

8. Visiting the Sick

8.1 VISITING A PATIENT It is your duty to visit your Muslim brethren in time of illness. This will enhance and nourish the bond of Islam and the brotherhood among you. As a committed Muslim, do not undervalue the great reward from Allah. Imam Muslim reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “A Muslim visiting ill brethren will continue to be in the Khurfa of paradise until he, or she comes back home. He was asked, “What is the khurfa of Paradise?” He answered, “This means the harvest of paradise.” Imam Ahmad and Ibn Hibban in his authentic book reported that the Messenger said: “A visitor walking to visit a patient will be wading in the mercy of Allah. When the visitor sits with the patient they will be immersed in mercy until his, or her return.”

8.2 PRAYING FOR THE SICK It is very appropriate to say few prayers for the sick asking Allah (SWT) to bless them with recovery and help them through their sickness. Bukhari and Muslim reported that Aisaha said If someone fell sick the Prophet would pass his right hand over them while saying the following prayer ‘O the Lord of humans, take away the suffering, bring the recovery, no cure but your cure that leaves no illness.’” In another hadith reported by Bukhari, Ibn Abbas said that the Prophet when visiting a sick person would say: “Hold on, may Allah cleanse you.”

8.3 THE LENGTH OF THE VISIT Certain etiquette will make your visit to an ill person a refreshing and morale boosting one. Your duty is to ease his or her pains, and to make him or her more conscious of the rewards they will gain in return for their suffering and endurance.

Make your visit brief. Sick persons may not withstand such long visits. The length of the visit should be not longer than the time between the two speeches of Friday. In this respect, it was said that the visit should be long enough to convey your greeting and wishes (Salam), to ask the sick how he or she is doing, to pray for recovery and to leave immediately after saying good-bye.

If you visit a patient say your greeting
And immediately you should say, “Good-bye”

The best visit is every third day
The best stay is in the blink of an eye

Do not bother the patient with many questions
Two or three words¹ will get you all along.

At the end of his book of Malkite Fiqh *Al-Kafi*, Imam Ibn ‘Abdul Al-Barr said: “Whether you visit a healthy or an ill person, you ought to sit where you are told. Hosts know better how to ensure privacy in their home. Visiting an ill person is a confirmed Sunnah. The best visit is the shortest. The visitors

¹ Examples include: “Get well soon,” or “May Allah help you.”

ought not to sit too long with an ill person, unless they are close friends and the ill person enjoys their company.”

8.4 THE MANNERS OF VISITING A PATIENT The visitor ought to wear clean clothes with a fresh scent in order to make the patient feel better both spiritually and physically. At the same time, it is improper to wear fancy clothes that are more appropriate for parties and festivities. Wearing a strong perfume may annoy the sick.

Visitors ought to keep their conversation light and avoid gloomy talk that might exacerbate the patient’s distress. Avoid conveying bad news such as a failing business, a death, or similar bad news. Also, visitors ought not to inquire about the details of illness unless the visitor is a specialized physician. Similarly, visitors should not recommend to a patient any food or medicine that might have helped them or someone else. Such recommendation might lead the ill person, out of ignorance or desperation, to try it, causing further complication or even death.

Do not criticize or object to the treatment by the physician in the presence of the ill person for it might cast doubt in the mind of the sick. If you are a specialized physician, you may want to discuss the case and its treatment privately with the doctor in charge.

8.5 How the Ill express their complaints It is recommended that when asked about our condition, a sick person should start by thanking Allah and then proceed to list his complaints. This is to avoid the appearance of complaining of Allah’s will. This was the etiquette of the followers as reported by Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi in his *Tarikh Baghdad*² in the biography of Abdul Rahman Al-Tabib who was the physician of Imam Ahmad and Bishr Al-Hafi. Abdul Rahman said both Imam Ahmad and Bishr became sick and were treated at the same place. “When I visited Bishr, I asked how he felt, and with thanks to Allah first, he then proceeded saying I have this pain or that complaint. When I visited Imam Ahmad and asked how he felt, he would say “I feel all right.” One day I told him, “your brother Bishr is also ill, but when I ask him of his conditions, he thanks Allah first, then tells me his condition. Imam Ahmad said, ‘Please ask him from where did he get this.’ I answered, ‘His presence makes me reluctant to ask.’ Imam Ahmad said, ‘Tell him your brother, Abo Abdillah asks from where did you get this.’ Abdul Rahman asked Bishr as told. Bishr said, ‘Abo Abdillah wants everything with authority. I heard this from Azhar who heard it from ibn Aoun who heard it from ibn Sireen(?). “If a person thanked Allah before complaining, it will not be a complaint but as if telling the acts of Allah. “ Abdul Rahman said, “I told this to Imam Ahmad. After that, if asked how he felt, he would start by thanking Allah, and then describing his complaints.”

