

# The Rights of Neighbours in Islam (part 1 of 2): The Kind Treatment of Neighbours

**Description:** A look at how Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, and the *sahabah* treated their neighbours.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2014 NewMuslims.com)

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## Objectives

- To see and understand how neighbourly relations reflect on the wider community.
- To understand that good neighbours and neighbourly concern is a blessing from Allah and should be maintained and nurtured.
- To realise that concern for neighbours means for all neighbours not just those of the same race, ethnicity or religion.

## Arabic Terms

- *Hadith* - (plural " *ahadith* ") is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Sahabah* - the plural form of " *Sahabi*," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.

In an authentic *hadith*, the good and kind treatment of neighbours is linked to belief in Allah and the tenants of Islam. Prophet Muhammad said that, "For whoever believes in Allah and the Day of Judgement it is essential that he does not harm his neighbours..." [1] Thus we are able to understand that the rights of neighbours hold a high status in Islam, in fact Prophet Muhammad's beloved wife Aisha narrated in another *hadith* that the angel Gabriel was so insistent that the rights of neighbours be upheld that he, Prophet Muhammad, wondered if inheritance rights would be bestowed upon close neighbours.



The *sahabah* were constantly reminded by both word and deed that Allah and His messenger placed great importance on the consideration and kind treatment of neighbours. Prophet Muhammad once had a neighbour that harmed and insulted him at every opportunity. When a few days had gone past and the Prophet did not encounter the man, he visited him because he was concerned that his neighbour might have been ill or be in need of help. That is how Prophet Muhammad treated his neighbours, even those who were not his brothers and sisters in Islam. A good neighbour is one who guarantees comfort, security and safety. This is true regardless of the ethnicity or religion of the neighbours. Community relations are very important and should be able to transcend perceived barriers such as race, religion or political affiliation.

The Muslim society, particularly the society that was set up in the city of Medina, placed great emphasis on community cohesion. If one member of the community suffers then the whole community is at risk. In the past, neighbours and wider community members depended on each other in times of strife or calamity. This is not so far from the situations we find ourselves in today; old people die alone and are forgotten and neighbours go hungry huddled behind closed doors. Many community problems such as these could be solved by neighbourly concern.

Recently a group of high school boys in Sydney Australia began mowing lawns and cleaning the yards of their elderly and disadvantaged neighbours.<sup>[2]</sup> The boys are Muslims; however most of their neighbours are not. What a noble way for these youth to follow in the footsteps of their beloved Prophet. The people of the neighbourhood talked of their surprise and initial wariness of the boys' intentions but with time they became comfortable. Good neighbourly relations is exactly what Prophet Muhammad said it was; a joy in one's life.

As we can see from the Sydney example, Muslims are in a unique position to give communities something that is often missing as the world drifts into the future: community unity and a safe environment. As Muslims we know that part of obeying Allah and his Messenger is ensuring a safe community for all. We do not have to guess at ways to make that a reality but are able to follow the guidance of the Quran and the authentic *Sunnah*.

Because of the importance of having good neighbours, people often make inquiries before they move into a certain area. This is because a wrong type of neighbour can make life miserable. Just as a bad relationship with a neighbour can make life wretched, a good neighbour can do just the opposite. Prophet Muhammad said, "Among the things that bring happiness to a believer in this life are a righteous neighbour, a spacious house and a comfortable means of transport".<sup>[3]</sup> If we are unsure about how to treat our neighbours then we can look to the *sahabah* and try to emulate their behaviour in a way that is suited to our time and place.

Abu Dhar, was told by Prophet Muhammad to add extra water to his broth in order to be able to offer some to his neighbours.<sup>[4]</sup> Abdullah ibn Amr once asked his servant after slaughtering a sheep, "Did you give some to our Jewish neighbour?"<sup>[5]</sup> A believer is encouraged to give gifts even if they are of little monetary value. The true value of the gift is the spirit with which it is given. The giving of gifts encourages friendship and good

neighbourly relations. When the Prophet's wife Aisha asked him which neighbours she should send her gifts to, he replied, "To the one whose door is closest to yours".<sup>[6]</sup> Although the closest neighbours are the ones we should be mindful of in the first instance, Islam urges us to take care of all our neighbours and to be mindful of the wider community.

There are many *ahadith* that stress the importance of kind treatment to neighbours. "The best of companions with Allah is the one who is best to his companion, and the best of neighbours with Him is the one who is best to his neighbour." But what about those neighbours that disrupt the fair enjoyment a person is entitled to in his or her own home? Prophet Muhammad was asked about a certain woman who prayed and fasted more than was obligatory upon her, and gave generously in charity, but unfortunately, she did not refrain from speaking harshly to her neighbours. He described her as being among the people of Hell. Another woman was described to him who worshipped no more than was obligatory upon her and he said she was a person from Paradise simply because she was a good neighbour.<sup>[7]</sup>

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Endnotes:

<sup>[1]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim.*

<sup>[2]</sup>

<http://mobile.news.com.au/national/nsw-act/whipper-snipper-boys-will-do-your-lawn-for-free/story-fnii5s3x-1226908304459>

<sup>[3]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

<sup>[4]</sup> *Saheeh Muslim*

<sup>[5]</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>[6]</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>[7]</sup> *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

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