

12 Orphans & Widows

All of us must face the fact that at some time people we love will die, as will we. None of us live as immortals on this earth.

Many of us lose our parents early in life. In the West, an immature girl does not consider herself an orphan until she loses both parents. However Quranically she becomes an orphan when her father dies, as we saw in Chapter 3 when discussing polygamy. We looked at Verse 4:3 then, but let me repeat the first phrase here:

If you deem it best for the orphans, you may marry their mothers....
(*Quran: The Final Testament 4:3*)

Thus God shows us children become orphans when they lose their fathers. This makes sense because if we follow the Quran, the father provides for the family and acts as the protector. He very often sets the basic tone of the family, because as we saw in Chapter 8, he has charge of his family. Of course, he needs to consult with his wife, and also his children. Though he makes the final decisions, he must treat the members of his family in the best possible manner as Verse 17:53 says.

Losing any family member brings pain in almost all circumstances. But losing my parents hurt more than losing my older sister or grandparents, cousins, aunts, or uncles. I suspect most people find this true because God used our parents to bring us into this world. That does not diminish the importance of the rest of the family, but it highlights the importance of our parents. God stresses this importance in a number of verses. For example, the beginning portion of Verse 6:151 puts honoring our parents right after the critical commandment prohibiting idolatry:

Say, "Come let me tell you what your Lord has really prohibited for you: You shall not set up idols besides Him. You shall honor your parents...."
(*Quran: The Final Testament 6:151*)

In many chapters of this book, parents play a special role. They have unique obligations and rights given in the Quran. We saw in Chapter 4 they belong to the first category among those we must regard (please see Verse 4:36). The Quran's verses in my Chapter 11 on divorce mention the various roles they play in that painful process (please see Verses 2:233 and 4:35). My next chapter will show the roles parents play in inheritance. Chapter 14 will discuss that when we bear witness, we must be truthful, even against our parents. And in Chapter 18, on the obligatory charity, we will see that we must give this first to our parents if they need it.

The loss of either parent brings pain. However, in my own case, the time I spent with my mother as she slowly transitioned from life, going into the hereafter, brought great healing. It also brought pain but during the time I spent with my younger sister in a hospice room with my mother I could feel the mutual love among us fill the room. It remains one of my most treasured memories of my mother. Though she never came out of her coma, caused by a massive stroke, I am certain she remained present on some level and shared her love with us both.

My father's death occurred several years later. This time my experience with death did not last long because his wonderful caregiver somehow lost my new phone number. She could not reach me over the weekend to tell me an ambulance had taken "Daddy", as we called him, to the hospital. I did not know until I went into work Monday morning. By the time I rushed to his bedside he had been in the process of dying for quite a long time.

Just after I got to his bedside, one of the volunteer hospice workers came in to speak to me and offer her condolences and help. When I turned back to my father he had already left his body.

I started crying, afraid he could no longer hear me as I told him how much I loved him. I kissed his cheek, knowing he was no longer there, but desperate to communicate my love to him. For years after I felt guilty that I had not reached him in time to really say goodbye and to let him know how much I loved him.

I learned recently the last sense to stop functioning at death is our hearing. This comforted me more than I can say for I believe I did not get there too late after all.

If you have had a similar experience with a dying loved one, I hope this knowledge will comfort you too. If you have not had to deal directly with the death of someone you love yet, please do remember they will still hear you longer than it might appear.

With the passing of my father, I became what some consider to be an "adult orphan", like the countless other humans who have suffered the same loss. This concept of adult orphans may only exist in the United States and became popular quite recently as an article (dated April 21, 2019) by Steven Petrow on the Washington Post website demonstrates¹. However, it seems that when the Quran speaks of orphans it is speaking of children who have not yet matured.

The prophet Muhammad was orphaned as a child himself so he probably related to the over twenty verses of the Quran which speak about orphans. Of course, most of us will also deal with this loss but after we have matured.

God tells us needy orphans should receive some of our charity in Verses 2:177, 2:215, 4:8, 8:41, 59:7, 76:8, and 90:14-15.

For those who take over the responsibility of raising orphans, the Quran tells us in the first portion of Verse 2:220:

.... They ask you about the orphans: say, "Bringing them up as righteous persons is the best you can do for them. If you mix their property with yours, you shall treat them as family members."

