

316054 - Differentiating between guests in terms of seating and offering food

the question

Sometimes guests visit us, and among them are people of status who are held in high esteem among the people. Is it permissible for us to pay special attention to them and offer them more food than others?

Detailed answer

Showing special generosity in offering food to one who is rich and giving him special seating that makes him stand out from the other guests who are with him in the gathering undermines the concept of showing hospitality and kindness to your guests.

This way of treating guests will make them feel humiliated and sad.

Ibn al-'Arabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said, about differentiating between rich and poor guests in gatherings where people are invited for food:

This makes them feel sad and humiliated, and the host will incur sin because of treating them in this manner, so giving them food and then showing disrespect is not a good thing." (*'Aaridah al-Ahwadhi* 5/9).

Regarding food such as this, which is made exclusively for the rich, there is a hadith which says that it is the worst type of food.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that he used to say: The worst kind of food is the food of a feast to which the rich are invited, to the exclusion of the poor. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (5177) and Muslim (1432).

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“The worst kind of food is the food of a feast...” – what this means is that this hadith was a foretelling of how people would behave after the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was gone: they would pay extra attention to the rich at feasts and on similar occasions, to which only the rich would be invited and the best food would be offered only to them; they would be given the best seats and they would be given precedence over others, and other things that usually happen at feasts. And Allah is the One Whose help we seek." (*Sharh Saheeh Muslim* 9/237).

Ibn Hubayrah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This hadith indicates that food may all be the same in name and type, but what varies is the intention of those who prepare the food.

Whoever makes food exclusively for the rich, who do not need it, putting all his effort into preparing food for them to come and eat, whilst ignoring those who have a greater need for this food, that will lead to loss for him.

For in principle, the one who has food should give what is surplus to his need to those who need it, so if the purpose of giving food changes, in that case food is not being dealt with in the proper manner." (*Al-Isfaah* 6/285).

Conclusion: the host must avoid this behaviour, because it does not serve any shar‘i purpose; rather it leads to bad consequences, because it makes guests feel humiliated and sad, and it enables the Shaytaan to drive wedges between the Muslims and weaken the bonds of Islamic brotherhood. Any behaviour that leads to such consequences is forbidden in Islamic teachings, as is also the case with regard to private conversation. It was narrated that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas‘ood said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “If you are three, two should not converse privately to the exclusion of the third, because that will make him sad.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (6290) and Muslim (2184).

Any action that makes a Muslim sad is forbidden according to Islamic teachings.

And Allah knows best.