

# 1. Respect Of Human Beings

One of the vital points in social life is regard for the dignity of human beings which is an integral part of Islamic jurisprudence, and the great leaders of Islam have paid due attention to this. The Holy Prophet emphasized human respect as a part of his mission.

كان يُكرم من يدخل عليه حتى ربما بسك ثوبه ويُؤثر الداخل بالوسادة التي تحته.

He (the Holy Prophet– S) used to respect everyone who entered, so much so that many a times he put his robe under him for sitting and gave his own pillow for support<sup>1</sup>.

Once, while the Holy Prophet (S) was sitting alone in the mosque, a person entered and came towards him. The Holy Prophet (S) got up and vacated his seat for him. The newcomer asked: "O Messenger of Allah! The mosque is vacant and there is ample space. Why have you stepped back?" The Holy Prophet (S) said: "It is one of the rights of a Muslim upon another Muslim that when one wishes to sit near the other, the latter should step back as a token of respect to him." (ibid.)

If many people sat before the Holy Prophet (S), he in order to maintain the respect of all, used to look at all of them with equal frequency<sup>2</sup>. When the Holy Prophet (S) wanted to sit down, he sat wherever there was an empty space, and he did not care whether it was the place of honour or otherwise.

When he sat with his companions in the mosque or any other place, people sat in a circle so that the sitting had no distinguished place of honour and all were equal. If any stranger came to the sitting of the Holy Prophet (S), he could not know who was the Holy Prophet (S) because the Holy Prophet (S) did not occupy any place of honour; the new comer had to ask who among them was the Holy Prophet (S).

The round tables which are now standard fixtures of political and other conferences in the world, are in fact a legacy of the sitting of the Holy Prophet (S). But there is a big difference. The round tables of today have an aim which is diametrically opposed to the aim of the round sitting of the Holy Prophet (S). The Holy Prophet (S) adopted the sitting in a circle because he did not like to sit in a higher place with others sitting below him. But the round tables of today have been adopted because none of the

participants likes anyone to sit in a higher place and is not ready to sit in less distinguished place.

The Holy Prophet (S), with full moral force, was looking for ways to root out class and racial differences and other such things. He always tried to abolish the wrong criteria which people had adopted for false superiority. He established the genuine and correct criterion of superiority based on spiritual and moral foundations.

The respect, which the Holy Prophet (S) showed for others attracted and absorbed people in him. Humanity was benefited by the Prophet (S). Indeed the Holy Prophet (S) clearly said:

بُعِثْتُ لِتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

I have been sent to perfect the noble character.

During his reign, once Imam `Ali ibn Abi Talib (a.s.)<sup>3</sup> was travelling outside Kufah: a non-Muslim who did not recognize him became his travel companion from a place. "Where are you going?" He asked. "To Kufah" `Ali (a.s.) replied. At a junction where their paths parted, the non-Muslim proceeded to his way, but to his utter surprise, he saw `Ali (a. s.) following him. "Are you not going to Kufah?" he questioned. "Why?" Asked 'Ali (a.s.). "It is the other path which leads to Kufah." "I know",

`Ali (a.s.) replied. "Then why did you deviate from your route?" he asked. Imam `Ali (a.s.) said: "For the amicable parting of the company, it is obligatory on a man to follow a few steps with his fellow traveller as a token of respect before bidding goodbye and this ethic has been taught to us by our Holy Prophet (S) ." This affection and respect impressed the non-Muslim very much, and he asked, "Did your Prophet give you such code of conduct?" "Yes", replied 'Ali (a.s.). The non-Muslim said: "Those who accepted the Prophet of Islam (S) and followed his footsteps, were enchanted by this moral teaching and nobility." Then he changed his route and accompanied 'Ali (a. s.) to Kufah, had discussions about Islam with him and finally became Muslim<sup>4</sup>.

Respect of others occupies such a significant place in principles of social life that Allah emphasized it to the Prophet of Islam in the Qur'an:

وَقُلْ لِعِبَادِي يَقُولُوا الَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ

***And say to my servants that they should only say those things that are best . . . (17: 53)***

The fifth Imam, Muhammad al-Baqir (a.s.) said;

عَظَمُوا أَصْحَابَكُمْ وَوَقَرُوهُمْ وَلَا يَتَّهَمُوا بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ

Respect and pay regards to your friends and never confront each other disrespectfully.<sup>5</sup>

The Holy Prophet of Islam (S) said:

لَا تُحَقِّرُونَ أَحَدًا مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَإِنَّ صَغِيرَهُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَبِيرٌ.

