



# Friendships

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

- Know what is the difference between a friend and an acquaintance and the importance of friendship in Islam
- Understand briefly the consequences of not having friends
- Understand that some characteristics drive away people from us
- Understand that a friend or companion is a mirror to a believer
- Be reminded that friends (peer pressure) can influence us in a good way or a bad way
- Know basic strategies of dealing with peer pressure.
- Understand that we can choose our friends and that Islam emphasises on choosing good friends and the characteristics of such friends
- Discuss that it is okay to have non-Muslim friends as long as they do not influence us in a negative way. In fact, we should try to influence them to do good
- Know which types of people to avoid making friends with
- Know that the responsibility to family is more important than that to friends
- Understand that keeping friends is sometimes more difficult than getting friends
- Know that sometimes people change and stop being friends with us for no apparent reason. Know some strategies for coping with such events.
- Understand some of the ways to help maintain strong friendships

## Lesson 1

### FRIENDSHIP IN ISLAM

One of the most significant blessings Allah (SWT) has bestowed on human beings is love and friendship. Human Beings are created to be social creatures. Like with every blessing that Allah (SWT) has bestowed upon us, if we misuse it or do not use it correctly it can be harmful for us in this world and in the hereafter. In these three lessons we shall learn some of what Allah (SWT) and the Ahlul Bayt (as) tell us about this very fundamental of human relationships.

### ISLAM TELLS US TO HAVE MANY GOOD FRIENDS

We have to remember that when we are talking about a friend, it is someone we know personally, have spent time with, know their character, have a special 'love' or affection for them etc. As humans, we meet and greet and know many people in our lives but only a few of them are close enough to us to be able to influence us. These are our as friends and these are referred to in these lessons. The others such as class mates, Facebook "friends", work mates etc. are usually our acquaintances and the rules of dealing with them has been discussed in the previous lesson on socialisation.

Islam encourages us to make as many friends as we possibly can. Luqman, while advising his son, his son says to him:

"Oh my Son, take a thousand friends, and even a thousand is few. And do not make even one enemy, and one enemy is too many."

The reason for this is that friendship has many advantages and benefits and having no friends is very harmful for us. We shall discuss some of these advantages and disadvantages in this and subsequent lessons.

## CONSEQUENCES AND REASONS OF SOCIAL ISOLATION

Social life in the western communities is unfortunately very much devoid of the blessings of close friendship and companionship. The individualistic, capitalistic nature of people has made them become isolated from others.

This has serious consequences on people even from a very young age. Emos, Goths, so called "internet addicts" or computer game "addicts", loners etc. are some examples of the sad consequences of not having friends. Some of the major consequences of social isolation are:

1- **Loneliness** – often loneliness leads to many vices and mental problems such as depression. Severe depression can result in many serious problems such as homicide and suicide! One of the blessings of friendship is that friends can help a person see his mistakes or even be there as a comfort in times of difficulty. The Holy Prophet (saw) has said:

"A believer is like a mirror for his believing brother and should remove his troubles."<sup>i</sup>

2- **Bad attitude**- Often people who do not have friends have a very pessimistic and negative attitude toward society. They do not care about any one which leads to paranoia and other mental disorders. Paranoia is when they feel that everyone is their enemy. This can have severe consequences whereby they can destroy property, steal etc.

3- **Selfishness**- One of the worst consequences of having no real or good friends is that a person becomes very selfish. They do not like to share anything which further adds to their isolation.

## **WHAT MAKES A PERSON ISOLATED?**

There are many reasons a person can become isolated and friendless. Many of these reasons are a consequence of their own behaviour but sometimes it can be forced by some external factors that are beyond their control. Some of the characteristics of a person that drive away friends are:

1- **Disloyalty**- If a person is not trustworthy and is a tell-tale people will often avoid them.

2- **Being argumentative**- Imam 'Ali (as) said:

"He who argues with his brothers has few friends."<sup>ii</sup>

Sometimes people will 'befriend' such a person as a form of entertainment but the friendship is very weak and doesn't last long.

