

FROM THE MINBAR

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR: A MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE

Khutbah delivered by Imam Dr. Zijad Delic at SNMC on April 27th, 2012 corresponding to Jumadath Thani 6th, 1433 H.

BACKGROUND

Indeed all praise is for God, Lord of the worlds. Peace and blessings of God be upon Muhammad (S), his family, Khulafai Rashidin, all his Companions, and all those who follow in their footsteps until the Last Day. All praise is for God! We praise Him. We seek His help and ask for His forgiveness. We seek God's refuge from evils of ourselves and from our evil actions. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except God, alone, having no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad (S) is His Messenger.

My dear brothers and sisters in Islam ~ *As Salamu 'Alaikum Wa Rahmatullahi Wa Barakatuhu.*

INTRODUCTION

Teachings of Islam tell us that all of humanity originates from one couple, Adam and Eve. Thus we are all brothers and sisters in humanity, and our differences in languages and colors are but a mercy so that we might know one another.

Teachings of Islam can basically, be divided into two parts. The first part is related to the rights of God. It tells what the claim of God is upon human beings and what the duties of human beings are in that regard, and how this claim should be discharged and how the obligations are to be fulfilled (*huququllah*). The second part consists of the teachings related to the rights of people on each other, and the duty they owe to all created beings in general (*huququl 'ibad*). How human being is to fulfill his/her social responsibilities and act towards all individuals or groups or any other creature with whom he/she may come into contact in the different life circumstances or conditions.

The question of the rights of "children of Adam" is vitally important in the sense that if we disregard them, i.e. infringe on rights of anyone or do some other injustice to them, then God Almighty has not kept the forgiving of it in His own hands but has declared that amends are to be made for it in this life by referring back to the persons we have sinned against and to give such persons their due or to seek their pardon, otherwise we will have to repay them in the hereafter, which indeed, will cost us very dearly.

According to the principles of Islam, the sins done towards other people are sins that human beings will have to settle with each other; God will not pass over these sins without doing justice. The mutual wrongs, injuries and violations of rights done by human beings towards each other will surely be repaid. Simply put, sins done towards God need only His forgiveness while sins done towards other human beings need their forgiveness as well as forgiveness from God Himself.

Abu Hurairah (r.a) reported that the Prophet (s) said: *"Whoever may have done an injustice to a brother/sister, or defamed him/her or transgressed against his/her rights in any way should set right the affair with him/her on this very day, in this very*



life- before the day of Judgment-when he/she will 'have no dinars and dirhams (no dollars/money) to settle the claim. If he/she will possess a stock of good deeds, the aggrieved will be recompensed from it in relation to the injustice done to him/her. And in case he/she is empty-handed in the matter of good deeds, the sin of the hurt will be thrust upon him/her. (thus justice will be done that Day)."

Apart from our parents, children and near relatives, there also exists a permanent association and contact between us and our neighbors. The state of his/her association – be it good or otherwise has a great influence on our lives and morals. The Messenger Muhammad (S) had attached great importance to this and has constantly urged Muslims to pay due regard to the rights of neighbors to the extent that he had declared good neighborliness to be part of *Iman* (Faith) and an essential requisite for salvation.

BACKGROUND & NEIGHBORS

In the good old days, not too-long-ago, we could leave our front door open and trust that the neighbor will take care of our house. Our neighbors were like members of our family. How often do we hear that sentiment from the elderly in our community? The "good old days" is now only mentioned in the past tense. It is a "long-gone era".

The days when neighbors knew each other on a first name basis, when people looked out for each other, socialized together and shared common interests and concerns, seem long gone. The pace of life in 21st century has become too fast and furious, beating to the drum of globalization. Traditional communities are crumbling and relations with our neighbors are all-too-often reduced to a curt nod.

Even here in the beautiful capital of Canada, many of us are living side-by-side but rarely mix. Do we really know much about each other's lives, our shared hopes – or even why it is important to have a joint stake in the well-being of our local community/society?

We may pass each other on the staircase or in front of the houses yet we do not talk to one another: not really. We even do not greet one another not to mention talk to one another. Neighbors who live in the same building often find themselves in an awkward situation when suddenly stuck in an elevator together, standing in silence, suddenly discovering patterns on the floor or fiddling with a mobile phone, blackberry or iPod to avoid a conversation.

