

Islamic Manners, Part VI: Social Manners

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1) Manners of Jesting

Although being humorous is pleasant and commendable, there are some manners and rulings related to it that have to be observed.

A) Jesting does not mean impoliteness, vain talks, inappropriate words, or mocking people. A joke that hurts someone is a sin. The Prophet (s) said, “I make jokes, but I do not say except the truth” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 16:298).

A group of people had gathered around the Prophet (s). One of them got up to go out but forgot to take his shoes. He only realized it when he had reached the door. He returned to take his shoes, but one of the companions had hidden his shoes to tease him. Not being able to find his shoes, he asked, “Where are my shoes?” The companions replied, “We have not seen your shoes.” The Prophet (s) became aware of this, and said, “Why do you frighten a believer?” They replied. “We are just joking.” The Prophet (s) said two or three times, “What does it mean to frighten a believer” (Mundhiri n.d., 3;484)?

One of the companions of Imam Ali (a) says,

Once, I asked the Imam (a), “A person is sitting with a group. They talk to each other, make jokes, and laugh. Is anything wrong with this?” He (a) replied, “As long as there is nothing, it is alright.” I thought what the Imam (a) meant was that there should not be any swearing. The Imam then said, “A Bedouin Arab used to visit the Prophet (s) and give him gifts. He would then say, ‘Give me the price of my gift.’ And then the Prophet (s) would laugh. When the Prophet (s) was sad, he would say, ‘Where is the Bedouin Arab? I wish he was here’” (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:663).

Therefore, the jokes that involve insulting and mockery must be avoided. The Prophet (s) said,

Indeed, a person who talks in a meeting [and tells lies] to make people laugh will be left in the Hell which is between the heavens and earth. Woe to the one who lies to make people laugh! Woe to him! Woe to him! Woe to him! (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 12:251)

B) One should consider the time and the place in which he wants to make a joke and also the person he is going to joke with, including his mental situation, age, and condition. Sometimes a person is not mentally ready for a joke. An ill person or one who is trying to sleep or study are good examples. One should avoid joking with people at these times. If one does not pay attention to this point, jesting will lose its positive effects and will result in conflict and enmity.

C) Moderation should be observed in joking. The same way excessive salt makes the food unbearable, disproportionate jesting bears negative results. Imam Ali (a) said, “A mature person is the one whose

seriousness prevails over his wit” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 443). The following are some of the disadvantages of excessive jesting:

Ruining one’s dignity

An excess in jesting can ruin one’s dignity. Imam Ali (a) said, “Excessive jesting spoils one’s respect and grace, and excessive laughing reduces faith” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 73:58) and “Whoever jests a lot is a fool” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 222).

At the time of Imam Sajjad (a), there was a person who used to talk senselessly and make people laugh by his actions. Once he passed by Imam Sajjad (a) and said, “This man has made me tired. No matter what I do he does not laugh.” Then, trying to make the Imam (a) laugh, he took the Imam’s (a) cloak from his shoulders and ran. The Imam (a) ignored him, but other people who were there followed him and took the cloak back and brought it to the Imam (a). The Imam (a) asked them, “Who was he?” They answered, “He is a clown, who makes the people of Medina laugh by his actions.” The Imam (a) said, “Tell him that God has a day on which seekers of vanity will forfeit” (Majlisi 1403AH, 46:68).

Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Do not jest; otherwise, people will become impudent to you” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 12:118).

Creating hatred and hostility

Excessive jesting causes hatred and hostility. Imam Ali (a) said, “Jesting leaves grudges [among people]” (Harrani 1404 AH, 86), “Avoid jesting; for it fertilizes grudge” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 222), and “For everything there is a seed, and the seed of enmity is jesting” (436).