3- **Loss of formalities**- Sometimes, we think that there should be no formalities at all between friends. This is not true for some formality MUST remain between friends. Imam Kāḍim (as) has said :

"Don't let the formality be removed between you and your friend, rather keep a bit of it, for the removal of complete formality results in removal of shame."

4- **Being over sensitive**- one of the major causes of why someone cannot make friends is that they are very sensitive to the comments of their friends even if the comments are made innocently or sincerely. We have to always try to have an open mind and a big heart and take criticisms well.

5- **Bad Habits and Poor Grooming** – Sometimes if someone has bad habits, such as picking their nose inappropriately in public, making offensive jokes about other people or other gender, has a strong offensive odour or is unkempt, dresses shabbily etc... this will drive others away from such a person.

It is important to note that there are some people who do not make friends, but it is not out of any fault of their own. They may be suffering due to a difficult upbringing. They may have a mental health illness or might be being abused. We should not make life more difficult by such people by bullying them or further isolating them. Instead, we should try where we can to be understanding and kind to them. We should encourage them to seek the help of teachers or other advisors.

## STRONG FRIENDSHIPS

Once we are in a friendship, there are some rules and responsibilities. A friend is someone you can trust, one who can correct you when you are wrong, is loyal and shares your interests and perhaps even some goals. According to Islam, a friend must be able to tell you your mistakes and be a reflection of your actions as we have discussed. At the same time we should remove any

negative characteristics we may have that may drive away good friends. We should not betray our friends, talk about them behind their back, make fun of them or quarrel with them or try to hurt them. Instead, we should be patient, understanding, protective and helpful to our friends.

Imam al-Ṣādiq (as) said, "If you want the exclusive love of your brother, then do not ever make fun of him, nor quarrel with him, nor compete against him, nor be malicious to him."<sup>iiii</sup>

## Questions

**Q1. Which of the following is a consequence of not having friends**

- Picking others mistakes constantly
- Being cheerful and happy
- Being kind to others
- Being an active member of the community

**Q2. Which of the following is a friend?**

- My Facebook buddy whom I have never met or barely know about
- My mate who shares my interests and knows me well

## Lesson 2

Now that we understand the importance of the blessing of friendship we have to understand the effects friends have on us. The Holy Prophet (saw) has said that:

"A person is influenced by his friends. Therefore be careful of whom you associate with."

Certainly, sometimes it is not only our friends who influence us; it's even people we do not know so well. Sometimes in order to befriend someone or be part of a group or a 'gang' we tend to let go of all our principles and imitate them or do what they want so that we are accepted. These kinds of friendships are often baseless and end bitterly for everyone.

## PEER PRESSURE

"Come on! ALL of us are cutting math. Who wants to go take that quiz? We're going to take a walk and get lunch instead. Let's go!" says the coolest kid in your class. Do you do what you know is right and go to math class, quiz and all? Or do you give in and go with them?

We may have already faced such situations where we have to make some challenging decisions. Some don't  
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have a clear right or wrong answer — like should you play soccer or cricket? Other decisions involve serious moral questions, like whether to cut class, try cigarettes, lie to your parents, break a promise etc...

Making decisions on our own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressure us one way or another it can be even harder. People who are our age, like our classmates, are called peers. When they try to influence how we act, to get us to do something, it's called peer pressure. It's something everyone has to deal with — even adults. Let's talk about how to handle it.

## TYPES OF PEER PRESSURE

There are three major types of peer pressure we must understand and recognise. Each of these can be either negative or positive:

- Direct:** for example someone telling me what I should be doing
- Indirect:** it's not always obvious, but a group might have certain habits or do certain activities together. When you are in a different group of people, you might be unlikely to do those things.
- Self-motivated:** putting pressure on yourself to fit in with your desired friendship group

## HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE

As we discussed, not all peer pressure is bad, your peers may encourage you to wake up on time for prayers or teach you a way of learning a math problem in school. The peer pressure we have to deal with swiftly and very well is the negative pressure. We will discuss some ways below:

