



Friendships

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 5

Lesson 1

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand that Islam encourages friendship with other Muslims and especially practicing believers
- Discuss 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
- Understand and recognise the signs of peer pressure
- Know the strategies of dealing with peer pressure-
- Understand that we can always choose our friends
- Be reminded of the characteristics of the friends we should keep
- Know which qualities we should avoid in friends
- Know that the responsibility to family and Islam is more important than that of friends
- Understand that keeping friends is sometimes more difficult than getting friends
- Know that friendships can change and that this is part of life
- Understand our responsibilities towards our friends

Human beings are social creatures and must create strong and positive friendships, for which Islam has given us detailed guidelines. In fact, friendship is so important that Imam Ali (a) classifies it as a *necessity*.

Imam Ali (a) says: “He who lacks friends lacks a bare necessity”.

CONSEQUENCES OF ISOLATION

Social life in the western communities is unfortunately very much devoid of the blessings of close friendship and companionship due to the individualistic and capitalistic nature of people and society. Some of the major consequences of social isolation are:

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.”ⁱ

Selfishness & Individualism - 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 and want everything for themselves, therefore not contributing much to society. This is opposed to the quality of a believer, who gives out of what he actually loves for himself. This is not limited to material

possessions. It also extends to our time, our compassion, and our comforts and preferences.

WHAT MAKES A PERSON ISOLATED?

1- **Disloyalty:** We all want friends who would stand by us in both good and bad days, and protect our honour when others are talking badly about us.

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

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

3- **Loss of formalities:** Imam al-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.”

Having no formalities therefore makes one have no shame, driving away good friends from them. One important example is when friends begin to talk about intimate or private issues such as when married people begin to discuss their sexual life with friends. This is seen to be normal in the West. However, in Islam such things should not be discussed outside marriage shamelessly for the sake of a joke or entertainment. Of course, if a person has problems related to this aspect of life, they should seek professional help from an appropriate person or get sincere advice from a trusted friend.

4- **Being over sensitive:** Not being able to take criticism or making a big deal out of everything drives others away.

5- **Bad Habits and Poor Grooming:** Doing certain acts in public which others annoys others, dressing or smelling badly and other such things.

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 or may have a mental health illness or might have been 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.

A BELIEVER IS LIKE A MIRROR

According to the narration from the Holy Prophet (saw), a believer is like a mirror for his believing brother. This means that they must have a good knowledge regarding

each other's manners and affairs, and must attempt to alleviate the problems and troubles of each other as if it was their own. There must therefore be minimal formalities between them for this to be possible, but care must be taken that formalities are not lost in totality, as mentioned.

Activity

1. **Discuss the consequences of not having friends.**

2. **Describe the characteristics which may drive good people away from us.**

Lesson 2

INFLUENCE OF FRIENDS

Peer pressure is the influence which our friends and friendship groups have over us, and can be positive or negative. The Holy Prophet (saw) has said that:

“a person is influenced by his friends. Therefore be careful of whom you associate with.”

As human beings, we tend to act in conformity with groups that we are a part of, attempting to meet their expectations in order to be accepted. This peer pressure continues on throughout our lives, and we feel it in school, university, and even at work. For example, in Western countries one will often be faced with situations where their whole cohort is going to a mixed party where alcohol is served. In such situations, peer pressure arises in three shapes.

- **Direct:** If someone tells you what to do. (“*You have to come to the party!*”)
- **Indirect:** If you do something due to the group you are in, because everyone in the group does it. You would not do it perhaps if you were in another group. (“*Our whole grade is going and it's something we are all doing together!*”)
- **Self-motivated:** putting pressure on yourself to fit in with your desired friendship group. (“*I HAVE to go, or else no one will accept me.*”)

HOW TO HANDLE PEER PRESSURE

When faced with negative influences, some of the ways to deal with them are:

- 1- **Just Say “no”:** Focusing on what Allah (SWT) says is right and wrong can help us build the strength to simply say "no". Having at least one friend who shares our values and also says “no” is highly useful, and we should try to find and keep such friends. Most of the time, people will respect our choices and the fact that we have values which we stand up for. We just need to be brave and express ourselves without fear.
- 2- **Choosing Friends Wisely:** Islam encourages us to choose our friends wisely, meaning we only receive positive pressure which helps us become better people and better Muslims. We must avoid taking those who don't share similar values as influential friends.
- 3- **Faith & Self Confidence:** Inner strength, strong belief in Allah (SWT) and self-confidence can help us stand firm, walk away, and resist doing something when we know better. We must firmly and confidently believe in our values and know that they are greater than whatever negative thing others are pressuring us into.

CHOOSING FRIENDS

As we have learnt previously, we have freedom in choosing our friends and must follow the Islamic guidelines to make sure we choose the righteous believers as our friends – those who influence us positively and protect us from negative pressures.

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.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Our closest friends must be practicing believers, who constantly remind us of Allah (SWT) and take us closer to Him. They must be knowledgeable and intelligent^{iv}, loyal and trustworthy, and have your best interest at heart.^v

It is important to realize that in order to have such friends, we need to display such traits ourselves as well.

PEOPLE WE SHOULD NOT KEEP AS FRIENDS^{vi}

In accordance to the teachings of the Ahlul Bayt (as)^{vi}, we must keep away from those who are liars, fools, immoral, or break family relationships. This is for our own good, because someone who, for example, breaks ties with their mother, who brought them to this world and raised them, cannot be trusted to not break ties with you.

It is also important for us to keep away from those who would take us towards sins. This includes people from the opposite gender, especially in Western societies where one is exposed to a lot of advertisement for sin. Religious youth are also sometimes fooled by Satan into befriending someone from the opposite gender in order to ‘guide them to the right path’.

