

## Rights of Friends

### Merits of Friends

Man has longed for making friendships so that he can obtain individuals supporting him, alleviating his troubles, and sharing in his sorrow and joy.

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: "Try to have as many as possible true friends, for they are the supplies in joy and the shelters in misfortunes<sup>1</sup>."

Imam as-Sadiq (a) said: "A friend occupies a great position to the degree that even the inhabitants of Hell will seek his help before the relatives. In this regard, Allah, conveying the words of the inhabitants of Hell, says:

***'so, we have no intercessors, nor a true friend. (26: 100-1)'***

A wise man said: "The true friends are the most favorable gain in this world. They are adornment in luxury, support in misfortune, and aid for acquiring good living and good deeds."

As a wise man was asked whether he prefers his brother or friend, he answered: "I prefer my brother when he is a friend of mine."

### Reality of Friendship

Some people may think that the true friend is the one who treats them courteously and bright-facedly, but if such one is tested, his falsity is proved. Old and modern writers have gone on complaining about friends' alienations in spite of the love that is born for them. This is because of:

- The ignorance of the reality of friendship and the incapability of making distinction between the true and false friends, or
- Most of the friends are characterized by common social weak points, such as changeableness and

disloyalty.

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: "There are two classes of friends: friends of confidence and friends of grimace. The friends of confidence represent the hand, the wing, the family, and the wealth. Regarding your relation with the friends of confidence, you should offer your wealth and body to them, act with sincerity towards him who acts with sincerity towards them, antagonize him who antagonizes them, conceal their secrets and flaws, and publicize their nice qualities

You should know that friends of confidence are as rare as red sulfur. Friends of grimace are those from whom you can gain pleasure; therefore, you should not prevent them from gaining pleasure through you. Do not expect anything more from them. As long as they show you good humor and good wording, you must show them the same<sup>2</sup>."

Imam as-Sadiq (a) said: "Friendship is nil unless its limits are kept. He who does not keep these limits should not be regarded as friend. The first limit is that the inner self and the appearance should be identical. The second limit is that the friend should regard your goodness as his goodness and your evil as his evil. The third limit of friendship is that a position or fortunes should not change the relation with the friends. The fourth limit is that the friend should not deprive his friend of anything that he is capable of doing. The fifth limit which is the most comprehensive-, is that the friend should never leave his friend alone in calamities<sup>3</sup>."

## Friends' Selection

The characteristics of friends move between them very quickly. The bad, however, move in greater speed. It frequently happens that well-behaved individuals have gone astray because of the influence of their bad friends. So, it is important for every man of reason to choose friends that are characterized by good mannerism and behavior.

## The Ideal Friend

The first characteristic of the ideal friend is intelligence. In fact, the companionship of the foolish is vicious and malicious because the foolish injures his friend when he intends to benefit him:

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: "The foolish does not advise you of good and is not expected to save you from any problem even if he does his best. Moreover, he may harm you as he intends to benefit you. His death is better than his life, his silence is better than his words, and his remoteness is better than his closeness<sup>4</sup>."

Friends must be characterized by faith, uprightness, and well mannerism. Friends who are empty of such traits are insignificant since they are anticipated to mislead their associates:

***"It will be a hard day for the unbelievers. It will be a day when the unjust will bite their fingers,***

***(regretfully) saying, "Would that we had followed the path of the Messengers. Woe to us! Would that we had not been friends with so and so. He led me away from the true guidance after it had come to us. Satan is a traitor to people." (25:27-9)"***

The Prophet (S) said: "Man imitates his friends. Hence, you must consider them whom you want to befriend<sup>5</sup>."

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: "To sit with the evils causes mistrust in the good. To sit with the good attaches the evils to the good. The sinful ones' sitting with the good ones attaches the sinful ones to the good ones. If you cannot discern the belief of somebody, you should investigate his associates. If they are following the right creed, he will inevitably be on the right creed. If they are not, he then has no share in the religion of Allah. The Prophet (S) used to say: He who believes in Allah and the Final Day should not fraternize with any disbeliever or associate with any sinful. He whoever fraternizes with a disbeliever or associates with a sinful one is certainly regarded as disbeliever and sinful<sup>6</sup>."

Imam al-Baqir (a) said: My father Ali Ibn al-Hussein, once, advised me: 'O son, do not associate, talk, or accompany five classes of people.' 'Who are they, father?' asked I, and he (a) answered: 'Beware of associating with the liar, for he is as same as mirage: he shows you the near as remote and shows you the remote as near. Beware of associating with the sinful, for he will disappoint you for a single bite or even something less valuable. Beware of associating with the stingy, for he will let you down when you are in urgent need of his property. Beware of associating the foolish, for he harms you when he intends to do you favor. Beware of associating with the disregardful of his relatives, for I found him cursed in the Book of Allah<sup>7</sup>.'

Friends should exchange expressive desires of affection and fraternity so that their handle of friendship will be firmer. But if such tendencies fade away, the relation will be enfeebled, and the alienated party will expose himself to criticism and revulsion.

