

A Social Vision

Freedom, Equality, Compassion



The religion of Islam is a comprehensive system of life, completed by Allah through the medium of sending the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) to all mankind. The philosophy that underlines the legislation of Islam is that of perfect balance between individual and collective responsibility. In other words, there are individual duties and there are societal duties, and the two go hand in hand. Humans are social beings by nature, and as such must be integrated into societies. For this reason, scholars of old have said that rectification of the world lies in two important elements: a system that governs society as a whole, and components of the same system that result in individual peace.

Islam is based on principles that address both the individual and the society, as can be derived from the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The primary goal of Islam is the establishment of a society based on peace, security, and justice, so that humanity can fulfill the purpose for which they were created: to worship God (Allah) in all that they do. In order to fulfill this noble goal, and thereby ensure the success of society, there are a number of fundamental principles.

Islam aims to awaken the heart of the believer and to free him or her from the worship of base desires and created things, leaving only the worship of the Creator. A believer who experiences this freedom purifies himself of all subservience to created beings, i.e., everything other than Allah. He learns that death, affliction, poverty, and debasement all occur with the permission of Allah.

Islam is the only system that can produce such absolute freedom. The true believer is left independent of anything save Allah; he calls upon Allah to solve his problems, and even more so, he is content with his lot at all times.

Mankind has a single origin and was created for a single purpose

Islam came to finalize the equality of all humans. It came to people who worshipped many gods, during a time when the blood of the nobility was considered far superior to that of the common man, to a mindset that based society on all-pervasive social strata that could never be breached. Under this modus operandi, the poor would always be poor and subservient to the rich until their deaths. Contemporaneously, some were debating the true nature of women: did they have souls, and if so, were they pure evil?

In such a dismal time to such an unenlightened people did Islam preach its message of equality: mankind had a single origin, was created for a single purpose, had a single destination, and was in absolute servitude to and in need of a single God (Allah). It also taught that the only meaningful difference in rank between Arab and non-Arab, woman and man, poor and rich, educated and unlettered, black and white was based solely on taqwa (God-consciousness). Finally, Islam insisted that the only things that would benefit mankind on the Day of Judgment are sound belief and good deeds done solely for the sake of Allah.

Such are the essential elements of any society that hopes to achieve true success and happiness. The hearts of the members of such a society must be linked by a sense of brotherhood – each person must want for one's 'brother' or 'sister' in this society what one wants for oneself. Second, the society must be governed by a series of clearly defined and recorded rules, which each citizen must abide by and enforce without exceptions or biases based on social strata. Finally, each member of society must be and feel completely equal before the law and before Allah. All divisions between people based on injustice must be immediately eradication.

Neighbors

Up to Seven Doors Away



The Qur'an tells us that all of mankind is descended from one couple, Adam and Eve. Thus we are all brothers and sisters, and our differences in languages and colors are but a mercy that we might know one another. Language and race should never be a reason for discriminating against people.

A Muslim should maintain good relations with his relatives, but he should not unjustly favor them over others. Further, a Muslim must be good to his neighbors, no matter their religion. But the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) taught us that a "neighbor" is not just the one next door but includes all those up to seven doors away - effectively a whole neighborhood.

This concern for our neighbors can take many forms. It means to ensure that our neighbors have the basic necessities, for a Muslim should not eat if his or her neighbor is going hungry. It means that Muslims should wish for their neighbors what they wish for themselves. It means sharing their happiness and sorrow. Further, it means to not spy on them and respect their privacy, to not gossip about them, to not harm them in any way, and to keep common use areas — such as apartment building entrances, streets and sidewalks — clean.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was told of a woman who prayed and fasted a lot and gave alms generously, but whose neighbors complained of her abusive tongue. He said that she would be in Hellfire. When he was told of another woman who did not do all those extra acts of worship but whose neighbors were happy with her, he said that she would be in Paradise . Thus we see the importance of being good to our neighbors, both in actions and words.

Kindness to a Non-Muslim Neighbor

Tips for Interaction



The neighbor holds a special status in Islam. Islam encourages Muslims to treat their neighbors in a gentle way that reflects the true and genuine spirit of Islam as exemplified in its tolerant aspect especially with people of other faiths. It makes no difference whether the neighbors are Muslim or non-Muslim. 'A'ishah, the Mother of the Believers, (may Allah be pleased with her) stated that she once asked the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), "O Messenger of Allah! I have two neighbors. To whom shall I send my gifts?" He said, "To the one whose gate is nearer to you."

It is clear from the above Prophetic Hadith that Muslims are encouraged to not only treat our neighbors kindly, but also to exchange gifts with them. The wording of the Hadith does not indicate whether the one with whom we exchange gifts is a Muslim or not.

It was even reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) had a neighbor who used to harm him and insult him at every encounter. Some days elapsed without the Prophet getting his share of this man's abuse. Thinking that there must be some reason behind the man's absence, he (peace and blessings be upon him) paid him a visit and found him sick. The man wondered how the Prophet could meet his bad treatment with such great behavior. To him, such noble character as taught by Islam was completely new.

If your neighbors are Muslim and relatives, then they have three rights on you: the right of the neighbor, the right of kin, and the right of the co-religionist. If they are non-Muslim and relatives, then two rights are due to them: that of neighbor and kin. And if they are non-Muslims outside of the family, you owe them the right of the neighbor only. Referring to this, Allah Almighty says what means, (And serve Allah. Ascribe no thing as partner unto Him. (Show) kindness unto parents, and unto near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and into the neighbor who is of kin (unto you) and the neighbor who is not of kin and the fellow traveler..) (An-Nisaa' 4:34)

Care for your neighbors continually, especially at times of need and distress

Enough to say that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) stated in one of his Hadiths that Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) kept exhorting him to treat neighbors kindly to the extent that the Prophet imagined that a neighbor could inherit from his neighbor.