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:220)

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/when-my-parents-died-a-few-months-apart-a-friend-said-now-youre-an-orphan-too-but-i-was-59/2019/04/19/e7f365c8-5632-11e9-8ef3-fbd41a2ce4d5_story.html - (last accessed 3/10/2021).

Once orphans have reached maturity then the responsibility changes to making sure that they receive their properties (4:2)

Looking a bit farther in the same chapter we see the following:

Do not give immature orphans the properties that God has entrusted with you as guardians. You shall provide for them therefrom, and clothe them, and treat them kindly. You shall test the orphans when they reach puberty. As soon as you find them mature enough, give them their property. Do not consume it extravagantly in a hurry, before they grow up. The rich guardian shall not charge any wage, but the poor guardian may charge equitably. When you give them their properties, you shall have witnesses. God suffices as Reckoner.

(Quran: The Final Testament 4:5-6)

God also warns us against the misuse of the orphans' property, saying such misuse will be punished in Hell:

Those who consume the orphans' properties unjustly, eat fire into their bellies, and will suffer in Hell.

(Quran: The Final Testament 4:10)

Verse 6:152 reiterates that warning as do Verses 17:34 and 89:19.

In my Chapter 3, we saw in Verse 4:3 marrying the mothers of orphans gives the only reason stated in the Quran for polygamy. Verse 4:127 tells us orphaned girls must receive their appropriate dowry. That verse goes on to say Muslims must respect the rights of all orphans, both male and female.

In the Quran's Chapter 18 we have the story of Moses and his teacher. In the last part of that story, Moses objects to his teacher not asking for a wage when he fixed a collapsing wall. That objection was the last chance for Moses who had promised not to question his teacher. But before he left, the teacher explained:

"As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city. Under it, there was a treasure that belonged to them. Because their father was a righteous man, your Lord wanted them to grow up and attain full strength, then extract their treasure. Such is mercy from your Lord. I did none of that of my own volition. This is the explanation of the things you could not stand."

(Quran: The Final Testament 18:82)

I share this story because it shows to what extent God wants us to safeguard the rights of orphans. We cannot tamper with their rights in any manner without serious consequences as we saw in many of the verses listed above.

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Unlike becoming adult orphans, not all women will become widows. Though overall more men die at an earlier age than women, it does not always happen. But when a woman does lose her spouse, she loses the helpmate she married with such hope and love. Then society calls her a widow.

This loss is just as painful as the loss of one's parents and perhaps even more painful. Each of us expects our parents will die before us. But with our spouses, this may or may not happen. Perhaps we will die first.

The pain of loss may intensify for a widow with dependent children. She must deal with her own pain and also the pain of her children. Plus she may need to cope with a reduction of funds. This adds the burden of changing the family's lifestyle to a more economical one. That can leave her grieving over her husband's death and also the loss of the comfort they had enjoyed together. It becomes a bitter dilemma for many widows, as the number of novels written on this theme indicates.

God provides great relief for widows through His commandments in the Quran. Like orphans, the Quran mentions widows, though far less frequently. The main verses on them appear below.

God tells widows that they need to wait long enough before marrying again to ensure that they are not pregnant. This makes it clear who fathered the child. It also means a man will not marry a widow without knowing that she carries her previous husband's child:

Those who die and leave wives, their widows shall wait four months and ten days (before they remarry). Once they fulfill their interim, you commit no error by letting them do whatever righteous matters they wish to do. God is fully Cognizant of everything you do.

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:234)

God commands husbands to leave a will to provide support for their widows:

Those who die and leave wives, a will shall provide their wives with support for a year, provided they stay within the same household. If they leave, you commit no sin by letting them do whatever they wish, so long as righteousness is maintained. God is Almighty, Most Wise

(Quran: The Final Testament 2:240).

So for a year, a widow has the Quranic guarantee of a home and support. By the end of the year, God willing, she will have found other means of support and a new home, or perhaps she will have returned to her parents' home. In any case, we know God provides for us all and a widow is no exception.

We already saw the verse where the Quran deals specifically with widows in Chapter 3 on polygamy. I repeat it here:

If you deem it best for the orphans, you may marry their mothers—you may marry two, three, or four. If you fear lest you become unfair, then you shall be content with only one, or with what you already have. Additionally, you are thus more likely to avoid financial hardship.

