Kindness and Respect to Parents in Islam: Tawhid, Ihsan, and the Rights of Parents

1. The Quranic Foundation: Worship Allah Alone and Goodness to Parents

The Quran places the command to worship Allah alone immediately alongside the command to show goodness to parents. This linkage is foundational in Surah al-Isra':

وقضى ربك ألا تعبدوا إلا إياه وبالوالدين إحسانا إما يبلغن عندك الكبر أحدهما أو كلاهما فلا تقل لهما أف ولا تنهرهما وقل لهما قولا كريما

"**And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents. If either or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them (so much as) 'Ugh' nor chide them, and speak to them a generous word**."
— Surah Al-Isra' (Quran 17:23)

The term *qada* (قضى) here denotes a decisive command and ordinance from Allah to worship Him alone, without associating any partners with Him. Commentators emphasize that Allah coupled the command of worshipping Him with being good to parents to underscore the immense right parents have over their children. Parents are described as the apparent cause of a child's existence and upbringing. This pairing signifies that, after the worship of Allah, the most important duty for a Muslim is to demonstrate beautiful conduct towards their parents.

The Quran continues:

واخفض لهما جناح الذل من الرحمة وقل رب ارحمهما كما ربياني صغيرا

"**And make yourself submissively gentle to them with compassion, and say: O my Lord! have compassion on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little**."
— Surah al-Isra', (Quran 17:24)

This linkage is also found in other verses, including Quran "**Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful**." (Quran 4:36), "**And We have enjoined upon man [care] for his parents. His mother carried him, [increasing her] in weakness upon weakness, and his weaning is in two years. Be grateful to Me and to your parents; to Me is the [final] destination**. **But if they**

endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do." (Quran 31:14–15), "**And We have enjoined upon man, to his parents, good treatment. His mother carried him with hardship and gave birth to him with hardship, and his gestation and weaning [period] is thirty months. [He grows] until, when he reaches maturity and reaches [the age of] forty years, he says, "My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents and to work righteousness of which You will approve and make righteous for me my offspring. Indeed, I have repented to You, and indeed, I am of the Muslims**." (Qura 46:15), and "**And We have enjoined upon man goodness to parents. But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. To Me is your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do**." (Quran 29:8). The Quran mentions kindness to parents in seven different places. Gratitude to Allah is thus accompanied by gratitude to parents, and kindness and humility towards parents are considered equal to servitude to God.

2. Ihsan: The Meaning of Good Treatment

The Arabic term *ihsan* (إحسانا) means “good treatment” or “kindness.” It is not merely basic care but encompasses a profound, proactive, and comprehensive form of benevolence. *Ihsan* is above all kinds of appreciation and thankfulness and covers man’s highest ability in being and doing good.

بروا آباءكم تبركم أبناؤكم؛ وعفوا تعف نساؤكم

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **Be kind to your parents and thus, your children will be kind to you, and practice chastity so that your wives keep chaste**

— Nahj Al-Fasahah

Imam Abu Abdullah (Jafar al-Sadiq), peace be upon him, explained *ihsan* in a narration:

عن الحسن بن محبوب، عن أبي والد الحناط اقل: سألت أاب عبدهللا)عليه السالم(عن قول هللا عز وجل:)وابلوالدين إحساان(ما هذا االحسان؟ فقال: االحسان أن تحسن صحبتهما، وأن ال تكلفهما أن يسأالك شيئا مما يحتاجان إليه وإن كاان (مستغنيين، أليس يقول هللا:)لن تنالوا البر حتى تنفقوا تحبون واقل:)إما يبلغن عندك الكبر أحدهما أو كالهما فال تقل لهما أف وال تنهرهما(اقل: إن أضجراك فال تقل لهما: أف، وال تنهرهما ،إن ضرابك، اقل:)وقل لهما قوال كريما(اقل: إن ضرابك فقل لهما: غفر هللا لكما، فذلك منك قول كريم اقل:)واخفض لهما جناح الذل من

الرحمة(اقل: ال تمل. عينيك من النظر إليهما إال برحمة ورقة، وال ترفع صوتك فوق .أصواتهما، وال يدك فوق أيديهما، وال تقدم قدامهما

From Al-Hassan bin Mahbub, from Abu Wallad Al-Hannat who said: I asked Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) about Allah's saying: "**and to parents, good treatment**" [Quran, 2:83], what is this good treatment? He said: **Good treatment is to be good in accompanying them and not making them ask you for anything they need, even if they are wealthy. Does not Allah say: "You will never attain righteousness until you spend from what you love**" [Quran, 3:92]. **And He said: "Whether one or both of them reach old age with you, say not to them 'uff,' and do not repel them**" [Quran, 17:23]. He explained: **If they irritate you, do not say 'uff' to them, and do not reject them even if they strike you. "And speak to them noble words**" [Quran, 17:23]. He explained: **If they strike you, say to them: May Allah forgive you both - that is the noble word from you. "And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy**" [Quran, 17:24]. He explained: **Do not look at them except with mercy and gentleness, do not raise your voice above theirs, do not raise your hand above theirs, and do not walk ahead of them**.

