



NIZAMIYE MOSQUE COMPLEX

“Where heart and mind meet”

FRIDAY SERMON 14: NEIGHBOUR’S RIGHTS IN ISLAM

❁ وَأَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي
الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ
الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ
أَيْمَانُكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ مَن كَانَ مُخْتَالًا فَخُورًا ﴿٣٦﴾

Observing neighbors’ rights is an issue that the Qur’an emphasizes, along with treating one’s parents kindly, being faithful to relatives, and caring for orphans. It is commanded in Surah an-Nisa (Women) (as interpreted): “...worship Allah and do not associate anything as a partner with Him; do good to your parents in the best way possible, and to the relatives, orphans, the destitute, the neighbor who is near (in kinship, location, faith), the neighbor who is distant (in kinship and faith), the companion by your side (on the way, in the family, in the workplace, etc.), the wayfarer, and those who are in your service. (Treat them well and bring yourself up to this end, for) God does not love those who are conceited and boastful.” (an-Nisa 4:36)

Here, directly following the command to worship Allah (swt) and not to associate any partners with him, doing good to parents is commanded. Actually, when love, respect, and yearning to meet someone are concerned, what comes after Allah’s right is His Messenger’s: we recognize our Lord thanks to him; we learn the way to perceive and interpret creation correctly thanks to him; and we understand that we are created and meant for eternity thanks to the messages he brought. In these respects, we are greatly indebted to him. However, as the verse mentioned above addresses this issue, not in terms of theory but practical deeds, parents’ rights, not the Prophet’s, are mentioned second. The fact that the beginning of the divine command is not related to faith in God but to worship Him also indicates this.

After mentioning parents, the verse commands doing good to relatives, orphans, and the destitute, respectively. Then, the verse draws attention to the rights due to neighbours by commanding the doing of good to both near and distant neighbours. Accordingly, all people living around us are included in this meaning, and they deserve to be treated well.



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A way to attain perfect faith

An authenticated saying of the Prophet (saw), confirmed by great scholars including Bukhari and Muslim,^[1] stresses the importance of neighbourliness. Indeed, Gabriel gave such insistent advice to the Prophet (saw) about neighbours that he thought Gabriel would nearly declare neighbours as inheritors to one another.

Given that a person's inheritors are their closest relatives, we can imagine how important neighbours' rights are in the sight of Allah (swt). Actually, we do not know all of the advice concerning neighbours' rights that Gabriel gave to the Prophet (saw) as the Messenger of Allah did not relate the details of the case. However, the fact that the Prophet (saw) nearly thought neighbours would become inheritors to one another indicates how much emphasis Gabriel placed on this issue.

Another saying of the Prophet (saw) relates this issue to faith: **"Whoever believes in Allah swt and the Day of Judgment let him be good to his neighbour. Whoever believes in Allah and the Judgment Day, let him treat his guest. Whoever believes in Allah swt and the Judgment Day, let him speak goodness or be silent."**^[2]

As it is seen, being good to neighbours is mentioned as a requirement of having belief in the true sense. There is another point to note here: Faith in Allah swt naturally requires belief in other essentials of faith, including belief in the Judgment Day. It is additionally mentioned in this context, since goodness done here for the sake of Allah swt will be rewarded generously when the Judgment Day comes.

Good neighbours who offer the key to eternal bliss

The Messenger of Allah (swt) also gave warnings that a person who comfortably sleeps with a full stomach while his neighbour is hungry cannot be a believer in the true sense, and that a person whose neighbours are not safe from his harm cannot enter Paradise. If the rights of neighbours are stressed so much in the Qur'an and the Tradition of the Prophet, it is an issue of great importance. In this respect, a Muslim should embrace—near or distant—all of their neighbours magnanimously. People with sound faith should know how to share all of the beauties they possess with their neighbours; it is a requirement of Muslim ethics.

When rights of neighbours are mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is the material kind of aid, such as offering them food, clothes, and the like. As it is known, zakah—the prescribed alms—is given to Muslims only; however, other kinds of alms can be given to non-Muslims.

For example, one can provide financial aid to near or distant neighbours whether they are Muslims or not, because these are basic human needs. Particularly in circumstances of poverty, Muslims should never let their neighbours starve, no matter who they are, and should absolutely provide them with support. Helping a neighbor find a job is also a very important means of doing good.