Below are some tips on how to approach your non-Muslim neighbors in a kind way that exemplifies Islamic manners:

1. Being good to neighbors is not only restricted to those who share the same building with you. Your roommate at the dorm is your neighbor; the person sitting behind you or next to you in a bus or at a bus stop is your neighbor; the one sharing your office at work is your neighbor; the person enjoying fresh air next to you in a public garden is also a neighbor. You ought to treat all of those people kindly and socialize with them within the permitted scope of Shari `ah.
2. Introduce yourself and your family to your neighbors when you move into a new place or when new neighbors move in. This will also help to relieve any fears or tensions they may have about Muslims. Also, don't forget to say good-bye when you or they move away.
3. Care for them continually, especially at times of need and distress, as "the neighbor in need is a neighbor indeed." If a neighbor is elderly or chronically ill, offer to run errands or shop for him or her.
4. In dealing with neighbors, it is safer to deal with those of the same sex as yourself. This does not mean that you should stop socializing at work or school with your non-Muslim workmates or classmates of the opposite sex, but be aware of Satanic snares. After-hours socializing should be with your same sex.
5. While socializing with non-Muslims, be cautious of becoming too lenient at the expense of your creed and principles. For example, don't go out drinking with them. They will respect you more for sticking to your principles than for breaking the rules.

Common grounds should be enhanced, and areas of dissension should never be raised.

6. In addition to sharing ideas, you can share meals with them by inviting them to dinner on the weekend or accepting their invitation to the same, provided that you let them know about your dietary restrictions as a Muslim.
7. Conduct mutual visits so that the families can interact in a constructive way. If the discussion does turn to religion, focus on areas of common ground. For example, if your neighbors are Christian, then you should not enter into a futile argument with them about whether Jesus is God incarnate or not. Rather, tell them to what extent Islam honors all God's Prophets and Messengers as a whole, and that Jesus is granted a special status among God's Prophets and Messengers.
8. While socializing with neighbors, present your *deen* (Islam) in the best way. If you are faced with a difficult question or a distortion about Islam, do not be ashamed to stop for a while and tell them that you will try to contact a more knowledgeable person to seek the guidance regarding the issue raised. Thus, common grounds should be enhanced, and areas of dissension should never be raised.
9. If your neighbors show an interest in Islam, invite them to attend Islamic events, and even to accompany you to the mosque to see what it is like. It may be that their hearts become softened to Islam, and if they remain non-Muslim, at least you have succeeded in breaking the barrier. You can also visit the church where your neighbors pray if they invite you to do that, but here you should be cautious not to perform any act that your religion prohibits. In brief, be only a watchful monitor.

10. Always keep in mind the mighty reward that is in store for you in the Hereafter when you show kindness to a neighbor.

A Constructive, Unified Society



The unity of mankind is conceived in the light of the common parentage of Adam and Eve. Every human being is a member of the universal family established by them, and is entitled therefore to enjoy the common benefits as he is enjoined to share the common responsibilities. When people realize that they all belong to Adam and Eve and that these were the creation of God (Allah), there will be no room for racial prejudice or social injustice or second class citizenship. People will be united in their social behavior as they are united in nature by the bond of common parentage.

The unity of humanity is not only in its origin but also in its ultimate aims. According to Islam, the final goal of humanity is God. From Him we come, for Him we live and to Him we shall all return. In fact, the sole purpose of creation as described by the Qur'an is to worship God and serve His cause, the cause of truth and justice, of love and mercy, of brotherhood and morality.

With this unity of origin and ultimate goal as the background of the social life in Islam, the relations between the individual and society are based. The role of the individual is complementary to that of society. Between the two there are social solidarity and mutual responsibility.

The individual is responsible for the common welfare and prosperity of his society. This responsibility is not only to the society but also to God. In this way the individual works with a sound social-mindedness and genuine feeling of inescapable responsibility. It is his role to do the utmost for his society and contribute to its common welfare.

On the other hand, the society is also responsible to God for the welfare of the individual. When the individual is able he is the contributor and society is the beneficiary. In return he is entitled to security and care, should he become disabled. In this case he is the beneficiary and society is the contributor. So duties and rights correspond harmoniously. Responsibility and concern are mutual. There is no state to dominate the individual and abrogate his personal entity. Likewise, there is no individual or class of individuals to exploit the society and corrupt the state. There is harmony with peace and mutual security. There is a constructive interaction between the individual and society.

Besides the unity of humanity in origin and ultimate goal, and besides this mutual responsibility and concern, the social life of Islam is characterized by cooperation in goodness and piety. It is marked with full recognition of the individual and his sacred rights to life, property and honor. It is also marked with an effective role played by the individual in the domain of social morals and ethics.

In an Islamic society the individual cannot be indifferent. He is enjoined to play an active part in the establishment of sound social morals by way of inviting to the good and combating evil in any form with all lawful means at his disposal. In so doing, not only does he shun evil and do good but also helps others to do the same. The individual who feels indifferent to his society is a selfish sinner; his morals are in trouble, his conscience is in disorder, and his faith is undernourished.

The structure of social life in Islam is very comprehensive. Among the substantial elements of this structure are sincere love for one's fellow human beings, mercy for the young, respect for the elders, comfort and consolation for the distressed, visiting the sick, relieving the griefed, genuine feelings of brotherhood and social solidarity; respect for the rights of other people to life, property, and honor; mutual responsibility between the individual and society it is a common thing to come across Prophetic sayings that entreat us to fulfill our social obligations: "Whoever relieves a human being from a grief of this world, God will relieve him from a grief on the Day of Judgment."

"None of you is a true believer in Islam until and unless he loves for his fellow man what he loves for his own self."