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 21, Section 6, Chapter 92, Hadith 27663

عن أبي ولاد الحناط قال: سألت أبا عبد الله (ع) عن قول الله عز و جل و بالوالدين إحسانا ما هذا الإحسان؟ فقال: الإحسان أن تحسن صحبتهما و أن لا تكلفهما أن يسألاك شيئا مما يحتاجان إليه

Imam Jaffar Sadiq (peace be upon him): Abu Wallad al-Hannat narrates that he once asked Imam as-Sadiq (peace be upon him) about the meaning of the words of Allah (in the Qur'an): "**And be good to parents**."Al-Qur'an, Suratul Baqarah (2), Verse 83"

The Imam (peace be upon him) replied: "**Being good to them means to accompany them in a good manner and never to wait for them to ask you for what they need**."

— Biharul Anwar, Volume 74, Page 79

Thus *ihsan* includes good companionship, proactive care, preserving parents' dignity, and fulfilling their needs before they have to ask, even if they are wealthy. It is connected to the principle of spending "**from what you love**" (Quran 3:92).

3. Specific Etiquette in Old Age

The Quran and the narrated teachings provide precise guidance on how children must interact with parents, especially when they reach old age.

a. Prohibition of Saying "Uff" and Chiding

The command “say not to them (so much as) ‘Uff’” prohibits even the slightest expression of annoyance, irritation, or disgust. Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) clarified that even if they irritate you, do not say ‘uff’ to them.

عن محمد بن سنان عن حديد بن حكيم، عن أبي عبدهللا)عليه السالم(اقل: أدنى العقوق أف، ولو علم هللا شيئا أهون منه .لنهى عنه

From Muhammad bin Sinan from Hadid bin Hakim, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: **The least form of disobedience to parents is saying "uff" (a word of displeasure), and if Allah knew of anything lesser than this, He would have forbidden it**.

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 21, Section 6, Chapter 104, Hadith 27693

If a milder word than “uff” existed, Allah would have used it, illustrating the extreme sensitivity required.

b. Prohibition of Repelling or Chiding Them

The instruction “nor chide them” means one should never shout at parents, argue with them harshly, or turn them away. Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) further explained that one should “**not reject them even if they strike you**.” This emphasizes extreme patience and gentle conduct, even in the most challenging situations.

c. Command to Speak Generously and Nobly

Instead of harshness, the verse directs: “**and speak to them a generous word**.” This entails addressing them with utmost respect, honor, and benevolence. Imam Ja’far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) illustrated this by saying: “**If they strike you, say to them: May Allah forgive you both – that is the noble word from you**.”

d. Lowering the Wing of Humility with Compassion

The verse continues: “**And lower to them the wing of humility out of mercy**.” Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) provided practical interpretations: “**Do not look at them except with mercy and gentleness, do not raise your voice above theirs, do not raise your hand above theirs, and do not walk ahead of them**.” This encapsulates a complete demeanor of deference, tenderness, and respect, both physically and verbally.

e. Supplication for Them

Children are instructed to pray: "**My Lord! have compassion on them, as they brought me up (when I was) little**" (Quran 17:24). This reminds children of their parents' sacrifices during upbringing and reinforces the duty to seek divine mercy for them.

4. Universal Kindness, the Mother's Status, and Limits of Obedience

a. The Mother's Elevated Status

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) emphasized the mother's priority:

محمد بن أبي عمير عن هشام بن سالم عن أبي عبد الله عليه السلام قال: جاء رجل إلى النبي صلى الله عليه وآله فقال يا رسول الله: من أبر؟ قال: أمك قال: ثم من؟ قال: عليه السلام: أمك قال ثم من؟ قال: أباك.

Muhammad ibn Abi Umayr narrated from Hisham ibn Salim, from Abū Abdillah (peace be upon him) who said: "A man came to the Prophet (sw) and asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, whom should I be kind to?' He said, '**Your mother**.' He asked, 'Then who?' He (sw) said, '**Your mother**.' He asked, 'Then who?' He said, '**Your father**.'"