(Quran: The Final Testament 4:3)

Widows must be treated with careful regard. God does not desert anyone. As He does for any of us, He will always be there for righteous widows—provide for them, heal them, comfort them, and help them.

In my many years as a Quranic Muslim, I have known several widows. In one case, the sister had been in a polygamous marriage where she had agreed to keep the marriage secret. Her mourning had to stay private and though it took a number of years, she eventually remarried into a very happy new marriage.

Most of the Muslim widows I know did not have the difficulties of that sister, but losing one's spouse will always remain painful no matter what the circumstances. All of them have required time to heal the pain of loss, but eventually, they have all been able to move on with their lives and return to their normal selves. Most have found great satisfaction in the rest of their lives, whether or not they remarried. Most had children and eventually grandchildren to help heal the emotional loss of their spouse, and most had meaningful activities that they began or returned to after their period of mourning.

All married women have the possibility of encountering the same sorrows as my widowed Muslim sisters. Strengthening our personal connection with God and trying to become as self-sufficient as we can without neglecting our husbands while they still live, seem the major things we can do to prepare for our spouse's death. If we can do that, I believe we have done what we also need to do to grow our own souls in preparation for our return to God, the Merciful Creator.

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Becoming an orphan will always retain a good amount of pain, no matter who you are. For many women, talking about or writing about that pain helps to lessen it. Here sister LK shares her experience of becoming an adult orphan.

Becoming an Adult Orphan

Orphan! The word conjures up images of Oliver Twist, helpless boys and girls, grim hostile places, cruel indifferent caretakers. We know that's not true. Modern facilities for orphans are as much like home as possible, with caring staff and volunteers.

Still, the negative image came to mind when my father died and I used the word "orphan" on myself. Never mind that I was inheriting a tidy sum or that I was almost 50 years old. I was far from helpless, had a good life and a bright future.

But I guess it doesn't really matter how old you are or what your circumstances are. When your parents die, you become an orphan. The major realization for me was that now I was at the top of the generational chain. With my Mom and Dad alive, there was a layer between me and the end of life. That was now gone. It simply made me more aware of my own mortality.

And that made me more aware of the Hereafter and what I would need to do to make it to Paradise. It also made me more thankful of the time I had had with my parents and more conscious of those less fortunate, those who lose their parents early or never know their parents, those who need the loving care of foster families or adoption. May God reward those who open up their homes to children in need. We all need to be kind and generous to orphans.

[2:215] *They ask you about giving: say, “The charity you give shall go to the parents, the relatives, the orphans, the poor, and the traveling alien.” Any good you do, God is fully aware thereof.*

[76:8] *They donate their favorite food to the poor, the orphan, and the captive.*

[93:9] *Therefore, you shall not forsake the orphan.*

—LK, U.S.A.

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Not all parents have given birth to their children. Many wonderful souls have taken on the care of orphans or children whose biological parents cannot take proper care of them. Connie, one such amazing sister, tells her story here.

Raising Kids Was My Choice

A child doesn't have to be biologically yours for you to love them like your own.

—Unknown author

Raising kids was my choice, with God's blessings. I consider kids a gift from Him, so I decided to be a foster mom.

I never thought I would adopt my first foster child, for when she went home to her mom, it hurt me very much that she went. But things did not work out, so she was returned to me. The social workers decided that if her mom did not improve her situation, the baby would be put up for adoption. That is when I decided to adopt her. I put everything in God's hands and didn't know whether or not it was going to happen. Her mom could change the situation for herself and get her baby and her other children back. So for a whole year I waited until the time came for me to adopt her.

It is all God's will that He blessed me with my other two daughters who were foster children too. When you go to adopt, the judge will ask you if you will raise them as if they are your own. I said yes!

It always bothered me when people would ask me how I could raise other people's children. To be honest, I'm not sure what answer I gave them. As a Muslim my thoughts were that God put these gifts in my life.

It has not been easy, for they were born to drug addict moms and that affects a child. They all have problems—physical, mental, emotional and sometimes they just can't help themselves. I have always told my kids it is ok to be weird; everybody is weird they just won't admit it. I am weird and everybody has issues. But this is also God testing you and the other person.

