

CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

SUNNAH REGARDING HOSPITALITY TO GUESTS

O Allah (The Exalted) bless our lord and master Muhammad (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) as many times as there are created beings.

Looking after guest gains you many rewards. Not only will it please the guest when you look after them but it will gain you satisfaction too. There is no better example in looking after the guest except in the life of the Prophet of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace).

It is up to you to eat

Jabir (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) that, *"Whoever is invited to a meal accept it, whether you desire to eat or not is your choice."*ⁱ

If you are not hungry does not mean you don't attend, but it will please the host if you at least attend but are not obliged to eat.

Respect your guest

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace); *"Whosoever believes in Allah (The Exalted) and the day of resurrection should respect his guest."*

To look after also means to respect and make sure they are happy and fulfil their needs.

Look after your guest

Abu Lahoos Jismi (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from his father, he says 'I asked the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), I went to a person's house and he did not look after me (as a guest), he has now come to my house, shall I look after him or get my own back?' The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) replied, 'Look after him.'ⁱⁱ

This is the beautiful character of the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), may Allah (The Exalted) give us a drop of the character of His beloved, Ameen!

See the guest to the door

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) that, *"The Sunnah is this, that you see your guest to the door."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) has related that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that, *"One should welcome his guest by coming out of his door and while bidding farewell should accompany him to the door of the house."*^{iv}

You will not be called to account

Ja'far bin Muhammed Sadiq (may Allah be pleased with him) states that, *"When you eat with your brothers and friends on a floor mat (dastarkhan), do not rush as this is the time that will not be accounted for."*

Hasan Basri (may Allah be pleased with him) states that, *"Whatever a person eats and drinks and feeds his mother and father, will be accounted for, except for food eaten with friends."*

Subhanallah! We learn that to have food with friends is a greatly rewarded act and love will increase between the Muslim communities.

'Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) states that, *"To put food in front of brothers, to me is better than to set a slave free."*

In a hadith it has been stated there are three times when one will not account for his deeds in front of Allah (The Exalted) the first is he who makes Sehri, he who makes Iftar (opens fast) and one who eats with his friends.

Feeding the guest

One of the companion's (may Allah be pleased with him) was keeping fast after fast, as he could not find anything to eat. Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) came to know of this. He told his wife, *"I shall bring a guest tonight. When we sit at the meal put out the lamp, pretending to set it right, and you are not to eat anything until the guest has taken his fill."*

When Thabit (may Allah be pleased with him) reported this to the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) presence next morning, he was greeted with the happy news; *"O Thabit! Allah (The Exalted) has very much appreciated your entertainment of the guest last night."* Subhanallah!

The Prophet & his closest companions

Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) states that, "Once the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) came out and met 'Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) and 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) and said, 'What is it that has brought you out at this time?' They said, 'Hunger'. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'I swear by He who has my life in his hand, that thing that has bought you out of your houses has also brought me out too. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Get up' they got up with the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and went to an Ansari's house. When they looked in the house, he was not there. When the Ansari's wife saw the guest she said, 'Welcome', the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) asked where is such a person?' He replied 'He has gone to get some sweet water', the Ansari came, and when he saw the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and the companions, he said, '*Alhamdulillah* there is no one more happy than me today, as I have respected guests'. Then he brought a container with dates which had half cooked dates and wet dates too, he said to his guest, 'Eat and took a knife out (meaning he had the intention to sacrifice a goat) the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Do not sacrifice the one that gives milk.' The Ansar sacrificed a goat, the guest ate the meat of the goat and ate dates and had some water. When they had completed the meal the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said to 'Abu Bakr and 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both), 'I swear by He who has my life in his hand, on the Day of Resurrection we will be questioned about this. Hunger brought you out of your houses and before returning you were given this blessing.'" ^v

Supplication

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) once said, *"Give a present to your brother."* The companions asked, *"O Messenger of Allah! What present should we give?"* He replied, *"When one goes to his Muslim brother's house and takes meals there, then he should pray for the mercy and blessing of Allah (The Exalted) for him. This is the present (return) to him."* ^{vi}

Request that the guest take more

Whenever the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) would feed his guests he would request to them again and again to have more and stopped only when the guest said that he has had his fill. ^{vii}

Make supplication for the house owner. ^{viii}

Sunnah regarding the unexpected guest

One should not go to another's house at meal times. It is narrated in one hadith that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that 'It is forbidden to partake of the meals of another without being invited to do so.' However, it is permissible and Sunnah to go to the house of one's close companion without an invitation and to partake in meals thereof.

One may place before an unexpected visitor whatever one has available (by way of food). However, one should not borrow money to obtain provisions for such visitors.

If one does not have excess provisions then it is not necessary to feed the visitor.

The Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that, 'It is a major sin to regard that which the host presents as little or for the host himself to feel it low to offer it to his guest.'

