

Lesson 27: The Islamic Community (1)

1. The Brotherhood of Islam

A Muslim is related to different people in different ways: first, he is very closely related to his family members; second, he is related to his relatives; and finally, he is related to other Muslims in the bond of religious brotherhood known as the *Muslim Ummah*.

The first two circles of relationship are based on family ties. You and your brother or you and your cousin are from a common fore-father. But the third relationship is not based on family ties, it is based on religious ties. All Muslims are related to one another through Islam, and this relationship is known as the “Islamic Brotherhood”. Allāh says in the Qurʿān, **“Indeed the believers are brothers.” (49: 10)**

The basis of Islamic brotherhood is not a common forefather, but the common God, Prophet, the Book, etc. All Muslims believe in Allāh, Prophet Muhammad, and the Qurʿān, and they all pray towards the same Ka`bah.

Relationships are also based on common race, language or country. People of the same race, same language or same country feel a special fraternity towards each other. But Islamic brotherhood transcends all these boundaries of race, language, country, colour and wealth. Allāh says in the Qurʿān:

“O you mankind! We have created you from a male and a female; and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know each other [more easily]. Indeed, the most noble among you in view of Allāh is the most pious of you.” (49: 13)

All Muslims are brethren of each other even if they are from different families, races, and countries, or have different skin colour and language. Muslims in China, Mexico, Iraq, Kenya, USA, India, England, Turkey, Malaysia, Ghana, Japan and Tunis are all brethren of one another on the basis of their common faith and beliefs. Their colour, country, and language are less important when it comes to their relationship based on Islam.

All the Muslims of the world form a single brotherhood or community which is known as “the Muslim Ummah”. Every Muslim is a member of the ummah. The Ka`bah is a visual center of gravity for the Muslim ummah—Muslims all over the world face the same Ka`bah five times a day and confirm their brotherhood.

2. The Prophet & Islamic Brotherhood

The issue of Islamic brotherhood and fraternity was so important in Islam that soon after migrating to Medina, the first important social decree of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) was on the issue of brotherhood.

The Muslim community of Medina was divided into two groups: the Ansār and the Muhājirīn. “Ansār” (Helpers) was a title used for the natives of Medina, whereas “Muhājirīn” (Immigrants) was a title used for those Muslims, mostly Meccans, who had migrated to Medina.

Among the Ansār, there were two tribes known as the Aws and the Khazraj who were bitter enemies and had fought each other for more than a century. The Prophet had resolved this conflict even before he migrated to Medina. With the advent of Islam, the Aws and the Khazraj put their past animosity behind and accepted the bond of Islamic brotherhood. Referring to this blessing of Islam, Allah says:

“And remember the favour of Allah upon you—you indeed were enemies (of each other) and then He created fraternity between your hearts and thus you became brethren by His blessing...”

(3:103)

The Prophet found that there was cultural and economic disparity among the Ansār and the Muhājirīn. So with the guidance of Allah, the Prophet announced one day that he was going to establish the bond of brotherhood between the Ansār and the Muhājirīn. He gathered the two groups at the mosque and then started calling out the name of one Muhājir and one Ansār, and declared them to be brothers of each other. Referring to this bond of brotherhood, Allah says:

“Those who believed, migrated and fought in the way of Allah [i.e., the Muhājirīn], and those who gave shelter and helped [i.e., the Ansār]—they are the true believers, for them is forgiveness and a noble sustenance...” (8:75)

Some of the Ansār went beyond the call of duty in fulfilling the rights of brotherhood: they divided their entire wealth into two and gave one-half to their immigrant brother-in-faith. Some even specified a substantial portion in their estate to be inherited by their immigrant brother-in-faith. Then Allah revealed the following verse

“The blood relatives have more right to each other in the Book of Allah”.

This shows that one of the first steps towards building an Islamic community is creating the atmosphere

for Islamic brotherhood and fraternity.

An interesting segment of the event of brotherhood is that when the Prophet had joined each Muhajir with an Ansar, 'Ali bin Abi Tālib (a Muhajir) was left out. So he came to the Prophet (who was also a Muhajir) and complained that he had been left out from the bond of brotherhood between the Muhajirin and the Ansar. The Prophet said, "O 'Ali! You are my brother in this world as well as in the hereafter."