Adopted children have a hard time about why they can't be with their real families. I tell my kids that their parents had problems we don't know about; but it was

not their fault and for their safety they were taken away from their parents. I told my kids when they turned eighteen that I would help each of them search for their family. For now my older children are not interested in finding their families yet, even though I have asked them. If they ask me I will be glad to help them.

I also believe that God gave children the names on their Adoption Birth Certificate. This shows the name their parents gave them and the parents' last name. I just added a middle name if they did not have one and my last name. That was to follow this verse:

You shall give your adopted children names that preserve their relationship to their genetic parents. This is more equitable in the sight of God....
(Quran: The Final Testament 33:5)

My daughters are blessings, and I like to think of them as gifts from God.

—Connie, U.S.A.

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All married sisters may become widows. For some, life as a widow leaves them full of sorrow. But others handle it differently, as the following story shows.

Embracing Life and Death

I was still a teenager when I got married. This was my father's decision and choice. Because our families were close friends and he knew my spouse and his family he thought that this would be a good choice for me. I decided to accept what I thought was going to be an ordinary marriage without love. However, Mohsen's loving, kind and righteous behavior attracted me to him and before long I was in love with him. After we had all our kids, he wanted to move to the United States for the sake of our children's education. I was concerned that it might not be a good fit for me because of my religious beliefs and practices. However, I agreed and we moved to the United States. Initially it was challenging to be away from my family and friends however the abundant love and kindness of my husband filled my heart so I didn't feel the void of my loved ones in Iran. Gradually we were able to form good meaningful friendships. Additionally, my big concern regarding my faith was resolved in the best possible way: I received a message supported by mathematical and scientific proofs that there is one universal religion for all people regardless of their name. I was filled with joy and felt closer to God. By following this message that there is only one God and Creator and worshipping Him alone I have found true peace and happiness and established good relationships with people of various faiths. By following this path, I have also come to know my true self.

After many years of a happy marriage we suddenly found out that my husband had a terminal illness. I was amazed at how gracefully he accepted this news and was at peace with it in the few months that remained of his life. His faith came to life as he willingly submitted to the will of his Creator. For my dear husband, the time around his

passing was very special and spiritual. Close family and friends were there and we were commemorating God and singing God’s praises. I felt the presence of the angels that had come to take his soul. This experience has transformed my perspective toward life and death. I always thought that it would be hard for me to live without him. However because I knew that he has gone to a much better place since he was a righteous believer I did not want to grieve because of my loss. My happiness for him was greater than the sadness of being away from him. I am also grateful to God for a good life with him filled with peace, joy, love and good memories that I still cherish.

At the recommendation of family members I participated in a class for widows. Most of them were still grieving after months. After a few sessions the teacher said that my perspective on life and death, which I shared in the class had a positive impact on the other widows. Indeed knowing the purpose of life—which is to grow our souls so we will enjoy being in God’s presence when we leave this life—and death—which is simply returning to the divine presence—has helped me to tolerate the loss of my dear Mohsen.

—*Pari, Iran & U.S.A.*

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This afternoon I spent over an hour on the phone with an old friend and sister of my heart. Earlier this week her husband “transitioned into the next life” as she beautifully explained it. Like Pari, whose story you just read, Sayyidah’s experience was a loving and beautiful one, though of course, it was not easy. Losing earthly contact with someone with whom God has blessed you for many years probably can never be easy for most women. But that does not mean that it must feel like a tragedy or the end of one’s happiness. Rather it can act as a doorway into new understanding of God and His wonderful system for mankind.

We have already discussed how the body forms a garment for the soul, but now I would like to try and share how seeing that garment disintegrate for someone you love provides a new platform for experiencing our Creator, for He never leaves us. God always holds us in His loving protection and support, at least if we seek that protection and support. Unlike the beautiful humans He blesses our lives with, God never leaves us and He is always worthy of our trust, our thanks, honor, and appreciation. He is the source of all good.

As you will read in the next chapter, I continue to sense the bonds or ties of love with my dear ones who have gone into the next stage of life, which we call death. We call it death, but in truth, for those who have lived righteously, they just move into a different but lovely dimension where time has a different meaning. There they pass what feels to them like a very short time until, God willing, we join them again.