- Just Say "no":** It is tough to be the only one who says "no" to peer pressure, but we can do it. Paying attention to what Allah (SWT) says about what is right and wrong can help us know the right thing to do. Inner strength, strong belief and self-confidence can help us stand firm, walk away, and resist doing something when we know better.
- It can really help to have at least **one other peer**, or friend, who is willing to say "no," too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure and makes it much easier to resist. It's great to have friends with values similar to ours who will back us up when we don't want to do something.
- "Choose our friends wisely."** - Islam encourages us to choose our friends wisely for this very reason. If

our friends are good, we only get positive pressure to become better people and better Muslims.

If we continue to face peer pressure and we're finding it difficult to handle, we should talk to someone we trust. Don't feel guilty if you've made a mistake or two. Talking to a parent, teacher, or school counsellor can help us feel much better and prepare us for the next time we face peer pressure.

## **CHOOSING FRIENDS**

Islam has given us brilliant guidelines on whom we should choose as friends. We should use the gift that Allah has given us and choose wisely for His sake.

The Prophet of Islam (saw) says:

“Be selective of those with whom you communicate, for there is none who dies but his friends will resemble him on his way to Allah. Then if they were good people the resemblance will be good, but if they were evil people, it will be evil. And none dies but I appear to him at the time of his death.”<sup>iv</sup>

There are two major things we need to remember when choosing friends:

- Our friends should influence us positively
- Our friends should not make us uncomfortable or pressure to act differently to what we believe is right

In order to make good friends our behaviour and attitudes have to be good to everyone- we have to be approachable and non-judgemental ourselves. Imam alSajjad (as) once was advising his companion Zohri telling him:

“If the Satan-May the curse of Allah be on him- allures you that you are better than other Muslims, then whoever is older than you, say (to yourself): He has exceeded me in faith and righteous deeds, thus he is better than me. And if you are older than him, then say (to yourself): I exceeded him in sins thus he is better than me. And if he is of your age, then say (to yourself): I am sure about my sins but doubt his, then why should I leave my certainty to my doubt.”<sup>v</sup>

Some of the characteristics of good friends and therefore characteristics we must have to be good friends are:

1- **They should be believers** and constantly remind us of God (SWT). A companion asked the Prophet (saw): “*O Messenger of Allah! What type of friends are the best?*”

The Prophet (saw) replied:

“Those who seeing them reminds you of Allah, and their talk increases your knowledge, and their actions encourage you for the hereafter.”<sup>vi</sup>

Here we have to note that we can be friends with non-Muslims as long as they are not enemies of Islam or have a grudge against Islam or Muslims. However, our closest friends, and those friends that influence us, need to be not only Muslims, but also believing and practising Muslims.

Imam al-Sajjad (as) said:

“Beware of the companionship of the sinful (disobedient to Allah), and of helping the unjust.”

2- Be friends with those who are **intelligent**. Imam ‘Ali (as) said:

“The most goodness and righteousness is to be found in the company of people of reason and understanding.”<sup>vii</sup>

3- Befriend those who are **loyal and trustworthy** and those who have your best interest at heart. Imam al-Şādiq (as) said:

“Befriend one who gives you a good image, and do not befriend one who uses you to boost his own image.”<sup>viii</sup>

In order to work out who is a good friend or not, Imam al-Şādiq (as) said:

“Do not call a man your friend with the true stamp of friendship until you have tested him in three matters: anger him so that you may see whether his anger takes him away from right into wrong; test him with the dinar and the dirham [in money matters]; and travel with him.”<sup>ix</sup>

## **PEOPLE WE SHOULD NOT KEEP AS FRIENDS**

Imam al-Bāqir (as) summarised very well the kinds of people we should not befriend when he said:

- "Beware of and do not associate with the one who tells lies. He is as a mirage which makes near for you what is far, and makes far to you what is near."
- "Beware of and do not associate with an immoral person, because he will sell you at the price of a morsel or less than that."
- "Beware of and do not associate with a miser because he will deprive you of his wealth when you are seriously in need of it."

