Condolences

Condolences refer to offering comfort and support to the family of the deceased, alleviating their grief, and encouraging them to remain patient and seek reward from Allah. They are among the rights of brotherhood in Islam and constitute a highly emphasized Prophetic Sunnah. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) offered condolences to his Companions, the Companions consoled one another, and the Successors (Tābiʿūn) and those who followed them continued this practice. The overwhelming majority of Islamic scholars agree on its legitimacy without disagreement.

Offering condolences also embodies the Islamic principles of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Furthermore, it falls within the general meaning of Allah's statement:

"And cooperate in righteousness and piety." (Qur'an 5:2)

The purpose of condolences is to strengthen social solidarity, compassion, and mutual support among members of the community during times of bereavement. Condolences are not limited to expressing words of sympathy; they also include providing emotional and material support and standing by the deceased's family to strengthen and comfort them. Their significance lies in reassuring the bereaved that they are not alone in their sorrow, thereby easing the burden of grief and fostering unity, compassion, and solidarity under the shared belief in Allah's divine decree and destiny.

1. Those to Whom Condolences Should Be Offered

It is recommended to offer condolences to all relatives of the deceased, including adults and children, men and women. However, if the bereaved woman is young, only her maḥrams (male relatives whom she is permanently forbidden to marry) should offer condolences to her. This ruling is agreed upon by the recognized schools of Islamic jurisprudence.

2. The Wording of Condolences

There are no prescribed or fixed expressions for offering condolences in Islam. A Muslim may console his fellow Muslim with any kind and appropriate words that fulfill the intended purpose of comforting the bereaved and encouraging patience. Condolences may therefore be expressed through any words that help ease the afflicted person's grief, such as: "To Allah belongs everlasting life," "May Allah magnify your reward," "Be patient and seek Allah's reward," or any other customary expressions that are consistent with Islamic teachings.

However, expressions that contradict Islamic principles should be avoided, such as saying, "May the remainder be in your life," and similar phrases that are not considered Islamically appropriate.

Among the best forms of condolence is the statement authentically narrated in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim from Usāmah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with them). He reported that one of the daughters of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) sent for him,

informing him that her young son had died. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"Return to her and tell her: Indeed, to Allah belongs what He has taken, and to Him belongs what He has given, and everything with Him has an appointed term. Therefore, instruct her to be patient and to seek Allah's reward."

3. Prophetic Traditions on Offering Condolences and Their Virtues

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

"There is no believer who consoles his brother in a time of affliction except that Allah, Glorified and Exalted is He, will clothe him with garments of honor on the Day of Resurrection."

This noble hadith highlights the lofty status and immense reward of comforting a fellow believer during times of hardship. The divine recompense corresponds to the nature of the deed: whoever strives to alleviate the sorrow of those who are grieving will be honored by Allah with "garments of honor" on the Day of Resurrection—a distinction that elevates one's rank before all creation. The hadith also demonstrates that offering condolences and emotional support is not merely a social obligation but a noble act of worship that reflects sincere Islamic brotherhood and embodies the values of mercy, compassion, and mutual solidarity, making the Muslim community like one body that

shares the pain and grief of its members in pursuit of Allah's pleasure.

It is also narrated on the authority of Usāmah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with them both) that when one of the daughters of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) sent word informing him that her son was at the point of death, he sent back the following message:

"Indeed, to Allah belongs what He has taken, and to Him belongs what He has given, and everything with Him has an appointed term. Therefore, let her be patient and seek Allah's reward."

This hadith represents one of the most comprehensive, eloquent, and beneficial expressions of condolence for those afflicted by loss. The statement, "Indeed, to Allah belongs what He has taken, and to Him belongs what He has given," establishes in the believer's heart the reality that life, wealth, and loved ones are trusts entrusted by Allah and ultimately belong to Him. This understanding eases the pain of bereavement. The continuation of the hadith, "Everything with Him has an appointed term," reinforces faith in Allah's divine decree and predestination, affirming that death neither comes earlier nor later than its appointed time, thereby dispelling regret and excessive sorrow. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) concludes his wise guidance by calling upon two fundamental virtues: patience (ṣabr) in enduring the pain of separation and seeking reward (iḥtisāb) by hoping for Allah's recompense.

4. Obligatory and Recommended Practices

Offering condolences in Islam combines moral responsibility with recommended acts of the Sunnah that take into consideration the feelings of the bereaved and help ease the burden of loss. Its primary objectives are to supplicate for the deceased, console the living, and provide sincere comfort. It is recommended to choose kind and uplifting words that encourage acceptance of Allah's decree and inspire patience while praying that the bereaved receive abundant reward.

Among the noble teachings of the Prophetic Sunnah is that relatives and neighbors should prepare food for the family of the deceased and send it to them, recognizing that they are preoccupied with their loss and grief. This is based on the statement of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) when the news of the martyrdom of Jaʿfar ibn Abī Ṭālib reached him:

"Prepare food for the family of Jaʿfar, for there has come upon them that which occupies them."

Proper etiquette also requires visitors to keep their stay brief and avoid prolonged visits. The Sunnah is to offer condolences and then depart without becoming a burden upon the grieving family. As for the appropriate time, condolences may be offered immediately after death and are permissible both before and after the burial, provided they are extended when the bereaved are most in need of support and consolation.

5. Offering Condolences to a Non-Muslim

It is permissible to offer condolences to a non-Muslim upon the death of a Muslim or a non-Muslim protected citizen (dhimmī). This is the opinion of the majority of Muslim jurists, including the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, and Shāfiʿī schools of law.