Do not look down upon anyone of the Muslims because even a humble Muslim is great before Allah. (ibid. Indifference towards friends is against courtesy and this wrong attitude shakes the foundation of friendship, creating heartache.

Imam `Ali (a.s.) said:

لَا تُضَيِّعَنَّ حَقَّ أَخِيكَ إِتْكَالًا عَلَى مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ لَكَ بِإِخٍ مِنْ ضَيَّعَتْ حَقُّهُ.

“Do not neglect the right of your brother, trusting the relation between you and him (i.e., thinking that the relationship between you and him is above such requirements) because the person whose right you have neglected, is not your brother.”<sup>6</sup>

Ignoring the people, or abusing and humiliating them is a condemnable attitude because ridicule and hatred are the two acts which can never win friends. Aristotle said that for preservation of friendship, the friends should recognise status and pay due regard to each other.

If two friends do not recognise and respect each other, there is no possibility of cordial relations and sincere friendship between them. Courtesy costs nothing, but pays a lot. One can achieve through courtesy what one cannot do through gold and silver.

Once a man, named az-Zuhri<sup>7</sup>, came to the fourth Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (a. s.) with a gloomy face. The Imam asked him the reason of his sadness. az-Zuhri said:

"O son of the Messenger of Allah, sorrow and distress are attacking me from all sides. On one hand, the envious people cannot bear my comfort and well-being, and make me sad by their behaviour. On the other hand, the enemies and ill-wishers cause me distress. Above all, the people to whom I had done some good turn and expected friendship and love from them are creating obstacles in my way."

The Imam said: "O az-Zuhri, keep your tongue under control, and do not say whatever comes to your mind, lest you lose your friends and turn them into enemies." az-Zuhri replied, "O son of the Messenger of Allah, I do them a good turn by the words I tell them." The Imam: "It is not so. Resist from saying a thing which the minds of people are not ready to accept." Then the Imam said: "O az-Zuhri, a man whose mind is not mature, may get doomed by even small things."

Thereafter, the Imam gave him a code of conduct, so that by following it he may not get distressed by

the behaviour of the people. The Imam told him, "O az-Zuhri, is it really difficult if you deem all Muslims like your family members and dependants. elders like your father, youngsters like your children and contemporaries like your brothers? When you will think about them in these terms, then whom would you like to be unjust to? Whom would you curse? Whom would you want to dishonour? O az-Zuhri, if you think that you are better than a certain person, then discipline yourself in this way. If he is older than you, you should tell yourself: 'He is my senior in Islam and faith and has done more good deeds.' And if he is younger than you, then think in these terms: 'He has committed less sins than me.' And if he is of your own age, then say to yourself: 'I know my own sins and have no knowledge about his sins.'

The Imam went on to say: "If people respect you, think that it is because of their own generosity, and if they show discourtesy, say that it is because of your own sins. If you follow this code, life will become sweet for you and you will get many friends and the rank of your enemies will decrease. Also do not forget that people show more respect to a man whose benefit reaches more to them and who expects nothing from them."<sup>8</sup>

The above description is one of the top secrets of social life in Islam with regard to human respect and discharge of duties. There are many Qur'anic injunctions and ahadith (traditions) concerning this subject and some of them are mentioned below.

<sup>1</sup>. Biharul '1-Anwar, vo16.

<sup>2</sup>. ar-Rawdah of al-Kafi

<sup>3</sup>. (a. s.) : is the abbreviation of the Arabic phrase 'alay-hi/ha/himu's-salam (may peace be upon him/her/them).

<sup>4</sup>. Biharul '1-anwar, vo1.74

<sup>5</sup>. Biharul '1-anwar, vo1.74

<sup>6</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>. Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn 'Abdillah ibn Shihab az-Zuhri (58/678 – 124/742), one of the great scholars and narrators of traditions of his time. (ed.)

<sup>8</sup>. Biharul '1-Anwar, vol. 74.

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