

Answer to those who say "I want to live as a Muslim, but I am worried about my family's reactions."

Before embracing Islam, people live according to some social rules and codes outside of the criteria that Allah has laid out in the Qur'an. Many traditions and rituals formed in a society that is heedless of religion define the relations of its members with other people.

However, the only guidance for humanity is Allah and His Book. Those people who grasp this fact have to leave the period of ignorance behind, abandon all behaviors related to ignorance, and be guided only by the Qur'an. This surely also applies to one's relations with his or her family.

In all countries, including some Muslim ones, some families may react negatively to family members who want to live by the Qur'an's values. Some families might have severe reactions if their children display even a small amount of interest in religion. Moreover, in order to keep their children away from religion, they distort some religious commands. Trying to draw them back to ignorance, they tell their children that "The rights of the parents upon their children are above anything else," "It is the greatest sin to oppose parents," and similar unfounded assertions. The resulting psychological pressure may well engender feelings of guilt in children who are not well informed about Islam.

However, as is the case with every other issue, the right thing to do is to resort to the Qur'an. In the Qur'an, Allah reveals the ideal attitude that believers must assume toward their parents, as follows:

We have instructed man to honor his parents ... (Qur'an, 29:8)

However, this does not mean that children must fulfill or obey all of their parents' wishes unconditionally. Rather, they are to assume a respectful, measured, tolerant, and kind attitude, and to avoid doing anything that will hurt or bother them. But this does not extend to making concessions in matters concerning Allah's commands and prohibitions. In the latter part of the above verse, Allah defines the limits of this respect and understanding in the following terms:

... 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 that you will return, and I will inform you about the things that you did. (Qur'an, 29:8)

Children have to obey their parents as long as this obedience does not cause them to transgress the limits set by Allah. For example, if parents say that: "You have to comply with my wish rather than Allah's," which clearly means, "Your deity is not Allah but me," their children should disobey them, for adopting such an attitude means associating partners to Allah, which is forbidden.

However, along with disobeying one's parents if and when they encourage rebellion against Allah, He encourages believers to be kind to them, although they are unbelievers, and to be tolerant toward them in mundane matters:

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, but

follow the Way of him who turns to Me. Then you will return to Me, and I will inform you about the things that you did." (Qur'an, 31:14-15)

When discussing one's parents, Allah especially calls upon believers not to ascribe partners to Him and not to serve anyone or anything other than Him. As the verse above also makes clear, believers must not obey their parents if they ask them to return to their old ways; rather, they must remain among those who turn to Allah.

When we examine the Qur'an, we see that some believers, including the Prophets, were tested through their families or close relatives. Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh), for instance, employed the Qur'an's method of "not obeying yet getting along well" against his father, who called him to the ignorant way of living:

Mention Ibrahim in the Book. He was a true man and a Prophet. Remember when he said to his father: "Father, why do you worship what can neither hear nor see and is not of any use to you at all? Father, knowledge that never reached you has come to me, so follow me and I will guide you to the right path. Father, do not worship Satan. Satan was disobedient to the All-Merciful. Father, I am afraid that a punishment from the All-Merciful will afflict you, and turn you into a comrade of Satan." He [his father] said: "Do you forsake my gods, Ibrahim? If you do not stop, I will stone you. Keep away from me for a good long time." He [Ibrahim] said: "Peace be upon you. I will ask my Lord to forgive you. He has always honored me." (Qur'an, 19:41-47)

The wives of Prophet Lut (Lot) (pbuh) and Prophet Nuh (pbuh) also became unbelievers, and thus Allah punished them. Allah warned Prophet Nuh (pbuh) that his son was an unbeliever: **"Nuh, he is definitely not of your family. He is someone whose action was not righteous. Do not, therefore, ask Me for something about which you have no knowledge."** (Qur'an, 11:46)

While fulfilling his duty of communicating Islam's message, our Prophet (pbuh) also faced the severe reactions of his close relatives, reactions that extended to the point of hostility. His uncle Abu Lahab, who had a great aversion toward and grudge against our Prophet (pbuh), made propaganda against him and tried to impede his efforts by placing various difficulties and hardships in his path. Indeed, Allah devoted a special chapter in the Qur'an to denouncing this man. During the first years of Islam's spread, many Muslims endured similar reactions and torments from their own families, yet never swerved from the true path. Later, many parents who had been influenced by their children's resoluteness and sincerity embraced Islam.

The relentless commitment of Muslims in this matter stems from the Qur'an's encouragement of rationalism, as opposed to sentimentality. Being a religion based upon pure reason, people who have an emotional, romantic state of mind find it difficult to live by Islam's principles. Muslims are sensitive people. But once Islam's interests are concerned, they show not the slightest emotional sentiment and never swerve from following Allah's guidance. Since their main goal is to earn His good pleasure, they harbor no prejudice or fixed ideas about any issue, person, or thing. This is the only state of mind that allows people to attain genuine faith. What lies at the bottom of sentimentalism is channeling love to the wrong people. Real believers show their love only to Allah and to those with whom He is pleased. Any love nourished by something other than Allah's good pleasure is associating partners with Allah. In the Qur'an, Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) explains this situation in the following words:

He [Ibrahim] said: "You have adopted idols apart from Allah as tokens of mutual affection in this world. But then on the Day of Resurrection you will reject one another and curse one another. The Fire will be your shelter. You will have no helpers." (Qur'an, 29:25)

Loving someone who displays a hostile attitude toward Allah and His religion is the same as the situation described in the above verse. Whether this be one's family, parents, children, siblings, spouse, or any other relatives or close associates, this situation never changes. The Qur'an makes this issue explicit:

O you who believe, do not befriend your fathers and brothers if they prefer unbelief to faith. Those among you who do befriend them are wrongdoers. Say: "If your fathers or your sons or your brothers or your wives or your tribe, or any wealth you have acquired, or any business you fear may slump, or any house which pleases you, are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger and striving for His sake, then wait until Allah brings about His command. Allah does not guide people who are deviators."
(Qur'an, 9:23-24)

The Qur'an refers to believers who had to abandon their homes and families in order to fulfill Allah's commands. One of these people was Maryam (Mary) (pbuh), a young and unprotected woman, who trusted only in Allah and took refuge in Him. She abandoned her family and people in order to attain His good pleasure. The Qur'an refers to her in the following terms:

Mention Maryam in the Book, how she withdrew from her people to an eastern place. (Qur'an, 19:16)

Another example is a group of young people called "the Companions of the Cave." Since their people rebelled against Allah, they abandoned their people and took refuge in a cave. The Qur'an provides the following account:

Our people have taken deities apart from Him. Why do they not produce a clear authority concerning them? Who could do greater wrong than someone who invents a lie against Allah? When you have separated yourselves from them and everything they worship except Allah, take refuge in the cave, and your Lord will unfold His mercy to you and open the way to the best for you in your situation. (Qur'an, 18:15-16)

In brief, new Muslims who have abandoned their former ignorance need to communicate the true path to their parents if they are bereft of the Qur'an's values and try to block their children from earning Allah's good pleasure. If this communication is ineffective, then the correct attitude is to employ the Qur'anic principle.