

Right n. 32: The Right of the Neighbor

حق الجار

وَأَمَّا حَقُّ الْجَارِ فَحِفْظُهُ غَائِبًا وَكَرَامَتُهُ شَاهِدًا وَنُصْرَتُهُ وَمَعُونَتُهُ فِي الْحَالِينِ جَمِيعًا. لَا تَتَّبِعْ لَهُ عَوْرَةً وَلَا تَبْحَثْ لَهُ عَنْ سَوْءٍ [لِتَعْرِفَهَا، فَإِنْ عَرَفْتَهَا مِنْهُ عَنْ غَيْرِ إِرَادَةٍ مِنْكَ وَلَا تَكْلُفٍ كُنْتَ لِمَا عَلِمْتَ حِصْنًا حَصِينًا وَسِتْرًا سَتِيرًا، لَوْ بَحِثْتَ الْأَسِنَّةَ عَنْهُ ضَمِيرًا لَمْ تَتَّصِلْ إِلَيْهِ لِانْطَوَائِهِ عَلَيْهِ. لَا تَسْتَمِعْ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُ. لَا تُسَلِّمُهُ عِنْدَ شَدِيدَةٍ، وَلَا تَحْسُدْهُ عِنْدَ نِعْمَةٍ. تُقْبِلُ عَثْرَتَهُ وَتَغْفِرُ زَلَّتَهُ. وَلَا تَدْخِرْ حِلْمَكَ عَنْهُ إِذَا جَهَلَ عَلَيْكَ، وَلَا تَخْرُجْ أَنْ تَكُونَ سُلْمًا لَهُ. تَرُدُّ عَنْهُ لِسَانَ الشَّتِيمَةِ، وَتُبْطِلُ فِيهِ كَيْدَ حَامِلِ النَّصِيحَةِ، وَتُعَاشِرُهُ مُعَاشِرَةَ كَرِيمَةٍ. وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

And the right of your neighbor is that you should be a guardian for him when he is absent, and you should honor him when he is present, and you should assist and support him in both situations. You should not pursue any of his imperfections, and you should not seek any of his faults. But if you should discover any of his faults unintentionally, you should take the role of a fortified stronghold and a veiling screen regarding what you know.

You should guard them in such a way that none of his defects can be discovered even if they are thoroughly inspected with spears. And you should not eavesdrop on him, and you should not forsake him during times of hardship. And you should not envy him when he receives a blessing. Pardon his deviation and forgive his mistakes. And do not lose your temper when he behaves out of ignorance with you. And do not stop to be his supporter, and answer those who scold him. And divulge for him the deception of those who counsel him, and associate with him in an honorable manner. And there is no power or strength but in God.

The Arabic word ‘jar’ meaning neighbor is used with several implications in the Holy Qur’an. In some places, it is used to refer to neighbors – close or far away. In the Holy Qur’an, it is also used to refer to those who seek asylum as in the following verse:

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ فَأَجِرْهُ

“If one amongst the Pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him...” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Tawbah 9:6]

The above word used for neighbor has the deeper meaning of security. That implies that neighbors are granted security by each other. The right of a neighbor is great both intellectually and religiously. The word ‘jar’ is used in any place where there is a great right as in the following verse:

لَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَإِنِّي جَارٌ لَّكُمْ

“No one among men can overcome you this day, while I am near to you.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Anfal 8:48]

Here in the phrase ‘I am near to you’ in Arabic the word ‘jar’ is used. The Qur’an refers to close-by and distant neighbors. We shall discuss this issue next.

The Rights of Neighbors as Viewed in the Qur’an

Consider the following verse of the Holy Qur’an:

وَاعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَلَا تُشْرِكُوا بِهِ شَيْئًا وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَبِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَالْجَارِ ذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْجَارِ
الْجُنُبِ وَالصَّاحِبِ بِالْجَنْبِ وَابْنِ السَّبِيلِ وَمَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُكُمْ

“Serve God, and join not any partners with Him; and do good – to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess.” [The Holy Qur’an, al-Nisaa 4:36]

The verse refers to some of the rights in Islam including those of neighbors. ‘Neighbors who are near’ in this verse has been interpreted by various commentators to imply various things. Some consider it to imply relatives. However, since the verses that have preceded this verse in the Qur’an refer to the rights of relatives this interpretation seems to be an unlikely meaning. Rather other implications seem to be more appropriate. It may mean neighbors who are closer to us in religion.

“Neighbors who are strangers” implies physical distance. According to traditions people living in up to forty houses away in either direction are considered our neighbors. It may also refer to non-Muslim neighbors who are not fighting with Muslims. ¹ Now that we have studied the Qur’anic verses regarding neighbors, we will briefly review the traditions on this issue.

Traditions on the Rights of Neighbors

There are many traditions about the rights of neighbors, their due respect and their role in our security.