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: "To alienate the one who desires for making friendship with you is diminution of reason, and to desire for him who does not want you is humility<sup>8</sup>."

## **Standards of Love**

Aspects of love may be confused among people in general and friends in particular. Suspect may creep into the relations of friendship. Solving this problem, the Ahlul-Bayt (a) identified definite mental standards that reveal the actual feelings and hidden.

Imam as-Sadiq (a) answered the man who asked him how he would realize the real feelings of those who claim bearing love towards him: "You should test your heart. If you really love him, he will really love you<sup>9</sup>."

Imam al-Baqir narrated that, while he was dying, Amirul-Mu'minin (a) gathered al-Hasan, al-Hussein,

Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya, and the other sons and commanded them: “ Sons, you should associate with people in such a way that they will long for you when you are absent and will weep for you when you depart this life. Sons, hearts are well-mobilized troops; they recognize each other by means of amiability as well as hatred. Hence, you should expect good from the one whom you love without seeing any good from him. Likewise, you should beware of the one whom you dislike although you have not seen any ill behavior from him<sup>10</sup>.”

## Friendship between Ebb and Flow

“Which is better: to have many friends or to be friendless?”

Answering this question, people of reason have had various opinions. Anticipating the pleasures of sociability and benefits of solidarity, some people have preferred having many friends to being friendless. Others, however, have opted for the opposite, claiming the many problems of friendship that originate hatred an enmity.

In fact, the question has nothing to do with the number of friends. It is related to the traits of nobility and sincerity that friends must bear. However, the noble, sincere friends are, unfortunately, very few. A single sincere friend is of course better than thousand insincere ones. In this regard, Alexander said: “He who has many friends arbitrarily is as same as him who has many stones, and he who has few, but selective, friends is as same as him who has selective pearls.”

## Rights of Friends

### 1. Material Care

It is incumbent to help the friend who suffers an economic crisis. This is in fact one of the obligatory rights of friendship and one of the proofs of loyalty. God, in the holy Quran, praises some peoples who showed altruism:

***“They give preference to them over themselves – even concerning the things that they themselves urgently need. (59:9).”***

Imam al-Kadhim (a), once, asked one of his close companions: “How do you behave concerning your mutual association and relief?” The man answered: “We are in the best manner in this regard.”

The Imam (a) asked: “Are you pleased when one of your needy associates come to your shop or house to take that which they need?” The man answered: “No, we are not.”

The Imam (a) commented: “Now, you are not behaving as I want you to do in this regard<sup>11</sup>.”

Abu Ismaeel narrated that he told Imam al-Baqir (a) that numbers of the Shia were great. The Imam (a)

said: “Do the rich ones among them act with kindness toward the poor, the good-doers overlook the evildoers, and they help each other?” I answered: “No, they do not.” The Imam (a) commented: “They are not Shia. The true Shia are only those who do these acts<sup>12</sup>.”

Al-Waqidi related the following story:

The Eid day was about to come while I had no single dirham in possession. My wife, noticing this manner, asked me to do something since our children would be very depressed if they saw the other children with new clothes. Hence, I had to send a letter to my Hashemite friend asking him for help. He therefore sent me a bag of one thousand dirhams. As soon as I received them, another friend of mine sent me a letter complaining about neediness. I had to send him that very bag. Because I was embarrassed to see my wife, I spent that night in the mosque. The next morning, I went home and told her of the story. She did not blame me for so. In fact, she praised me for such a doing.

After a while, my Hashemite friend came to me bearing the very bag of one thousand dirhams. He asked me to tell him the truth; therefore, I told the whole story. He said: “When I received your letter, I had nothing at all but that bag. Nevertheless, I sent it to you. I, then, wrote a letter to our friend asking for help, and he sent me the very bag. Hence, we may distribute that sum among us.”

This story was told before al-Ma'mun the Abbasid caliph- who summoned me and gave seven thousand dirhams. The share of each of us was two thousand, and my wife was given one thousand.

## **2. Moral Care**

Mental crises and misfortunes may befall some people who, in such cases, become in urgent need for aid and relief. The loyal friends are the first people who must hurry in providing such help by means of words and authorities. This is in fact the true standard of love and the distinctive mark between genuine and false friends.

Amirul-Mu'minin (a) said: “The true friend is only he who regards his friend in three situations: ordeal, absence, and death<sup>13</sup>.”

## **3. Excusation**

Like all people, friends, even if they enjoy the highest ranks of mannerism, are subjects to erring. Therefore, one must overlook and excuse so long as one trust their love and loyalty. Such overlooking will perpetuate the relation of friendship since excessive criticism leads to reluctance.

Amirul-Mu'minin said: “Bear yourself towards your brother in such a way that if he disregards kinship, you keep to it; when he turns away, be kind to him and draw near to him; when he withholds spend for him; when he goes away approach him; when he is harsh be lenient; when he commits wrong think of (his) excuse for it, so much as though you are a slave of him and he is the benevolent master over you.

