

Muwasaat: A Forgotten Talim of Islam

By: Qazi Dr. Shaikh Abbas Borhany

PhD (USA), NDI, Shahadat al Aalamiyah (Al Hawzah, Najaf, Iraq), M.A, LLM (Shariah)

Mushir: Fed. Shariat Court of Pakistan

Member, Ulama Council of Pakistan

The Writer is Attorney at Law & a Religious Scholar

Email: qazishkborhany@hotmail.com

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Muwasaat means sharing with the needy and extending material support to the Muslims. Muwasaat has great value in Islam as it plays a vital role in the betterment of the under privileged class of Muslims. Moreover, it can instill a sense of brotherhood and love amongst the community at large. It is considered as an investment of Barakah. Imam Jafar al Sadiq explained:

"Seek Qurbat to Allah by helping your (Muslim) brothers."

Rasulullah (S) explained this point to Amir al Mumineen, Ali Ibn Abi Talib:

The most commendable are three deeds:

- i). First is being just to the people even if they are against you.*
- ii). Second, Muwasaat and material help to (Muslim) brothers.*
- iii). Third, Zikar of Allah in all circumstances.*

Amir al Mumineen Ali further explained:

"Muwasaat is the gateway to an increment in Rizaq."

Al Waqidi, the famous historian narrates:

"I had two very close friends, one of whom was from Bani Hashim. Truly speaking, we were like one spirit in three bodies. Once, on the occasion of Eid, I was in dire financial crisis. My wife consoled me saying 'we would boldly face all the hardships together,' but I could see the pain in her eyes for she could do nothing for her children who longed for new clothes after seeing their friends. She asked me if I could arrange some money for our children's dresses. I pondered but could not find any source of obtaining money. Finally, I wrote a letter to my friend who belonged to Bani Hashim for help. My friend sent me a sealed packet containing one thousand Dirhams. Before I could open the packet, a message came from my second friend with a request of help; I sent him the same packet intact and went to the Masjid, with a broken heart. I passed the night in the Masjid as I was not in a position to face my wife. When I went home the next morning, to my great surprise, my wife welcomed me with a smiling face and expressed her unbounded pleasure for the help I had rendered to my friend. Then my friend who belonged to Bani Hashim came to me and asked me what I had done with the money he had sent to me the day before. I narrated to him the matter. He bent his head for a moment, then told me that on receipt of my

message, he had sent me whatever he had, but then to meet his own requirements he wrote to the third friend for help. The third friend sent him the same sealed packet. My first friend was extremely puzzled by this mystery, till it became clear to all of us."

Al Waqidi further adds:

"Then we divided that amount equally amongst us, each getting three hundred Dirhams, and the remaining one hundred Dirhams was the share of my wife." This generous attitude describes the feelings of a few Muslims, who had learnt the lessons of Muwasaat from the Qur'an and Saheb al Qur'an. This is a glowing example of the spirit of Muwasaat and fraternal love which had enlivened the lives of Muslims in the past as a result of the practice on the Talim of Islam.

The early history of Islam is full of such inspiring events which demonstrated the spirit of Muwasaat that governed the lives of the Muslims. In the Gazwah Uhud - one of the most difficult and dangerous battles of Islam - the Muslims set high examples of self sacrifice and many of them were killed while fighting bravely. Amongst them, seven stalwarts were fatally injured and every breath of theirs seemed to be their last. All of them felt pangs of thirst. Someone came to them with a small quantity of water, hardly sufficient for a single person. The water-bearer offered the glass of water to one of them, but he directed him towards the person lying by his side. The second soldier sent him to the third one who directed him to the fourth and so on; this went on till he reached the seventh soldier. When he approached the seventh soldier, he told him that since the first soldier was very thirsty, he should be given water first. The water-bearer then returned to the first soldier and found that he had expired. He then found that all of them had passed away. All of them died thirsty setting an excellent practical example of Muwasaat. This is a lesson from the school of Rasulullah (S) which was followed by his true followers in every walk of life, even under the most difficult conditions. It is an irony of fate that we have abandoned examples and golden principles but drifting towards selfishness which is undoubtedly the gift of the Shait'an. Note the warning of Rasulullah (S):

"One who starts his day without caring about the affairs of the Muslims, is not a Muslim."

