

The Value of Friendship

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Love is a natural human feeling. It is for this reason we see every man is attracted by an internal power to other members of his kind. Thus, this instinctive need must be fulfilled and every one must establish brotherly relations with certain individuals or groups so as to benefit socially from such relations.

Love is the foundation of security and comfort. It is the most enjoyable spiritual need which develops with time. There is not a more valuable thing in this world than love. The pain and suffering which result from losing a beloved one are most disastrous to man; spirits need other spirits for refuge or we would become torn in the hands of insecurity and anxiety, thus, becoming the victims of our own world's oppression.

A certain scholar was quoted as saying in this regard, "The secret to happiness is to maintain brotherly relations with our world, instead of creating chaos. Those who can not love their own kind, can not live an anxiety-free and secure life."

The ties which best bring the various elements of a society to each other are those which are built on true feelings and real love. Harmony which exists between two souls is what makes them unit in the worlds of love and unity. It is from here that the basis of eternal happiness stems. Yet, in order for such happiness to survive, one must set differences aside and compromise with others on some of the issues which they rightly reject.

The most valuable friendships are those which are not built on personal interests but are twin with the feeling of brotherhood and are able to satisfy the human soul which needs love and comfort. A person who presents himself as a faithful friend should not allow any factor to shake his feelings towards that friend; in fact he should endeavor to remove the calamities and pains which befall his friend's heart, and demonstrate to him the gardens of hopes and comfort.

Those who ask for the love of others should have the ability to give them the same prior to living in the shadow of their emotions. According to one scholar, "Our lives are like a mountainous area, whenever one makes a sound he hears the echo coming back at him; those whose hearts are full of love for others will experience the same from them.

It is true that it is our material life that is built on exchange. We do not wish to say the spiritual life is built on the same basis, but how is it possible to expect faithfulness from others without being faithful to them? And how can one ask for love from others without loving them first?"

Interacting with others can be very harmful if it is not built on love and honesty from both sides.

If the nightmare of hypocrisy overtakes the hearts and lives of men; if flattery replaces honesty and friendship, harmony and sympathy will be weakened and the spirit of cooperation will be stolen from the society.

Undoubtedly, many of us have met others in society in whose hearts lay no real love or emotions; they conceal their real selves behind the cover of love. But frequently we are able to reach beyond that cover to their realities and actual feelings, and as a result, our relationship with them results in the destruction of their masks.

Indeed one of the prerequisites of happiness and an effective method of spiritual development is real friendship with righteous people. This is because personal thoughts develop under the shadow of such relationships, wherein the spirit rises to levels of piety and excellent traits.

Therefore, it is essential to carefully examine individuals to be taken as friends. It is an unforgivable error to establish friendships with any one whose honesty and purity are not verified - because man was created susceptible to the characteristics of others through his interactions with them. Negative relationships are a threat to the happiness of humanity

Ill-Natured Individuals are Resentful

Certain characteristics and unwanted habits weaken the ties of love and sometimes result in breaking up excellent relationships. Hot-tempered individuals, who are unable to keep the love of others, erect an indestructible wall between them and society, which prevents them from realizing the light of love.

Ill nature, therefore, destroys the basis of happiness and devalues man's character. It is indisputable that bad manners keep people away from each other, for man suffers from the treatment of those whom he resents or cannot relate to. Thus, bad manners force people to give up many abilities, which could be very useful in the path of their advancement in life had they been well-mannered.

It is necessary for one who wishes to interact in his society to first realize the art of interaction, and after becoming familiar with it, put it to use according to the acceptable social rules. Without this process, a person cannot live in harmony with his society, nor can interpersonal conduct move towards perfection in such a society.

Good conduct, therefore, is the main basis of happiness between people. It is also an important factor in bettering individual personalities. In fact, good conduct allows man to make use of his abilities and become effective on the general level of managing society. There is not

another characteristic equal to good conduct in attracting the love and affection of others and
reducing the pains which maybe faced in life.

Those who enjoy such good traits do not manifest their sad sides to others, hence preventing them from reaching beyond their privacy. Such individuals struggle to create a rainbow of happiness and affection around themselves to make those who interact with them, forget their own miseries by giving them a sense of security. They also present their own security despite any troubles they may have, thus, increasing the chances of their success and victory.

Good manners are a strong element in securing success for many individuals. Needless to say, the success of commercial establishments is directly related to the good conduct of its employees.

A manager of a company who enjoys good manners is usually active and attracts many vital connections to himself. In conclusion, good manners are the secret behind being accepted by others. People cannot bear with ill-natured people regardless of their positions. A personal survey would reveal the reasons behind the inclinations towards certain individuals over others. A western scholar recorded the following regarding his experience in this field: "One day I decided to conduct an experiment on how my attentiveness and cheerful face affected my life. Prior to that day I was sad and depressed; on that morning I left the house with the intention of being cheerful. I thought to myself. I have noticed many times that other's attentiveness and cheerful faces give me strength.

I wanted to discover if I, myself, could be influential to others in the same way. I repeated to myself while on my way to work, my resolution to be attentive and have a cheerful face; I even convinced myself that I was a very lucky man. As a result I felt a sense of comfort overtake my body. I felt as if I was flying. I looked at my surroundings with a wide smile on my face; yet I still saw many faces around me on which the features of sadness were apparent. My heart burnt for these people and I wished I could grant them some of the light from my heart.

