

Visiting the Sick

(part 1 of 2)



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Islam invites to all that is good and warns from all that is bad. From those good and virtuous deeds is the visiting of the ill and afflicted. When people visit each other in good health, bonds of brotherhood and friendship are strengthened. How then when people visit each other in times of sickness and poor or failing health? Illustrating the empathy that Muslims are required to feel for each other, Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, said:

“The parable of the Believers in their mutual love and mercy is like that of a living body: if one part feels pain, the whole body suffers in sleeplessness and fever.”^[1]

Visiting the sick is from the clearest signs of such mutual love, mercy and empathy. More than that, visiting the sick is a major responsibility that every single Muslim is duty-bound to fulfill. The Prophet Muhammad said:

“The rights of one Muslim over another Muslim are six... When you meet him, you greet him with the *salaam* (i.e. to say: “*As-Salamu alaykum*”), when he invites you, you accept his invitation, when he consults you in a matter, you give him sincere advice, when he sneezes and praises God, you ask God to

have mercy on him, when he is sick, you visit him, and when he passes away you accompany him (through his funeral).”[2]

In this Prophetic narration) we find that the Muslim is encouraged with concern for his brother in Islam during the three phases of his worldly existence: his health, sickness and his death.

Whilst in good health, the Muslim is obliged to greet his brother in faith with the greetings of peace and protection, to accept his invitations and to give him sincere advice.

Then, when the Muslim is suffering from a cold, an allergy or whatever else is causing him to sneeze, his brother in Islam is obliged to ask God to have mercy on him. Likewise, when the Muslim’s sickness is such that he is incapacitated, his brother in Islam is obliged to visit him.

Finally, when the Muslim passes away from this life, his brother in faith is obliged to accompany his funeral procession, prayer and burial.

The great reward awaiting those who visit the sick was spelt out by the Prophet when he explained:

“A Muslim visiting his sick brother will continue to be in the harvest of paradise until he or she returns home.”[3]

And God’s Messenger of Mercy, Muhammad, also said:

“A visitor walking to visit a sick person will be wading in the mercy of God. When the visitor sits with the sick one, they will be immersed in mercy until his or her return.”[4]

God Himself explained the importance of and greatness of the reward of visiting the sick. The Prophet said:

“On the Day of Resurrection, God the Mighty and Majestic will say: ‘O child of Adam! I became sick and you did not visit me!’ The person will say, ‘O Lord, how can I visit you and you are the Lord of all that Exists!’ God will say, ‘Did you not know that my slave ‘so and so’ became sick, and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you visited him, you would have found me with him?’” (Saheeh Muslim)

As with every other virtuous deed and noble duty, Prophet Muhammad led by example. He would both make time to personally visit the sick and also enquire after them through others.

Whilst in Mecca, for example, a pagan woman was given to throw filth and garbage upon the Prophet whenever he passed her house. One day, the noticeable absence of the Prophet’s abuser concerned him so much that he enquired after

her. When he learnt of her sickness, he visited her. She was so taken aback by his merciful concern and that she embraced Islam.

“Repel (the evil of your foe) with what is better: then lo! the one between whom and you was enmity (will become to you) as if he were a dear friend.” (Quran 41:34)

The learned Companion, Anas b. Malik, also related the following episode from the life of God’s Final Prophet to humanity:

“A Jewish boy who would serve the Prophet fell sick, so the Prophet said: **‘Let us go and visit him.’** They (the Prophet and his illustrious Companions) went to visit him and found his father sitting by his head. The Messenger of God said: **‘Proclaim that there is no true deity worthy of being worshipped except God alone, and I will intercede on your behalf on account of it on the Day of Resurrection.’** The boy looked at his father and the father said: **‘Obey Abul-Qasim (Muhammad)!’** So the boy uttered: **‘There is no true deity worthy of being worshipped except God alone, and Muhammad is the last Messenger.’** The Messenger of God then said: **‘All praise is due to God Who saved him from the Fire of Hell.’**”^[5]

From these two examples from life of the Prophet, we find that it is not a precondition that the sick being visited are from within the fold of Islam. Nevertheless, from these two examples, we find that the act of visiting the sick and suffering, as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad, can be such a touching and moving experience that it might even cure that most fateful of diseases: infidelity.

“Indeed in the Messenger of God you have an excellent example to follow for whoever hopes for [the meeting of] God and the Last Day and remembers God much.” (Quran 33:21)

Footnotes:

[1] *Saheeh Muslim.*

[2] Related by Abu Hurayra in *Saheeh Bukhari.*

[3] *Saheeh Muslim.*

[4] Imam Ahmad and Ibn Hibban.