² 10:276

The answer of Bishr indicates that when asked about their health, the sick preferably should praise Allah first then explain their complaints. By this approach, it is not considered complaining against the acts of Allah.

9. Condolence

9.1 BREAKING UNPLEASANT NEWS If you have to break the undesired news of a tragic accident, or the death of a dear or close relative or friend, break the news in such a way as to lessen its impact and to make it as mild and gentle as possible. For example, in the case of a death, you may say: “Recently, I learned that Mrs. X has been terribly sick, and her condition worsened. Today, I heard she has passed away. May the mercy of Allah be with her.”

Start by giving the name of the person in question. Do not break the news of a death by saying, “Do you know who died today?” This unduly manner frightens the listeners and prompts them to expect the worst, namely that the death involves someone who is very close to them. Instead, mention the name of the dead person before breaking the tragic news of the death. This will soften the impact of the news, reducing the listener’s apprehension, and making the news more bearable.

Convey the news of fire, drowning, or car accident, etc. in a similar fashion. Prepare the listener for the news in a way that minimizes its impact. Mention the name(s) of the affected person(s) in a kind way, not a shocking way. Some people have weak hearts and such bad news may cause them to faint and collapse.

If it is necessary to convey such news, choose the appropriate time. It should not take place at a meal, before going to sleep, or during an illness. Compassion and tactfulness are the best qualities you will need to handle such a situation.

9.2 EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES IS A COURTESY AND A DUTY Parting among loved ones is one rule of Allah in his creations. Al-Hafiz Al-Munziri reported a Hadith, “Love whoever you will and you will part.” Along this same rule, poets said:

We are but guests with our families,
Staying for a while, and leaving them.
Wealth and families are but trusts.
Inevitably, one day trusts will be recalled.
The sons of this life will all part
To meet together again in the hereafter.

One wise poet listed eight stages we must all pass through. No one will be spared of these:

Happiness and sorrow; gathering and parting;
Difficulties and easiness; and illness and good health.

Another poet said

Make perseverance your friend, and leave painful sorrow
You are not alone
Everyone lost, or will lose a loved one.

If a relative or a close friend of one of your relatives or friends dies, hasten to offer your condolences. You owe your relatives, friends and Muslim brothers the moral obligation of alleviating their plight. If you can, you should attend the funeral and the burial at the cemetery. Aside from being a highly rewarding gesture of sympathy, it could be an effective and stern admonition, and a lesson reminding you of the inevitability of death.

While alive, your life had lessons, reminders and admonition
Today, your death gives me the most important lesson

Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "A Muslim owes his Muslim brethren five gestures: returning a greeting, visiting the ill, and attending their funeral..." Imam Ahmad reported that the Prophet said: "Visit the sick and follow the procession of funerals; you will remember the Hereafter."

Condolences is to alleviate the sense of grieving that confront the family of the deceased. This is achieved by encouraging them to be composed while trusting in Allah's promise of great reward. Allah said in Surat Al-Baqarah³ "And give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere; who say, when afflicted with a disaster, "Truly! To Allah we belong and truly, to Him is our return." They are those on whom descend blessings and receive the mercy of their Lord, and it they who are the guided ones." Condolence is done by praying for the deceased to be helped and pardoned, since they will receive the benefit of such prayers. Condolence is a sincere expression of sympathy and to share the sorrow of these stressful moments. Ibn Maja and Baihaki reported, with a fair authority, a Hadith: "A Muslim who consoles other Muslims suffering from a calamity will be awarded a dress of dignity by Allah on the day of Judgment."

9.2 EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES AND SYMPATHY When offering condolences about a plight that befalls a relative, friend or acquaintance, it is kind to pray for the dead. Say a prayer similar to that reported by Muslim to have been articulated by Messenger (PBUH) to Umm Salamah (RA) at the death of her husband: "O Allah, forgive Abi Salamah, elevate his status among the guided people, and look after

³ Al-Baqarah 2:155-157

the family that he left behind. O Lord of the universe, forgive us and him, comfort him in his grave, and lighten his stay.”

Your conversation with anguished persons should be aimed at mitigating their agony by mentioning the reward of patience, the transitory nature of life on earth, and that the Hereafter is everlasting life.

