

COMMUNITY CARE

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Learn some of the etiquettes of looking out for the ill, including
- Understand some of the etiquettes of looking after the elderly

Social Rules

JUNIOR LEVEL

Community Care

A community can be defined as a group of people that live together or a group of people whose beliefs, ideas or culture bring them together. Perhaps the best example of a community for us is our community who gather at our local mosque or Islamic centre.

DIFFERENT PEOPLE WITHIN A COMMUNITY

Different types of people make up a community. There are the elderly, the adults and the children. The Holy Qur'an and the Ahlul Bayt (as) have given us directions on how to treat two particularly vulnerable groups within our communities:

- Those who are ill or frail
- The elderly

THE IMPORTANCE OF VISITING THE ILL

As humans, it is in our nature that we feel sad when we hear that someone in our community is sick. Islam emphasises on the importance of visiting the ill in our community. The reason Islam gives this role so much importance is because:

- It brings a sense of brother/sisterhood in the community
- It gives the ill person or their family love and support which eases their pain

- It reminds us about how weak we are as humans and that an illness can overpower us at any given time
- It reminds us to be thankful for our health

Consider the following sayings of the Holy Prophet (saw) to understand the importance and benefit of visiting the sick:

"Every Muslim who visits a sick person is absorbed in Allah's blessings and during the time he is seated by him he sits in the middle of Divine Mercy. If he visits the sick man in the morning, seventy thousand angels pray for him till evening and if he visits him in the evening, seventy thousand angels pray for him till morning."

"Visit the sick and attend the funerals of the dead so that you may remember the next world. Pray for the sick person and say: O Allah! Cure him with your cure and treat him with your medicine and keep him safe from your calamity."

BASIC ETIQUETTES OF VISITING THE ILL

Different communities have different things that they do when they visit the ill. There are some that read Qur'an and pray for them, there are some that talk to them about different topics in order to get their mind off the illness, and there are some that help keep the ill person's affairs in order. There are others who financially or physically support and assist the caretakers of the ill person. As mentioned above, everyone needs help and support in the community - especially those who are closer to the less fortunate.

The Holy Prophet (saw) said:

"The perfect visitation of the sick person is when you put your hand on him and ask him how he is feeling. And the handshake is the perfect greeting."

When we are around a patient, we should do our best to not discuss topics that would upset or stress them. Instead, we should try to cheer them up and keep them happy.

It might also be an idea to remind them of the Mercy which they receive due to their illness. Imam Ja'far al-Şādiq (as) says in regards to this:

"When the believer experiences a single episode of fever, his sins would fall off as tree leaves would; and if he

becomes bed-ridden, his moaning is counted as tasbeeh (glorifying God)"

It is also important to pray for the ill person, when we are visiting them and in their absence. In particular, we can do this by:

- Reciting Surat al-Fātiḥa
- Āyatul Kursi
- Āyah 27:62
- Dua al-Mashlūl

THE DIFFICULTIES OF ILLNESS

An ill person is faced by many difficulties in their life as a consequence of their sickness. They may not be able to perform all their daily tasks without help. They may suffer loss of income or occupation. Their mood may suffer and they may become isolated. For these reasons, it is important to look for those who fall ill, especially if their illness is chronic and makes them unable to engage in social life.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ELDERLY

We often forget that old people were once young people. They had a family, a goal and still have a purpose in life. We often forget to include them in our lives, and don't give much importance to their needs. This is the reason Allah (SWT) has placed a lot of importance in the Qur'an on keeping in touch with one's relatives.

Old people are amongst the wisest people in our community. They have lived longer than most people and have therefore learnt a lot of lessons from life. Seeking an old person's advice is very beneficial.

SHOWING RESPECT TO THE ELDERLY

As showing respect to everyone in the community is very important, it is crucial to show love and respect to elder members of the community. Old age results in weakness and sometimes even separation from one's children as they are too busy looking after their own families. Therefore, it is essential that one treats them with utmost respect and honour.

The rights of the elders are respected in Islam. Families are taught to honour and respect their elders instead of casting them out to the homes for the elderly. In the Islamic world, one rarely finds 'old people's homes'. The strain of caring for one's parents or elders within the community in this most difficult time of their lives is considered an honour and a blessing and an opportunity for great spiritual growth. In Islam, it is not enough that we only pray for our parents and for the elderly, but we should act with limitless compassion, remembering that ⁱwhen we were helpless children, they preferred us to themselves.

Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (as) said:

“He is not amongst us who does not show respect to our elderly and does not show mercy to our youngsters.”

Prophet Muḥammad (saw) said:

“One who recognises the virtue of an elder person and honours him for his age, Allah shall protect him from the fear of the Day of Judgment.”

Review Questions

1. When we visit the ill

- a. We should act like we normally act around them
- b. We should try to cheer them up
- c. We should discuss stressful topics around them

2. Islam teaches us to:

- a. Care for the elderly and look after their needs ourselves
- b. Care for the elderly in nursing homes
- c. Not listen to the advice of the elderly

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- ⁱ Makarem ul Akhlaq
 - Bihar al-Anwar
 - Al-Islam.org
 - Risalatul Huqooq
 - Al-Kafi