[5] Ibn Hibban.

The rewards for visiting the sick are great in both number and magnitude. The Prophet Muhammad said:

“If a man calls on his sick Muslim brother, it is as if he walks reaping the fruits of Paradise until he sits, and when he sits he is showered in mercy, and if this was in the morning, seventy thousand angels pray for him until the evening, and if this was in the evening, seventy thousand angels pray for him until the morning.” (Al-Tirmidhi)

And he, Heavenly Salutations be upon him, also said:

“Whoever visits a sick person is plunging into mercy until he sits down, and when he sits down he is submerged in it.” (Silsilah Al-Saheehah)

And the Prophet also said:

“Whoever visits a sick person or visits a brother in Islam, a caller cries out to him: ‘May you be happy, may your walking be blessed, and may you occupy a dignified position in Paradise.’”^[1]

Happiness and optimism are Islamic virtues when they spring from trust and hope in God. Likewise sadness and pessimism are sinful when they reflect a state of despair in the Almighty. Therefore, regardless of how bad or “incurable” the illness, the one visiting the sick should encourage him with hope in God, Who has power over all things, including the chronically, even terminally ill.

“Is not He (God) able to give life to the dead?!” (Quran 75:40)

“...And in God should the believers put their trust.” (Quran 3:122)

Besides trying to help the sick forget their pain, suffering, discomfort and hardship – even if only for a short while - the visit should also serve to boost their morale, lift their spirit and strengthen their resolve. Abdullah b. Abbas, the cousin and Companion of the Prophet, related that when visiting a sick person, God’s Messenger would say:

“Be steadfast, may God purify you.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

What’s more, the visitor should use the occasion of his visit to remind himself and the one being visited of their total and utter dependence upon God; that it is better to suffer in this life than the Next, and that He, Most High, will reward the believer who is patient and firm when put to in trial.

“...And (righteous are those) who remain patient in times of poverty, sickness and during conflict...” (Quran 2:177)

Tactful speech is advisable during the best of times. The one visiting the sick ought to be especially sensitive and careful with his words when in the presence of

the suffering. After all, exacerbating the patient's distress might lead to a worsening of their physical condition. And just because a person may be incapacitated due to their sickness, it does not mean that they forfeit their right to be obeyed in their own house, nor that their privacy go un-respected. The scholar of Islam, Imam Ibn Abdul-Barr, wrote in his book of Islamic jurisprudence, *Al-Kafi*:

“Whether you visit a healthy or an ill person, you ought to sit where you are told. Hosts know better how to ensure privacy in their home. Visiting an ill person is a confirmed Sunnah. The best visit is the shortest. The visitor ought not to sit too long with an ill person, unless they are close friends and the ill person enjoys their company.”

As for the length of the visit, if the visitor is sincere in his intention, once he has achieved the objective of his visit, he would have no reason to burden the sick person with a prolonged stay and unnecessary disturbance. The Syrian scholar, Shaykh Abdul-Fatah Abu Ghuddah, wrote in his book on Islamic manners:

“The length of the visit should not be longer than the time between the two sermons of Friday. In this respect, it was said that the visit should be long enough to convey salaams and wishes, to ask the sick how they are doing, to pray for their recovery and to leave immediately after bidding them farewell.”

The point being that the visitor must show compassion at every moment and opportunity: compassion through the appropriateness of his words, compassion through the correctness of his conduct, and compassion through the brevity of his stay; all in the sure knowledge that doing so would lend him towards God's Compassion, as His Beloved Prophet said:

“Show mercy to those on earth, the One above the heavens will show mercy upon you.”

And from the most compassionate of actions is to emulate the *Sunnah*(inspired practice) of the Prophet Muhammad in visiting the sick. That is because to say and do as he did is the surest way to bring about success in both this life and the Next, for both the visitor and the one being visited. From the many Prophetic narrations that have reached us in this regard is the narration of A'isha, the wife of the Prophet, where she said:

“If someone fell sick, the Prophet would pass his right hand over them while saying the following prayer: ‘O Lord of humanity!, take away the suffering, bring the recovery, there is no cure but Your cure that leaves no illness.’”

(Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)

Also, from the practice of the Prophet when visiting the sick was to say:

“No worry. It is a cleansing and purification, if God so wills.” (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Let us hope and pray that each and every affliction we experience is a blessing in disguise, a cleansing and purification of both our body and soul from every harm and impurity. And may our visiting others during their sickness bring us and them reward from He Who is Most High. And in God we seek refuge.

Footnotes:

[\[1\]](#) *Al-Tirmidhi*.