

In the service of God and man

All the teachings of Islam are based on two basic principles — worship of God and service of men. Without putting both of these principles into practice, there can be no true fulfillment of one's religious duties.

Islam inculcates in its followers the spirit of love and respect for all human beings. By serving human beings, on the one hand they please their God, and on the other achieve spiritual progress for themselves.

According to one *hadith* (tradition), should you be merciful to people on earth, God will be merciful to you. In this manner does Islam link personal salvation to the service of people. One can receive God's reward in the Hereafter only if one has done something to alleviate the sufferings of mankind in this world.

On Doomsday, it is said, God will say to a person, "I was ill, but you did not come to nurse Me." The man will reply, "God, You being the Lord of the Universe how can You be ill?" God will answer, "Such and such servant of Mine was ill. Had you gone there, you would have found Me there with him." Then God will say to another person, "I was hungry, but you did not feed Me." The person will reply, "God, You are the Lord of the worlds, how could You go hungry?" God will say, "Such and such of my servants came to you, but you did not feed him. Had you done so, you would have found Me with him."

The Islamic principle is that if someone wants to find God, he shall first have to make himself deserving of this by helping the poor and the needy. This act becomes a means of spiritual progress for him, and there is no doubt that it is only those people who have elevated themselves spiritually, who find God.

This culture of mercy and compassion approved of by God is not limited towards human beings, but extends also to the animal world. We must be equally sympathetic to an-

Horizons



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imals. *Hadith* gives us many guidelines on how to look after animals and treat them with fairness. There are duties laid down by God. One who is cruel to animals risks depriving himself of God's mercy.

Two significant examples have been mentioned in a *hadith*. One devoutly religious woman, who spent most of her time in worship, one day became enraged with a cat and trussed it up with a rope, depriving it of food and water, in which state it remained until it died of thirst and hunger. God so strongly disapproved of this that, despite the woman's great devotion, He decreed that she be cast into Hell.

Another woman, a prostitute by profession, was generally despised by people. One day she found a dog lying on the ground dying of thirst. This woman felt sympathy for it. She searched high and low, till she found a well — but there was nothing with which to draw water from it. She tied her shoe to her shawl, and by lowering this into the well she was able to draw water which she gave the dog. She did this several times until the dog's thirst was quenched. Then it revived and walked happily away. According to the *hadith* God was so pleased with this gesture that He decreed that she should enter Paradise...

Islamic belief softens the hearts of its believers. That is why when people imbibe Islamic belief they will of necessity become kind and compassionate to others. But if even after adopting the beliefs of Islam, feelings of love and compassion do not well up in the heart of its believer, he should rethink on whether or not Islamic beliefs have truly found a place in his heart and mind, whether or not he is able to fully practice what he believes and whether or not he has succeeded in moulding himself entirely into the path of Islam.

When Umar Faruq, the second Caliph of Islam, travelled from Medina to Palestine, he had taken only one camel along with him. He felt that if he rode the camel for the entire journey, it would be cruelty to the animal, so it must be given rest. Therefore he rode and walked by turn, so that the camel should have periods of rest, until he reached his destination.

If the true spirit of Islam is inculcated in a person, he becomes so compassionate to all living beings that even at the cost of his own comforts he extends a helping hand to others.

As it is put in a *hadith*, "By God, he is not a Muslim who eats his fill, while his neighbour goes hungry." This shows that a Muslim is one who is as concerned with others' hunger and thirst as he is with his own; who is concerned not only with his own person but with the whole of humanity.

According to another *hadith*, you should "extend greetings to people, feed them and earn your place in heaven." This shows that according to Islam that person is worthy of Heaven whose heart is impatient for others' peace and goodwill, who is eager to share with everyone, whether it be food, clothes or medical help, etc. In short, one should share in people's pain and suffering.

Islam is a religion of humanity. Islam considers serving others a great act of worship. According to the teachings of Islam, it is only in serving people that we shall have a share in God's mercy.