

وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ ٥

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فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ ٩

And your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied.

Did He not find you an orphan and give [you] refuge?

And He found you lost and guided [you],

And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient.

So as for the orphan, do not oppress [him].

Surah Doha 93:5-9

I want to share a story with you about a Pakistani family from Bradford. Henna at the age of 15 lived with her mother and siblings. Her mother and father separated due to domestic violence. Her mother suffered years of abuse at the hands of her drug-addicted father. Because of her mother's severe depression, Henna had to take care of her siblings and eventually, social services got involved and placed Henna and her siblings in foster care. However, all of them got separated. Henna was placed in a mixed foster home with teenage males who were non-mahrams. She started smoking and drinking and spending time with bad company. Her brother and sisters also ended up in non-Muslim foster houses. Who was there to look out for Henna?

We are answerable as a community for neglecting the protection of vulnerable children like Henna - who will protect their faith and identity?

Sadly today, children are losing their faith once they are taken into care. Children feel uncomfortable practising their religion in non-Muslim houses and often lose their faith identity and follow examples contrary to Islamic practise. If we don't give them a home, then who will? We must also support non-Muslim carers to better understand Islam.

Sadly, the facts are shocking:

- **Over 4000 Muslim living in care**, many are living with Non-Muslim carers
- **In 2018, 4,250 unaccompanied refugee children living in care mainly from Muslim countries** Sudan, Eritrea, Albania, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Syria
- **There is an urgent need for more Muslim foster carers.** As an example, statistics from Rotherham in March 2019 highlighted the need for 53 Muslim children in care but there were only 3 Muslim families available.
- The greatest need being for foster carers is for **older children, sibling groups, special needs and unaccompanied refugee children.**

But why should we foster or adopt a child?

Ibn Majah in a hadith said "The best house among the Muslims is one where an orphan is well treated, and the worst house among the Muslim is one where an orphan is badly treated" .

Our beloved Messenger (SAW) is reported as saying, as recorded by Imam Bukhari(rh) in al-adab al-Mufrad(137)

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Abu Hurayra reported that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "The best house among the Muslims is the house in which orphans are well treated. The worst house among the Muslims is the house in which orphans are ill-treated. I and the guardian of the orphan will be in the Garden like that," indicating his two fingers.

This latter statement is found in Sahih Bukhari as well, where the Prophet(SAW) said ***ana wa kaafilul yateemi fil Jannah kahaatayn.***

Have we forgotten that the Prophet(SAW) was also an orphan? He was the only son of Abd Allah ibn Al-Muttalib and Amina bint Wahb. **Abd Allah died before Muhammad's birth** and Muhammad was raised by his mother Amina, who in keeping with Meccan tradition entrusted her son at an early age to a wet nurse named Halima from the nomadic tribe of the Sa'd ibn Bakr. He grew up in the hill country, learning their pure Arabic.

When Muhammad (SAW) was **5 or 6** his mother took him to Yathrib, an oasis town a few hundred miles north of Mecca, to stay with relatives and visit his father's grave there. On the return journey, Amina was taken ill and died. She was buried in the village of Abwa on the road leading to Makkah. Halima, his nurse, returned to Mecca with the orphaned boy and placed him in the protection of his paternal grandfather, Abdul Al-Muttalib. When his grandfather passed away, he was about **8 years old** and he was then fostered by his uncle Abu Taalib.

Later in his life, our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) fostered children and also encouraged his uncle Al-Abbass to do the same. The Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib was struggling to support his own children, so the Prophet (SAW), took responsibility for looking after Ali ibn abi Talib (RA) and this was before he(SAW) became a Messenger. At the same time, he encouraged Abbass(RA) to take care of Jaf'ar ibn abi Talib.

After he became a Prophet, he (SAW) continued this good practice. Imam at-Tabari reports in his seerah, Zayd ibn Harithah was a young child who was kidnapped from his family and sold into slavery. He was purchased by a merchant of Mecca, Hakim ibn Hizam, who gave the boy as a present to his aunt, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. Zayd remained in her possession until the day she married Muhammad when she gave the slave as a wedding present to her bridegroom. Muhammad became very attached to Zayd, to whom he referred as al-Ḥabīb (meaning, the Beloved).

