**BEING THE BEST TO OUR PARENTS**

**Nouman Ali Khan**

23. And Your Lord has decreed that you Worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age In your life, Say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them In terms of honour.

24. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through Mercy, and say: "My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small."

25. Your Lord knows best what is In your inner-selves. If you are righteous, then, Verily, He is ever Most forgiving to those who turn unto Him again and again In obedience, and In repentance.

Assalamualaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa barakatuhu

Today we are talking about the importance and value of regard for our parents and I've chosen of the many ayah dedicated to this subject probably the central ayahs from Surah Al Israa, surah no. 17, these are ayahs 23 to 25 dealing with the subject.

Allah az wajjal begins & He says "**Wa qada rabbuk**" - Your Lord declared "**Alla tabudu illa iyyah**" - that you will not be enslaved to anyone except Him alone. "**wa bil waalidaini ehsana**" - and in regards to both of your parents the best possible conduct.

Those of you that are from Persian or Urdu or similar backgrounds have one common misconception: "Oh a lot of the words in the Quran are also in Urdu, so I know what it says, I know the meanings."

Well you know it so happens that a lot of the words in similar languages like Turkish or Urdu or Persian that are influenced by the Arabic language have similar vocabulary but they mean different things. They don’t mean the same thing. So just because you know what the word means in English or in Urdu or in Farsi doesn't mean you know the word in Arabic. Just to give you an extreme example of that, so that the matter becomes absolutely clear. In the Arabic language Allah uses a word in the Quran "Zaleel". If I use this word in Urdu you would be offended. And in Quran Allah uses the plural of it (the plural of Zaleel is Azilla) and He uses it for the Sahaba, "**Wa lakad nasrakumullahu bi badarin wa antum azilla**" - Allah aided you at the time of badr while you were all (collectively) azilla - meaning weak or powerless. So the word Zaleel in Arabic means weak or powerless, incapable of helping oneself. This is what it means. But in another language it may be very very offensive.

And the reason I bring this up is the word "ehsan", I think because my first language is Urdu when you think of the word ehsan, you are thinking of a favour. Now Allah says "**wa bil waalidaini ehsana**" - with both of your parents have ehsan, which means do them favours? Actually no, it has nothing to do with doing them favours. It means to be the best at something. Ehsan in Arabic is excellence, it has nothing to do with doing favours. It has to do with doing your best. So Allah is demanding from us nothing short of our best when it comes to our parents. What that means is you have a potential to be good, to be patient or to be merciful or to have kind words or to be charitable or to have courtesy... The best of your courtesy, the best of your words, the best of your patience should go to who? Your parents. So of the good characteristics you have the peak of them, the highest of them who is deserving of them? Your parents.

But He says this of course after He mentions Himself. "**Wa qada rabbuka Alla tabudu illa iyyah**" - The ayah begins "Your Lord declared that you do not enslave yourself to anyone except Him alone." And then He immediately went to the parents, and look at the high standard He set for us "**wa bil waalidaini ehsana**". Now there are other places in the Quran where Allah says "Husnan", instead of the word "ehsana" He says "husnan". Husnan is more general - Good. Generally speaking you have to have an attitude of good towards your parents. But with ehsan, with the use of this word ahsana, to be the best, to excel, it raises the bar between us and our parents.

Now the other thing I want you to focus in here is the use of the word "waalidain" the singular of which is "waalid". And there are two of course : waalid and waalida, you heard both of these words before waalid means father and waalida means mother. And there are two other words for mother and father in Quran, there’s "Ab" and then there’s "Umm". So you've got 4 words now: waalid & waalida and you've got ab & umm. Ab & Umm are more respectable terms then waalid & waalida. Ab & Umm in Arabic are at a higher level. And the way that linguists describe the difference: waalid comes from walada/yalidu which means to give birth, meaning your physical father and your physical mother they are your waalid & waalida. But Ab is a little more than that, Ab didn't just father you physically, he’s not just biologically your father, he actually contributed to your upbringing. He provided for you, took care of you, protected you, etc. etc. So he graduates from waalid and becomes Ab. So not every waalid is necessarily a good Ab. But every Ab is a waalid, so Ab is a more specialised subset. So what is the higher term waalida or Umm? Umm is the higher term.