Relationships with the opposite gender may start off with good intentions, or we may make excuses for ourselves to try to justify the relationship. However, more often than not, these relationships lead to sinful words and acts, and to difficulties in the lives of both people involved. Therefore we should be extra wary of such relationships.

FRIENDSHIP BEFORE MARRIAGE?

In many places around the world, the idea that “friendship is a necessary precondition for getting to know a person so that you can choose them for marriage” is promoted. Often, you will see this ‘dating game’ advertised in music, movies and TV shows, targeted even at young children. The reality is that the dating game is dangerous and damages our souls, destroying the family institute by trapping one in a long cycle of different relationships.

Islam provides a much better alternative in which the sanctities of the persons, the families, and the institute of marriage are kept. This involves proposal ceremonies coordinated with both families, in which both parties get to know each other and can discuss the various issues that arise in marriage. If there are familial similarities and agreements on the greater level, the potential spouses can then hold extensive discussions in private to get to know each-other and discuss specific details in full depth. Such familial supervision ensures the best outcomes for the candidates, the support of both families throughout the marriage, and the abstention from the dangers of the

dating game, while allowing a deep understanding of one's potential spouse as well as the family which shaped them.

Therefore, if we are interested in getting married, we should firstly discuss this with our families. If our interest in someone specific whom we may have come across at university or at an Islamic centre or elsewhere, then our family can approach their family to open the way for us to get to know each other with the supervision of our parents. If we are not interested in someone specific, then our family may be able to introduce us to someone through their family ties and connections.

Review Questions

1. Discuss the qualities that you would like to find in a 'good' friend, and assess whether you also have these qualities.
2. Discuss the strategies on how to deal with negative peer pressure.
3. Discuss in class what you had in mind as an approach to marriage before going through this lesson.

Lesson 3

FAMILY COMES FIRST

In Islam, our responsibility before our family always comes first it comes before our responsibility to our friends. One must make sure that they are not spending too much time with their friends such that they are neglecting their family. 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.

The most ideal situation is if our family members are our best friends, as this builds trust, confidence, warmth and happiness in our close environment.

This is especially important in an age where technological advancements are making us increasingly isolated from our families, where for example each person dwells within their Smartphone and neglects other family members during gatherings.



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. 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 the friends he has already made.”

Friendships can break due to doing things such as embarrassing your friend or putting your friend to shame^{vii}, ridiculing them, arguing excessively^{viii}, being overly sensitive and having a poor moral character in general. These actions erode trust and once trust is gone, friendship also disappears. Islam teaches us the exact opposite, and preaches a stress free friendship in which you even create excuses for the mistakes of your friend.

Imam Ali (as) said: “Seek an excuse for your brother (friend), and if you couldn't find any excuse for him, then make one for him.”^{ix}

Sometimes, despite our best efforts at maintaining a friendship, for some reason or another, a friendship can break down. People sometimes change as they grow and enter new friendship circles. This can be a very painful experience but like every difficulty in life, should be taken as a blessing from Allah (SWT). If this happens, we should not become vengeful or spiteful as it only makes things worse, and should leave space open in our hearts for a return.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A FRIEND

When we befriend someone, it is upon us to fulfil our obligation towards them, such as:

- 1- **Protecting and looking after your friend:** As friends the main responsibility we have is to be there for

them when they need us, protect their dignity and honour in their absence, and protect them from sins. 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.”^x

- 2- **Don't be assertive:** Sometimes one might be selfish and try to skilfully force their friends into whatever they want, without being considerate of their friend. We must refrain from this.
- 3- **Don't imitate everything:** With the exception of good things, imitating everything your friend does makes them feel that their identity and personality is being taken away.
- 4- **Do not share all your secrets with them:** This is very important as we sometimes feel the need to share personal secrets with friends, but later face problems since the friend may not be able to handle it well, or might reveal it accidentally. They might even use it against us if our friendship breaks.

Imam 'Ali (as) said, “Shower all your love on your friend but do not shower all your trust on him.”^{xi}

- 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. Allah (SWT) also grants the one who prays for their brother immensely from His bounties.

In summary, Imam al-Sajjād (as) says:

ⁱ Mishkatul Anwaar Hadith 062

ⁱⁱ Gurur Al Hikam no. 8772

ⁱⁱⁱ Al Kafi 2:466

^{iv} Imam Ali (a): “The most goodness and righteousness is to be found in the company of people of reason and understanding.” Ghurar Al-Hikam, No. 3129

^v Imam al-ÑÁdiq (as) said: “Befriend one who gives you a good image, and do not befriend one who uses you to boost his own image.” Bihar al-Anwar, v. 76, p. 267, no. 9

^{vi} Imam Sajjad (a) said: 1- “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.” 2- “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.” 3- “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.” 4- “Beware of and do not

“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.”^{xii}

Review Questions

1. Discuss how we must act in order to keep our friends.
2. Describe our duties and responsibilities towards our friends.

associate with a fool, because he wants to be of avail to you but he harms you.” 5- “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.” Al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 641

^{vii} Imam Ali (a): “When a man puts his friend to shame, he has indeed parted from him.” Biharul Anwaar. v. 74, p. 165, no. 28

^{viii} 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.” Bihar al-Anwar, v. 78, p. 291, no. 2

^{ix} Ibid. v.75, p. 197

^x Ghurar al-Hikam, no. 1904

^{xi} Bihar al-Anwar, v. 74, p. 165, no. 29

^{xii} Bihar al-Anwar, v. 74, p. 7, no. 1