.”³³

A child training has great reward in Islam, it can be known by the various sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he said that “when a man dies, his action discontinues from him except three things, namely, charity, or knowledge by which benefit is acquired or a pious child who prays for him.”³⁴ This hadith highlights that the importance of the upbringing of children is a way to get the will of Allah, which makes beautiful not only this world but also the next world.

Affection and Security

In Islam, being affectionate and kind with the children is as important as being good and generous to the parents, and malice to children is strictly forbidden. If parents abuse their children, they will be punished by God hereafter and a miserable life in this world. Parents should be tolerant, generous and compassionate towards their children. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says: “He is not one of us he who shows no mercy to our young.”³⁵ This hadith is not confined to parents but it generally addressing all people for showing softness and mercy to their youngsters. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) showed his love and mercy while treating children. His biographers wrote that he used to carry his granddaughter Umamah, and when he prostrated in prayer he would put her on the ground, and upon rising from prostration he would carry her again.³⁶ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encouraged to respect, make children happy and express love and affection to them, he mentioned that kissing children is highly rewarded by God. “Once Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) kissed his grandson Hazrat Hasan (RA) while Aqra’ bin Habis, a Sahabi was sitting beside him. Al Aqra’ said, I have ten children and I have never kissed anyone of them, whereupon Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, whoever not merciful to others will not be treated mercifully.”³⁷

The assurance of children’s security is of the utmost importance that can be observed in Islam through its declaration of rights of foetus in the womb of mother. Islam in its essence and by virtue of its rules and regulations provides children a protective environment. The responsibility of children’s protection cannot be fulfilled unless to oppose all forms of

³³ *Jami at Tirmidhi (Daif)*, Hadith: 1952, <https://sunnah.com/>

³⁴ *Sunan Abu Dawud (Sahih)*, Hadith: 2880, <https://sunnah.com/>

³⁵ *Ibid*, Hadith: 4943, <https://sunnah.com/>

³⁶ Children in Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 54

³⁷ *Sahih Bukhari (Sahih)*, Hadith: 5997, <https://sunnah.com/>

violence and exploitation against them which threatens the enactment of their basic rights or attaining sufficient care from not only the parents but society as well.³⁸ Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), said: “Indeed all of you is a shepherd and all of you will be questioned regarding your flock. The commander who is in authority over the Muslims is responsible and will be questioned regarding his responsibility. The man is responsible over the inhabitants of his house and he is the one who will be questioned about them...”³⁹ Islam restricts to abuse, frighten and rebuke children, it teaches to show sympathy and affection towards them run hand lovingly on their heads; take them in lap and fondle them.⁴⁰

Psychological exploitation of children is also prohibiting by Islam; it includes emotional deprivation, negligence of material and moral needs of children, and deserting them without paying attention and leaving them to a known person or institution. These damages may be precipitated by frustration, lack of self-confidence, poor school performance, isolation and lack of interest in taking part in any activity, whether within the family or at school or in society. On the other hand, due to these deprivation children can be violent, they may be driven towards addiction, may escape from home, or may even attempt suicide.⁴¹

One of the most painful practices as far as children are concerned is gender discrimination. Within the family by parents, Islam calls for full equality among the children, whether males or females. They should be treated equally, whether in terms of material gifts or in showing them love and affection. Inequity with girl child will inevitably precipitate bitterness and hostility. Abu Nu‘man bin Bashir in a Khutba reported that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “Treat your children fairly, treat your children fairly.”⁴² The dislike of daughter is a repulsive custom of the pre-Islamic Arabs also known as days of ignorance. Islam upholds the equality among children in showing kindness and compassion to them, it does not discriminate male and female. The discrimination towards daughters is just like to maintain the practice of pre-Islamic Arabs, a sign of ignorance of religion and weakness of faith. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was emphasised upon the care of daughters. He has instructed to pay proper attention to the care and training of daughters. He assured that whoever looks after two daughters till their maturity will be with him on the day of

³⁸ Children in Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 52

³⁹ *Jami at Tirmidhi (Sahih)*, Hadith: 1705, <https://sunnah.com/>

⁴⁰ Abbasi, S. M. Madni, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-134

⁴¹ Children in Islam, *op. cit.*, p. 53

⁴² *Sunan Nasai (Sahih)*, Hadith: 3687, <https://sunnah.com/>

resurrection. It is also a hadith that a father who bringing up three daughters will be protected from the fire of hell.⁴³ Another hadith is “If anyone cares for three daughters, disciplines them, marries them and does good to them, he will go to paradise.”⁴⁴ This hadith mentions that daughters are the way to go to paradise. It also clears the misconception that women have unfair position in Islam. Instead of that Islam gives respect and care to women more than any other religion.

Conclusion

Care of children and their upbringing in Islam is most important and serious responsibility. As they are the unit of the society and also leaders of future who will lead the world. Their choices, behaviour, social interaction and character influence their life and surrounding environment as well. Therefore, parents should be conscious and aware about their duties and responsibilities for their children. A good human being and *Momin* grow up in a healthy and secured environment and required proper *tarbiah* and education, when parents consciously fulfil their responsibilities only after that the establishment of an ideal society can be imagined. Hence, Islam clearly states that children are the gift from God and declared parents its trusty, who protect them from each and every kind of harm and provide healthy environment for their nurture, for that they get reward and who do not take care of this gift or trust do not get any reward instead of that their misery continues even hereafter. It is the duty of all Muslim parents to bring up their children with all consciousness of Islamic principles, as God made incumbent upon them not only to take care of their children but also provide them an Islamic environment in which they can grow up as an obedient servant of Allah, whose intentions and deeds are beneficial for humanity and his own *akhirah*.

⁴³ Rafiq bin 'Abd Al-Rahman, *The Upbringing of Children in Islam*, Montreal (Canada), 1991, p. 26

⁴⁴ *Sunan Abu Dawud (Daif)*, Hadith: 5147, <https://sunnah.com/>