Imam Jafar al Sadiq explained:

"The best amongst you are those who are generous and the worst are the misers."

The event behind the Ayah of Surah al-Dahr-76 is narrated by Ali bin Ahmad al Wahidi in his commentary of the Qur'an titled "Al Basit," as well as others like Zamakhshari, Razi, Nisaburi. Syedna Abdullah Ibn Abbas narrates:

"Amir al Mumineen, Ali ibn Abi Talib, on the guidance of Rasulullah (S) took a Mannat [vow] to observe Siyam [fast] for three days with Syedah Fatimah and Fizzah (her devoted maid-servant) for the recovery of his two beloved sons, Al Imam al Hasan and Al Imam al Husain. After the recovery of the children, they along with Al Imam al Hasan and al Imam al Husain observed Sawm. However, there was nothing to eat in the house of Ahl al Bait for iftaar[breaking fast]. Amir al Mumineen Ali borrowed three Sa' (weighing about 9 kilos) barley from a Jew named Shamoon. Syedah Fatimah grounded three kilos of barley into flour for making the bread for iftaar on the first day. But at the time of iftaar, a beggar appeared and said:

"Salaam upon you, O Ahl al Bait of Mohammad! I am a poor Muslim and need some food; Allah will reward you with dishes of food in Jannah."

Ali offered the beggar whatever he had, and set the lamp light dim; he then invited him to have food in the darkness of the room and himself sat there pretending he was also eating, though, in fact, he did not take a single morsel. Ali, Fatimah and their children broke their Sawm with water only and gifted their breads for the Qurbat of Allah and remained hungry themselves. On the second day they observed their Sawm again, and when the time of iftaar approached after Salaat al Maghrib, an orphan came and asked for food. Everybody in the house again handed over their share of bread to the orphan and broke their Sawm with water only. Likewise on the third day, at the time of breaking fast, a captive asked for food and they did the same and gave him their bread and instead broke fast with only water.

On the fourth day Amir al Mumineen Ali took his sons to Rasulullah(S), who observed that the faces of his grandsons were pale with weakness. He inquired about the reason for this and proceeded to the house of Fatimah. There Rasulullah(S) saw his beloved daughter in the Ibadah of Allah and noticed that her eyes were sunken on account of weakness. When Rasulullah(S) noticed her condition, he became restless. Jibrael al Ameen appeared with the following Wahi of glad tidings:

O Rasulullah(S)! Allah has congratulated you on the virtues of the Ahl al Bait!

Then Rasulullah(S) asked the reason. Jibrael recited Surah al Dahr in response. (According to Ibn Mahran's tradition, he recited it from Ayah 5 till the end). Ayah 8-9 of Surah Ad Dahr-76 praises their Taqwa and spirit of generosity in these words:

And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. They say: 'We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks'.

[1-Al Zamakhshari's al Kashshaf, vol. 2; 2-al Wahidi's Asbab Al Nuzul; 3-Al-Tabarasi's Majma' al Bayan in the interpretation of the Surah Ad Dahr;4-al Hafid Muhib bin Jarir Al Tabari's al Kifayah;5-Ibn Abd Rabbah's al Iqd al Farid, vol. 3, p.42-47;6- Al Naishaburi's Manaqib Fatimah as stated in al Kifayah;7- al Thalabi's Tafsir al Kashf wal Bayan;8- al Alusi's Ruh al Ma'ani;9- al Tabari's al Riyad al Nadirah, vol. 2, p. 207, quoted from al Amini's al Ghadir, vol. 3, p. 107-111].