The Prophet of God said:

مَنْ أَعْلَقَ بَابَهُ خَوْفًا مِنْ جَارِهِ عَلَى أَهْلِهِ وَمَالِهِ فَلَيْسَ جَارُهُ مُؤْمِنًا.

“The neighbor because of whom one locks the door, out of fear for one’s family and wealth, is not a believer.”

The Prophet of God was asked: “O Prophet of God! What are the rights of neighbors incumbent upon other neighbors?” He said:

مِنْ أَدْنَى حُقُوقِهِ عَلَيْهِ إِنْ اسْتَفْرَضَهُ أَفْرَضَهُ وَإِنْ اسْتَعَانَهُ أَعَانَهُ وَإِنْ اسْتَعَارَ مِنْهُ إِعَارَهُ وَإِنْ أَحْتَاجَ إِلَى رِفْدِهِ رَفَدَهُ وَإِنْ دَعَا أَجَابَهُ وَإِنْ مَرِضَ عَادَهُ وَإِنْ مَاتَ شَيَّعَ جِنَازَتَهُ وَإِنْ أَصَابَ خَيْرًا فَرِحَ بِهِ وَلَمْ يَحْسُدْهُ وَإِنْ أَصَابَ مُصِيبَةً حَزَنَ لِحَزْنِهِ وَلَا يَسْتَطِيلُ عَلَيْهِ بِنَاءٍ سَكَنَهُ فَيُؤْذِيهِ بِإِشْرَافِهِ عَلَيْهِ وَسَدِّ مَنَافِذِ الرِّيحِ عَنْهُ وَإِنْ أَهْدَى إِلَى مَنْزِلِهِ طُرُقًا أَهْدَى لَهُ قِسْمًا مِنْهَا إِذَا عَلِمَ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ عِنْدَهُ مِثْلُهَا أَوْ فَلَيْسَتْ رِجْلُهَا عَنْهُ وَعَنْ عِيَالِهِ إِنْ شَحَّتْ نَفْسُهُ بِهَا. إِسْمَعُوا مَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ: لَمْ يُؤَدِّ حَقَّ الْجَارِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ مِمَّنْ رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ، وَلَقَدْ أَوْصَانِي اللَّهُ بِالْجَارِ حَتَّى ظَنَنْتُ أَنَّهُ سَيُورِيئُهُ.

“The least of a neighbor’s rights on him is that if he asks him for a loan he should grant it to him. If he asks for help, he should help him. If he wants to borrow something from him, he should lend it to him. If he needs him to donate something to him, he should do so. If he invites him, he should accept his invitation. If he gets sick, he should go and visit him. If he passes away, he should attend his funeral procession.

If he receives some blessings, he should be happy and not envious of him. If a tragedy befalls him, he should grieve for his grief. He should not build a tall building in front of his dwelling which would trouble him due to its overlooking his house and obstructing the passage of breeze. If he is presented with some novelty in his house, then he should present him a part of it if he knows that he does not have something like it, otherwise he should conceal it from him and his family if he desires it for himself.”

(The Prophet of God then added:) *“Listen to what I tell you. Only a few people who are blessed by God’s Mercy fulfil the rights of neighbors. God enjoined on me the rights of the neighbor to the extent that I thought He would appoint him as an heir.”*²

There are three important points stressed by the Prophet in this tradition. The first point is that each person’s house is his place of peace and security, both for his property and for honor. Should one lose his security at home, he has lost his most secure stronghold. This peace and security is everyone’s certain right, and should not be violated by anyone. If one lives in such a way that threatens the security

of his neighbors, then he is not a true believing Muslim.

The second point that is stressed here is not to build tall buildings overlooking other people's houses. We all know that at the time of the Prophet there were no tall buildings in Arabia. However, the teachings of the Prophet are universal, and for all times. Thus, he instructed us not to build such buildings. This is one of the signs of the completeness of Islamic teachings and a proof of Islam being the last religion. Housing is still one of man's major social problems.

The problem of finding a secure place to live is not only one of our problems, but it is also one of most countries of the world. The Westerners have chosen living in apartments with all its problems and limitations. Our people are also following this practice. The third point that is stressed is that one should not show what he brings into his house to his neighbors, or give a little of what he brings home to his neighbors if they are poor.

It is Forbidden to Hurt One's Neighbors

Imam Sadiq said:

مَلْعُونٌ مِّنْ آذَى جَارِهِ.

*"One who troubles his neighbor is cursed."*³

On the other hand, pleasing one's neighbor is a cause of forgiveness. In Lubb al-Lubab Qutb al-Rawandi quoted on the authority of God's Prophet :

مَنْ مَاتَ وَلَهُ جِيرَانٌ ثَلَاثَةٌ كُلُّهُمْ رَاضُونَ عَنْهُ غُفِرَ لَهُ.

*"Anyone who dies with three neighbors pleased with him will be forgiven (by God)."*⁴

The Prophet of God said:

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلَا يُؤْذِ جَارَهُ.

