PRESERVATION OF THE FAMILY IS THE PROMOTION OF PEACE

by Madame Jehan Sadat

The sanctity of the family is increasingly receiving attacks from many different quarters. As a result, the ability of the family to survive into the next century is being questioned. Considering the conditions being imposed upon parents and their children by poverty, illiteracy, and rapid social changes, I can understand why scholars and ordinary citizens are cynically predicting the extinction of the traditional family. Although I understand this, I will never agree with anyone who says the family is a relic of worn-out virtues and values that can no longer be applied to modern society.

The family today, and as it has been since the creation of Adam and Eve, is the basic element of society. It stands alone in the position of prominence in determining the quality of life. Without God, mankind is lost, and left to wander and stumble blindly in a wilderness of desperation. Only when the relationships between family members are rooted firmly in mutual love, trust, respect, and dignity can the community hope to be strong. If not, no matter how developed or prosperous society is, it is doomed.

To us in Egypt, the center of life is the family, an attitude validated by the depictions of daily activities found on our ancient temple walls and in our museums. From our agrarian background, we developed strong bonds to the land and to family, creating a deep sense of social responsibility prevalent in our modern way of life. No one can grow up in such an atmosphere and become immune to the condition of life for others. As we say in Egypt, “Paradise without people is not worth having.”

When an Egyptian speaks of family, he means the father, mother, children, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and scores of cousins. Everyone is generously welcomed whether by a rich uncle in Cairo or a distant and poor cousin in Aswan. We think of ourselves as one big family. As Egypt continues to develop, the rituals of family life will naturally change. However, we will never allow our ties to the land and to family to be completely broken.

World change need not imply the loss of traditional values nor is progress another word for moral decay. It is not development that jeopardizes values and morality but rather the absence of a strong moral foundation developed foremost in the family. Surely we can enjoy the conveniences of modern life—airplanes and automobiles, computers and cell phones—without losing our sense of values. When we love God, love our families, we can enjoy life without betraying the practices of decency, without betraying the traditions of our culture.

The Holy Book of Islam, the Qur’an, clearly prescribes how we are to treat each other, especially parents. It tells us to obey, respect, and love them, with an attitude of humility and tenderness. Treatment of parents is second only to the worship of God. And mothers hold a very special place. There is a story in my culture that tells of a Muslim who asked the Prophet Mohammed, “Who is most deserving of my compassion?” The Prophet responded, “Your mother.” Mothers are the ones who give us life. They are our first teachers, giving us the lessons and values we will carry for the rest of our lives. Our Prophet said, “Heaven lies at the feet of mothers.”

Behavior in marriage is also addressed in Islam. This relationship between a husband and wife is one of God’s signs; therefore, there should be an atmosphere of peace and quiet, kindness and mercy. The Qur’an states, “Your wives are your inner garments and you are their inner garments.” This does not mean that a spouse is as ordinary as a favorite sweater, but rather each partner is to protect and cover the mistakes of the other. Husband and wife should never expose the deficiencies of the other, but rather complement each other. The foundation of the marriage is nourished by loyalty and love, growing ever stronger with experiences that only time can bring. Husband and wife must work together, in a loving way, in order to bring peace and happiness to the family.

In reference to family values my husband wrote, “I could never turn against or show the least lack of loyalty to my family, since this is in sharp contradiction with the family values I was brought up on—the values that continue to sustain my lifeblood and determine my mental life more effectively than anything else. Indeed, the faith I have in these values deepens day after day, so much that I have come to believe that only adherence to such values can save society . . . .” No matter where I may go in this world, Egypt is my breath and my family is the beating of my heart. The love given me by my children, grandchildren, and Anwar Sadat give me great satisfaction, pride, and happiness. I will leave you with this thought: Preservation of the family is the enactment of God’s will and is, therefore, the promotion of peace that brings the wholeness and happiness of life.

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