This historical event which took place in Madinah has been quoted by many scholars. Syed Al Amini has provided references of twenty-four prominent Sunni scholars which are enough to judge the authenticity of the background of the Wahi of Surah al Dahr. This historical account and background of the Nuzul of Surah is denied only by a radical branch of Sunni Muslims. Due to hostility, to hiding the merits of Ahl al Bait, the radicals have changed the time of the Nuzul of the Surah. They also changed the name of the Surah from al Dahr to Al Insaan. (See: al Ghadir, vol. III, p. 111; Tafsir al Kashshaf, vol. III, p. 239, Egypt Publication; Tafsir al Bayzawi etc.)

Of course, such glorious example of self-denial is not possible for anyone; only a man like Ali al Murtaza could perform such deeds. Islam, therefore, does not compel its followers to do similar deeds. Islam actually taught Muwasaat, which means that a Muslim must help another Muslim if he is in need. A part of his resources should be reserved for the benefit of the needy Muslims. He must visit the sick and ailing Muslims and not only sympathize orally but find out if they need any assistance, financially or in any other form. Treating them kindly - like a guardian to an orphan - and participating with all possible means in general welfare, and being helpful to those in distress is advised. A Greek remained with Ali for a considerable period, making inquiries

about Islam. Once he was convinced of the truth of Islam, he embraced Islam at the hands of Amir al Mumineen Ali. Then, Ali informed him about his duties as a Muslim. During that discourse, he guides:

I direct you to help your brothers and sisters (in faith) who are the followers of Mohammad (S) and mine, assist them from the wealth which Allah has given you, fulfill their needs, redress their troubles and behave with them, with friendship and love.

This Talim of Amir al Mumineen is not limited to his Greek devotee but it is extended towards all his devotees.

Safwan al Jamal narrates:

While I was sitting with Imam Jafar al Sadiq, a native of Makkah arrived and told him that he had no money to return to his home. The Imam directed me to help that person. After efforts, I arranged the fare for him and returned to the Imam. The Imam asked:

"What did you do for your brother?"

I replied:

"By the Rahmat of Allah his need was fulfilled."

The Imam said:

"Know that helping a Muslim is preferred as opposed to performing Nafil Tawaf of the Baitullah seven times."

The Imam then added:

"A man approached al Imam al Hasan with the request of help. The Imam at once put on his shoes and went with him. On the way they passed a place where al Imam al Husain was engaged in Ibadat. Al Imam al Hasan asked the person,

'Why did you not approach al Husain to ease your troubles?

He replied:

O grandson of Rasulullah (S)! I wanted to go to him; but I was informed that he was in Eitekaaf, therefore, I did not approach him.

The Imam replied:

Had he got the opportunity to help you, it would have been far better for him than one month's Eitekaaf."

Tiding of the Qur'an is enough to explain the great reward for any good deed: (2:261)

"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like that of a grain of corn that sprouts seven ears, and in every ear there are a hundred grains. Thus Allah multiplies the action of whomsoever He wills. Allah is Munificent, All-Knowing".

A native of Kufa (Iraq) Abul Ala left for Madinah. One of the devotees of al Imam Jafar al Sadiq handed him his letter to the Imam in which he discussed his problems and requested him to bring the replies from the Imam. They also asked him to request the Imam to explain the rights which a Muslim has over other Muslim. Abul Ala says that when he reached in the presence of the Imam, he replied to all the questions but did not say anything about the rights of Muslims upon each other. He went to the Imam several times, but there was silence. At the end of his stay, he went to take permission for his departure from the Imam and requested an answer to that particular question which was still unanswered. The Imam replied:

"I deliberately avoided this issue.

Abul Ala asked the reason for this.

The Imam said:

Because I am afraid that if I tell you the same and you do not follow it faithfully, you will go against the religion of Allah."