The close communal ties, that were once emblematic, allowed neighbors to build strong and healthy neighboring environment. Today, social, cultural and political strains are leading to an aggressive 'individualism', eating away at our traditional society and the shared values that underpin it. It is to the detriment of us all. Some have said it has led to an explosion in anti-social behavior, and is driving support for some extremist groups, dividing us even further.

Today, Canadian Muslims should inherently identify with a strong 'neighborly' culture in every city or town and practically live out the teachings of Islam, which call on us to be exemplary good neighbors. As a national community, Canadian Muslims are in Canada to stay and thus they must do their part in helping make the streets around them better places to live.

The emphasis placed on Muslims towards their neighbors is emphatic: *"Worship God, and associate no partners with Him; and do good to parents, relatives, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near of kin, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer you meet."* (An Nisa 4: 36)

The Prophet Muhammad himself said: *"The best of neighbors to God are the ones who are the best of them to their neighbors."*

NEIGHBOR: A DEFINITION

The neighbor is the person who lives near one, regardless of whether he/she is a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Some people think that the neighbor is only the one who lives near your residence. Undoubtedly, this is one of the commonest forms; however, there are other forms that are included in the concept of neighbors. There is the neighbor at work, in the market, on the farm, in the classroom, and many others.

The obligation to live in peace and harmony with neighbors, as demanded in the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions, also includes the non-Muslim neighbors. They too have a claim to our kindness and sympathy. It will be significant to note that in all traditions mentioned in this article, with regards to the basic rights of neighbors, no distinction had been made between Muslims and non-Muslims.

This Issue 'From The Minbar' presents:



**Loving Your Neighbor:
A Muslim Perspective**



In next issue: Social Attitude of Muslims

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TEXTUAL REFERENCES

There are numerous injunctions in Islam about the necessity and paramount importance of love for—and mercy towards—the neighbours. Love, respect, kindness, caring for the neighbours, contributing to their happiness, cooperating with them and being generous to them as well as avoiding harming them in any way are acts which are essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God.

In Islam without love of the neighbour, there is no true faith in God and no righteousness. Without sharing with the neighbour what we ourselves love, we do not truly love God or the neighbor.

Mu'awiya ibn Haidah (r.a.) relates that the Prophet (s) said: *"The rights of the neighbor upon you are that; If he/she falls ill you visit (and take care of) him/her; if he dies you attend his funeral (and take part in the burial arrangements); if he commits an evil deed, you prevent it from being known (i.e. do not give publicity to it); if he is favored by good-fortune, you congratulate him; if a calamity befalls him, you grieve in sympathy with him; and that you restrain from erecting your building higher than his in such a way that the passage of fresh air is blocked from his house (unless you obtained his consent) and further, (you take care that) the aroma of your cooking pot does not cause sorrow to him (and his children) except that you send some of it (the food) to him."*

Here are a few pearls of Muslim traditions related to the neighbours:

1. The best neighbors

Abdullah bin 'Umar (r.a.) reported: Messenger of God (S) said, *"The best of neighbors, in the sight of God, is the one who is best to his/her neighbor."* (Tirmidhi, Ahmad and Hakim)

2. Love your neighbor and treating him/her well, you will be a true believer!

Anas (r.a.) narrated that he heard the Messenger Muhammad (S) saying: *"By Him in Whose hand is my soul, no person truly believes until he/she loves for his/her neighbor what he/she loves for himself/herself."* (Muslim)

Amongst other points this *Hadith* explains that it is essential for the true believers to be mindful of their neighbors at all times so that they do not harm them in anyway. Importance of good treatment to neighbors is an essential condition of *Iman*/Faith. It also gives us an idea of the value placed on the rights of neighbors by the Prophet of Islam (s).

In another *Hadith* related by Abu Hurairah (r.a.), the Messenger Muhammad (s) said: *"By God, he is not a true believer, By God, he is not a true believer, By God, he is not a true believer (three times). He was asked "Who?" Upon which he replied, "The one whose neighbors do not feel secure from his/her mischief and evil."*

The construction and manner of the *Hadith* shows how disturbed the Prophet (s) must have been when he said this. The essence contained in this *Hadith* is that the Muslim whose character is such that his/her neighbors expect nothing but evil from him/her and they live in fear of being hurt or harmed by him/her, cannot be regarded as a true and faithful believer.

