Why do you sit in pathways? Avoid sitting in pathways

Abu Talhah Zayd ibn Sahl (may Allah be pleased with him) reported: We were sitting in the yards and talking when the Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) came. He stopped by us and said: "Why do you sit in pathways? Avoid sitting in pathways!" We said: "We sit for no harm whatsoever. We sit to discuss and talk." He said: "If you have to, then fulfill their rights: Lowering the gaze, returning the greeting, and speaking fairly."

[Authentic hadith] [Narrated by Muslim]

Abu Talhah (may Allah be pleased with him) says that the Companions were sitting in the house yards discussing their affairs. The Messenger of Allah (may Allah’s peace and blessings be upon him) stopped by and forbade them to sit in pathways. They said that they had no intention for doing harm, and just sat to discuss their own affairs, without violating Islamic principles. Therefore, he guided them, should they insist, to fulfill the rights of the road. They asked him, as we know from another narration, what the rights of the road were. He mentioned three rights: lowering the gaze, returning the greeting, and speaking fairly. According to another narration: Lowering the gaze, refraining from harming others, returning the greeting, enjoining what is good, and forbidding what is evil. So there are rights to be fulfilled when choosing to sit on the road. By forbidding them to sit in pathways, the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) wanted to save them from potential violations, such as looking at women and getting seduced by them; abusing the rights of others, which would be otherwise kept intact if one stays at home; seeing wrongdoings. In such a case, one should enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil. Failure to observe this duty will expose one to the danger of disobeying Allah. Also, one has to greet others back. Failure to do so, especially when one's response is inadequate to the amount of greetings one receives, makes one incur a sin for not fulfilling such an obligation. Anyhow, a Muslim is required neither to expose himself to temptations, nor to bind himself with something that he cannot properly fulfill.

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