

Neighbors: From a

SALAHUDDIN MUHAMMAD

LET us break down the phony barriers that the devil has put in our way as stumbling blocks and use them as stepping stones to begin to know each other and to embrace each other as the all wise, true, and living God intended. Your neighbor is yourself; if you love yourself then you should naturally love your neighbor.

God says in the Noble Quran (The Book of Guidance for well over one billion Muslims):

Serve God and join not any partners with Him and do good — to parents, kin folk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the companions by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and what your right hands possess. For God loves not the arrogant, the vain-glorious (4:36).

When you review the exegetical work (commentary) done on this text it becomes ever apparent that doing good to one's neighbors is akin truly to serving God. If persons are sincere about their commitment to serve God then they have to treat their neighbors well. A biblical scriptural verse comes to mind concerning this idea. "How can you love God whom you have not seen and hate your brother whom you have seen." We are told that having proper human relationships is absolutely important, if you want to have a healthy, successful, and peaceful life. We must treat our neighbors with respect, love, and human kindness.

A neighbor is someone who lives in close proximity to you. Someone nearby. This could be your next door neighbor. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace of God be upon him) is reported to have said, "Your neighbors are forty houses in front of you, forty houses in back of you, and forty houses on the side of you." According to Abdul Rahman al-Ubaid the word neighbor "also applies to the 'neighbor' at work, in the Mosque, along the road, in a gathering, and so forth." Within the meaning of neighbor is the act of being courteous and generous to one's neighbor. What is also included in the meaning is to help your neighbors when they are in need of your assistance, visiting them when they are sick, and in general checking on their welfare.

OUR NEIGHBORS ARE IMPORTANT

- There are many *hadith* that speak to the importance of neighbors. The Prophet Muhammad (Peace of God be upon him) is reported to have said, "The angel Gabriel kept advising me concerning the neighbor to the point that I thought he would inherit (from his neighbor)." He (Peace of God be upon him) also said, "whoever believes in God and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor."
- In another *hadith* the Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) said, "By God, he is not a believer, by God he is not a believer, By God, he is not a believer." It was said to him, "Who is that, O Messenger of God?" He (Peace of God be upon him) said, "The one from whose affairs his neighbor is not safe."
- On yet another occasion the Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) was asked about a woman who performed lots of prayers, fasted, and gave charity, but she used to harm her neighbor by her speech. The Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) said, that she is in the hell-fire. The Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) was asked about a woman who did not fast, pray, or give much in charity (more than what is obligated) but she would not harm her neighbors. The Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) said that she was in paradise.
- The Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) even demonstrated specific ways by which one is generous or courteous to one's neighbors. He (Peace of God be upon him) told Abu Dharr, "When you prepare stew, increase its water, and deliver it to some of your neighbors."

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE

- A neighbor is very important to the Muslim. The following story captures the importance of how one is to treat one's neighbors. There was a man who had a serious vermin problem. He called someone from pest control to help him get rid of the problem. The pest control person told him he could put some pesticide around the house that would get rid of the vermin. The owner of the house asked, "What will happen to the vermin?" The pest-control person said, "The vermin will leave your house and go somewhere else." "I am in no need of your services," the homeowner said, "because I cannot allow my problems to be the problems of my neighbors."

Muslim Perspective

■ We will be accountable on the Last Day for how we treated our neighbors. The Prophet (Peace of God be upon him) is reported to have said, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." If this *hadith* was truly applied then the whole society would be filled with love and a closeness towards one another.

WE ARE ONE FAMILY

■ A verse from the Noble Quran states that...

...we were created from a male and a female, and made into nations and tribes to get to know one another not despise one another, and the best of us in the sight of God is the one who is most regardful of their duty to God (49:13).

Therefore, if a Muslim is not treating his neighbor well, even his non-Muslim neighbors, then he is not fulfilling that condition of his faith, which means that he

has a shortcoming in his *Imaan* (faith).

We are all from the same source. We are family no matter where we come from, what we look like, what language we speak, or what our religion is. Almighty God says in the Noble Quran, "we created you from a single soul and made you into Adam and Eve" — and then we were scattered all over the earth.

If we are going to survive in this world, we had better recognize that we are all descendants of Adam and Eve. We are indeed related to one another.

Salahuddin Muhammad is Imam of the Islamic Learning Center of Orange County and chaplain at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. He is also chaplain at Fishkill Correctional Facility in Fishkill, N.Y.