— Kitab al-Zuhd by Husayn b. Said al-Ahwazi, Book 2, Chapter 5, Hadith #21

عن المعل بن خنيس، عن أبي عبدهللا)عليه السالم(اقل: جاء رجل وسأل النبي)صل هللا : عليه وآله(عن بر الوالدين فقال .أبرر أمك، أبرر أمك، أبرر أمك، أبرر أابك، أبرر أابك أبرر أابك، وبدأ ابالم قبل االب

From Al-Mu'alla bin Khunais, from Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: A man came and asked the Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) about kindness to parents. He said: **Be kind to your mother, be kind to your mother, be kind to your mother, be kind to your father, be kind to your father, be kind to your father** - and he began with the mother before the father.

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 21, Section 6, Chapter 94, Hadith 27672

b. Kindness Even When Parents Are Not Muslim

Imam Ali Raza (peace be upon him) wrote:

عن الرضا (ع) في كتابه إلى المأمون قال: و بر الوالدين واجب و إن كانا مشركين و لا طاعة لهما في معصية الخالق

In a letter to Mamun, Imam ar-Ridha (peace be upon him) wrote: "**To do good to one's parents is obligatory, even if they are of the polytheists, however, they should not be obeyed in acts that go against the commands of Allah**."

— Biharul Anwar, Volume 74, Page 72

The Quran similarly states that if parents strive to make one join partners with Allah, they should not be obeyed, yet one should bear them company in this life with fairness and consideration. "**But if they endeavor to make you associate with Me that of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them but accompany them in [this] world with appropriate kindness and follow the way of those who turn back to Me [in repentance]. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do**" (Quran 31:15)

c. Three Obligations Toward Parents

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said:

يجب للوالدين على الولد ثلاثة أشياء: شكرهما على كل حال. وطاعتهما فيما يأمرانه وينهيانه عنه في غير معصية الله. ونصيحتهما في السر والعلانية.

Three things are obligatory upon a child with the parents: to thank them in all circumstances, to obey them in what they command and forbid him from doing as long as it does not involve disobedience to Allah, and to advise them in secret and in public.

— Tuhaf al-Uqul by Ibn Shu'ba al-Harrani, Volume 0, Page 322

d. Gratitude and Family Ties

Imam Ali Raza (peace be upon him) said:

عن الحرث بن دلهاث، عن أبيه، عن أبي الحسن الرضا عليه السالم اقل: إن هللا أمر بثالثة مقرون بها ثالثة أخرى أمر ابلصالة والزكاة فمن صبل ولم يزك لم تقبل منه صالته، وأمر ابلشكر له وللوالدين فمن لم يشكر والديه لم يشكر هللا، وأمر ابتقاء .هللا وصلة الرحم فمن لم يصل رحمه لم يتق هللا

From Al-Harith bin Dalhath, from his father, from Abu Al-Hassan Al-Ridha (peace be upon him) who said: **Indeed, Allah has commanded three things paired with three others. He commanded prayer and zakat, so whoever prays but does not give zakat, his prayer is not accepted. He commanded gratitude to Him and to parents, so whoever does not thank his parents has not thanked Allah. And He commanded fear of Allah and maintaining family ties, so whoever does not maintain family ties has not feared Allah**.

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 9, Section 1, Chapter 3, Hadith 11429

e. Kindness to Children

عن أحمد بن محمد بن عيسى، عن أبي طالب، رفعه إلى أبي عبدهللا)عليه السالم(اقل: اقل : رجل من االنصار: من أبر؟ اقل .والديك، اقل: قد مضيا، اقل: بر ولدك

From Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Isa, from Abu Talib, raising it to Abu Abdullah (peace be upon him) who said: A man from the Ansar asked: Who should I show kindness to? He replied: **Your parents**. The man said: They have passed away. He said: **Show kindness to your children**.

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 21, Section 6, Chapter 88, Hadith 27649

و قال الصادق عليه السلام : بر الرجل بولده بره بوالديه.

Imam Jafar ibn Muhammad Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: **A man's kindness to his child is a form of his kindness to his own parents**.

— Man La Yahduruh al-Faqih (Vol. 3) by Shaykh Muhammad b. Ali al-Saduq, Book 3, Chapter 49, Hadith #19

محمد بن عيل بن الحسين اقل: اقل الصادق)عليه السالم(: بر الرجل بولده بره بوالديه.

Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Al-Hussein said: Al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said: **A man's kindness to his children is equivalent to his kindness to his parents**.
Recommendation Of Being Kind To One's Children, Loving Them, Showin...

— Wasa'il al-Shia Vol. 21, Section 6, Chapter 88, Hadith 27653

5. Spiritual Status and Consequences

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said:

قال رسول الله (ص): نظر الولد إلى والديه حبا لهما عبادة

Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) has said: "**The look of a child towards his parents out of love for them is an act of worship**."

