

A Good Friend in Islam

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Reccive: 04/10/2015

Accept: 08/03/2016

Abstract

Through this paper, the need of a good friend has been discussed by taking evidence from Islamic sources. This evidence then is further reinforced through the discussion of sociological, cognitive and psychological research findings. The introduction of this paper briefly sheds light on how Islam is a complete code of life and how friends have played an important role in expanding and sustaining this code. Furthermore the introduction shortly discusses the need for friends as identified via contemporary sociological research. The main theme of the presents references from the Holy Quran and Sunnah through which the need of having and being a good friend in human life is critically explored. Lastly, conclusion of the paper sums up the discussion and presents recommendations through which the element of friendship can be effectively incorporated in one's life.

Keywords: Friend, Friendship, Quality of Good Friend, Companionship in Islam

Introduction

According to Hewer and Anderson (2006) and Qutb (2006) "Islam" is best defined as a complete and all-embracing code of life that provides an in-depth and broad spectrum guideline concerning all spheres of life.

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Hewer and Anderson (2006) further elaborates by stating that a follower of Islam can get theorized version of these guidelines through the Holy Quran while their practical implementations can be seen through primarily the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and then through the life of his family and companions (A.S). It is important to note here that the friends or the companions of the Holy Prophet have played a critical and vital role to establish, expand and carry forward the religion of Islam. From this very fact, the significance of friends in the life of an individual can interpreted.

Moving further to include evidence from scientific and more contemporary research, Buote (2007) highlights that individuals need friends to adjust in new environments, to go through change and to cope with emotionally challenging situations. Buote (2007) basis his conclusions on a research conducted on university students and states that through individuals who were surrounded by effective friendships reported the transition periods to be relatively easier than those who were not thus implying that the need of friends in human life is great.

Up till now, the importance of friends has been briefly explained through an Islamic and a scientific perspective. This paper henceforth will be focusing on the need of healthy friendship for an individual as highlighted by Islamic theory and behavioral guidelines.

The Significance of Quality Friendships

According to Al-Bosnee (n.p) human beings have almost always been social creatures in the need for companionship. Even during the times when humans lived in caves, they had interactions amongst themselves which further led to grouping and bonding.

It is safe to say here that the foundations of friendship have been laid through the lives of the early humans and thus it is nothing less than a law of nature itself. However it is important to state here that all human interaction does not necessarily end in a positive and mutually beneficial relationship.

Stronger relationships call for sacrifices, emotional and logical control, teamwork and leadership as and when required. White (2015) describing the characteristics of a positive and quality friend says that generally across cultures, i) honesty, ii) dependability, iii) loyalty, iv) trustworthiness, v) empathy, vi) listening skills, vii) the ability to be non-judgmental, viii) supportive behavior, ix) the ability to be fun, and x) self-confidence are important and determining elements. Apart from this, the relationship of friendship itself should be unconditional and committed (Argintar, 2014).

Further noting the impacts of high quality friendship Berndt (2002) states that: a high quality friendship is related to higher levels of pro-social behavior and intimacy and lower levels of conflict, negative emotions and rivalry. This implies that in the presence of quality friendships, a person is more likely to have a satisfied emotional and social life with significantly lesser levels of stressful elements as compared to in its absence.

Within the field of developmental psychology a research conducted by Ladd et al (1996) took data from kindergarten children and studied the impacts of friendships on their feelings, perceptions and behaviors. The research findings revealed that the children who had high quality friendships in January reported greater liking from the school and higher levels of perceived classmates' support.

This view is further reinforced by Ladd et al (1996) findings that those children who had negative friendship features were found to display a greater degree of disruptive behaviors in the school and were less likely to engage in classroom activities.

The Importance of Good Friends in Islam

Islam places a great deal of importance on the issues of sociability, peace, mutual respect and fair treatment of others (Laliwala, 2005).

The Holy Quran in Surah Hujrat states that, “And of two parties of believers fall to fighting, then make peace between them...make peace between them justly and act equitably. Lo! Allah Loveth the equitable”

This amongst other Quranic references clearly indicates the tremendous importance Allah has placed on maintaining peace, equity and justice on His lands and one of the most effective and direct ways of achieving this is via friendships. If people have the characteristics of friends mentioned above, the likelihood of conflicts will be reduced which then essentially make Allah happy. Thus Muslims need to be good friends as it is one of the ways to please The Creator.