3. The Moral Rights of Brotherhood

Islamic brotherhood as expressed in the Qur'ān ("Indeed the believers are brothers") is not just a fancy idea. It had been implemented by the Prophet in Medina. There are certain rights which the believers have over each other. Allah has described some of those rights immediately after the verse quoted above.

In this lesson, you will learn six of those rights from the Qur'ān:

"O you who believe!

1. ***"No people should laugh at, or make fun of, another people."***

You might laugh at others because of what you see—their appearance, dress or way of living. But you do not know anything about their hearts and minds. Their faces and dresses might look funny to you, but inside they may be better than you. Therefore, do not make fun of other people ***"because those who are being laughed at may be better, in Allah's view, than those who laugh."*** (49:11)

2. ***"Do not find fault with your own Muslim brothers."*** (49:11)

A Muslim should pay more attention to his own deeds and try to amend his own mistakes. There is no need to probe and find the faults or mistakes of others.

3. ***"Do not call one another by insulting nicknames."*** (49:11)

Every Muslim has a good name; call others by their proper name or by a nickname which they use for themselves. But never call names because Allah does not like that one Muslim should insult his own brother-in-faith.

After mentioning these three rights of Muslim over each other, Allah ends the verse with the following statement: ***"And those who (commit such sins and) do not ask forgiveness, they are the unjust people."***

This verse of the Qur'ān makes it clear that even such trivial things —making fun of others or calling names— are so much disliked by Allah that He considers such sins as "injustice". And He surely does not like the unjust people!

4. **“O you who believe! Avoid most of the suspicious [thoughts about other Muslims].” (49: 12)**

The reason why Allah wants us to avoid most of the suspicious thoughts about other Muslims has been explained by Allah in the next sentence: **“Surely suspicion in most cases is a sin.”** Islam wants you to think positively about your Muslim brother and sister.

5. **“And do not spy [on each other].” (49: 12)**

Spying on your Muslim brother or sister and trying to find their weak points and secrets is not allowed in Islam.

6. **“Nor should some of you backbite others.” (49: 12)**

“Backbiting” is known in Arabic as *ghibat*. *Ghibat* means talking about the hidden bodily defects or secret inappropriate behaviour of someone behind his/her back.

The reason why *ghibat* of another Muslim is forbidden in Islam has been explained by Allah in the next sentence of the verse: **“Does any one of you like to bite the flesh of his dead brother?! Surely you dislike it.”**

Ghibat is just like biting the dead body of your own brother: he cannot defend himself. Saying bad things about someone in his absence is almost the same—he is not present to defend himself. In this sense, the term “backbiting” is very close to the meaning of *“ghibat”*.

The last three sins —suspicion, spying and backbiting— are connected to each other. If you avoid the first one, you will be able to stay away from the other two sins. But if you always suspect others, then you will be tempted to spy on them or find bad things about them. If you find out anything negative about others, then you are tempted to gossip about them.

So keep your mind clean and try to think good of your Muslim brethren. These are some ethical rights which Muslims have over each other.

* * *

This lesson has been written by Sayyid M. Rizvi

Question Paper on Lesson 27

Question 1: [20 points]

True or False:

- (a) Islam gives preference to the Arabs.
- (b) Ummah means the Arab nation.

- (c) Islamic brotherhood transcends all racial boundaries.
- (d) Allah created each race from different first parents.
- (e) Ansar means the refugees.
- (f) Aws and Khazraj were from the Muhājirīn.
- (g) Suspicious thoughts about Muslims must be avoided at all times.
- (h) Suspicion, spying and backbiting are connected to each other.
- (i) The name of Chapter 49 of the Qurʾān is al-Hujarāt.
- (j) The word “ghibat” used in this lesson and the word “ghaybat” in Lesson 18 mean the same thing.

Question 2: [10 points]

What is the basis of Islamic brotherhood?

Question 3: [10 points]

Briefly describe the event of brotherhood from the Islamic history.

Question 4: [10 points]

List the ethical rights of brotherhood as described in Chapter 49 of the Qurʾān.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/islam-faith-practice-history-sayyid-muhammad-rizvi/lesson-27-islamic-community-1#comment-0>