



Community Care

Objectives >>>

Students should:

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

Community Care

In previous years, we have learnt some of etiquettes for dealing with members of our community who may be ill. In this lesson, we will review this briefly, before discussing another important issue: how to deal with elder members of our community.

HOW TO DEAL WITH THE ILL

As previously mentioned, Islam has placed great emphasis on visiting the ill. It has instructed us to inquire about our brothers and sisters who have not been seen in the mosque or in social gatherings for an unusually long time.

REWARDS OF VISITING THE ILL

a) Visiting the ill is likened to visiting Allah (SWT) Himself

The Prophet (saw) said: “Allah Almighty will say on the Day of Resurrection , ‘O son of Adam, I became sick and you did not visit Me!’ and he will ask, ‘O Lord, how can I visit You when You are the Lord of the worlds?’ He Almighty will say, ‘Did you not know that My servant so and so became sick and you did not visit him?! Did you not know that if you had visited him you would have found Me there with him?!’”ⁱ

SOCIAL RULES

LEVEL 5

b) Forgiveness of sins.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) said: “Whoever visits a sick person, seventy thousand angels will escort him repenting for him until he returns to his house.”ⁱⁱ

c) Reminder of the Hereafter:

When we visit the ill, we attain a realisation of our weakness and the transient nature of this world where everything will someday age, deteriorate and eventually die. This realisation is healthy as it reminds of our final abode – the hereafter- and therefore helps to keep our actions on track.

The Prophet (saw) said: “Visit the sick and follow funeral processions, they will remind you of the Hereafter.”ⁱⁱⁱ

DEALING WITH THE ELDERLY

Like illness, ageing is a natural and inevitable part of life. In affluent countries like Australia, there is a large population of elderly people and this means a greater responsibility on younger people to look after them. Islam has laid as much emphasis on our social responsibilities such as looking after the elderly as it has on our spiritual and individual aspects of life.

According to the Holy Qur’an, the life for the aged has been described as the most miserable stage of life (arthalil ‘umr). This is because that part of life is very difficult and leads to people becoming dependent on others. The Holy Qur’an also says that those who are given long lives suffer a ‘reversal’ in creation, physically and mentally, slowly reverting to a life similar to that of a baby, which is helpless and dependent.

“And he whom We grant long life, We reverse him in creation (weakness after strength). Will they not then understand?”^{iv}

It is also difficult for us to imagine the difficulties of life for the elderly, because we have not experienced it. We think that we will always have our current health and strength and so we become impatient with the elderly because of their slowness or weakness. Once a champion marathon runner was taken to a running track he used to frequent. Now, in his old age, he could hardly run and was moving like a toddler would. This reminds us that no matter how fit we are, we will one day be old and weak too and so we should be patient with our elders now that we are young.

Elderly people are often depressed because they feel that they are now useless and dependent on others. In addition, they may be suffering from medical conditions which cause them pain and suffering. In addition to all this, they often have many expenses related to health care which makes their life even more difficult. In many cases, elderly people are left alone in a nursing home or in a corner of their house without anyone paying attention to them or visiting them. They can become so depressed that they pray to be taken from this world.

Islam has given us instructions for every aspect of our lives including our responsibilities toward our elders and how to deal with them in the right manner

OUR RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARD ELDERS

We need to be good and respectful to elderly people, especially our parents. In fact, the Holy Qur’an says:

“...and to your parents, be good to them (directly). If one of them or both them reach old age do not say (even) ‘uff’ to them and do not chastise them and say to them honourable speech”^v

We should take time out from our life and wait on our parents like servants, and always speak to our parents respectfully.

According to the Qur’an, **we should be humble towards our elderly parents** and be like a soft carpet they can walk on.

“and lower to them the wing of humbleness and mercy”^{vi}

If we need to correct our elders or give them advice, we should be subtle in doing this and shouldn’t be blunt. Even if the elderly person thinks they are always right because of their experience, we should still not be blunt in advising them and should take their age into consideration.

We should spend time around them, converse with them and make them laugh. Give them company and remove some of their boredom and depression.

We should look after their financial needs without them having to ask us. A man has as much responsibility to look after his parents as he does towards his wife and children. Wives, in turn, should not complain about their husbands sending money to look after his parents. Remember, when we were young, our parents looked after us, and now they may be too proud to ask for anything when they need it. In one narration, a man came to Imam al-Ṣādiq saying that he had a financial dispute with his father and he wanted the Imam to judge between them. The Imam (as) said: “you and your wealth belong to your father.”

When we are helping our parents financially, we should do in a subtle and respectful way, and should not make them feel bad about it. Part of this is that we should be vigilant of their needs and give them assistance before they ask. Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) says: “do not trouble them to ask you for their needs.”

We should pray for them as we have been instructed by the Holy Qur’an:

“Say: O Allah have mercy on them just as they raised me when I was young. Reward them goodness for their goodness, and forgiveness for their mistakes”

Review Questions

Q1. In regards to dealing with the elderly:

- Islam has not laid much emphasis on it
- Islam has laid as much emphasis on this as it has on individual acts of worship
- By providing financial assistance only we have fulfilled our duties.

ⁱ al-Tarhib wa al-Tarhib, v. 4, p. 317, no. 3

ⁱⁱ [al-Kafi, v. 3, p. 120, no. 2]

ⁱⁱⁱ Kanz al-`Ummal, no. 25143

^{iv} Holy Qur’an (36:68)

^v Holy Quran (17:23)

^{vi} Holy Quran (17:24)