6. Common Innovations and Improper Practices in Condolence Gatherings

- **Burdening the Family of the Deceased with Preparing Meals**

Among the most objectionable practices is requiring the family of the deceased to prepare food and host banquets for those offering condolences. This is contrary to the Prophetic Sunnah. The Companion Jarīr ibn ʿAbdullāh (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

"We used to regard gathering at the house of the deceased and the family's preparation of food after the burial as a form of wailing."

- **Excessive Display and Extravagant Spending**

One of the most serious deviations is turning funeral gatherings into occasions for ostentation and excessive expenditure, which conflicts with the principles of Islamic law. Some people rent luxurious tents at considerable expense or hire Qur'an reciters for substantial fees paid from the deceased's estate or the inheritance of the heirs. Such practices become even

more reprehensible when these expenses are taken from funds that rightfully belong to minor orphans who have not yet reached legal maturity. This constitutes an unlawful consumption of the property of orphans and diverts resources that should instead be preserved while prayers are offered for the deceased's mercy and forgiveness.

Another negative manifestation that undermines the true objectives of condolence gatherings is transforming them from occasions of reflection and consolation into arenas of social competition and prestige. Some individuals seek to impress others by serving luxurious meals, expensive beverages, and premium dates. Such extravagance not only contradicts the spirit and purpose of offering condolences but also turns the mourning gathering into an event resembling a social celebration. It imposes unnecessary financial and emotional burdens upon the bereaved family and distracts from the essential purpose of praying for the deceased and sincerely comforting the family with humility and simplicity.

- **Inappropriate Social Conduct During Condolence Gatherings**

Certain inappropriate social behaviors during condolence gatherings diminish the solemnity and dignity of the occasion. Among the most common is engaging in conversations about worldly affairs instead of reflecting upon death and praying for the deceased. Rather than serving as gatherings for remembrance, reflection, and consolation, some condolence assemblies become venues for laughter and discussions about business, politics, and other worldly matters. Such

behavior not only wounds the feelings of the bereaved and belittles their loss but also contradicts the spiritual and educational wisdom behind attending funerals and visiting the family of the deceased, which is fundamentally intended to inspire reflection on death and the Hereafter while expressing sincere sympathy with humble and attentive hearts.

- **Wailing and Excessive Lamentation**

Wailing and excessive lamentation constitute some of the gravest improper reactions to bereavement. They go beyond the natural expression of grief and include prohibited acts such as tearing one's garments, striking one's cheeks, or objecting to Allah's decree through words or actions. Such behavior is not only a remnant of the practices of the pre-Islamic Age of Ignorance (Jāhiliyyah), which the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) expressly forbade, but also undermines genuine acceptance of Allah's decree and deprives the afflicted person of the reward for patience and seeking Allah's pleasure. A Muslim is expected to confine grief to the natural emotions of the human heart without resentment or rebellion, remaining content with Allah's will while avoiding expressions of anger and dissatisfaction that increase one's burden of sin without restoring what has been lost.

7. The Duration of Offering Condolences

There is no explicit text in the authentic Prophetic Sunnah that specifies a particular period for offering condolences. Muslim jurists have differed regarding the period during which offering condolences is recommended. The majority of Hanafi, Shafi'i, and Hanbali jurists held that condolences are recommended within three days of the death and are disliked thereafter. This is because the purpose of offering condolences is to comfort the bereaved and ease their grief, and it is generally expected that the intensity of sorrow will begin to subside after this period. Offering condolences afterward may lead to renewed grief. The jurists made exceptions for a person who was absent, did not learn of the death until more than three days had passed, or was unable to offer condolences during that period; in such cases, there is no objection to offering condolences afterward.

In this regard, Imam al-Nawawi, may Allah have mercy on him, said: "Our scholars said: Offering condolences after three days is disliked because condolences are intended to comfort the heart of the bereaved, and it is generally expected to become calmer after three days; therefore, the grief should not be renewed. This is the correct and well-known view." Imam Ibn Qudamah, may Allah have mercy on him, also reported the view that condolences should not be offered after three days, except in the case of someone who was absent, in which case there is no objection to offering condolences upon his return.

Some scholars, including certain Maliki jurists, held that condolences should not be restricted to a specific period,

since there is no authentic and explicit religious evidence establishing that the period for offering condolences ends after three days. They maintained that the permissibility of offering condolences is linked to the fulfillment of its intended purpose: comforting the bereaved and alleviating their grief. Accordingly, condolences may be offered after three days if the bereaved person still needs comfort and support, or if the person wishing to offer condolences was unable to do so earlier, provided that this does not renew the bereaved person's grief or increase their pain.

Some scholars have cited, as evidence for limiting the period of condolences to three days, the saying of the Prophet: "It is not lawful for a woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day to mourn for a deceased person for more than three days, except for her husband, for whom she mourns for four months and ten days." However, this hadith does not explicitly specify the duration for offering condolences. Therefore, limiting condolences to three days remains a matter of juristic interpretation and scholarly reasoning.

Accordingly, the fundamental principle is that offering condolences is prescribed in Islam for the purpose of comforting the bereaved, consoling them, and encouraging them to remain patient and seek reward from Allah. No specific duration for offering condolences has been established in the Prophetic Sunnah. Offering condolences during the first three days is a well-known view held by the majority of jurists, while offering them afterward remains permissible when there is a valid reason, such as the absence of the person wishing to offer condolences, delayed knowledge of the death, or the bereaved person's continued need for

comfort and support, provided that doing so does not renew their grief or increase their pain.