Some years later, some members of Zayd's tribe happened to arrive in Mecca on pilgrimage. They encountered Zayd and recognised each other, and he asked them to take a message home. On receiving this message, Zayd's father and uncle immediately set out for Mecca. They found Muhammad (SAW) at the Kaaba and promised him any ransom if he would return Zayd to them. Muhammad replied that Zaid should be allowed to choose his fate, but that if he wished to return to his family, Muhammad would release him without accepting any ransom in exchange. They called for Zayd, who easily recognised his father and uncle, but told them that he did not want to leave Muhammad, "for I have seen something in this

man, and I am not the kind of person who would ever choose anyone in preference to him.”

At this, Muhammad took Zayd to the steps of the Kaaba, where legal contracts were agreed and witnessed, and announced to the crowds: “Witness that Zayd becomes my son, with mutual rights of inheritance.” On seeing this, Zayd’s father and uncle “were satisfied,” and they returned home without him.

It’s worth noting here that even though his father was still alive, Zayd was still taken into care. Similarly, today, children may have been removed from their parents and can be taken into care similarly. But as seen in this situation the father was alive but was too poor to provide for his children.

Many of our greatest scholars including Imam **Shafi’i**, Imam **Bukhari** and Imam **Suyuti** (may Allah have mercy on them all) were also orphans who were well taken care of by a loving and generous community.

Once a person came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and complained of grief and sorrow. The Prophet (ﷺ) advised him to stroke the head of an orphan and told him through this simple act, he will find tranquillity in his heart. From this, we learn that it is not enough to simply feel sympathy for an orphan, but rather the advice of “stroking the head” indicates that **concrete action must be taken**. It refers to actually physically ensuring that the physical, emotional and educational needs of the orphan are well taken care of.

Thus, the question arises as to **how we should practically answer this call** of Our Beloved Habib, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), today. One of the many blessings we have in this country is the ability to take care of children with the support of fostering and adoption agencies and they even cover the costs of the care so that it is not a financial burden upon you or your family.

Interestingly, many of our parent’s generation fostered a child to bring them into this country. And most Muslims will try to support or **sponsor an orphan** abroad. But what about what’s happening on our doorstep in the UK - who’s going to take care of them?

But I already have children and won’t be able to cope?

Ibn Hisham relates in *As-Seera an-Nabawi* - the life of the Prophet(SAW) - that Halima Sa’diyya had 3 boys and 2 girls of her own. This was a year of famine and the family they were destitute. With her husband and children, she rode a dusky she-donkey of hers with an old she-camel which did not yield a drop of milk. They could not sleep the whole night

because of the weeping of their hungry children. She had no milk to give them, nor could their she-camel provide a morning draught, but we were hoping for rain and relief.

They reached Mecca desperate to make an income through fostering a child. There were many other women there too and they quickly flocked to the richer families and none would respond to Amina, the mother of the Prophet(SAW) as they worried that without a father, this orphans mother would not pay as well. Amina narrated that "Every woman who came with me got a suckling except me, and when we decided to depart I said to my husband: "By Allah, I do not like the idea of returning with my friends without a child; I will go and take that orphan." He replied, "Do as you please; perhaps Allah will bless us on his account."

So I went and took him for the sole reason that I could not find anyone else. I took him back to my baggage, and as soon as I put him in my bosom, milk for him to drink overflowed so he drank until he was satisfied, as also did his foster-brother. Then both of them slept, whereas before this we could not sleep with him. My husband got up and went to the old she-camel and to his amazement, her udders were full; he milked it and he and I drank of her milk until we were completely satisfied, and we passed a happy night. In the morning my husband said: "Do you know, Halima, you have taken a blessed child?" I said, "By Allah, I hope so." Then we set out and I was riding my donkey and carrying him with me, and she went at such a pace that the other donkeys could not keep up so that my companions said to me, "Confound you! stop and wait for us. Isn't this the donkey on which you started?" "Certainly it is," I said. They replied, "By Allah, something extraordinary has happened."

Fostering in our times comes with many rewards from Allah(SWT) and we live in a system whereby every child is financially supported as well, so benefit just like the beautiful example of Halima Saadia.

What about them not being mahram?

Islam does outline some rules regarding fostering or adoption.

For one, the child must retain their name and knowledge of their family.

They must also not under any circumstances be led to believe that they are the biological child of the adoptive parents.