But take care that this should not be done inappropriately, and that you should not behave so with an undeserving person. Do not take the enemy of your friend as a friend because you will thus antagonize your friend. Never use trickery. It is the manner of the evil ones. Give true advice to your brother, be it good or bitter. Help your brother in any case, and go with him wherever he goes, and never retaliate him even if he throws dust in your mouth. Prevail your enemy by doing favor to him.

This is more successful. You will save yourself from people by good manners and swallowing the anger. I did not find a sweeter thing than swallowing one's anger in the end, and nothing more pleasant in consequence. Never suspect in your brother and never leave him without blaming. Be lenient to him who is harsh to you for it is likely that he will shortly become lenient to you. Rupture of relations is very ugly. What an ugly thing is the alienation after brotherhood, enmity after affection, betraying those who trust you, disappointing those who expect your good, and cheating those who confide in you!

If you intend to cut yourself off from a friend, leave some scope for him from your side by which he may resume friendship if it so occurs to him some day. If anyone has a good idea about you prove it to be true. Do not disregard the interests of your brother depending upon your terms with him, for he is not your brother if you disregard his interests. Your family should not become the most miserable people because of you.

Do not lean towards him who turns away from you. Do not turn away from him who leans towards you when he deserves association. Your brother should not be firmer in his disregard of kinship than you in paying regard to it. You should exceed in doing good to him than is evil to you, giving to him than is withholding, and favoring him than is ceasing. Do not feel too much the oppression of a person who oppresses you, because he is only busy in harming himself and benefiting you. The reward of him who pleases you is not that you displease him. Livelihood is of two kinds –a livelihood that you seek and a livelihood that seeks you, which is such that if you do not reach it, it will come to you<sup>14</sup>.”

Imam al-Hasan (a) said to one of his sons: “O son, do not befriend anyone before you know his means and sources. When you try him and please to associate with him, you should then befriend him on bases of pardoning his faults and consoling him in misfortunes<sup>15</sup>.”

It is recommended to neglect the friend's offense so as to show trust in him. This will certainly cause the offensive friend to admire his friend and try to keep good relations with him.

It is also required to accept the friend's apologies without strictness or obstinacy so as to achieve the high moral standard.

Gentle reproof is recommended in this regard, because negligence of reproof may make the friend feel his friend's negligence or hidden rage. Unless it is characterized by gentleness and sensation, reproof is useless and unappealing. Excessive reproof may lead to the friend's alienation and dissatisfaction.

***“Only through the Divine Mercy have you (Muhammad) been able to deal with your followers so***

***gently. If you had been stern and hardhearted, they would all have deserted you a long time ago. Forgive them and ask Allah to forgive (their sins) and consult with them in certain matters. But, when you reach a decision, trust Allah. Allah loves those who trust Him. (3: 159)”***

***“And not alike are the good and the evil. Repel (evil) with what is best, when lo! He between whom and you was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend. And none are made to receive it but those who are patient, and none are made to receive it but those who have a mighty good fortune. (41:34-5)”***

The Prophet (S) said: “In the same way as He has ordered me of performing the religious duties, my Lord has ordered me to treat people courteously<sup>16</sup>.”

“The most intelligent are the most courteous with people<sup>17</sup>.”

It is worth mentioning that within the strong factors of prosperity of friendly relations is that each party should avoid giving credence to the backbiters and talebearers who, according to the description of the Prophet (S), are the vilest of people.

## **Moderation with Friends**

It is wise to choose moderation in dealing with friends. Excessive love and confidence in friends are unacceptable since it happens that a friend may change into an enemy and use the secrets that he had shown as weapons.

Imam Ali (a) said: “When you cherish someone you should cherish him moderately for he may be your enemy someday, and when you hate someone you should hate him moderately for he may be your friend someday<sup>18</sup>.”

Imam as-Sadiq (a): “The secrets that you must show before your friends are only those through which your enemies cannot harm you, for a friend may change into an enemy.”

<sup>1</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara; 51 (as quoted from al-Amali).

<sup>2</sup>. Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 104 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

<sup>3</sup>. Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 104 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

<sup>4</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara 56 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

<sup>5</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara; 52 (as quoted from al-Amali).

<sup>6</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara; 53 (as quoted from Sifat ush-Shia).

<sup>7</sup>. Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 105 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

<sup>8</sup>. Quoted from Nahj ul-Balagha.

<sup>9</sup>. Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 106 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

<sup>10</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara page 46 (as quoted from al-Amali).

<sup>11</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara; 46 (as quoted from Qadhaa ul-Huqouq).

<sup>12</sup>. Quoted from Bihar ul-Anwar; Kitab ul-Ashara 56 as quoted from al-Kafi.

<sup>13</sup>. Quoted from Nahj ul-Balagha.

[14.](#) Quoted from Nahj ul-Balagha: Imam Ali's commandment for Imam al-Hasan.

[15.](#) Quoted from Tuhaf ul-Uqoul.

[16.](#) Quoted from al-Wafi; part 3 page 86 (as quoted from al-Kafi).

[17.](#) Quoted from Sheikh as-Sadug's Meaani al-Akhbar.

[18.](#) Quoted from Nahj ul-Balagha.

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