In this respect, it is desirable to reiterate certain verses of the Quran, the sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) or some of the well-spoken condolences of our ancestors. You may mention the saying of Allah SWT: “But give glad tidings to those who patiently endure, who say, when afflicted with calamity: To Allah we belong and to Him we return. They are those on whom [descend] blessings from their Lord, and mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance.”⁴ Or you may quote another verse from the Quran: “Every soul shall have a taste of death and only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only those who are saved far from the fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object [of life], for the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception.”⁵ And such are Allah’s words: “All that is on earth will perish. But Allah will abide [for ever], the face of your Lord, most gracious, and most generous.”⁶

You may mention some of sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) reported by Muslim and others: “Oh Allah, reward my calamity and replace my loss with a better one.” And like the saying of Prophet (PBUH) reported by Bukhari and Muslim: “It is Allah’s that takes and it is He that gives, and He prescribes a certain destiny for every matter.” Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported that when the Prophet (PBUH) mourned the death of his son Ibrahim he said: “My eyes are tearful. My heart is full of anguish, but we will say only what pleases our Lord. O Ibrahim, your loss filled us with sorrow.”

Also, it is very appropriate in this regard to use some of the traditional sayings of the Muslim forefathers. Omar bin Al-Khattab used to say: “Everyday we are told that so and so has just died. One day it will be said, ‘Omar has died.’ ” You may allude to the saying of the just Caliph Omar ibn Abdul Aziz (RA): “A person who is not separated from Adam by a living father, is indeed deep-rooted in death.” The honoured follower Al-Hasan Al-Basri said: “Oh son of Adam, you are nothing but mere days. Whenever a day passes away: a part of you passes away.” He also said: “Allah ordained that the ultimate resting place of believers will be paradise, no less.” His student Malik ibn Dinar said: “The wedding of the one who fears Allah, is the Day of Judgment.” A poet said:

⁴Al-Baqarah, 2:155-157.

⁵Al Umran, 3:185.

⁶Al-Rahmman, verses 26,27.

Passing the days we are content
Passing a day brings us near the end

Another poet said:

Offering condolences, we trust not living long
The manners of this religion we follow along
The consoled and the consoling may live today
Tomorrow though, they 'll vanish away.

A suitable poem in this regard:

We die and live every night and day
One day we will die and move away

Another poem describes how oblivious humans can be to death:

Life is but a ship afloat
We think it's still, but running is the boat

I have quoted all these appropriate mourning quotations because I have witnessed many inappropriate conversations and talks by people offering sympathy. Mourning hearts are depressed with anguish and sorrow. Be sensitive and select a suitable topic for your conversation.

Attempt to lift the spirits of the bereaved family. The great scholar, Mansour bin Zazan said, "Sorrow and sadness will increase rewards." Al-Hassan Al-Basri pointed out that this painful state will gradually pass away, but our sins will remain with us forever. He said, "Every sad anguish will diminish, except anguish over sins." The great scholar, Ata bin Abi Muslim pointed out that life is full of challenges and events. "A believer would not be happy for one complete day."

9.4 Sending Flowers and Reading Quran during Funerals It should be noted that many people at the death of a dear person will bring flowers and wreaths and after proceeding with the funeral, will take the flowers and wreaths to the home of the deceased. They buy the best flowers and wreaths to show their deep sympathy and concern. To do this is forbidden - whether presenting it at the funeral, accompanying the funeral with it, or bringing it to the deceased's house. This is an imitation of non-Muslims, and is an evil innovation which should be strictly avoided. Those who do such a thing will have no reward from Allah. To the contrary, they will be questioned for such meaningless waste.

Another misguided innovation during funerals is that the car that carries the deceased will broadcast, through speakers, a recording of the Holy Qur'an as if announcing the passing away of the deceased. The funeral procession should be characterized by thoughtfulness, humbleness, remembrance,

reflection, awareness of Allah, and prayers for mercy. No sad music or religious chant should accompany funerals. These two rules should be followed and spread around to make Muslims aware of the right way.

A Final Word This is a collection of Islamic manners that form the etiquette of our pious Muslim predecessors. I introduced it in a clear and understandable way so that you may practice it. The best place to follow these manners is at your house and the houses of your brothers. Do not overlook these etiquettes when dealing with your family and your Muslim brethren. Your immediate family and friends are the most deserving of your good conduct and manners. In this regard, Bukhari and Muslim reported that a man asked the Prophet (PBUH): “Oh, Prophet of Allah, who deserves my best behaviour? The Prophet answered: “Your mother! Your mother! Your mother! Then your father, then the closer, and the closer among your relatives.”

Do not overlook these manners when interacting with the appropriate people, and act nicely and amicably with others. If you do not behave properly, you degrade yourself, abuse the duty that you are entrusted with, and abandon the guidance of the Messenger of Allah (PBUH). Rely on Allah to attain His pleasures and the manners of His religion, for it is He who protects the virtuous people.

May Allah protect you, your relatives and your beloved ones. May Allah help you obey His orders, remain obedient to Him, and follow the example of His Prophet. May Allah grant you His love, grace and His generosity. May Allah pray upon His Prophet and Messenger Muhammad, his family and his companions. All praise to Allah, the Lord of the universe. Ameen.

This was written in the hope of receiving your prayers.

Abdul Fattah Aboghodda