Fulfilling the neighbors’ privileges
Dr Syed Zafar Mahmood

God expects us to do good to "the neighbor who is near, the neighbor who is distant and the companion by your side (on the way, in the locality, in the workplace, etc.)" (Quran 4:36). In this glorious verse, our Creator has mentioned the rights of neighbors along with the rights of parents and relatives. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, “Whoever believes in God and the Last Day should continue to behave kindly towards his or her neighbors.” The Prophet also warned that God will be particularly displeased with those persons who cause discomfort to their neighbor. He added, “Gabriel (Jibrel - pbuh) kept on enjoining good treatment with the neighbor to the extent that I thought that God would order neighbor’s share in one’s property.” The Prophet also recommended, “No one should eat to the fill, while the neighbor is hungry.” He said, “If a person fasts during day and worships during night but also causes discomfort to the neighbor, then such transgressor would be admitted into Hell. Contrarily, a person who does not offer supererogatory (Nafl) prayers but behaves kindly towards the neighbors, would be admitted into Paradise.” One should occasionally send gifts to the neighbor and a gift offered by the neighbor should be accepted with respect and humility. The Prophet's daughter Ayesha asked him, "I want to send a gift to one of my neighbors; whom should I send it to?" He answered, “The one whose door is closest to yours.”

Quranic term ‘the companion by your side’ also includes in its definition the temporary companion at any certain place e.g. in the market, in a gathering, in a hostel, in the offices, the people standing, sitting or walking beside in bus, train, aeroplane, bus stop, railway station, airport, park etc. The commentators of the Quran say that this temporary companionship also imposes some obligation on a decent and civilized person, which requires that the other person must not be troubled and should be treated well. And if the neighbor happens to be a relative, then one has twofold responsibility; Quran describes this as ‘the neighbor who is near of kin’. 

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A man came to the Prophet (pbuh) and complained, “I am not feeling secure with my neighbor, let alone the expectation of some good from him.” After that the Prophet proclaimed in the Grand Mosque, “If one’s neighbors are not safe from his evils, then he is not a true believer”. After this, the Prophet said, “In each direction, forty houses come under the canvas of neighborhood.” The scholars of Quran and Prophetic Traditions agree that kind behavior with the neighbor making sure that the basic necessities of life are available with him or her include participation in happy and sad times, non-violation of privacy, keeping the common paths and entrances in and around the houses neat and clean, extending one’s helping hand when the neighbor in a bad condition, offering loan if asked for, visiting during illness, attending funeral prayer, providing special assistance, not to build one’s house higher to the extent that it deprives the neighbor’s house of light and ventilations, and not to let the odor of the meals of one’s house reach the neighborhood.

It is the requirement of the true spirit of the faith that whenever we go to a certain area as new neighbors or a new neighbor comes to our area, we should introduce ourselves to the family in order to establish positive and equitable social cohesion and inclusion.

One wide realm for positive effort in the society is kinship and the other one is neighborhood. If we proactively perform well in these two orbits of life, each one of us can shine as a brilliant star on the societal firmament. Then, if some insane person dares to break peace, the society - rich with high ethical values - will jointly come to its own rescue.