Now another place in the Quran you will find Allah az wajjal tells us to be good to both parents and then He says "**Hamalathu ummuhu wa wassainal insana bi waalidaihi**" - We gave man a legacy with regards to both his waalidain, and then He says "**hamalathu ummuhu**", He switches the term He doesn’t say hamalathu waalidatuhu, He says hamalathu ummuhu. So He begins with the word waalid but he doesn't use the word that goes with waalid, He uses the word umm. And the reason for that is that the mother has already contributed, when she carries the child, when she delivers the child, when she feeds the child, she’s not just a physical mother anymore she’s already contributed something towards the child. So she’s automatically earned the status of umm.

But the father may not have necessarily earned that status, right. And the wisdom in these ayahs is that Allah uses the word waalidain, what that teaches us is that we have to be the best to our parents and especially to our father whether he was good to us or not. Whether Muslim or not, good to us or not, kind or not, merciful or not, courteous or not, he was there for you or not, it doesn't matter because Allah used the word waalid. You know in modern society you’re not good to your parents, or your parents say why are you so mean to me?, and you turn to your dad and say, well you weren't there for me, what did you do for me?, I remember when i was little you didn't take me to the park blah blah blah... and now I'm leaving you in a nursing home. There’s this reciprocal mentality, what you do for me, I'm going to do for you. But by Allah az wajjal using the word waalidain there’s no reciprocal mentality. If he fathered you, he deserves the best of your conduct regardless of how he is to you. Subhan Allah! This is a very high principle in our deen, wa bil waalidaini ehsana.

"**imma yablu ganna indakal kibr**" - Even if it be that they reach in your midst old age. "**ahaduhuma aw kilahuma**" - One of them or both of them. And Allah specifically mentions, subhana wa taala, old age. Why? Because as people get older their expectations become more, when your children are little you don’t expect too much from them. When they spill some water, they say it’s a baby what you gonna do, right. When they get a little older you say why you spilt the water. Then they get a little older you say go buy the water. So your expectations with your child get more and more and more. And so it’s natural that the child can become more agitated with the parent because they are demanding more and more and more.

Also naturally with ageing Allah says "**wa min nuammir hu nunakkis hu khalq**" - whoever we give old age we reverse them in creation, and one of the interpretations of that ayah is you know old people become more and more childish. They become stubborn like a child would, they become emotionally volatile like a child would, right they become harder to deal with like a child is sometimes, you don’t know why they are angry, you can't reason with them. You might feel like that sometimes with your parents. So when they reach this old age, it’s a particular challenge.

One of them or both of them - and especially in those circumstances "**fa la takkalahuma uff**" - then don't even say uff to them. And now the word "uff" like i mentioned before is the expression in Arabic for the show of frustration. We can't even show our parents that we are frustrated, whether they are yelling at us, whether they are saying things that are fair or not fair, whether they are insulting you, it doesn't matter what they are doing, that’s not the point. 1) You’re not showing them respect because of them; you are showing them respect because it’s a command of Allah. 2) You are showing them respect because no matter how much harm they do to you psychologically or physically even, no matter how much harm they do to you, they can never outdo the good they did for you. The good your mother did for you can never be outweighed by anything she says to you or does to you.

If those of you that have had children, those of you who have seen your wives go through the difficulty of labour and carrying the child and then delivering the child, and then feeding the child, staying up at night after night through her own sickness for the child, these are the people that appreciate their mother all of a sudden. You see your wife in the ER and you say Subhan Allah! This is what my mother put up with. And then after she’s done delivering this child, going through the pain, after which Allah forgives all their sins. It’s not something cheap what they go through, right. And our mother sgo through that for us and then they after that, it’s not like they are done, they get a two week vacation, you just had surgery you know. You go to work, you break an ankle or you burn a hand or something, you get a couple of weeks off, physical leave, medical leave. A mother doesn't get a medical leave of absence; she just delivered the child 40 minutes ago now she has to feed the child. And the first time it hurts like bleeding. She’s gotta get to work right away, no vacation.

