

ANSWER

وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا إِمَّا يَبْلُغَنَّ عِنْدَكَ الْكِبَرَ أَحَدُهُمَا أَوْ كِلَاهُمَا فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا
كَرِيمًا

And do good to parents. If either of them or both reach old age, do not say to them 'uff' (a word of anger or contempt) and do not scold them. And address them with respectful words [17:23]

COMMENTARY

It is very important to respect and obey parents

Imām al-Qurtubī says that, in this verse (23), Allah Ta'ālā has made it necessary (*wājib*) to respect and treat parents well by combining it with the command to worship Him. This is similar to what has been said in Sūrah Luqmān where the inevitable need to thank Him has been combined with the need to thank one's parents: **(Be grateful to Me, and to your parents - 31:14)**. This proves that, after the obligation of worshipping the most exalted Allah, obeying parents is most important and being grateful to parents like being grateful to Allah Ta'ālā is *wājib* (necessary). This has its confirmation in the Hadīth of Saḥīh al-Bukhārī here a person reportedly asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ: "Which is the most favored deed in the sight of Allah?" He said, "Salah at its (*mustahabb*: preferred) time." The person asked again, "Which is the most favored deed after that?" To that he said, "Treating parents well." (Qurtubī)

Some other important instructions relating to the old age of parents have also been given in the verses under study. They are as follows:

1. Do not say even 'uff' to them. Briefly explained parenthetically in the accompanying translation as 'a word of anger or contempt,' 'uff' covers every word or expression that shows one's displeasure. The limit is that breathing a long breath after having heard what they said and thereby betraying displeasure against them is also included under this very word 'uff.' In a Hadīth narrated by Sayyidnā 'Alī radi'allāhu 'anhu, it has been reported that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, "Had there been some other degree of hurting lesser than the saying of 'uff,' that too would have certainly been mentioned." (The sense is that even the thing that hurts parents in the lowest of the low degree is forbidden).
2. Do not scold them: This is the second instruction. The word: (*nahr*) in the text: means 'scold' or 'reproach.' That it causes pain is already obvious.
3. Address them with respectable words. This is the third instruction. The first two instructions related to the negative aspects where bringing the least emotional pressure on parents has been prohibited. Given in this third instruction is a lesson in the art of conversation with parents - talk to them softly with love, grace and concern for them. Says the revered Tābi'ī, Sa'īd ibn Mussaiyyab, 'like a slave talking to his strict master!'

The merits of obeying and serving parents in Hadīth narratives

1. In the Musnad of Ahmad, Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and Mustadrak Hākim, it has been reported on sound authority from Sayyidnā Abū 'd-Dardā' *radi'allāhu 'anhū* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, *"A father is the main gate of Jannah. Now it is up to you to preserve or waste it."* (Mazharī)
2. According to a report from Sayyidnā Abdullāh ibn 'Umar *radi'allāhu 'anhū* appearing in Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī and al-Mustadrak of al-Hākim (which Hākim rates as Sahīh), the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, *"The pleasure of Allah is in the pleasure of a father and the displeasure of Allah in the displeasure of a father."*
3. Ibn Mājah reports on the authority of Sayyidnā Abū Umāmah *radi'allāhu 'anhū* that a person asked the Holy Prophet ﷺ, *"What rights do parents have on their children?"* He said, *"They both are your Paradise, or Hell."* It means that obeying and serving parents take one to Jannah and their disobedience and displeasure, to Jahannam.
4. Al Baihaqī (in Shu'ab al-Īmān) and Ibn 'Asākir have reported on the authority of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās *radi'allāhu 'anhū* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, *"For one who remained obedient to his parents for the sake of Allah two gates of Paradise shall remain open. And for one who disobeyed them two gates of Hell shall remain open, and if he had just one of the two, either father or mother, then, one gate (of Paradise or Hell shall remain open)."* Thereupon, someone asked, *"Does it (the warning of Hell) hold good even when the parents have been unjust to this person?"* Then he said thrice: (in nearest meaning) *'yes, there is that warning of Hell against disobeying and hurting parents even if they were unjust to the son.'* (The outcome is that children have no right to settle scores with parents. If they have been unjust, it does not follow that they too back out from obeying and serving them).
5. Al-Baihaqī has reported on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās *radi'allāhu 'anhū* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, *"An obedient son who looks at his parents with mercy and affection receives the reward of one accepted Hajj against every such look cast."* People around said, *"What if he were to look at them like that a hundred times during the day?"* He said, *"Yes, a hundred times too (he will keep receiving that reward). Allah is great (His treasures never run short)."*

