

GOODNESS TO NEIGHBOURS

بالجار الاحسان

Objectives

Students should understand:

- The importance of goodness to neighbours
- The rights of Muslim and non-Muslim neighbours
- That goodness to neighbours is a form of showing Islam in a good light
- The ways of being good to neighbours, most importantly not harming them
- The issue of 'neighbours of the mosque'

Goodness to Neighbours

In the Holy Qur'an Allah (SWT) orders us to be good to our neighbours whether they are Muslim or not, and whether they are close to us or not. In an āyah which lists ten obligations upon Muslims, neighbours are included among those to whom we must show goodness. Just as the āyah commands us to worship Allah and to be good to our parents, it similarly, with the same seriousness, commands us to show goodness to our neighbours.

“Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphan, Al-Masakin (the poor), the neighbour who is near of kin, the neighbour who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful” (4:36)

In emphasising the importance of respecting the rights of the neighbours, Imam 'Ali (as) said whilst on his death bed:

“Fear Allah and keep Him in view in the matter of your neighbours, because they were the subject of your Prophet's advice. He continuously advised in their favour such that we thought he would allow them a share in inheritance”ⁱ

WHO IS CONSIDERED TO BE OUR NEIGHBOUR?

The definition of a neighbour in Islam is anyone who lives within forty houses from our house in each direction i.e. north, east, south and west. This was the definition given by the Prophet (saw) when asked to define a neighbourⁱⁱ

OUR DUTIES TOWARDS OUR NEIGHBOURS

We have certain obligations in relation our neighbours whether they are Muslims or not. If we are not careful of our duties toward them, we will be sinful.

REFRAINING FROM HARMING THEM

The least we are expected to be careful of is to avoid anything that may cause harm to our neighbours. Things like making noise, or throwing rubbish near their house, or parking our cars in a way that blocks their driveways are all considered major sins.

Infact, the Prophet (saw) asked Imam 'Ali (as) to go to the mosque and to repeat the following three times:

“A person whose neighbour does not feel safe from his harm has no faith”ⁱⁱⁱ

DOING GOOD TOWARD THEM

In addition to avoiding harming our neighbours, we should always perform acts of kindness toward them. In a lengthy ḥadith, the Prophet (saw) gives us many examples of how we can practically help our neighbours in addition to always praying for them:

“To help him if he asks your help, to lend him if he asks to borrow from you, to satisfy his needs if becomes poor, to console him if he is visited by an affliction, to congratulate him if he is met with good fortune, to visit him if he becomes ill, to attend his funeral if he dies, not to make your house higher than his without his consent lest you deny him the breeze, to offer him fruit when you buy some or to take it to your home secretly if you do not do that, nor send out your children with it so as to not upset his children, nor bother him by the (tempting) smell of your food unless you send him some to him.”^{iv}

We should realise that by doing good to our neighbours, particularly those who are not Muslim, we will be giving them a very good impression about Islam. In today's world where Islam is too often portrayed negatively, it is important that we do our part in reforming this negative image and present Islam in its true and pure light.

THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF NEIGHBOURS

Whether our neighbours are Muslims or not, they all have rights over us. However, some neighbours have more rights over us than others and we should deal with them accordingly. Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says:

“There are three types of neighbours. The first type is the neighbour who has one right, the second is a neighbour who has two rights, and the third is a neighbour who has three rights. The neighbour who has three rights is a Muslim neighbour who is also a relative. Such a neighbour has the right of Islam, the right of kinship and the right of neighbourhood. The neighbour who has two rights is a Muslim neighbour, who has the right of Islam and the neighbourhood. The neighbour who has one right is a polytheist neighbour, who has the right of neighbourhood”^v

NEIGHBOURS OF THE MOSQUE

The neighbours of mosques must also be treated in the same way as our home neighbours. In fact, if they are not treated well and are annoyed with the Muslims who use that mosque, they may begin to hate Islam and Muslims, and this is a terrible thing. For example, we should never park our cars in ways that inconvenience our neighbours. Worst still is to park our cars in their driveways. Would you like someone to park his car in your driveway? What if there was an emergency and you needed to transport a family member to hospital but someone has blocked your driveway? This careless attitude could surely cost someone's life!

Another example of looking after the neighbours of mosques is not to throw any rubbish on to their front yards. Unfortunately this is something very common in our communities so we should make sure that we stop doing this ourselves and then advise others against it. Remember, we are representing Islam by our actions!

Imam Khomeini had ordered the Adhan for fajr prayers to stop being sounded on the microphone lest this noise would disturb an aged or ill neighbour of the mosque.

Homework Activity

Between now and next week, ask yourself about your actions with your neighbours. Is there anything you do to hurt them? If yes, what steps would you take to change your actions? List down three things that you would do to change, or improve your attitude towards your neighbours.

Review Questions

Q1. Which neighbour has the greatest right over us?

- A Non-Muslim
- A Muslim who is also a relative
- A Shi'ah

Q2. My neighbour harmed me. Islamically, what is the best way to treat him?

- Harm him
- Be patient and forgive him
- Report it to the police.

ⁱⁱ Wasaelu-Shi'a (12:125)

ⁱⁱⁱ Wasaelu-Shia (12:125)

^{iv} Scale of Wisdom (Pg, 235, No. 1308)

^v Al-Mahajatul-Baydha 3:422

ⁱ Scale of Wisdom (Pg, 233, No. 1301)