It is critical to note here that friends in a person's do not necessarily signify Allah's pleasure. For example a group of criminals are also essentially friends who trust and help each other to create “fassaad” or nuisance on Allah's land. Such are friends from which both the Quran and the Prophet have warned the Muslim ummah and the world in general against.

Focusing on this further, Allah in the holy Quran says (Surah Al Furqan Verse 27-29):

"وَيَوْمَ يَعَضُّ الظَّالِمُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي اتَّخَذْتُ مَعَ الرَّسُولِ سَبِيلًا. يَا وَيْلَتَى لَيْتَنِي لَمَ اتَّخَذْتُ فُلَانًا خَلِيلًا لَقَدْ أَضَلَّنِي عَنِ الذِّكْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَنِي وَكَانَ الشَّيْطَانُ لِلْإِنْسَانِ خَذُولًا"

“On that Day the wrongdoer will bite his hands saying: Oh! Would that I had only taken the pathway alongside the Prophet. Oh! Would that I had never chosen so-and-so for my companion. He was the one who led me astray from the admonition even after it had reached me. Shaitan is ever treacherous to man.”

As can be seen, in the above mentioned Verse, God recognizes the need of a good friend and its importance in a person’s life. The most relevant element of this Verse is the “choosing of a good friend”. According to the Holy Quran, friends (or companions) have a tendency to lead an individual astray. What the Quran said more than 1400 years ago has been validated by the research of Sieving, Perry and Williams (2000) according to which individuals whose friends were involved in drug or alcohol consumption showed a significantly increase consumption of the same.

On the same grounds, Salmivalli (2010) explained that victimization and bullying in schools is a group process implying that companions get together to make life difficult for others around them. Such are examples of friends against whom the Quran has warned the believers and has stated that it is better for a Muslim to make the Holy Prophet his/her companion rather than those who will lead him/her astray.

There is no doubt about the fact that the surrounding of one has a great influence on everyone life. The good friendship can force you to follow a right path and vice versa. It is clear that on the Day of Judgment when people will be thrown into hell and they shall complain of bad friends who led them astray.

Up till now, this paper has shed Islamic light on the importance of choosing a good friend. The question that arises now is who is considered by Allah and his Prophet (PBUH) to be a good friend. This question is answered through the Holy Quran by the following two verses:

"إِنَّمَا يَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللَّهِ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى
الزَّكَاةَ وَلَمْ يَخْشَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ فَعَسَىٰ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنْ يَكُونُوا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ"

“The mosques of Allah should be maintained by those who believe in Allah and the Last Day, establish Salah (prayers), and pay Zakah (poor due) and fear none except Allah. It is they who are expected to follow the true guidance.” (Surah AT Tauba, Verse 18)

The above Verse shows that a good believer will be the one who establishes prayer, pay Zakah, and fear none except God. These are the people with whom we make friendship with and as God says, follow them for true guidance. Within this verse is embedded the guideline provided by Allah on “making friends” that is, by visiting mosques where believers gather for prayers and social contact.

For example, if you are living in a country where there are no Muslims or mosques are not available or you are in danger to keep your religion, you basically are unable to develop friendships as prescribed by Allah and therefore it is recommended in Islam to migrate to such a place where you can easily practice your religion, visit mosque and interact with other Muslim beings.

The same issue is further discussed in the following:

"وَدُّوا لَوْ تَكْفُرُونَ كَمَا كَفَرُوا فَتَكُونُونَ سَوَاءً فَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءَ
حَتَّىٰ يَهَاجِرُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَقْتُلُوهُمْ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ
وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا مِنْهُمْ وِلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا"

“Their real wish is to see that you become a disbeliever, as they themselves have disbelieved, so that you may become exactly like them. So you should not take friends from their ranks unless they immigrate in the way of Allah; and if they do not, seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and do not take any of them as protectors or helpers.” (Surah An-Nisa, Verse 89)

Thus essentially, a good friend in Islam is defined as a person who brings you closer to Allah, His Prophet and His religion. For a Muslim, this world and its pleasures are understood to be temporary and the real satisfaction or absolution is achieved only by striving for the will and pleasure of Allah, a path in which a good friend plays a positive role. As can be seen, there is a link between migration and a better place to worship which leads you to have a good friend. One should migrate if his religion is in danger as religion is the base of a good friendship. If a person has kept his religion and migrated on the way of God, he shall be rewarded heavily by God himself.

