

CONSIDERATION FOR NEIGHBOURS

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Prophet Muhammad, may God shower him with His praises, is a man loved by all Muslims. He is honoured and respected by countless others and considered influential in both religious and secular matters. Mahatma Ghandi described him as scrupulous about pledges, intense in his devotion to his friends and followers, intrepid, fearless, and with absolute trust in God and in his own mission. Muslims all around the world consider him the example to follow in their worship of God and in their dealings with others.

The religion of Islam, as taught to us by Prophet Muhammad, urges kind and considerate treatment towards our neighbours. They deserve our respect and good treatment regardless of their religion, race or colour. In a saying narrated by Aisha^[1], a wife of Prophet Muhammad, it is reported that the angel Gabriel insisted that Prophet Muhammad understand the importance of the good treatment of neighbours. Prophet Muhammad said that at one stage he thought the angel Gabriel would bestow inheritance rights on neighbours; such was his insistence on their kind and fair treatment.

Prophet Muhammad's mission was simply to convey the message of God, who clearly commanded the good treatment of neighbours in the Quran.

“Worship God and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet)... Verily, God does not like such as are proud and boastful.” (Quran 4:36)

The men and women around Prophet Muhammad were constantly reminded of their obligations to God and to one another. Prophet Muhammad was often heard to exhort them to do good needs and to remember their obligations. He said, **“Whoever believes in God and the Last Day, let him not harm or annoy his neighbour...”** He also reminded, not only for his companions but for all of us to follow, that a believer in God does not allow his brother or sister to go hungry or live in unfortunate conditions. Today in a time when old people die alone and forgotten, and when our neighbours both near and far go hungry whilst we have food, we would do well to remember the

examples set by our righteous predecessors.

Abu Dhar, one of the close companions, was told by Prophet Muhammad to add extra water to his broth in order to be able to offer some to his neighbours.^[2] Another companion, Abdullah ibn Amr once asked his servant after slaughtering a sheep, “Did you give some to our Jewish neighbour?” A believer is encouraged to give gifts even if they are of little monetary value. The true value of the gift is the generous spirit with which it is given. The giving of gifts encourages friendship and mutual support. When the Prophet’s wife Aisha asked him about what neighbours to send her gifts, he replied, **“To the one whose door is closest to yours”**^[3]. Although the closest neighbours are the ones we should be mindful of in the first instance, Islam urges us to take care of all our neighbours. It is a system that takes into consideration the needs and feelings of others in the greater community.

When one truly understands the teachings of Islam, he or she begins to see that if one member of a community suffers the whole community is in strife. After family, neighbours are the people that we depend on the most in times of strife and calamity, and in times of need. A bad relationship with neighbours can make life miserable. It is important that people who share a neighbourhood be able to trust and rely on each other, regardless of their religion or ethnicity. Neighbours must feel secure that both their honour and wealth are safe. Prophet Muhammad described a good neighbour as one of the joys in a Muslim’s life, he said, **“Among the things that bring happiness to a believer in this life are a righteous neighbour, a spacious house and a good steed”**.^[4] A good neighbour is one who guarantees comfort, security and safety. For this reason it is important that one who believes in obeying God does not spare any effort in being considerate of and generous to the neighbours. Prophet Muhammad warned his companions against harming or upsetting the neighbours.

In a saying^[5] that is as true today as it was 1500 years ago, Prophet Muhammad was asked about a certain woman who prayed and fasted more than was obligatory upon her, and gave generously in charity, but unfortunately, she did not refrain from speaking harshly to her neighbours. He described her as being one of the people of Hell who would be punished for this. In the same saying, he was asked about another woman who fulfilled only her obligatory duties and gave very little in charity, however her neighbours were safe from her harsh tongue and she offended no one. Prophet Muhammad described her as among the people of Paradise. The religion of Islam places great emphasis on the solidarity of families, neighbourhoods and the wider community.

Islam continuously advises the believers to be kind and considerate of neighbours. What happens however if one has a neighbour who behaves badly and does not show the respect inherent in the teachings of Islam? A Muslim is patient and tolerant and does not bare a grudge. A believer strives to mend the broken relationship through good morals and manners and a forgiving attitude in the hope that this will bring about great reward from God. A believer patiently bares the annoyances as much as he or she is able. If the situation becomes intolerable to publicise the bad behaviour may be a last resort.

The Prophet Muhammad once advised a man to gather his belongings in the middle of the road as an indication that he could no longer live beside his neighbour. The “bad neighbour” immediately apologised and begged his neighbour to return.^[6] Nobody likes their bad behaviour to be made public and this is especially true of a Muslim, whose religion requires that he have the highest moral standards. Islam places great emphasis on the qualities of respect, tolerance and forgiveness, and these qualities shown to neighbours is a demonstration of the moral values and virtues inbuilt into the worship of the One True God.

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[2] *Saheeh Muslim*

[3] Ibid.

[4] Reported with a Sahih isnad by *al-Hakim*.

[5] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

[6] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Ibn Habban & Abu Dawood.*

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