

## Mother in Islamic Culture

Farid Younos

Every year, on the month May, the world celebrates Mother's Day, emphasizing the role, significance and position of a mother in our family life, and pays gratitude, respect and admiration to her.

Islam, as one of the three monotheistic religions of the world, before it sees a mother from a biological perspective giving birth to a child, it sees her as a strong spiritual and social source and entity that originates the real existence of the world-order due to her effort, struggle, labor, and natural compassion via worshipping God. The word "Umm" (Mother) in Arabic, as well as in Islamic literature, has a broader meaning, emphasizing the role that a mother plays not only in world social order, but also, the very existence of the mother as a noble being within the social context. That is why there is the following names and attributes attached to the word of "Umm": The first chapter of the Qur'an is called "Umm al Kitab," (The mother of the book). "Umm al Balad," (The mother of the Cities), "Umm al Mumineen," (The mother of the Believers). So we can see that in Islamic lexicography, the word "mother" plays a larger and more significant role socially, culturally and politically. The mother is not only meant to bear a child and to nourish and cherish it, but also her role determines the world social order. That is why the Qur'an placed men and women equal in creation, family, and society. In the creation of mankind, the Qur'an clearly says "O mankind! Revere your Guardian Lord who created you from a single soul" (Qur'an 4:1). In the family, the Qur'an says "They are your garments and you are their garments" ( Qur'an 2:187), and in the society , the Qur'an says, "Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be male or female" (Qur'an 3:195). The mother, being the origin of the social order, has given a special place in human existence as well as in her interactions in social and cultural dynamics of any social experience. For example, in the beginning of creation, Islam rejected the Biblical contention that it was the woman (the first mother) who was deceived and thus was the cause of the fall of Adam. According to the Qur'an it was the disobedience of both by the Satan, not just Eve. The Qur'an has given Mary the mother of Jesus (pbuh) an extraordinary position where God communicated to her and gave her the news of her son before she became a biological mother. Hager, the wife of Abraham, proved to humanity that she was not only a mother, but also a strong social force where felicity, happiness and achievement are only possible with the worship of God alone. The Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (pbuh), declared that paradise is under the foot of a mother. Once he was asked by his disciples who were due for the best service in performing good deeds. He replied, "Your mother". They asked him again who was next to that, and he again replied, "Your mother", and the disciples asked for a third time who was next, to which he once again responded, "Your mother". They persisted and asked him for a fourth time, and then he said, "Your father". All this indicates that a mother in Islam has a very special place not only because she is the mother of her children, but a strong social force who makes history. She is the maker of our societies. That is why we say behind every successful man there is a woman. Once she gets married whether to have a child or not, she plays her role in history. We should remember that the beloved wife of the Prophet of Islam, A'isha, who was recorded in history of Islam as the First Teacher, did not have a child but was called umm al Mumineen, the mother of the believers, because she was a history maker. Therefore,

when Muslims celebrate May 8, it is not only to express their gratitude to their mothers for what they do as mothers in the family, but also to celebrate a being that constantly makes history and revitalizes the social system.

*Dr Farid Younos is Professor of cultural anthropology of the Middle East and Islamic philosophy at California State University East Bay.*

© Farid Younos