- "Beware of and do not associate with a fool, because he wants to be of avail to you but he harms you."  
"Beware of and do not associate with the one who disregards his kinfolks, because I found him (such a person) cursed in the Book Allah, Almighty and Glorious, in three occurrences."

## Activity

When you go home, make a list of all your close friends and your acquaintances and analyse whether your friends are the kinds of friends that take you closer or further away from God (SWT)

## Review Questions

**Q1. Which of the following people should we keep away from?**

- a. Someone who only talks about sports and does not excel in anything else
- b. Someone who reminds us about the time of prayer
- c. Someone who is good to his parents and family

**Q2. When we feel peer pressure to do something bad we should:**

- a. Avoid those people who are pressuring us and say no
- b. Do the action only when with these people but not normally
- c. Do it so that they don't feel bad and remain friends with us

## Lesson 3

We have discussed in the previous lessons the importance of friendship, the types of friends we must keep and how we should select those friends. If we already have good friends who share our values, remind us of our responsibilities and are loyal and truthful, we have to work really hard to keep them as our friends but at the same time we have to be careful not to go to the other extreme and fulfil their needs before those of our family. We shall learn what responsibilities we have to our friends.

The most ideal situation is if our family members are our best friends, where our parents are our best friends or our siblings are our best friends. We have to know the responsibilities and rights of family members and fulfil

those as a priority before we fulfil the rights of our friends. It is not fair that when your brother asks you for lunch money you refuse to give it to him but if your friend asks you gladly lend it to him!

## MAINTAINING FRIENDSHIPS

Islam encourages us to maintain the friendships we have created and not lose our friends by our own silly actions or bad habits. In Nahjul Balaghah, Imam 'Ali (As) says:

“The real disabled person is the one who cannot make friends. The person who is even more disabled is the one who loses friends he has already made.”

There are some actions that break up friendships; we have to try to avoid these things such as:

- 1- **Shaming/embarrassing one's friend**- Sometimes either due to peer pressure or bad habit, one may expose the faults of his friend in public or may embarrass them in public or in private by exposing a secret for instance. Imam 'Ali (as) said

“When a man puts his friend to shame, he has indeed parted from him.”<sup>x</sup>

These actions erode trust and once trust is gone then friendship also disappears.

- 2- **Do not argue all the time**- Imam al-ÑÁdiq (as) said:

“If you want the exclusive love of your brother, then do not ever make fun of him, nor quarrel with him, nor compete against him, nor be malicious to him.”<sup>xi</sup>

Imam 'Ali (as) said:

“He who argues with his brothers has few friends.”

If arguing constantly is in our character, then we will never make or keep friends.

- 3- **Being overly sensitive**- We should not be overly sensitive about what our friends might say and do. Sometimes, people might accidentally say something that may hurt us, without ever having intended to hurt us. Or they might be upset or stressed because of a situation in their own life, and this might make them a little irritable or angry. We should take all these things into consideration if our friends do something that upsets us. Instead of making the issue bigger, we should instead try to find excuses for our

friends. This will help us maintain stress-free friendships.

“Seek an excuse for your brother (friend), and if you couldn’t find any excuse for him, then make one for him.”<sup>xii</sup>

Sometimes, despite our best efforts at maintaining a friendship, for some reason or another a friendship can break down. It could be that either of the peoples’ attitudes and values changed or that the person you thought was your ‘friend’ did not feel the same way toward you. This can be a very painful experience but like every difficulty in life, should be taken as a blessing from Allah (SWT). Once a friendship has broken, we should not become vengeful or spiteful as this makes the situation worse for everyone. It is important to maintain some form of acquaintance with such a person for if they have a change of mind or heart they know they can rely on us and contact us.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES OF A FRIEND**

In order to maintain a friendship, it is important to know what the rights of a friend are. If we fulfil the rights of our friend, not only will we get benefits of a loyal and good friend and companion in this world but Allah (SWT) will reserve rewards for us even in the hereafter! Therefore, some of the responsibilities we have are:

**1- Be optimistic and meet your friend with a bright and cheery face-** The Prophet (SAW) says: “A real believer has the brightest face and is the nicest and most generous of people while the true disbelievers are the most stingy and ill-mannered”. If we are constantly in a bad mood, people don’t like spending time with us.

