

SOCIAL MANNERS, Part 1

Respect And Favour The Elderly

Recognize the status of the elderly and give them due respect. When walking with them, walk slightly behind, to their right. Let them enter and exit first. If you meet them, greet them properly and respectfully. If you discuss something with them, let them speak first, and listen to them attentively and graciously. If the conversation involves debate, you should remain polite, calm, and kind-hearted and you should lower your voice. Never forget to remain respectful.

When he was young, Abdullah bin Omar was at a gathering of the Prophet and his senior companions, like Abu Bakr and his father. The Prophet asked his companions, **'Tell us which is the tree that does not shed its leaves and is like the Muslim.'** The companions started suggesting names of desert trees. Abdullah bin Omar thought it was the **date-palm**. Since he was the youngest, and seeing Abu Bakr and Omar silent, he shied away and said nothing. The Prophet told his companions: 'It is the palm tree'. Later, Abdullah told his father that he knew the right answer but shied away. Omar said to his son 'For you to have said it right then, would have been worth a lot to me.'

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: 'Whoever does not respect our elders is not one of us.' Another version reported: 'Whoever does not respect our elders, is not compassionate to our youth, and does not give our scholars due honor, he is not one of us.'

Nevertheless, we should not belittle the youth.... Ibn Abbas once said, that Omar was allowing him to attend his court with seniors who attended **Badr**. Some of them felt uneasy and asked, 'Why are you permitting him to attend our gatherings, when he is as young as our children?' Omar replied, 'He is **[knowledgeable]** as you well know.' Another version elaborates that Omar asked the seniors to explain Sura Al-Fatiha and only Abdullah in Abbas explained it correctly. Ibn Abbas said, 'I thought he asked the question just to demonstrate my knowledge to them.'

The Elderly Are To Lead Prayers

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) taught the youth manners of companionship and the custom of giving priority to elders. Al-Bukhari and Muslim reported that the honored companion Malik bin Huwyrith (RA) said: 'I was with a youth group that visited the Messenger of Allah in Madina for twenty nights. The Messenger of Allah was very kind and compassionate. He sensed that we might have missed our families back home and he asked us about whom we had left behind. When we informed him, he said: 'Go back to your families, live with them, teach them Islam and tell them of good deeds. At prayer times, let one of you call the Azan, and have your eldest lead the prayer.'

The Prophet (PBUH) teaches us that the eldest should lead the prayers since they were above in knowledge. Being older in such a case merits leading the prayers. But, if a person is more knowledgeable, then he should lead the prayer since knowledge is an honor higher than age.

If the prayers were offered at a house, the host is entitled to lead it. Out of respect, he may request a person who is more knowledgeable, older or more prominent. If

the guest declines, the host should not hesitate to lead the prayers. Imam Ahmad reported that Abdullah ibn Masoud visited Abu Musa Al-Ashari. When it was time to pray, Abu Musa asked Ibn Masoud, 'Please lead the prayers since you are older and have more knowledge.' Ibn Masoud said, 'No, you lead the prayer. This is your house and praying area. You should lead the prayer.' Abu Musa did lead the prayer then.

Walking With the Elderly

'Ali bin Mubarak Al-Karkhi (-487H), was walking with his teacher Imam Abi Y'ala Al-Hanbali, the chief Shaikh of the Hanbali School of Law: 'Judge Abu Y'ala asked me 'If you walked with someone you honor, where would you walk?' I said: 'I do not know.' He said, 'Walk to his right. Place him at the position of Imam in the prayer. Leave his left side clear.'

The Elderly Are To Be Served First

Give preference to the elderly or to dignitaries, ahead of anyone else. After that, you may proceed with those on their **right** if you want to follow the practice of the Prophet (PBUH). Huzaifa (RA) said: 'Whenever we were invited to a meal with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), we would not reach the food with our hands before he reached for it.'

To emphasize the importance of these manners, Imam Al-Nawawi, in his book *Riyad Al-Salihîn*, cited a large collection of Hadith and devoted a whole chapter to the subject of 'Respecting Scholars, the Elderly and the Dignitaries. Allah said in the Quran: 'Are those equal, those who know and those who do not know? It is those who possess understanding that receive admonition.'

The Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Those who are best at reciting the Quran should lead the prayer. If they are equal, then those most practicing in the Sunnah should lead; if they are equal, then a person who migrated first [from Makka to Madina] should lead; if they had migrated at the same time, then an elder should lead.'

Ibn Mas'od said that the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Let your **wise** and **mature** pray immediately behind **me**, then those who trail behind them, and then those who trail behind them.'

Jabir bin Abdullah (RA) said: 'After the battle of Uhud, the Prophet (PBUH) buried two martyrs in one grave. He asked, 'which one memorized more of the Quran?' Upon being told which it was, he laid him first facing Qibla.'

Abduallah bin Omar (RA) stated that the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'I dreamt I was brushing my teeth with a **Miswaak** when two men approached me. I handed the **Miswaak** to the younger but was instructed to hand it to the older. Accordingly, I handed it to the older.'

Abu Mûsa Al-Ash'ari (RA) stated that the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Part of paying respect to Allah is to respect an elder whose hair has turned **gray**, or a [regular] reader of the Quran, or a just ruler.'

This desired behavior towards elders is so important that the Prophet made it a part of respecting and honoring Allah. To ignore it is a gross misbehavior. An honored

poet counted a group of rules and mentioned, that whoever broke these rules should be punished. The **8** rules are:

Disrespecting a grand ruler

Entering a house without being invited to do so.

Giving orders/directions at another's house.

Taking an undeserved seat of honor. (like dad's couch)

Insisting on discussing a topic with others.

Interrupting two others.

Asking charity from a person of low character.

Seeking a favor from an enemy.

Which **8** rules should not be broken?

'Part of paying respect to Allah is to respect an elder whose _____.'

Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Let your _____ and _____ pray immediately behind **me**,

Prophet (PBUH) said: 'Those who are best at _____ should lead the prayer.'

Huzaifa (RA) said: 'Whenever we were invited to a meal with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), we would not _____.'

Which is the tree that does not shed its leaves and is like the Muslim?'

If the prayers were offered at a house, who is entitled to lead it?