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But it is not a correct approach to reduce neighbors’ rights to material aid alone. Greeting neighbors and asking about their well-being, getting acquainted better through mutual visits, paving the way to friendly relations between people, and making efforts to eliminate negative feelings—if there are any—are also very important points. It is essential to establish a relationship with one’s neighbors, particularly for Muslims living in a foreign country. For example, they can take the opportunity on special days to make their neighbors happy with presents and visits. In this way, they can find chances to warm hearts, eliminate biased opinions about Muslims, and introduce their values to others. When the issue is seen from this perspective it is more easily understood that rights of neighbors should not be reduced to a notion of material aid.

Grounds of sin that grow into a disaster

There is another matter worthy of attention concerning neighbors that the Prophet (saw) mentioned. Adultery is many times over a graver sin if it is committed with a neighbor. As it is well known, forbidden and disliked acts have a certain ranking. For example, attributing certain things to Allah Almighty is such a grave sin that, as related in the Qur’an (Maryam 19:90) (as translated), it would nearly bring a great destruction: **“The heavens are all but almost rent, and the earth split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins...”** Similarly, there are certain kinds of sins that nearly shatter the heavens and earth asunder. As fornication between relatives fall into this category, such a sin between neighbors is evaluated by the Prophet in the same way—as an evil made worse many times over because the predominant feelings between relatives and neighbors must be trust and safety. Therefore, an evil committed by the people whom you trust will not be an ordinary evil; rather it will grow into an evil of manifold ramifications.

Bridges of friendship build through a bowl of pudding

Unfortunately, it is a bitter reality that there exists a serious void in terms of neighborly relations, as a result of neglecting our own values. To such a degree that even in Muslim countries, an entire society lives in their own worlds, retreated in their apartments. Neighbors knock on one another’s door only when there is disturbing noise, in order to warn the latter. Therefore, we need to do our best to make use of every possible means in order to eliminate this chronic problem. But it should not be forgotten that changing the established notions and understandings in people’s minds is not something easily done like taking off a suit. This issue requires persistence and resolved efforts. Sometimes, you take this chance through the tradition of cooking Noah’s pudding and offering your neighbor upstairs a bowl of pudding. Sometimes, you contact them while celebrating the birth of the Messenger of Allah, or sometimes, you show your good intentions on some other day that is important to your neighbor. Let us not forget, benevolence is a part of human nature and we do appreciate kindness.

Therefore, acts of kindness will definitely make their effect one day, sooner or later. Maybe your neighbors will try you for a long time but once they see that you seek no personal benefit, they should gradually open their doors and mutual visits will begin.



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The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, compared the situation of believers with respect to one another to a good building whose bricks are soundly integrated.^[3]

Naturally, all the factors—observing parents’ rights, strengthening bonds of kinship, caring for the needy, and observing neighbors’ rights—mentioned in the initially quoted verse play an important role at building such a society. Since neighborly relations undergo serious destruction in modern life, the first attempts to enhance relations may not be welcomed at the beginning. However, acts of kindness—even an individual gesture of goodwill—continued in a resolved and steady way will melt the icebergs between people. After a while, they will stimulate good feelings in hearts and, over time, turn into such a strong connection that they will become solid bonds between individuals. Thereafter, individuals will support one another without any expectations in return. When one falls, the other will lend a hand, and they will set about a race of goodness toward one another. An ideal society, without clash and conflict, can only be built from individuals such as these.

Finally, in the words of Bediüzzaman, a society whose elements and building blocks are made up of sins cannot be a healthy one. Thus, in order to become a healthy society, it is an important duty for individuals to support one another at protecting against sins and getting rid of vices. Allah Almighty reminds believers of their responsibilities toward one another with the command (as translated): **“...help one another in virtue and goodness, and righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sinful, iniquitous acts and hostility” (al-Ma’idah 5:2)**. In the name of maintaining such a feeling of help and solidarity, relationships between neighbors provide a very significant ground and opportunity, in my opinion, and is a responsibility that should not be ignored.

[1] Sahih al-Bukhari, Adab, 28; Sahih Muslim, Birr, 141

[2] Sahih Muslim, Iman, 74; Sahih al-Bukhari, Adab, 31

[3] Sahih al-Bukhari, Salat, 88