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FAITH AND ETHICS: SPEECH ETIQUETTE, NEIGHBORLINESS, AND HOSPITALITY

Abstract. This article examines the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that emphasizes three essential virtues: speaking good or remaining silent, treating neighbors well, and honoring guests. These principles represent fundamental ethical values in Islam and are considered practical manifestations of a believer's faith. The study analyzes classical scholarly interpretations, including the commentaries of Ibn Hajar, Imam Nawawi, and other leading scholars, highlighting how speech etiquette, social responsibility, and hospitality contribute to social harmony and moral development within Muslim communities. The article also explores Qur'anic verses and additional hadiths that reinforce the importance of ethical conduct, emotional restraint, and respect for others as core elements of Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Islamic ethics, speech etiquette, neighbor rights, hospitality, hadith studies, moral conduct, social harmony, prophetic traditions.

INTRODUCTION

In Islamic teachings, a person's culture of speech, behavior, and interaction is considered one of the fundamental indicators of faith. One of the main objectives of Islam is to establish mutual respect, generosity, and humanity within society. Therefore, a Muslim's faith is demonstrated not only through belief but also through words, actions, and moral conduct.

The sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) place special emphasis on speech manners, neighborly relations, and hospitality. These qualities are interpret-

ed as practical expressions of one's inner faith. Using language correctly—promoting goodness through speech or refraining from unnecessary talk—is considered proof of complete faith.

Respecting neighbors, avoiding causing harm, and offering support are essential aspects of Islamic ethics. Islamic sources interpret these virtues as the foundation of social stability. Likewise, honoring guests is regarded as part of the legacy of the prophets and a sign of generosity, respect, and compassion.

All these virtues carry significance not only from a religious perspective but also in ensuring social stability and spiritual integrity. The culture of speech, neighborly relations, and hospitality plays a major role in shaping the moral identity of Muslim society.

The hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra (may Allah be pleased with him) states:

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be good to his neighbor; and whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honor his guest.”

This hadith is narrated by Imam Bukhari and Muslim.

Scholarly Commentary on the Hadith:

Some scholars state that all virtues originate from this hadith. Others say that this hadith represents half of Islam, because Islamic rulings relate either to Allah or to creation, and this hadith describes the rulings related to creation.

Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) explains: “This hadith is one of the concise statements. Speech can either be good or evil. If a word brings benefit or is recommended, one should speak it; otherwise, speaking is considered harmful or leads to harm.”

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami says: “This hadith contains great principles. Because it discusses the rulings related to the tongue—the organ that moves the most among human limbs. Therefore, this hadith may be considered one-third of Islam.”

Reason for the Hadith Being Stated:

In **Jami‘ al-Kabir**, Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Salam narrates:

“One day I came to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and said, ‘My neighbor is harming me.’ The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘Be patient.’ I came again, and he told me, ‘Be patient.’ When I came the third time, he said, ‘Gather your belongings and sit on the road. Whoever passes by, tell him: My neighbor is harming

me.' The neighbor became ashamed, and then the Prophet (peace be upon him) recited the hadith:

‘Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent; whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be good to his neighbor.’”

Explanation of the Hadith:

In the phrase “Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day,” the meaning refers to *complete faith*. A person who truly believes in the Creator and in being held accountable on the Day of Judgement should behave accordingly.

Imam Nawawi states: “If a person wishes to speak, he should speak only if his words are good and rewardable. If his words lead to something forbidden or disliked, he must refrain.”

The Qur'an says:

“Not a word does he utter except that with him is an observer ready (to record it).”
(Qaf, 18)

The great imam Abu Muhammad Ibn Abi Zayd al-Maliki states:

“All good manners stem from four hadiths:

1. ‘Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good or remain silent.’
2. ‘Leaving what does not concern one is part of the beauty of one’s Islam.’
3. ‘Do not become angry.’
4. ‘None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.’”

Luqman the Wise advised his son: “If speech is silver, silence is gold.” Ibn Mubarak explained: “If speech is obedience to Allah, it is silver. Refraining from sin is gold.”

Dhu'l-Nun al-Misri said: “The best of people is the one who controls his tongue.”

The continuation of the hadith states:

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honor his guest.”

Doing good to one’s neighbor, refraining from harming him, and showing kindness are signs of correct faith. Allah says:

“Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and do good to parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, near neighbors, distant neighbors, companions, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and boastful.” (Qur'an 4:36)

In another hadith narrated by Bukhari, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

“By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe! By Allah, he does not believe!”

The companions asked, “Who, O Messenger of Allah?”

He replied, “The one whose neighbor is not safe from his harm.”

The hadith continues:

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should honor his guest.”

Hospitality is among the noble qualities of the prophets and righteous people. Prophet Ibrahim (peace be upon him) was known as “the father of hospitality.”

Imam Nawawi states: “The scholars agree that honoring guests is among the emphasized practices of Islam.”

Imam Shafi‘i, Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa, and the majority of scholars considered hospitality recommended (sunnah), while Imam Layth and Imam Ahmad considered it obligatory for one night and one day.

Benefits Derived from the Hadith:

1. Respecting neighbors and refraining from harming them is obligatory.
2. Honoring guests is a noble and recommended act.
3. Caring for neighbors and guests is considered adherence to Islam.
4. One must protect himself from the harms of the tongue.
5. The hadith encourages adopting noble character traits.
6. The qualities mentioned are among the branches of faith.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of this hadith demonstrates that it encompasses three foundational principles of Islamic ethics: speaking good or remaining silent, treating one’s neighbor with kindness, and honoring guests. These three teachings serve as practical indicators of a believer’s faith and reflect the essence of Islamic moral conduct. It is for this reason that many scholars have regarded this narration as one of the comprehensive hadiths that summarize the major principles of the religion.

The hadith highlights that true faith is manifested not only through belief held in the heart but also through one’s daily actions. Guarding the tongue, refraining from harming others, maintaining strong neighborly relations, and showing hospitality are

essential traits that strengthen social harmony and promote compassion and mutual respect within society. The Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the explanations of classical scholars consistently emphasize these virtues as the core of Islamic character formation.

Thus, this hadith represents a universal ethical framework that nurtures moral excellence and contributes to social stability. Its teachings remain highly relevant today, offering guidance for cultivating noble conduct, fostering community cohesion, and embodying the values of sincere and complete faith.

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