

# Islamic teachings offer a practical guide to living by Dr. Rateb Al Nabulsi

## Islam and social graces

Islam is a religion of peace that values skill in dealing with difficult or delicate situations; it urges its followers to practice appropriate and tasteful social behavior at all times. One who has poise and social grace is well-versed in the art of dealing with people in a respectful and appropriate manner, and effectively draws forth, the beauty that exists in all relationships. Islam values that trait.

Poised individuals are tolerant and know how to accommodate differing opinions without compromising their beliefs; a poised individual is dignified, self-confident and composed. He or she will take the time to listen to another's point of view while gently pointing out its flaws or weaknesses in a bid to promote a mutually acceptable compromise.

Individuals with poise take care to promote that which they believe is just and proper. Poise in character goes beyond action, it is evident in appearance. A poised individual elicits a positive response that garners respect. Poise and 'finesse' go hand in hand, to create a harmony and peace that enables others to feel at ease.

One who has poise is highly sensitive to inappropriate behavior, and is committed to doing what is right and just. He or she will focus on even the smallest details to maintain a sense of balance, peace and equilibrium in all circumstances.

While some suggest that poise is a quality valued only in western cultures, learned and promoted by western institutions, they are wrong. Many Islamic principles recognize and value poise and it is a characteristic that has always been highly prized and nurtured among Muslims.

**Contrary to what some believe, someone who is a faithful follower of Islam does more than commit to prayerful living and going to the mosque. Islam promotes a complete way of life - that is based on numerous details outlined by God. Faithful Muslims respect the teachings of God in all their actions, that is to say the teachings are not reserved for contemplation in the mosque but rather, followed and practiced at all times, in all relationships and interactions with others, in all thoughts and actions. The teachings extend to social interaction, offering guidelines for appropriate behavior in social settings.**

Few non-Muslims appreciate that Islamic teachings includes guidelines that promote poise, tact and social grace - including guidelines on appropriate table

manners, speech and social conduct among family members, friends and acquaintances, business partners and countrymen. **Muslims believe that God chose Islam and the prophet Muhammed to convey God's instructions on how to live, and those who follow the instructions will be rewarded on Judgment Day.** Given that belief, it is important that such instructions be accessible to all mankind and be comprehensively outlined to enable mankind to understand and obey the teachings through all ages, until the end of days.

### **Relationships between Parents and their Offspring**

Islam offers many guidelines that direct individuals on how to treat their parents; for example, Islam encourages children to always knock on the door and seek permission to enter, before going into their parent's room.

Allah (i.e. God) said in the Holy Quran (Al-Noor 58): "O ye who believe! Let your house servants, and those of you who have not come to adulthood, ask leave of you at three times (before they come into your presence): Before the prayer of dawn, and when ye lay aside your cloth for the noon nap, and after the prayer of night. Three times of privacy for you. It is no sin for them or for you, at other times, to wander freely in the house without having to ask. Thus Allah made it clear the revelations for you. Allah is Knower, Wise. (58)

After reading this instruction, a man came to Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) seeking clarity; he wanted to know if this guideline meant he had to seek permission from his own mother before he went into her room. The prophet asked him whether he liked to see his mother naked and when the man said 'No,' the Prophet explained that, to avoid

such a possibility it is important that he request permission before entering his mother's room.

Another guideline governing interaction with one's parents offers advice on how to speak to one's parents. **The Holy Quran urges individuals to refrain from shouting in the faces of their parents, directing that they refrain from saying 'ugh' or 'hush', but rather choose the finest words whenever talking to them.**

Allah said in Holy Quran (Al-Isra 23): "Thy Lord hath decreed, that ye worship none save Him, and (that ye show) kindness to parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age with thee, say not "Fie" unto them nor repulse them, but speak unto them gracious words."

### **Maintaining a clean, tidy environment**

Many think that road cleanliness is something that was introduced during the modern centuries, but for more than 1,400 years Islam has urged its followers to focus on maintaining clean and tidy roads and streets.

The Prophet Muhammed told his followers that those who removed garbage or any harmful objects from the road were considered as having supported charity.

The Prophet Muhammed also said that faith was divided into more than 60 sub-categories. According to the Prophet, the top categories seek to unify one's concept of God, while the bottom categories focus on removing garbage and harmful objects from the roads.

The Prophet Muhammed also urged people not to lie down or sit in the roads to obstruct people.

He said, "Never sit down on the road and, if for any reason, you have to, then you shall sit and abide by the rules of the road which direct one to cast down their eyes on people, refrain from causing harm to others, respond to greetings appropriately and advise and guide people to do what is right and good and try to prevent them from doing what's wrong."

### **Plan social visits in advance**

In Islam, individuals are encouraged to notify a friend or family member, in advance, if they are intending to visit someone at their home. The Quran recommends that individuals take an appointment or ask well in advance before visiting anyone at home, even if it is the home of a close relative or friend.

Allah said in the Holy Quran (Al-Noor 27): "O ye who believe! Enter not houses other than your own without first announcing your presence and invoking peace upon the folk thereof."

For those who arrive at a friend or relative's home to find no one there, the Prophet says you are not to enter without permission and, furthermore, if you did not pre-arrange an appointment in advance, the individual you are calling upon has every right to be excused from welcoming you for any reason, and that, if this should happen, you are to return to your home without any hurt feeling.

Allah said in Holy Quran (Al-Noor 28): "And if ye find no one therein, still enter not until permission hath been given. And if it be said unto you: Go back, then go back, for it is purer for you. Allah knoweth what ye do."

**Islamic teachings reference even the smallest of details relevant to social graces: The Prophet Muhammed instruct-**

### **ed Muslims on the manner to follow when knocking on the door of a friend or relative.**

He said, "If you knock on someone's door then don't wait facing the middle of the door, but take the right or left side."

In other words, He sought to direct appropriate social behavior through his teachings. In this case, it would seem he sought to ensure the person knocking stood in a way that prevented him or her from peering inside the house before being permitted to enter. It would seem he wanted to ensure an individual's privacy was respected at all times.

Islamic teaching also encourages patience, directing that one wait for at least five minutes after knocking before departing so that if the residents are unavailable for personal reasons, the visitor offers them sufficient time to respond

The Holy Quran also directs how one is to close the door of a house or car, recommending that one "tenderly close it" rather than slamming it.

The Prophet Muhammed said, "Anything accompanied with tenderness is a great and distinguished thing and anything that lacks tenderness is a bad thing."

**Another social grace of visiting is not to intrude, or visit without an invitation.** This lesson is clearly delivered in the story in which the Prophet Muhammed and five of his companions were invited for lunch at their friend's house; as they were heading there a sixth person - who was not invited - followed them. When they reached the house the Prophet said to the inviting friend: "This person has followed us, if you wish you can invite him in with the rest of us, otherwise you can tell him go back."

Through this story, it appears the Prophet is recommending one never assume or take for granted the hospitality of another. It would appear that he was mindful that making such assumptions can compromise the host's goodwill. He wants to counsel us to avoid making inappropriate assumptions that risk embarrassing those who extend kindness to others.

**Good manners and appropriate social behavior are fundamental aspects of the Islamic teachings. Islam, in many ways, offers a practical guide to living and seeks to ensure its followers exhibit social grace and poise in social settings that promote a mutual respect for those in our community.**