— Biharul Anwar, Volume 74, Page 80

قال رسول الله (ص): ما من ولد بار نظر إلى أبويه برحمة إلا كان له بكل نظرة حجة مبرورة. فقالوا يا رسول الله و إن نظر في كل يوم مائة نظرة؟ قال نعم. ألله أكبر و أطيب

Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) said: "**Every righteous child who casts a look of mercy and affection upon his parents shall be granted, for every look of his, rewards equivalent to that of an accepted Hajj**." Those around the Prophet questioned: "O' Prophet of Allah! Even if he were to look at them a hundred times a day?" The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his family) replied: "**Indeed! Allah is the Greatest and Most Kind**."

— Biharul Anwar, Volume 74, Page 73

نظر الولد إلى والديه حبا لهما عبادة.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: **A child's looking at his parents out of love for them is worship**.

— Tuhaf al-Uqul by Ibn Shu'ba al-Harrani, Volume 0, Page 46

رسول الله (صلي الله عليه و آله): نظر الولد إلى والديه حبا لهما عبادة

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his family) said: '**A son's looking at his parents with love is a form of worship [of Allah]**.'

— Tuhaf al-'Uqul, no. 46

و [جعل الله] بر الوالدين وقاية من السخط. (أعيان الشيعة-الطبع الجديد- ج1 ص 316)

Lady Fatima (peace be upon her): **And (Allah made) the kindness to parents as a protection (shield) to His wrath and displeasure**

— Ayan ush-Shia Ataba Al Jadeed, Vol. I, P 316

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said:

قال الصادق (ع): بر الوالدين من حسن معرفة العبد بالله إذ لا عبادة أسرع بلوغا بصاحبها إلى رضى الله من بر الوالدين المسلمين لوجه الله

Imam Jaffar Sadiq (peace be upon him) has said: "**Goodness towards the parents is an indication of a person's excellent cognizance of Allah. This is because there**

is no worship that can take a person towards the happiness of Allah faster than exhibiting respect towards his Muslim parents for the sake of Allah."

— Biharul Anwar, Volume 74, pg.77

Kindness to parents is considered a saviour from the (Divine) Wrath, a path to Paradise, a means of attaining God's pleasure and forgiveness, and a fundamental aspect of faith. Disloyalty or disrespect towards parents is considered a major sin, and the least form of disobedience is saying "uff."

Conclusion

Kindness and respect to parents in Islam is presented as an essential extension of Tawhid, not a secondary moral recommendation. The Quranic foundation is Surah al-Isra' (Quran 17:23), where Allah's decisive command, denoted by *qada* (قضى), joins worship of Allah alone with *ihsan* (إحسانا) to parents:

وقضى ربك ألا تعبدوا إلا إياه وبالوالدين إحسانا إما يبلغن عندك الكبر أحدهما أو كلاهما فلا تقل لهما أف ولا تنهرهما وقل لهما قولا كريما
— Surah Al-Isra' (Quran 17:23)

"**And your Lord has commanded that you shall not serve (any) but Him, and goodness to your parents**…" This linkage shows that, after the worship of Allah, the most important duty for a Muslim is beautiful conduct toward parents. Quran 17:24 further commands humility, compassion, and supplication for them. Gratitude to Allah is thus accompanied by gratitude to parents, and kindness and humility toward parents are considered equal to servitude to God.

Specific etiquette in old age is detailed: the prohibition of saying "Uff" and chiding, the command to speak generously and nobly, lowering the wing of humility with compassion, and supplication for parents. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) clarified that if parents irritate you, do not say "uff" to them; if they strike you, say, "May Allah forgive you both"; do not look at them except with mercy and gentleness; do not raise your voice above theirs; do not raise your hand above theirs; and do not walk ahead of them. The least form of disobedience is saying "uff," and if Allah knew of anything lesser, He would have forbidden it.

Three obligations toward parents from Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him): to thank them in all circumstances, to obey them in what they command and forbid as long as it does not involve disobedience to Allah, and to advise them in secret and in public. Gratitude to parents is also linked to gratitude to Allah and maintaining family ties. Kindness to children is likewise presented as a form of kindness to one's own parents.

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) said that a child's look toward his parents out of love is an act of worship, and that every righteous child who casts a look of mercy and affection upon his parents receives rewards equivalent to an accepted Hajj, even if repeated a hundred times a day. Allah made kindness to parents a protection from His wrath and displeasure. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) said that goodness toward parents is an indication of excellent cognizance of Allah, and that no worship takes a person faster to Allah's happiness than respect toward Muslim parents for His sake. Kindness to parents is a saviour from Divine Wrath, a path to Paradise, a means of attaining God's pleasure and forgiveness, and a fundamental aspect of faith; disloyalty or disrespect toward parents is considered a major sin, and the least form of disobedience is saying "uff."

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