And she’s gotta stay up and feed the child and take care of the child. Endless. Without any break what so ever. Wallahi, people think they have a hard time, men think they do a lot when they go to work and they earn a living, right. I would rather stay at work 12 hours, 16 hours, 18 hours then take the job of a mother for even one day. Because what they do, if you have kids you know this. If the wife leaves you with your children, your two kids or one child for three hours, you'll say Subhan Allah I’ve never put in more work than in this in my whole life. You know and they do this on a daily basis, on a daily basis. And they continuously do this without ever turning around and saying to the child, you know I’ve put in like 20 hours in the last two days for you, so how about a little minimum wage even. Nothing, they ask for nothing in return. But they in the end feel that they have some authority, some respect, they deserve something over their child. And rightfully so. Look at what they have done for us.

But what happens is when you and I become teenagers we become hot-blooded, because we've figured out the whole world. We know everything that’s right and everything that’s wrong and nobody can correct us because we're on top. And so your mother comes and says why are you home so late, I told you i was gonna go out with my friends. Come on, I told you, it’s not my fault, you're always blaming me and slam the door in her face. You walk away. And then you are IM’ing your friends, text messaging them nowadays, man my mother she just keeps yelling at me nowadays, she doesn’t understand me. And the other one is like, ya my parents actually got a funny accent, you gotta hear them talk. And then your mom comes and calls what are you doing? Nothing, homework. Because I can’t relate to my parents, they are like outta this world or something. So we've got no regard for our parents. And just imagine, these are the same parents that put up with us, so endlessly put up with us. Nothing but love for us. But we, one thing doesn't go our way and forget it, it starts even in childhood in our society.

Just by the way, side parenting advice; don't take your kids to toys stores, never. If you want to get your kids something, go get it yourself and then you bring it home. Because if you take them to the toy store, then there's about a 100,000 pieces of merchandise that they didn't bring home, right. So as they are leaving the cash register they are going to see a candy bar, and they are gonna see another video game that you didn’t buy them. So they are not going to remember what you bought them, what will they remember? What you didn’t get them. You’re teaching them, your children, you're teaching them ingratitude from childhood. Oh man, they didn’t even get that for me! Oh come on that’s not fair, I only got the cheap one! It’s just consumer society. Toy stores are designed by design. Stores are just designed to make you want to leave with something more. So you will notice if you just do a little bit of experiment yourselves. Go to a toy store and hang out there for a couple of minutes, you see kids leaving the toy store crying. No child leaves the toy store happy because there is always something back there.

So this mentality is brewed even from childhood. So as kids become adults, Oh my dad bought me a cheap car! He’s not paying all of my tuition, he’s only paying 85%. I don’t know what he wants from me. He only bought me one pair of sneakers this year! Now the children are trained to complain about things they get, rather than be grateful. This ummah is an ummah of gratitude, right. But we are turning into an ummah of complaints from early childhood. And we're doing this to our kids. We got to understand we can’t expose them to this kind of mentality and there are ways to be actively involved in the upbringing of our kids.

Anyway, they come to you in old age, one of them or two of them, “**fa la takkalahuma uff wa la tanharhuma wa kulla huma kawlun karima**” - don't abandon them and speak to them in gracious respectable terms. Don't reciprocate anger with anger. Don't reciprocate frustration with frustration. Don't reciprocate loud voice with loud voice. Whatever they use it doesn't matter, you respond with respect, you respond with gracious words.

Quick story: My teacher always tells this story, Dr. Abdul Sami, when he’s teaching this ayah. So I’ll share this story with you. It’s actually pretty interesting. There’s this boy and he’s about 3 years old and he’s walking with his dad in the park. And they are walking in the park and the boy sees a crow on a tree. And he says to his dad, dad what’s that? He says it’s a crow. He says oh ok, dad what’s that? He says it’s a crow. And he asks him again, dad what’s that? It’s a crow. Now they go past it, he turns around and say’s, dad what’s that back there? He says it’s a crow. He asks him like 20 times and he says it’s a crow. And the father thinks it’s funny. So he comes home and he writes it in his journal, today my son asked me 20 times about a crow! And he thought it was cute.