Unfortunately however, the social relations or the friendship of today are deviating from the guidelines of Islam. The problem is more profound in the younger generation which is influenced by elements such as free social media, rapidly growing communication technology and declining value and morals.

In places where the Muslim Ummah is scanty or unprotected Muslims can be seen to be rationalizing by saying that this is what we have got here and that they do not have another option.

This is where the instruction of God to migrate comes. Migration is not only from one country to another, it is from one city to another, one place to another or even one society in city to another society within the city to seek a true friend and have a better companion. Ameer ul momineen Ali ibn Abi Talib said in Nahjul Balagah that: “Two friends are in fact single soul but in different bodies”.

It is clear to select a friend who remind you of God and guide you to right path. On the other hand if you do not seek a good friend, you will never get it as Shaitan is trying his best to misguide Muslims. In this context, Allah disclosed in the Quran,

"قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ"

“Shaitan said: "I swear by Your Honor, I will mislead them all” (Surah Sad, Verse 82)

What needs to be noted here is that a friend that misleads a believer is in fact a follower of shaitan because shaitan has taken it up as his core work to mislead believer. Implanting a bad friend in the life of a believer then is one of the many ways through which Shaitan works his tricks for example by keeping them away from good companions such as scholars and philosophers.

Characteristics of Negative Friendships

Like in the case of quality or good friendship, various elements can assist in identifying the characteristics of a negative friendship. The first and foremost of these characteristics has been uncovered by Allah Himself and that is, hypocrisy.

Hypocrites are the people who present themselves as friend of people while in reality lie, break his promises, betray, back bite and abandon in the times of need.

About such people God says in Quran (Surah AT Tauba, Verse 67):

"الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمُنْكَرِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَقْبِضُونَ أَيْدِيَهُمْ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ"

“The hypocrites, both men and women, precede one from another. They enjoin the wrong, and they forbid the right, and they withhold their hands (from spending for the cause of Allah). They forget Allah, so He hath forgotten them. Lo! The hypocrites, they are the transgressors.”

Thus, while seeking a good friend it is important to ascertain that the concerned individual is “genuine” and “trustworthy”. This is an extremely difficult task considering that no individual reveals him / herself completely to others and therefore ultimate integrity and congeniality of an apparent friend cannot be known. Quran offers guidelines to the believers by identifying the signs to watch out as we should not develop friendship with hypocrites because they will not only drown in hell fire themselves but are likely to drag you along themselves as well.

A good friend according to Islam is one who helps you in remembering God and following His prescribed path. The speech of a good friend increases your knowledge and his actions motivate you in right direction for this world and that hereafter. Therefore it is clear that for any Muslim who wants to protect and safeguard his faith it is important to be selective in making friendships and company.

Apart from the mention of friendship, companionship and brotherhood in the Quran, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and Imams (A.S.) have talked about good friends in detail. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) has said (Bihar ul Anwar)

“Man is influenced by the faith of his friends. Therefore be careful of whom you associate with” (Bihar ul Anwar, vol. 74).

It is clear from the hadith of holy Prophet as well that we shall be careful in choosing our friends and to be careful with whom we associate. If someone chooses a bad friend, they will encourage him to do all bad things which are prohibited in Islam. The bad company will never encourage doing a good and righteous deeds.

This is very important for all Muslims to understand the philosophy of selecting a good friend, especially for new Muslims as they may have habits such as smoking or drinking. They may have accustomed to those habits which are regarded sin in Islam. It is necessary for those Muslims to cut their relation with those friends who smoke or drink, rather they should make friendship with believer who reminds them of God and God’s work.

Safeguarding Good Friendship

It has been highlighted that a Muslim should seek a good friend in order to be able to follow the right and guided path. Seeking good friendship and maintaining a companionship is a responsibility for each believer has to himself or herself, to god and his community.

Therefore seek a good friend who seeks paradise in the hereafter. However once we have established the friendship, it needs to be maintained as well.

There are certain rights and responsibilities among believers and which shall be maintained at all cost. In this regard, Allah says in Surah Al Kahf, Verse 28 that,

"وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تَطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا"

“Keep yourself content with those who call on their God morning and evening seeking His good pleasure; and let not your eyes turn away from them desiring the attraction of Worldly Life; nor obey the one whose heart we have permitted to neglect our remembrance, which follows his own desires and goes to extremes in the conduct of his affairs.”