Then the Imam explained:

Verily, the most difficult of the things which Allah has obliged his servants to do, are three things:

i). First, doing Adal between himself and others; it means that he should do to others as he wants for himself.

ii). Second, he should help Muslim by Muwasaat with his wealth.

iii). Third, he should always remember Allah. And when I say should remember Allah, I do not mean that he should always recite Subhan Allah and al Hamdulillah. But I mean that if he intends to do an unlawful deed, he must remember Allah and return from that sin.

This Talim had such an influence on the lives of the followers of Islam that their noble behavior could not be compared with any other nation; history is full of events of Muwasaat. Centuries have passed since the dawn of Islam and the world has achieved what is called technical and scientific revolution but such high morals and human virtues are not found in today's first world, which has forgotten the true sense of generosity. Behind charity often people/institutions find ultimate motives and vested interest of donations and charities.

It should be remembered that all Muslims are duty-bound to propagate the Talim of Islam in its pristine purity. Especially, they must acquaint their youths with this divine Talim, so that the spirit of Muwasaat becomes stronger and stronger; in this way the institution of Muwasaat will help the Muslim community at large to build a prosperous society. We must work for a better society, and not remain in the sweet intoxication of our past glories or our misfortunes.

We have forgotten the principles of Islam with especial reference of Muwasaat and welfare in last one hundred years. With the study of the Qur'an and the Sirah, you will get numerous shining examples, which may originate in you a spirit of contribution for the Muslim Ummah. Until we do not teach our children the importance of Muwasaat, charity and welfare in life, a prosperous Muslim society will always remain a sweet dream.

Study and experience both have proven that charity and welfare makes a person happy and satisfied which cannot be achieved through any other activity. People who spread happiness suffer less depression than those who don't. Generous people manage with their own problems more easily than those who don't contribute to charity, by the divine mercy. Helping others will elevate your value and self confidence in your life.

In the current era of recession, not only the underprivileged but the lower-middle is also suffering from financial crisis. If you find them facing trouble, help them through Muwasaat in a respectable manner. Give time to promote Muwasaat activities as much as you can. Help Muslim charitable institutions and welfare organizations for a few hours or a day in the week. You will surely meet many like-minded volunteers along the way.

- 1). Gift good items: it is not Muwasaat to gift used or old items. The philosophy of Islam in this regard is clear: it guides us that if we gift anything it should be new or in a very good condition. Giving used and old items is not called Muwasaat, it is a miser's mentality. Whatever you like for yourself, gift it in the way of Allah.
- 2). Muwasaat for health: If you are capable to contribute for medical expenses, you can save lives of Muslims, which is a great Muwasaat.
- 3). Fundraising activity: Support programs within the boundary of religious ethics, which aim at raising funds for a designated charity. This can be race, breakfast on holiday, children's festival, food fair etc for Muwasaat fund, on large scale program or a much smaller event for a local cause.
- 4). Donate from your bonus: When you receive funds, donate a reasonable amount from it for the less privileged class rather than completely spending it on yourself.
- 5). Support a cause you believe In: Different Muwasaat activities touch the heart of different people. If you love something or believe that a certain area is important, you should support that cause by donating.
- 6). Sponsor one child's educational expenditure: In today's time, rising inflation has made it difficult for the poor to send their children to school; therefore, submitting annual fees of at least one child in his /her institution means making education accessible which is a great form of Muwasaat. Instead of spending thousands on recreation, your donation as school/university fees of under privileged students would change their future and help them change their fortune.
- 7). Kinds of Muwasaat: Normally people consider Muwasaat only when it comes out of their own pocket but the types of Muwasaat are numerous and can be performed in different forms. Volunteering for an institution or supporting any individual or group for helping Muslims to raise funds can be just as valuable as giving money directly.

I conclude this discussion on the words of Amir al Mumineen Ali ibn Abi Talib:

“Do good and do not belittle any part of it. Even a small act of good is truly great, and even a few acts are surely plentiful”.

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