D) When jesting one must take into account on the age and gender of his targeted person. For example, a man should not jest with an unrelated woman. Abu Basir, one of the companions of Imam Baqir (a), says, “I used to teach the Quran to a lady in Kufa. One day I joked with her. When I went to Imam Baqir (a), he said, “What did you tell

the woman?” I was so ashamed that I covered my face with my hand. The Imam (a) then told me, “Never do that again” (Majlisi 1403AH, 46:258).

2) Manners of Rejoicing

Rejoicing has certain conditions and manners, some of which will be pointed out here:

A) Happy gatherings should not be corrupted with sins. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Do not make God dissatisfied to make his creatures pleased, and do not get close to people at the cost of getting far from God” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 16:154). He also said, “A believer should not sit in a gathering in which God is disobeyed and he cannot change it” (Hurr al-‘Amili 1409 AH, 16:260). Entertainments that are diversionary and harmful and those that cause negligence are banned in Islam. *Ghina* (sinful singing), gambling, and drinking alcohol are instances of banned entertainment.

B) One's rejoicing must not disturb or harm other people. The Prophet (s) said, “Whoever harms a believer has indeed harmed me, and whoever harms me has indeed harmed God” (Majlisi 1403AH, 64:72), and “Whoever harms Muslims in their path shall be cursed by God” (Muttaqi Hindi 1409 AH, 9:365).

C) Moderation in rejoicing is important; one should neither be a depressed figure nor an overjoyed person concerned only about his own happiness and indifferent to others' sorrows.

D) One should not be joyful in front of people who are sorrowful or people who have been stricken by a tragedy. Imam Hasan Askari (a) said, “Showing happiness near a sorrowful person is not polite” (Harrani 1404 AH, 784).

3) Manners of Entering Someone's Home

One of the manners of socializing in Islam is requesting permission for entrance. The Quran says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْنِسُوا وَ تَسَلِّمُوا عَلَى أَهْلِهَا ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

O you who have faith, Do not enter houses other than your own until you have announced [your arrival] and greeted their occupants. That is better for you. Maybe you will take admonition. (Quran 24:27)

The interesting point here is that the verb “*tasta’nisu*” is used, not “*tasta’dbinu*.” This is because the latter only indicates asking for permission, whereas the former, from the root ‘-n-s, suggests a kind of request for permission accompanied by friendliness and politeness. Therefore, many of the manners regarding our subject are summarized in this word. It implicates that one should not shout or ask for permission with a cold and unpleasant tone, and when granted the permission, he should not enter without saying *salam*, which is a sign of peace, affection, and friendship.

It should be noted that this ruling, whose humanely aspects are clear, has been followed by the phrase “*that is better for you.*” The reason is that these kinds of rulings are beneficial to mankind and are rooted deeply in human emotions and reason.

Once, Abu Sa’id, a companion of the Prophet (s), asked for permission to enter the Prophet’s (s) house while he was standing in front of the door. The Prophet (s) said, “While getting permission do not stand in front of the door.” The Prophet (s) himself used to stand at the right or left side of the door and say *salam* in order to get permission to enter someone’s home (Makarim Shirazi 1374 Sh, 14:431).

4) Manners of gatherings

Things mentioned in a private session should not be told elsewhere. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “[What is said in] gatherings is a trust. One does

not have the right to say things that have been kept secret by the person who said them except with his permission” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:660).

It is preferable to sit wherever there is room in a gathering, and not to sit in the forefront of the session. Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Whenever the Prophet [s] entered a house, he would sit in the closest possible seat” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:662).

In summers, when it is hot, it is appropriate to sit with a distance from others. The Prophet (s) is quoted to have said, “There should be a distance equivalent to the length of the bone of one’s arm between every two people sitting in a session in summer, so that they do not cause difficulty for one another” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:662).

One should avoid meetings in which people commit sins, backbite, or disrespect the Quran or the Islamic values. The Quran says,

وَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يُخَوضُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّى يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ
وَ إِمَّا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِى مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ

When you see those who gossip impiously about Our signs, avoid them until they engage in some other discourse. (Quran 6:68)

One ought to remain silent in class sessions, speeches, and religious ceremonies. Some people, mindful or unmindful of the situation, talk to their friends during these kinds of gatherings, which is impolite and a kind of insult to the speaker and the session.