In the true sense of Islam, it is vital to consider that individuals are accountable only for their own actions and not of the others. Allah promises this in the Holy Quran in the following words:

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَنْ ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ"

“O believers! You are accountable for none but for yourselves; anyone who has gone astray cannot harm you if you are on the Right Way. To Allah you shall all return and He will let you know the truth of all that you did.”

This basically means that with or without friendships, a believer is responsible for his actions and those cannot be blamed on someone else. Allah and his Prophet have clearly stated on multiple occasions that it is your own responsibility to surround yourself with people who will motivate you towards the path of Allah and not involve you in misled or worldly deeds.

It is recommended to stay at sufficient distance from ill mannered, ignorant, and non-believers person but treating everyone in kind and noble manner is necessary. God says in Quran:

"الْأَخْلَاءُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ إِلَّا الْمُتَّقِينَ"

“On that Day, even friends will become enemies to one another with the exception of the righteous people”. (Surah Az-Zukhruf, Verse 67)

It is clear that on the Day of Judgment all will be enemy except the one who were believers. Therefore we need to make friends which are believers and which remind us of God. It is wise to choose a good friend in this world to avoid regret in next world. In this context, there is a tradition from Imam Mohammad Baqir (A.S.) who heard from his father Imam Zain al abdeen (A.S.) that we should never befriend people, who are Kasab (liar), the one who takes the right of people, a miser, a fool and the one cuts relationship (Silay Reham). Imam Ali (A.S.) took it more forward and said that friend in need is friend indeed which today is considered as a standard definition of a “good friend” around the world.

The process of safeguarding the friendship has been suggested by Imam Askari (A.S.). According to Imam Askari (A.S.) that we should advice our friends secretly and not publicly because if we advise them openly, there is a possibility that we will humiliate and hurt them. This means that in the true value of Islam, it is important to uphold the respect and status of your friend. These elements as mentioned above are also considered to be the core foundations of a good friendship by modern day researchers.

A believer according to the behavioral codes of Islam, establishes the standards of friendship through which he/she will soon find themselves encircled with friends who will take them to heaven and take them away from the fire of Hell.

There are however certain important elements which needs to be done to keep stable and fruitful friendship. For this purpose we should not dispute with our friend or make indecent jokes with them.

It is important that we do not quarrel with them, do not be aggressive with them, and do not consider them inferior in any way because for a believer the true value of a person is only that in the eyes of Allah.

Finally, it is recommended that in case of a quarrel between friends, it is critical for a true believer to mend ties at the earliest. Imam Hassan (A.S.) said very nicely that behave in the same way with your friends the way you want them to behave with you. Thus overall, Islam has prescribed a healthy and effective manner of seeking and safeguarding a good friend. The Holy Quran sums it up by saying that:

"وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا"

"Hold fast the rope of Allah, and you shall never separate" (Surah Al – Emran, Verse 103)

Conclusion

An old English proverb says "A man is known by the company he keeps". The same thing was emphasized tremendously long before this proverb by the Holy Prophet (PBUH) on the importance of surrounding oneself with good people. Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) often spoke about the value of true friendship to his companions. He stressed the need to have good companion and surround ourselves.

He urged companions to be friends with those who hold same belief and values.

For the believer the only solid foundation to make friendship is Islam. Companionship has great importance in Islam, often prophet talked about it to have good friends and companions. A good friend is the one who guides you, support you, accommodate your faults but correct them and love and forgive you for the sake of Allah. Therefore it is important to choose your friends carefully.

The core question which arises from the discussion is how we should choose our friends? The answer is the one who is Momin.

The word Momin has very broad meaning and for which we will discuss in our upcoming article. For the time being we can stick with more narrow definition of Momin “the one who is loyal to God, Prophet and his progeny”.

There are friends who will always remain loyal and trustful under all circumstances and this is what Islam has taught us in terms of selecting and maintaining friendships. It urges us to have good friend who reminds us of God and keep us safe from sins. A believer must be selective when it comes to making friends.

Being friend with good will lead to righteous path while bad leads to sin. It will not only the path of righteousness in this world but leads us to next world as well.

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