So now he’s not 3 anymore, 30 years go by and he’s 33. And he lives in a different city; he’s got his own family, own problems. Dad calls one day, I want to come over for the weekend. Oh! I'm busy this weekend, we are going on a picnic, but okay if you have to then fine. Do I have to pay the ticket? So the father comes, early in the morning, the father says, let’s go for a walk. Is there a park nearby? I got to get to work. But it’s the weekend. I know i had some other plans, but ok fine let’s go. Fine fine just for 5 minutes.

Now they're going for a walk and they see a crow. And the father says, son what’s that? It’s a crow dad!! Son, what’s that? My goodness, I told you it’s a crow! I sent you glasses last month, is the prescription running out already? What’s the matter with you is this funny? And he asked him a third time and he says you know what I'm not talking to you anymore! And so the father pulls out his journal and he shows it to his son. And he says you asked me about a crow 20 times and I responded with a smile, you couldn't handle 3!! It’s just a story, but it tells us something about our temperament with our parents, right.

So Allah says "**wa kullahuma kawlan karima**" and then He uses these profound words. The Quran is full of imagery, just incredible images. Allah says "**wak fid la huma janahaz zulli minar rahmah**" - lower for them your wings of mercy, your wings of shade out of mercy rather. So each part of this ayah is important. First of all, lower for them, meaning lower your ego. Lower yourself. And then the words used are wings, we don’t have wings but the image is that of a bird. When it protects its nest what does it do? It puts its wings, its most precious asset, it puts it in front of the nest, if you want to attack something, attack my wings. Don’t attack my nest. So Allah is telling us to lower our wings of shade, to cover our parents out of one sentiment “minar rahmah”, out of mercy. No matter what your parents do to you or say to you or what you feel about them, the number one motivation we should have towards our parents is mercy.

And that is a commandment of Allah az wajjal, **wak fid** is a command (fail amr), **la huma janahaz zulli minar rahmah**, and while you do this and while they are hurting your feelings, or yelling at you and you’re convinced that they are wrong, while they are doing all of that you make dua for them in private. “**Wa kul**” – and say, “**Rabbir ham huma**” – My Lord! Have mercy on both of them. Now notice these words, you don’t even say “Rabbig fir la huma” – My Lord! Forgive both of them, because then you would be implying that they are doing something wrong to me Allah I want you to forgive them. But Allah tells us to say, show them mercy, don’t even attribute wrong to them. Ask Allah to show mercy to them.

And then you ask in reciprocation, because we as human beings can never pay back what our mothers did and what our fathers did for us. So Allah is the only One who can pay that back in full. So we ask “**Rabbir ham huma kama rabbayani sagira**” – Like they took care of me, like they were in charge of raising me and making sure that all of my needs were met whne I was small. Now look at the profound nature of this dua. We want Allah to show our parents mercy the way they showed us mercy. You would expect tit for tat. I should show them mercy like they showed me mercy. But you know what the ayah is teaching us, I can never do enough for them in response, in proportion to what they did for me. Only Allah can do that. So “**Rabbir ham huma kama rabbayani sagira**”, it’s a profound dua its not something small. Show them mercy like they were “rabb” over me. Now the word rabb in fail (verb) form, tarbiyyah, this word comes from this. Now rabbayani – they took care of me, this word in the past tense which has been used here, what does it mean? Allah az wajjal is our “Rabb”, He’s our Rabb, what does it mean? He’s our Sustainer, which means He provides for us and He allows us to exist from a moment to another. He takes care of every one of our needs. He is in complete charge over us. And in a limited mortal sense, Allah gave that responsibility to who? Our parents. They were cleaning us when we couldn’t clean ourselves, feeding us when we couldn’t feed ourselves and clothing us when we couldn’t clothe ourselves. They were there when we were in the most embarrassing, helpless situations. We were nothing more than animals you know, that they would take care of us. We would cease to exist without their help. And they were there in that state for us. And when they reach a helpless state, what do we do? Put them in an old folk’s home. It’s too hard to deal with them at home, it’s too much work. Their temperament I can’t handle.

