

Hospitality is the Hallmark of All righteous persons

The Quran records some examples of gracious hospitality in the lives of the previous prophets, our prophet and his companions so as to show us the excellent behaviour believers should emulate. A few are reproduced below from our two sources—the Holy Quraan and the Sunnah:

Quranic Ayaat on Hospitality

Prophet Ibrahim's treatment of guests

According to the Qur'an, two angels came to the Prophet Abraham (pbuh) in human guise and stayed in his house:

'Has the story reached you of the honoured guests of Abraham? When they entered his dwelling and said: "Peace," he replied: "Peace, to people we do not know." (Surat adh-Dhariyat: 51: 24-25)

Our angels brought the good news to Abraham. They said: "Peace," and he too said: "Peace" and brought in a roasted calf without delay. (Surah Hud: 11: 69)

As we see, the Prophet Abraham (pbuh) showed a superior hospitality to them, although he had never seen before, and immediately offered them pleasant refreshments. Such an act symbolizes his superior moral values. And, offering such refreshments before his unknown guests made any requests is an example of the fine thinking that believers need to emulate. Another model worthy of emulation is the way he prepared the refreshments without giving any indication that he was doing so:

'So he slipped off to his household and brought a fattened calf. He offered it to them and then exclaimed: "Do you not then eat?" (Surat adh-Dhariyat: 51: 26-27)

The Prophet Abraham (pbuh) did not ask his guests whether they were hungry or tell them that he had made any preparations. This is the height of good manners, for a guest may feel shy to request some refreshments, and his or her self-respect may prevent such a request from being made. The Prophet Abraham's (pbuh) handling of this situation indicates his respect for and interest in his guests. He offered them a roasted, fattened calf, which people of that time considered to be a most pleasing and delicious meal. His request that they eat is one of the finest examples of his superior morality and thought.

The Companion's treatment of a guest was one of the reasons behind the revelation of a Quranic verse

The Incident: Feeding A Guest In Darkness

A sahabi came to the prophet peace be upon him and complained of hunger and distress. Just then the prophet had nothing in hand, or in his home to feed him.

He asked the assembled sahaba:

"Would anybody entertain him as a guest tonight on my behalf?"

One of the Ansaar said:

"Oh prophet of Allah, I will do that."

The Ansaari took the person to his house and instructed his wife,

" This man is a guest of the prophet peace be upon him. We will entertain him as best as we can, and wont spare anything in doing so."

The wife replied:

"By Allah, we have no food in the house, except a very little-something just enough for the children."

The Ansaari replied:

"You lull the children to sleep without feeding them, while I sit with the guest over the meagre meal. when we start eating, put out the lamp pretending to set it right, so that the guest may not become aware of my not sharing the meal with him."

This worked out nicely, and the whole family, including the children, stayed hungry to enable the guest to eat his fill. The following Quranic Ayaat, singled out the Quality of both parties, i.e. the Ansaar (original inhabitants of Madina) and Muhaajirun (emigrants from Makkah):

9. But those who before them, had homes (in Medina) and had adopted the Faith,- show their affection to such as came to them for refuge, and entertain no desire in their hearts for things given to the (latter), but give them preference over themselves, even though poverty was their (own lot). And those saved from the covetousness of their own souls,- they are the ones that achieve prosperity.

10. And those who came after them say: "Our Lord! Forgive us, and our brethren who came before us into the Faith, and leave not, in our hearts, rancour (or sense of injury) against those who have believed. Our Lord! Thou art indeed Full of Kindness, Most Merciful." (Suratul Hashr: 59:9-10)

Prophetic guidance on Hospitality

It was narrated that Abu Shurayh al-'Adawi said: I heard with my own two ears and I saw with my own two eyes when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) spoke and said: "Whoever believes in Allaah and the Last Day, let him honour his neighbour; whoever believes in Allaah and the Last Day, let him honour his guest as he is entitled." It was said, "What is his entitlement, O Messenger of Allaah?" He said, "[The best treatment] for one day and one night; and hospitality is for three days, and anything after that is charity bestowed upon him. And whoever believes in Allaah and the Last Day, let him, speak good words or else remain silent." Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 5560; Muslim, 69.

There should be no doubt about this matter: the guest, whether invited or not, has rights; both should be honoured, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said.