The children are not mahram to you as they would be if there was a biological link so hijab must be observed around an adopted boy once he reaches puberty or by an adopted girl around her adoptive father. A lot of people have an issue with this because it seems very

difficult, but Allah (SWT) has provided an answer and makes things easy by making it possible for a child to be made mahram through the act of breastfeeding (suckling) from the adoptive mother (generally considered to be done before 2 years of age).

Repelling an orphan is associated with disbelief

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالذِّينِ

فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ

Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense?

For that is the one who drives away the orphan. [Surah Al-Ma'oon 107:1-2]

Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense? For that is the one who drives away the orphan.

There is a story related by the Prophet(SAW) narrated by Abu Huraira reflecting the importance of sharing our blessings to remain blessed:

Allah willed to test three who were a leper, a blind man and a bald-headed man.

So, he sent them an angel who came to the leper and said, "What thing do you like most?" He replied, "Good color and good skin, for the people have a strong aversion to me." The angel touched him and his illness was cured, and he was given a good color and beautiful skin. The angel asked him, "What kind of property do you like best?" He replied, "Camels (or cows)." (The narrator is in doubt, for either the leper or the bald-headed man demanded camels and the other demanded cows.) So he (i.e. the leper) was given a pregnant she-camel, and the angel said (to him), "May Allah bless you in it."

The angel then went to the bald-headed man and said, "What thing do you like most?" He said, "I like good hair and wish to be cured of this disease, for the people feel repulsion for me." The angel touched him and his illness was cured, and he was given good hair. The angel asked (him), "What kind of property do you like best?" He replied, "Cows." The angel gave him a pregnant cow and said, "May Allah bless you in it."

The angel went to the blind man and asked, 'What thing do you like best?' He said, "(I like) that Allah may restore my eye-sight to me so that I may see the people." The angel touched his eyes and Allah gave him back his eye-sight. The angel asked him, "What kind of property do you like best?" He replied, "Sheep." The angel gave him a pregnant sheep.

Afterwards, all the three pregnant animals gave birth to young ones, and multiplied and brought forth so much that one of the (three) men had a herd of camels filling a valley, and one had a herd of cows filling a valley, and one had a flock of sheep filling a valley.

Then the angel, disguised in the shape and appearance of a leper, went to the leper and said, "I am a poor man, who has lost all means of livelihood while on a journey. So none will satisfy my need except Allah and then you. In the Name of Him Who has given you such nice color and beautiful skin, and so much property, I ask you to give me a camel so that I may reach my destination." The man replied, "I have many obligations (so I cannot give you)." The angel said, "I think I know you; were you not a leper to whom the people had a strong aversion? Weren't you a poor man, and then Allah gave you (all this property)?" He replied, "(This is all wrong), I got this property through inheritance from my forefathers." The angel said, "If you are telling a lie, then let Allah make you as you were before."

Then the angel, disguised in the shape and appearance of a bald man, went to the bald man and said to him the same as he told the first one, and he too answered the same as the first one did. The angel said, "If you are telling a lie, then let Allah make you as you were before."

The angel, disguised in the shape of a blind man, went to the blind man and said, "I am a poor man and a traveller, whose means of livelihood have been exhausted while on a journey. I have nobody to help me except Allah, and after Him, you yourself. I ask you in the Name of Him Who has given you back your eye-sight to give me a sheep, so that with its help, I may complete my journey." The man said, "No doubt, I was blind and Allah gave me back my eye-sight; I was poor and Allah made me rich; so take anything you wish from my property. By Allah, I will not stop you for taking anything (you need) of my property which you may take for Allah's sake." The angel replied, "Keep your property with you. You (i.e., the three men) have been tested and Allah is pleased with you and is angry with your two companions."

[Sahih Bukhari: Volume 4, Book 56 Virtues and Merits of the Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam) and his Companions Number 670]

Foster Friday is taking place today

Foster Friday was started in 2017 by the Muslim Foster Network and is the only dedicated day for raising awareness about fostering in the Muslim community. In the last 2 years, the Muslim Foster Network has supported over 2000 people considering fostering.

Muslim Foster Network is a not for profit organisation and you can find more information about fostering and even register at www.muslimfosternetwork.org.uk

Further reading: [Personal experiences of fostering](#)