3. Treat neighbors well!

Aisha (r.a.) reported that the Messenger of God (S) said: *"Angel Gabriel kept recommending me to treat my neighbor well until I thought that he would tell me to make him one of my heirs."* (Bukhari)

This tradition shows that Angel Gabriel brought commandments from God, concerning the rights of the neighbors so frequently and stressed the need to be kind and courteous to them with such force and regularity that the Messenger (S) thought that the neighbor also will be made an heir i.e. just as parents, children and near relatives inherit the property left by the deceased, he thought that the neighbor, too, will be given a share in it. It should be noted that the purpose of this *Hadith* is not merely to state a fact, but rather it is most effective way of highlighting the importance of the neighbors to the Muslims.

4. Care for your neighbors!

Abu Dharr (r.a.) reported: Messenger of God (s) commanded me thus: *"O Abu Dharr! Whenever you prepare a broth, put plenty of water in it, and give some of it to your neighbors."* (Muslim)

5. A righteous neighbor contributes to happiness of his/her neighbors

The companion Saad Ibn Abib Waqqas (s) narrated that our Prophet (s) said: *"One thing that contributes to happiness is a righteous neighbor... and one thing that contributes to misery is a bad neighbor."* (Ibn Hibban)

6. Respect Neighbor's Generosity even if small

Abu Hurairah (r.a.) reported that the Prophet (s) used to say: *"O Muslim women! No one should scorn the gift of a neighbor, even if it is (only) a sheep's foot."* (Bukhari)

7. Do not eat your full while your neighbor is hungry

Abdullah Ibn Musawir narrated: "I heard Ibn Abbas mention Ibn Az Zubair saying that he was a miser, then he said: I heard the messenger of God (s) say: *He is not a believer who eats his fill whilst his neighbor beside him/her goes hungry."* (Bukhari)

Mu'awiya ibn Haidah (r.a.) relates that the Messenger Muhammad (S) mentioned that *"one of the rights of the neighbor is that one takes care that the aroma of one's cooking pot and that it does not cause sorrow to the neighbor and his children except that one send some of it (the food) to the neighbor."*

It is also reported on the authority of Jabir (r.a.) that *Rasulullah (s) said: "Whenever gravy is cooked in anyone's house, he/she should increase the broth (by adding water) and then send some to his/her neighbors."*

8. Prohibition of Harming Neighbor:

Abu Hurairah (r.a.) narrates that the Prophet Muhammad (s) said: *"By God, he is not a believer! By God, he is not a believer! By Allah, he is not a believer." It was asked, "Who is that, O Messenger of God?" He said, "One whose neighbor does not feel safe from his evil."* (Bukhari).

9. Refraining from harming your neighbor is a part of faith!

Abu Hurairah (r.a.) reported that the Messenger of God (s) said: *"Whoever believes in God and the Last day should not harm his neighbor."* (Bukhari)

11. Harming a neighbor severs relations with God

Islam warns against annoying one's neighbors or treating them badly. The Messenger (s) explained that this would lead to being deprived of Paradise: *"He/she will not enter Paradise from whose harm his/her neighbor is not safe."* (Muslim)

CONCLUSION

As seen in the *Khutbah*, our faith, as taught to us by the Prophet Muhammad (s), urges Muslims to be kind and considerate towards the neighbors. Neighbors deserve our respect and good treatment regardless of their religion, race or color. The men and women around Prophet Muhammad (s) were constantly reminded of their obligations to God and to one another. Islam encourages Muslims to be kind to their neighbors, to protect them, help them, be kind to them and treat them as someone close and dear to them.

How astonishing and a wide gap has occurred between these teachings and traditions and the actual conduct of the Muslims as a whole! It is extremely difficult for an unknowing person to believe that such, really, were the teachings of the Prophet of Islam (s).

Nevertheless, these traditions and teachings explain clearly the importance of good and kind treatment to neighbors and they are a clear admonition to those who remain indifferent to the needs and difficulties of their neighbors and care nothing for them.

When one truly understands these 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, neighbors are the people that we depend on the most in times of strife and calamity, and in times of need. Neighbors must feel secure that both their honor and wealth are safe. A good neighbor is one who guarantees comfort, security and safety. For this reason it is important that one who believes and obeys God does not spare any effort in being considerate of and generous to the neighbors.

AN ACTION ITEM

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