One should be thoughtful of other people in gatherings. A person who is going to give a speech, deliver a sermon, or even tell a memory should be aware and considerate of others’ feelings.

Sometimes, in gatherings, people talk about matters that are not pleasant to some of the participants. It might be a joke or a memory that humiliates a group or nation and causes hatred and conflict.

There are also matters that should not be discussed in front of a special group of people, such as discussing sexual matters in front of children or disclosing confidential information to the public.

It is reported that upon leaving a session the Prophet (s) would say while standing up, “Immaculate are You, My lord, and with your praise I testify that there is no god but You. I ask for your forgiveness and return towards you” (Majlisi 1403AH, 2:63).

One of the manners of gatherings, which has been recommended in the Quran, is to give your place to others. Some gatherings are limited in capacity and if everyone wants to sit comfortably, there will be little space for others. This is why the Quran says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ
وَ إِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا

O you who have faith, when you are told, ‘Make room,’ in sittings, then do make room; God will make room for you. And when you are told, ‘Rise up!’ Do rise up. (Quran 58:11)

Imam Musa Kazim (a) said, “Do not sit with a scholar except with the one who takes you from five things to five things: from doubt to certainty, from arrogance to humbleness, from hypocrisy to sincerity, from enmity to friendliness, and from desire to piety” (Majlisi 1403 AH, 1:205).

There are people who participate in religious gatherings but lose the merit of their deed by backbiting, slander, or doing other sinful actions.

Whispering

One should avoid whispering to someone in the presence of other people, because they will be offended by being treated like strangers. Of course, in some cases this may become necessary, like when one needs to tell a personal matter to someone urgently and cannot wait until the end of the gathering. In such cases, whispering is permissible.

Inappropriate Habits

- Belching

If a person is at the presence of someone else, he should behave and avoid belching. In many cases, belching is caused by overeating, which should also be avoided. Abu Juhayfa, one of the companions of the Prophet (s), says,

I went to the Prophet (s) while belching. The Prophet (s) said, “Reduce your belching, for the fullest person in this world will be the hungriest one in the hereafter.” (Majlisi 1403AH, 63:339)

- Spitting in public
- Cleaning one’s ears or nose in presence of others
- Untidy clothes, undone buttons, and uncombed hair.
- Not brushing one’s teeth, having bad mouth smell or yellow teeth.

There are other habits too which have been mentioned in other sections of this series, such as overeating, excessive talking, oversleeping, etc.

Social Considerations

A requisite of social life is being considerate and forgiving to others:

1. In a place where people stand in line, sometimes one should give up his turn to others, e.g. when there is a disabled or ill person cannot stand or wait in the line.
3. On public transportation, one should give up one's seat to the elderly, pregnant women, or the disabled.
4. A person who has a contagious disease, such as flu, has to be considerate and cover his mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, so that his disease is not passed to others.
5. One should not bother a person who is sleeping by making noise or turning the lights on.
6. One should avoid saying prayers individually where a congregational prayer is held—even if one does not consider the imam to be qualified, in which situation one should find a way to fulfil his religious obligation and at the same time refrain from disgracing the imam publicly.

5) Manners of Interacting with the Elderly

In Islamic teachings, the necessity of respecting the elderly is so obvious that needs no explanation. However, the quality and manners of interacting with them deserves some discussion. The following is a list of these manners:

Greeting them by saying *salam*.

Letting them speak first.

Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Two people went to the Prophet (s) and the younger one spoke before the elder. The Prophet (s) said, ‘[Respect] the elder! [Respect] the elder!’” (Tabarsi 1965, 168).