The punishment for depriving parents of their rights comes - much before Akhirah - right here in this world too

In Shu'ab al-Īmān, al-Baihaqī has reported on the authority of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr *radi'allāhu 'anhū* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ said, *"As for all those other sins, Allah Ta'ala defers whichever He wills up to the Last Day of Qiyamah - except the sin of depriving parents of their rights and disobeying them. The punishment for that is given, much before comes the Hereafter, right here in this world as well."*

(All Hadīth reports given here have been taken from Tafsīr Mazharī)

Obedience to parents: When necessary and when there is room for opposition

Muslim scholars and jurists unanimously hold that the obedience to parents is *wājib* (necessary) only in

what is permissible - and definitely not in what is impermissible or sinful. Says the Hadīth: *There is no obedience to the created in the disobedience of the Creator.*

A remarkable event

Al-Qurtubī has reported from Sayyidnā Jābir ibn ‘Abdullāh *radi‘allāhu ‘anhu* that a man came to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and complained that his father was taking away what belonged to him. He said, “Go and ask your father to come here.” Right then, came Sayyidnā Jibrā’īl alayhis salām, and told the Holy Prophet ﷺ, “When his father comes, ask him about the words he has composed in his heart and which his own ears have not heard yet.”

When this man returned with his father, he said to the father, “Why is it that your son complains against you? Do you wish to take away what belongs to him?” The father said, “You better ask him on whom do I spend other than his paternal or maternal aunts or myself?” The Holy Prophet ﷺ said: **ايه** (an expression which denoted that he had understood the reality and there was no need to say anything else).

After that, he asked the father of the man, “What are those words that have not yet been heard by your own ears?” The father said, “O Rasūlullāh, Allah Ta‘ālā increases our faith in you through everything.” Thereby he meant that he got to know what was not heard by anyone, which was a miracle indeed.

Then, he submitted, “It is true that I had composed some lines of poetry within my heart, something not heard even by my own ears.” The Holy Prophet ﷺ said, “Let us hear them.” Then he recited the following lines of poetry he had composed:

غَدَوْتُكَ مَوْلُودًا وَ مُنْتُكَ يَافِعَا
تُعَلُّ بِمَا أَجَنِي عَلَيْكَ وَ تَنْهَلُ

*I fed you in childhood and took care of you when young.
You lived on my earnings alone.*

إِذَا لَيْلَةً ضَافَتْكَ بِالسَّقَمِ لَمْ أَبْتَ
لِسَقَمِكَ إِلَّا سَاهَرًا أَتَمَلَمَلُ

*When on some night, you became sick,
I spent the whole night remaining awake and restless because of your sickness*

كَأَنِّي أَنَا الْمَطْرُوقُ دُونَكَ بِالذِّي
طَرِقَتْ بِهِ دُونِي فَعَيْنِي تَهْمَلُ

*As if your sickness was my own and not yours
and because of which my eyes kept shedding tears throughout the night*

تَخَافُ الرَّدَى نَفْسِي عَلَيْكَ وَانْهَافَا
لَتَعْلَمَ اِنْ الْمَوْتَ وَقْتُ مُؤَجَّلَا

*My heart kept trembling lest something happens to you,
though I knew that the time of death is fixed, being neither early nor late*

فَلَمَّا بَلَغْتَ السِّنَّ وَالْغَايَةَ الَّتِي
اِلَيْهَا مَدَى مَا كُنْتَ فِيكَ اُوْمِّلَا

*So, when you reached the age and maturity
that I had always been looking forward to*

جَعَلْتَ جَزْأِي غِلْظَةً وَفِظَافَةً
كَأَنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْمُنْعَمُ الْمَتَفَضِّلَا

*Then you made hard-heartedness and harshness my return
as if you were the one doing me favors and giving me rewards*

فَلَيْتَكَ اِذَا لَمْ تَرَعْ حَقَّ اَبَوْتِي
فَعَلْتَ كَمَا الْجَارُ الْمَصَاقِبُ يَفْعَلَا

*Alas, if it was not possible for you to fulfill my right as a father,
you could have at the least done what a good neighbor would have done*

فَاَوْلَيْتَنِي حَقَّ الْجَوَارِ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ
عَلَيَّ بِمَالٍ دُونَ مَالِكَ تَبْخُلَا

*So, you could have given me the least right of a neighbor and
abstained from becoming miserly in my case in my own property.*

After having heard these verses of poetry, the Holy Prophet ﷺ held the son by his shirt and said,
(meaning that): *Go. You and your property, everything belongs to your father.* (Tafsīr al-Qurtubī, p. 246, V. 10)

End.