See this is great cruelty in our times. And our society, Muslim society understood, the easiest way to earn jannah is be good to your parents. So when they become old, it’s more reason for you to be with them. And in modern times what is it? When they become old, it’s more reason for you to get away. You know, stay away, let’s move to another state, I don’t want to be around my parents because they will keep calling every day. That’s a good thing they keep calling, because if they annoy you congratulations, you’re fulfilling the ayah and you’re no saying uff. You can say to Allah, I didn’t say uff. Allah is giving you an opportunity to fulfil his word. So don’t think of it as something to complain about. Think of it as something to be grateful for.

And finally we end with the ayah, “**Rabbukum aalamu bima nufusi kum**” – Your Lord, He knows best what you have in yourselves. And this word is usually used in terms of secret. Meaning on our tongue and to ourselves we can even lie, we can say yes I take care of my parents, you don’t have to tell me all this, you’re preaching to the choir. I already do my job. But deep down inside you know that you are doing something bad. That you’re not doing enough. You and I know. Only one who knows that is you though, if someone else asks, you can I’m doing my job, I’m doing enough. I fulfilled my requirements. But Allah says, Allah knows best what is inside your nufus.

“**Inn takunu saliheen**” – If in fact you really are righteous in this context, in regards to this matter. If in fact you’re doing the right thing with your parents in the context of the ayah. “**Fa innahu kana lill awwabina ghafoora**” – For those who come clean, awwab is the one who comes clean before Allah, admits his sins and makes tawbah. So if you want to be clean with Allah subhana wa taa’la, come clean and say you know what I messed up so far. I’m coming back to Allah az wajjal and I’m promising, I’m making a resolution, a Ramadan resolution. Who needs a new year’s resolution? I’m making a Ramadan resolution to correct my relationship with my parents and be the best I possibly can with them. If I make that then Allah says, for those people Allah has always been exceedingly forgiving. Meaning Allah subhana wa taa’la is still willing to overlook our flaw and is still willing to forgive us if we come clean to Him. If we admit to ourselves first that we have missed out on taking care of our parents. And then do everything we can for them.

Now final piece of advice on this subject In sha Allah wa taa’la, especially for young brothers and sisters. A lot of times you have situations where you’re angry at your parents. Especially in our society here, right. The best thing to do, to tackle that situation is actually to do the opposite. Execute your anger by doing something extra for your parents. Buy your mother some flowers, vaccum her room, do the laundry without being asked. Don’t say (the younger guys) I clean up my room, you’re not doing that for her. That’s for you. Clean up their room, take the car to the car wash, and go do the groceries from your own money. Do something for them, something extra for them. Especially when they are extra mad at you. Even when you think that they are wrong and you’re right. Even then do something extra for them. And this will build inside you a high level of character. It’ll build inside you sabr and it’ll build inside you forbearance and it’ll build inside you good respect for your parents.

And in turn Allah will soften their hearts towards you. That’s the other thing, if you respond to your mothers angry comments with anger, there’s no way you’re ever going to win. She’s going to say, oh you’re so smart, fine you know what I’m sorry I didn’t realise I raised a smarter child than myself, you’re the best. You know you want me to forgive you; you want me to apologize to you. And she’s going to put herself down. And that’s the worst thing you want. That’s the last thing you want. So put yourself below, lower your wings. Humble yourself. Allah tells us, the believers, to come to other believers with humility. Than imagine our parents. We have to be extremely extremely humble to our parents. Knowing full well that they will probably say things that no one else will dare say to you. They will say them to you because they know they can get away with it.

I was bugged by kids. I’ll tease my kid’s, it’s just a force of habit. I’ll just tease them because I can. I can’t do with other people’s kids. They’ll say abba stop! But I won’t stop because I don’t have to. So yeah parents will say things to test you, to poke you. But that’s just part of the perks of being your parent, let them. You have to learn to deal with it. You have to learn to still smile in their face and that’s a good son and that’s a god daughter. May Allah az wajjal make us good sons and daughters and grant us good sons and daughters.

Assalamualaikum wa rahmatullah.