*"Whoever believes in God and the Final Day should not trouble his neighbors."*⁵

The Prophet also said:

حُرْمَةُ الْجَارِ عَلَى الْجَارِ كَحُرْمَةِ أُمَّهِ.

“The reverence of a neighbor incumbent on the neighbor is like the reverence due to one’s mother.”⁶

Complaining Against One’s Neighbor

Imam Sadiq narrated that someone complained to the Prophet of God about his neighbor. The Prophet turned his face away from him. He came back again. Then the Prophet told Ali , Salman and Miqdad:

إِذْهَبُوا وَنَادُوا أَنْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ عَلَى مَنْ آذَى جَارَهُ.

“Go and publicly announce that the curse of God and the angels is on one who troubles his neighbor.”⁷

Treating Neighbors with Kindness

The Noble Prophet said:

الْبِرُّ وَحُسْنُ الْجَوَارِ زِيَادَةٌ فِي الرِّزْقِ وَعِمَارَةٌ فِي الدِّيَارِ.

“Treating one’s neighbors with kindness and being a good neighbor will result in an increase in one’s share of daily bread and the development of towns.”⁸

Imam Ridha has been quoted as having said the following in Fiqh al-Ridha:

وَأَحْسِنُ مُجَاوِرَةً مَنْ جَاوَرَكَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى يَسْأَلُكَ عَنِ الْجَارِ، وَقَدْ رُوِيَ عَنِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: أَنْ اللَّهَ تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى أَوْصَانِي بِالْجَارِ حَتَّى ظَنَنْتُ أَنَّهُ يَرِثُنِي.

“Be a good neighbor for your neighbors since God will ask you about the neighbour. God’s Prophet has been quoted as having said: God the Almighty enjoined on me the rights of the neighbor to the extent that I thought he will inherit from me.”⁹

Be Considerate With Your Neighbors

It is quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

مَا آمَنَ بِي مَنْ بَاتَ شَبْعَانَ وَجَارُهُ جَائِعٌ.

“Whoever spends the night with a full stomach, while his neighbor is hungry, does not believe in me.”¹⁰

He also said:

مَا آمَنَ بِي مَنْ بَاتَ شَبَعَانَ وَجَارُهُ طَاوٍ، مَا آمَنَ بِي مَنْ بَاتَ كَاسِيًا وَجَارُهُ عَارٍ.

“One who spends the night with a full stomach while his neighbor is hungry, has not believed in me. One who spends the night clothed, while his neighbor has no clothes, has not believed in me.” [11](#)

In a letter to his governor Uthman ibn Hunayf, Imam Ali wrote:

أَأَبِيْتُ مِبْطَانًا وَحَوْلِي بُطُونٌ غَرَّتِي وَأَكْبَادٌ حَرَّتِي؟

“Should I pass the night with a full stomach while around me are hungry and thirsty bellies?” [12](#)

Bad Neighbors

It has been quoted on the authority of God’s Prophet :

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ جَارٍ سَوْءٍ فِي دَارٍ إِقَامَةٍ تَرَكَ عَيْنَاهُ وَيَرَعَاكَ قَلْبُهُ، إِنْ رَأَكَ بِخَيْرٍ سَاءَ وَإِنْ رَأَكَ بِشَرٍّ سَرَّهُ.

“I seek refuge in God from an evil neighbor next to one’s place of residence. His eyes see you and his heart watches you. If he sees you in a good state, it grieves him, and if he sees you in a bad state, it makes him happy.” [13](#)

Investigate Before Buying a House

The Noble Prophet said:

إِلْتَمِسُوا الْجَارَ قَبْلَ شِرَاءِ الدَّارِ وَالرَّفِيقَ قَبْلَ الطَّرِيقِ.

“Ask about the neighbor before buying the house, and the travelling companion before starting the journey.” [14](#)

The Domain of Neighborhood

Imam Sadiq quoted on the authority of the Commander of the Faithful :

حَرِيمُ الْمَسْجِدِ أَرْبَعُونَ دَارًا وَالْجَوَارُ أَرْبَعُونَ دَارًا مِنْ أَرْبَعَةِ جَوَانِبِهَا.

“The domain of the neighborhood of a mosque and a house is forty houses in four directions.” [15](#)

Imam Sajjad said: “The people living in forty houses on either side of your house are your neighbors. You must respect their rights, live with them, and associate with them in peace. Seek God’s help to do so.

- [1.](#) Tafsir-i-Namunah, v.3, pp.380-381.
- [2.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, p.79.
- [3.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, pp.78-79.
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Ibid.
- [6.](#) Ibid.
- [7.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, pp.78-79.
- [8.](#) Ibid.
- [9.](#) Ibid. p.80.
- [10.](#) Ibid. pp.78-79.
- [11.](#) Mustadrak al-Wasa'il, v.2, pp.78-79.
- [12.](#) Ibid.
- [13.](#) Ibid.
- [14.](#) Ibid.
- [15.](#) Ibid.

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