1. Not walking ahead of them. Imam Sadiq (a) is quoted to have said, “Honoring Hasan (a), Husayn (a) would never walk ahead of him and never started talking before him” (Tabarsi 1965, 170).
2. Not annoying them.

3. Giving up your seat to them in gatherings and meetings and on public transportation.
4. Calling their names respectfully.
5. Listen to what they say.
6. Not to engage in arguments with them and forgiving their mistakes.

Respecting the elderly as the following results in this world and the next:

1. Being respected in one's old age. The Prophet (s) said, "No youth respects an elderly person, but God decrees that he will be honored when he reaches his old age" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 72:137). Imam Ali (a) also said, "Respect your elder people, and the younger ones will respect you" (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 482).
2. Protection from divine punishment. The Prophet (s) said, "Whoever appreciates the merit of an old person and respects him for his age, God will protect him from the fear of the Day of Judgment." (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 12:99)
3. Friendship with the Prophet (s). The Prophet (s) told Jabir, "Venerate the elderly, so that you be my fellow in the Hereafter" (Majlisi 1403 AH, 72:137).

6) Manners of Interacting with Parents

The following is a list of manners relating to interactions with parents and their rights:

1. Obeying them.

Imam Ali (a) said, "The right of a parent over his child is that the child should obey him in every matter, except in disobeying God" (Nahj al-balagha, wisdom 399).

2. Never insulting them in any way.

The Quran says in this regard, "Do not say to them, 'Fie!' And do not chide them, but speak to them noble words" (Quran 17:23).

3. Standing up to greet them.

Imam Ali (a) said, “Get up from your seat in front of your father and teacher even if you are a king” (Tamimi Amadi 1366 Sh, 435).

4. Interacting with them gently and respectfully.

Explaining the verse “lower the wing of humility towards them, out of mercy” (Quran 17:24), Imam Sadiq (a) said, “Do not look at them but with mercy and kindness, do not raise your voice over their voice nor your hands over their hands, and do not walk ahead of them” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:158). Imam Sadiq (a) also said, “Whoever looks at his parents with an angry look [even] while they are wronging him, his prayer will not be accepted” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:349).

5. Calling their names politely.

The Prophet (s) said: “Do not call him [i.e. your father] with his name, do not walk ahead of him, do not sit before he sits, and do not [do things that will] make people curse him” (Kulayni 1407AH, 2:159).

Some concluding points with regard to respecting parents:

a) There is no limit to respecting one’s parents, except if it involves disobeying God.

b) Respecting and doing good to parents is not only for the time they are alive. Malik ibn Rabi’ah says,

Once I was with the Prophet (s) when one of the Helpers (*ansar*) came and asked, “Is there any good that I can do to my parents after their death?” The Prophet (s) answered, “Yes, four things: praying for them, asking God to forgive them, fulfilling their promises, honoring their friends, and maintaining good relationship with the kinship to whom you are related through your parents; these are the good things left for you to do for them after their death.” (Muttaqi Hindi 1409 AH, 16:579)

c) One should respect one’s parents even if they are non-believers or non-practicing Muslims.

d) Respecting the sister of one's mother is also emphasized in Islamic traditions. It is reported that

A man went to the Prophet (s) and said, "I had a daughter in the Age of Ignorance (*'asr al-jahiliyyah*), whom I brought her up. When she reached the age of puberty, I dressed her in her beautiful clothes and ornaments, took her to a well and threw her in it. The last word I heard from her was "O Daddy". Now I regret what I did. How can I compensate for the sin I committed. "Is your mother alive?" the Prophet (s) asked. The man replied, "No." The Prophet (s) asked, "Do you have a maternal aunt?" The man said, "Yes." The Prophet (s) said, "Do good to her, for she is like your mother, and this will expiate what you did" (Kulayni 1407 AH, 2:162-3).

e) One should respect his elder brother as he respects his father. It has been narrated that Imam Rida (a) said, "The elder brother is like the father." (Hurr al-'Amili 1409 AH, 20:283)

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