

Apart from a man's parents, children and near relatives, there also exists a permanent association and contact between him and his neighbors. The state of his association - be it good or otherwise has a great influence on his life and morals. The Prophet (PBUH) had attached great importance to this and has constantly urged the Ummah 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.

Three Categories Of Neighbors

In a Hadith, related by Jabir (R.A.), the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said

"Neighbors are of three kinds. Firstly, the neighbor who enjoys only one right (and as far as rights are concerned) he is of the lowest grade. Secondly, the one who enjoys two rights and thirdly the neighbor who enjoys three rights.

The neighbor with only one right is the Polytheist (i.e. a non-Muslim neighbor with whom there are no family ties). The neighbor with two rights is the neighbor who is also a Muslim (as such he has a claim as a neighbor as well as a fellow Muslim) and the one with three rights is the neighbor who is a Muslim and a Relative - he has a claim as a neighbor, as a fellow Muslim and as a relative".

This Hadith clearly explains that the obligation to live in peace and harmony with neighbors, as demanded in the Holy Quran and the Traditions, also includes the non-Muslim neighbors. They too have a claim to our kindness and sympathy. We treat the animals with kindness and we have been warned against ill treating them, then what of our fellow humans - more so our neighbors. It will be significant to note that in all Ahadith Traditions mentioned, with regards to the basic rights of neighbors, no distinction had been made between Muslims and non-Muslims.

Emphasis On The Rights Of Neighbors

It is reported, on the authority of Ayesha (R.A.) and Ibn Umar (R.A.) that the messenger of Allah (PBUH) said "The Angel Jibra'il (A.S.) counseled me so frequently regarding the rights of the neighbor that I feared, he too would be declared an heir."

This Hadith shows that Angel Jibra'il (A.S.) brought commandments from Allah, concerning the rights of the neighbor so frequently and stressed the need to be kind and courteous to him with such force and regularity that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) 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.

Note:- 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 neighbor to the Muslims.

Importance Of Good Treatment To Neighbors (It is an essential condition of Iman (faith))

It is narrated by Abu Shurayh (R.A.) that the Prophet (S.A.W.) said

"Whoever believes in Allah and the final day (Day of Judgment) it is essential that he does not harm his neighbors and whoever believes in Allah and the final Day it is essential for him to entertain his guest with kindness and generosity and whoever believes in Allah and the Final Day it is essential that he speak what is good or otherwise remain silent."

Amongst other points this Hadith explains that it is essential for the true believer to be mindful of his neighbors at all times so that he does not harm him in any way. It also gives us an idea of the value placed on the rights of neighbors by the Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH).

In another Hadith related by Abu Hurairah (R.A.) the Prophet (PBUH) said,

"By Allah, he is not a true believer, By Allah, he is not a true believer, By Allah, 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 mischief and evil.

The construction and manner of the Hadith shows how agitated the Prophet (PBUH) must have been when he said this. The essence contained in this Hadith is that the Muslim whose character is such that his neighbors expect nothing but evil from him and they live in fear of being hurt or harmed by him, cannot be regarded as a true and faithful believer - he doesn't deserve the title of Muslim or Mu'min. On another occasion the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said that such a person (whose neighbors do not feel safe on his account) shall not go to Heaven.

Note:- In the language of Prophet hood, when special emphasis is laid on a deed, the customary way of putting it is to say that whoever neglects it etc. is not a true believer, and he shall not go to Heaven. It should be understood that this does not imply that he has actually been thrown out of the fold of Islam and now the laws of Infidelity (Kufr) will apply to him, and that in the hereafter he will be treated as an infidel, but rather this is an emphatic way of explaining that such a person does not possess the true spirit of Iman which is the glory of a Muslim and is pleasing to Allah. The particular phrasing is used to lend greater force to the matter.

In yet another Hadith, related by Anas (R.A.), the Prophet (PBUH) said

"He has not affirmed faith in me (i.e. he is not a true follower) who eats to his satisfaction and sleeps comfortably at night while his neighbor goes hungry - and he is aware of it."

How astonishing that such 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 Holy Prophet of Islam (PBUH).

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.