Sunnah regarding the invited guest

1. The host should invite pious people rather than open sinners, as the latter shall spread wrong and sin.
2. Special meals are prepared for the first day. ^{ix}
3. A guest may be entertained and shown hospitality for a period of three days. Beyond the three days would be charity. ^x
4. A person who does not accept an invitation has disobeyed Allah (The Exalted) and the Messenger of Allah (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) unless non-acceptance is justified by an acceptable reason according to Shariah. ^{xi}

Sunnah regarding both the unexpected and invited guests

1. Although one's host has not treated him with honour and respect when he was a guest at the host's house, he must always treat that host with due respect and honour should he be a guest at his house. ^{xii}
2. One should not, as a guest, request anything that may cause inconvenience to the host.
3. If a host were to ask his guest to make a choice then the easier of the options should be chosen.
4. A guest should not inconvenience his host by overstaying. ^{xiii}
5. The host must respect and honour his guest. ^{xiv}
6. A guest should be seen off to one's door. ^{xv}

A Visitor is not an inspector

When you enter a home, whether as a visitor or an overnight guest, do not closely examine its contents as an inspector would. Limit your observation to what you need to see. Do not open closed closets or boxes. Do not inspect a wallet, a package or a covered object. This is against Islamic manners and an impolite betrayal of the trust your host has accorded to you. Uphold these manners during your visit and seek to cultivate your host's love and respect, may Allah (the Exalted) bless and protect you.

Burdening Hosts with Requests

Whether visiting friends or relatives, one must avoid unnecessary requests that may cause inconvenience to the hosts. For example, avoid using their phone, going to the toilet, or performing your ablution. Good manners dictate that you should be considerate, for not every house may have these facilities prepared for the convenient use of its guest. Its condition or location could be embarrassing for your hosts. Prepare yourself in the convenience of your home before paying visits. Your hosts will be very pleased if your visit was free of inconvenience and embarrassment.

Duties of the host

If you are having a guest overnight, be hospitable and generous. But do not exaggerate when providing food and drink to your guest. Moderation, not excess, is the Sunnah. You should try your best to make your guest's stay pleasant and comfortable during the day and night. Inform your guest of the direction of the Qibla and show them the way to the bathroom.

Your guest will need to use towels after ablution, having a shower or washing hands after meals. Make sure that these are fresh and clean. Do not offer towels that you or family members have used. It is also nice idea to provide the guest with perfume and a mirror. Make sure the toiletries and bath accessories they will be using are clean and sanitized. Before leading your guest to the bathroom, inspect it and remove anything you don't want your guest to see.

Your guest will need rest and a quiet sleep. Spare them the noise of the children and the house as much as possible. Remove intimate clothing from their view. If the guest is a man, remove all women's clothing and belongings. This is a desirable and decent practise that will leave both feeling comfortable.

Advice to Sisters

If you want to visit your relatives or your Muslim sisters, carefully select the day and the hour of your visit and its duration. There are appropriate and inappropriate times for paying visits even to relatives and friends.

Do your best to make the visit nice, brief and pleasant one. avoid turning it into a boring, wearisome, inquisitive and lengthy visit. Instead, it should be a visit whose purpose is to rekindle and nourish an old friendship or kinship. The visit is desirable if it is short and considerate, and it is undesirable if it is long and tedious during which conversation moves from being purposeful and valuable to being aimless and trivial.

The honourable Taba'i Muhammad ibn Shihab al-Zuhri (may Allah be pleased with him) said, *"When a meeting becomes too long, Shaytan increasingly participates in it."* During the visit, make sure that most if not all of your talk is of value and benefit. Keep away from backbiting, gossip and idle talk. Astute Muslim women do not have time for such nonsense.

The Test

A rich person came in the court of Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) and invited him to dinner. The friends of Allah usually keep distance from the people who love the world so he did not except his invitation. The person pleaded and Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) said on three conditions, if you except them I will except your invitation, he said, 'Please say,' the first condition is that 'I will sit where I desire, the second condition is that I will eat what I desire, and the final condition is that whatever I say you will do.' He decided to accept the conditions, as he wanted the friend of Allah to come to the house. He was very excited and told people that on such a day a friend of Allah (The Exalted) is coming to my house.

Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) went to the house and sat near where people had taken their shoes off, the host could not say anything due to the first condition that he agreed with, and when the food came people began to eat chicken etc. and Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) took out dried bread and was eating it. When dinner had finished he asked the host to get a large wok and heat it. When the dish became red hot Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) stood on it and gave an account of the food he had eaten and came of the red-hot wok. He told all present to stand on the wok and give an account of what they had eaten. People were shocked and said you are the friend of Allah and this is a miracle we are the people of the world how can we stand on that? Hatim Asam (may Allah's Mercy be upon him) said, "Remember that day, which will be 50,000 years and the sun, will be a mile away and the floor will be of copper! We have to answer for everything, you could not answer for one time, what miracle will you have on that day?" Listening to this people began to cry and repented. ^{xvi}

Important Rules

It is Sunnah to accept an invitation when you know there will be no songs and dance and if you know that there will be, as seen in most weddings nowadays, do not go.

Remember four things when invited to any place:

1. Sit in the place you are seated, if you sit where you want, you may overlook a private area of the house, or you may cause inconvenience to the house residents. (*As a rule, you should take off your shoes unless your host asks you to keep them on. Remove your shoes at an appropriate spot, and set them in an orderly fashion.*)
2. Be pleased with what is presented to you,
3. Do not leave until you have been granted permission and
4. When leaving make a supplication for the host.

May Allah (The Exalted) give us the ability to respect and look after our guest, Ameen.

ⁱ Muslim

ⁱⁱ Tirmidhi

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- iii Ibn Majah
 - iv Baihaqi & Ibn Majah
 - v Muslim
 - vi Abu Dawood
 - vii Tirmidhi
 - viii Faizane Sunnat
 - ix Bukhari
 - x ibid
 - xi Abu Dawud
 - xii Tirmidhi
 - xiii Bukhari
 - xiv ibid
 - xv Ibn Majah
 - xvi Faizane Sunnat