**2- Protect and look after your friend-** As friends the main responsibility we have is to be there for them when they need us and protect them from sin and especially protect their dignity and honour when they are not around. If someone talks badly of our friend, our responsibility is to protect him and stand up for him. Imam ‘Ali (as) said:

“A sincere friend is he who advises you with regard to your shortcomings, protects you in your absence, and prefers you over himself.”<sup>xiii</sup>

Imam ‘Ali (as) has said:

“Whenever you find that your Muslim brother is in need, try to attend to it.”

**3- Do not be jealous or envious of them.** Imam alṢādiq (as) has said that:

“Neither friendship [with others] nor wealth should render him envious of you.”<sup>xiv</sup>

In summary, Imam al-Sajjad (as) says:

“The right of your companion is that you share his company with bounty and fairness. You should honour him as he honours you, and should not let him be the first to extend his generosity. And if he is the first to do so, then repay him. Wish for him as he wishes for you, and restrain him from any act of disobedience that he might contemplate. Be a mercy for him, and not a chastisement.”<sup>xv</sup>

**4- Do not share all our secrets with them-** This is very important as we sometimes feel the need to share personal secrets with friends. There are many problems associated with this such as

- The friend may not know how to handle the secret and may give poor advice
- They may mistakenly reveal the secret to others
- It may be very heavy a burden for them to carry and may become really worried or anxious about us
- If the friendship breaks, they may use our secrets against us.

Imam ‘Ali (as) said, “Shower all your love on your friend but do not shower all your trust on him.”<sup>xvi</sup>

**5- Pray for them-** The blessing of friendship and having more friends is that God (SWT) listens to the prayers of a friend for his companions and grants it easily. It has been narrated that

“Whenever a believer prays for a fellow brother believer, an angel from the worldly sky says to him: 'O' servant of Allah! Know that whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer a thousand times of that would be given to you; the second angel makes triple and so on so forth until the seventh angel announces seven hundred thousand times of reward bestowed upon him. Then Allah announces glad tidings to him saying: 'O' My servant! My treasure never gets emptied through My donations! I will bestow upon you million times of

whatever you have asked for your fellow brother believer."<sup>xvii</sup>

## Review Questions

**Q1. If my friend is having difficulties with a bully at school, I should:**

- a. Help him to report it to the principal
- b. Avoid him so he does not ask you to help
- c. Move to another school so that he does not bother you any more

**Q2. A new student comes to my school. Should I:**

- a. Try and impress him by showing off the friends I have
- b. Test him to see if he is a good person and if he is try to befriend him without affecting the friends I already have
- c. Ignore him

<sup>i</sup> Mishkatul Anwaar Hadith 062

<sup>ii</sup> Gurur Al Hikam no. 8772

<sup>iii</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, v. 78, p. 291, no. 2

<sup>iv</sup> Al Kafi 2:466

<sup>v</sup> Al Tabrasi – Al Ehtijaj Vol 2 pg 158

<sup>vi</sup> Wasail Us Shia 12:23

<sup>vii</sup> GHURAR AL-HIKAM, NO. 3129

<sup>viii</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, v. 76, p. 267, no. 9

<sup>ix</sup> Amali al-Tusi, p. 646, no. 1339

<sup>x</sup> Biharul Anwaar. v. 74, p. 165, no. 28

<sup>xi</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, v. 78, p. 291, no. 2

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid. v.75, p. 197

<sup>xiii</sup> Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 1904

<sup>xiv</sup> Nahj al-Balagha, Saying 218

<sup>xv</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, v. 74, p. 7, no. 1

<sup>xvi</sup> Bihar al-Anwar, v. 74, p. 165, no. 29

<sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.al-islam.org/suluk/40.htm>