

Chapter 66: Friends and Friendship

A good friend and companion is the greatest gift of God. In adversity, a friend only is the refuge for a person and solace for his heart and soul. In this world, that is full of hardships and hurdles, presence of a true friend is absolutely necessary for every individual. One who doesn't have any friend, will be like a person, all alone, away from home. He will not have anyone to commiserate with him in the times of need.

Imam Musa ibn Ja'far was asked what is the ideal source for comfort in this world. The Imam replied:

"An airy house and plenty of friends!"^{[1](#)}

Imam 'Ali says:

"The weakest person is one who cannot make anyone his friend and brother."^{[2](#)}

"Not having friends is like being a stranger in ones own land and being a loner."^{[3](#)}

As the grown ups need friends, the children too want friends and companions. A child who doesn't have friends, will always be lonely and forlorn. The child, by nature, needs a friend and companion. He cannot be denied this natural need. There is also a subtle difference between a friend and acquaintance. Perhaps, a child may have acquaintances but no friends. Sometimes a child selects a friend from his class fellows and the children in his neighborhood. The cause for picking up a particular person as a friend may not be evident. Perhaps the spiritual similarity between the two has brought them together.

The Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali, says:

"The hearts of people are like migrant nomads, whosoever loves them, they are attached to him."^{[4](#)}

A friend cannot be thrust on anyone. The parents cannot very much restrict the child to accept particular persons as friends. The child must be free to make his own choice of friends. But this freedom will be with some conditions and restrictions. The character and conduct of the friends will have to be observed by the parents before they permit the child to pick a friend. If a child selects a courteous and polite

friend, he will definitely benefit by picking up his good habits. To the contrary, if the friend has undesirable habits then, naturally, the child will take to some of his bad habits. There are plenty of children and youths fallen into the morass of sin because of indiscreetly selecting bad friends. .

The Prophet of Islam has said:

“A man follows the faith, ways and habits of his friend.”[5](#)

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“The most fortunate are those who have connections with good people.”[6](#)

This is the reason the Religion of Islam exhorts its peoples to abstain from bad company.

‘Ali said:

"Avoid making friendship with transgressors and sinning persons because evil creates evil."[7](#)

Imam Zain ul Abidin told to his son, Imam Muhammad al Baqir:

“O My son Avoid acquaintance of five type of persons: 1. Don’t be friends with a liar. He will be like a mirage. He will trick you. When a thing is far, he will say it is near; and when it is at hand, he will say that it is very far. 2. Don’t make a transgressor and sinner your friend because he might sell you for as low a price. 3. Don’t make a parsimonious and stingy person your friend who may not help you in times of need. 4. Don’t make a stupid person your friend, lest he bring harm to you with his stupidity. It is possible that with all good intentions, he might bring harm to you with his foolish actions. 5. Don’t be friend with those who deprive their kin of their rights. Such persons are shorn of Allah's Blessings and are accursed people.”[8](#)

Responsible and thoughtful parents will not be totally unconcerned with the type of friends their children cultivate. While the parents must know the type of friends a child has, they should not appear to be interfering in their personal matters.

If the parents can provide a good friend to their child, they have made a great contribution to his virtuous future. But this is not such an easy task. The best way is to acquaint the child with what is good, and what is not, when he comes to the age of understanding. They should explain to the child the defects that might be there in undesirable friends.

The parents must keep a subtle watch over the activities of the child and his friends from a distance. If they find that the friends are good, they must appreciate them. They should create opportunities for the child to meet such friends. But if they notice that the child has picked up an undesirable acquaintance, then they should discreetly try to cut this friendship short. If the child persists in such friendship, deal with the matter strictly.

The parents can help the child in making good friends by another method. They should pick children in their neighborhood with good behavior, character and background. Create opportunities for the children to meet and react with one another. If they become friends, encourage them to cement the friendship. This way, even if there are some minor defects in their own child, they can be warded off in the company of good children. For example, if a child is timid, he might overcome his timidity by being friends with a bold and courageous child.

The parents should not be totally oblivious of the type of friends their child has. Particularly when the child is on the threshold of youth. This will be the period in his life when habits take root. Any negligence on the part of the parents might result in irreparable harm to the character and conduct of the child, if he persists to be in bad company. They should remember the dictum: Prevention is better than cure!

‘Ali, The Commander of the Faithful, says:

“For everything there is a calamity, and for virtue the calamity is a bad friend.”

One gentleman writes:

"My parents never permitted me to meet my friends. If sometimes friends visited me, I tried to send them away quickly after talking with them for a while. One friend of mine used to live very near our home. My parents knew him well but never allowed us to visit each other. I used to wish to have friends, meet them, chat and play with them.

But my parents were the impediment. I was very sad about this. One day I had decided to visit my friend, whatever came told my Mom that I had to go for my exams. I took permission for going to attend the examination but, in fact, I made a beeline to my friend's house. This friend's house was at a little distance from our home. I boarded an omnibus and reached his place. There were other children too at my friend's place. We had lots of fun together, When I returned home in the evening, Mom asked me why I was so late. To hide one lie, I had to utter another.

Now I wonder if Mom was not aware that the children too need friends and companions. Why did they restrict me so much?!

One girl writes:

"Once I invited some friends home. I had some savings from my pocket money. With this money I ran to the neighborhood grocery and brought a pack of ice cream. My mother was away visiting some people. While my friends were eating the ice cream, Mom returned home. I was very scared that she might scold me. She didn't bother a bit about my feelings and said angrily to my friends, 'You girls are making Saima waste her money!'

My friends abruptly went away. My Mom didn't stop at this. She visited my school the next day and complained to our class teacher that my friends visit our home and encourage me to waste my money.

She told the teacher that the girls visited a day earlier and asked me to buy ice cream for them.

My friends, who were also my class fellows, said, 'Aunty We shall pay you the price of the ice cream we ate at your home yesterday' I felt so ashamed and belittled that I wished the earth went asunder and I fell into the abyss. Ever since that day, I had never gone to the school. All my friends progressed in their studies. Today I am a forlorn and lonely person, lagging behind in all walks of life."

[1.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 74, p. 177

[2.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 74, p. 154

[3.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 74, p. 179

[4.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 74, p. 178

[5.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 72, p. 375

[6.](#) Gharar al hukm, p. 189.

[7.](#) Bihar al-anwar, v 74, p. 199

[8.](#) Usul al-Kafi, v 72, p. 376

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