"That morning I entered my office and greeted the accountant in a manner that he was not used to. Prior to this I rarely smiled and never greeted him like this even if my life was on the line. The accountant could not help but greet me with warmth and great affection. At that moment I felt that my happiness had truly affected him.

"The president of the company where I work is the kind of man who never lifts his head to talk to others, he is very unpleasant. On that day he harshly reprehended me, more that day than on any other day. I would not have put up with it; yet, because of my decision not to let any incident bother me, I answered him in such a manner that made some of the wrinkles on his

face disappear.

This was the second incident that day. Later on that day I endeavoured to keep my attentiveness and cheerfulness and pass them on to my co-workers.

“As such, I was able to practice this method with my family which resulted in positive consequences. As a result, I discovered that I could be active, happy and make others around me feel the same way.

This is possible for you too. Meet people with this attitude, have a cheerful face and the flowers of happiness will bloom in your life, as roses bloom in the spring-time, and you will gain many friends who will bring peace and tranquility to you eternally.”

No one denies the great effect of this characteristic on softening the hearts of the enemies. Respect and good manners also play an important role in convincing one’s opponents of the adherence to ideologies.

Another western writer said in this regard, “All gates are opened towards him whose face is cheerful and who enjoys good manners; while the ill-natured individuals have to knock down doors to open them just like gangsters. The best of matters are those related to kindness, good-manners and cheerfulness.”

Moreover, I would like to add that good manners necessitate happiness and lead good-natured individuals to perfection, but only if such manners and traits stem deep from one’s heart far from hypocrisy and pretense.

In other words, the feeling of love must be a manifestation of what is in the heart. The outside appearance is not necessarily a reflection of what is hidden in the hearts of men. It is possible that some of the good traits of an individual contradict his disturbed and misguided heart. Many are the devils that dress themselves in the garments of angels, hence concealing their .fearful faces under a curtain of beauty

The Prophet of Islam, the Perfect Exemplar

We all know that one of the most important factors of Islam’s advancement was the perfect conduct of the Prophet (S). This fact is stated in the Holy Qur’an where Allah, the Almighty, says: “And had you been rough, hard hearted they would certainly have dispersed from around you.” (Qur’an 3:158).

The Prophet of Allah (S) treated all people equally. His deep and indescribable love for humanity was perfectly manifested in his angelic being. He attended to all Muslims’ needs equally.

“And the Messenger of Allah (S) divided his moments between his companions: he would

attend to this and attend to that equally.”[1]

He (S) also condemned ill nature; he (S) repeatedly said: “Ill nature is evil and the worst of you are those who are ill-natured.”[2]

And he (S) also said: “O sons of Abdul Muttalib, surely you will not (be able to) satisfy people with your money, therefore meet them with cheerful faces and joyful conduct.”[3]

Anas ibn Malik, the Prophet’s servant, used to say when he remembered his (the Prophets) excellent traits: “I have served the Prophet (S) for ten years; during this time he has never said ‘woe’ (as if complaining) to me, regardless of what I did or did not do.”[4]

Furthermore, good conduct and cheerfulness are factors which prolong life. Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) said in this regard: “Kindness and good manners make land flourish and prolong lives.”[5] Dr. Sanderson has written this on the subject: “Kindness is an important factor in treating and preventing illnesses. Most medications result in unwanted side - effects along with a temporary cure, while kindness causes everlasting cures to all parts of the body (...) kindness moves all powers of the body. Blood circulation in those who enjoy good manners is excellent, and their breathing is better...”[6]

There is a beautiful point in Imam as-Sadiq’s (a.s.) statement. He (a.s.) says there is a direct relationship between kindness and good manners and stated that they are among the factors which prolong life. The reason behind this is that kind people enjoy a sense of happiness and satisfaction, thus, both kindness and good manners have the same desired effects. Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) also considered these traits elements for achieving happiness when he said: “Part of man’s happiness is his good manners”.[7]

Samuel Smiles added on the same topic: “Good manners and emotional balance have their effects on man’s development and happiness just like other powers and instincts do. As a matter of fact, individual’s happiness is greatly related to their affections and good manners.”[8]

In addition, good manners make life easier and increase subsistence and harmony, Imam ‘Ali (a.s.) said: “Good manners bestow subsistence lavishly and make friends (more) intimate.”[9] S. Marden wrote the following in his book: “I know a restaurant manager who became very wealthy and popular because of his good conduct. I learned that travelers and tourists traveled long distances to reach his restaurant; they did so because in this restaurant they liked the privacy and the pleasant atmosphere. When the customers are at the restaurant, the said manager cheerfully greets them in a manner that is not duplicated anywhere.

In fact, in this restaurant they do not experience the cold nuisance complaints that you find in other restaurants. In this restaurant the employees try to show affection and build friendly

relationships with the customers, instead of the usual seller - buyer relationships. The employees smile a lot and give special attention to serving their customers, this attention stems from love and affection for their guests. The employees establish such relationships with their guests that the guests not only feel that they should come back but also bring their friends. It is clear how effective this method is in attracting new customers” He added: “Good Manners have not played a more important role throughout history than at this time. They have become the capital of those who wish to bring happiness and success to their lives”.^[10]

Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) included cheerfulness among the signs of man’s ability to reason. He said: “Those who have the most perfect reasoning amongst people are those who have the best manners”.^[11]

Samuel Smiles says: “History shows us that the greatest geniuses were happy and Optimistic men, for they realized the real meaning of life and tried to manifest their reason in their flesh. When one reflects on their achievements, he can clearly notice their healthy souls and thinking and their kindness and enthusiasm The greatest souls and most intelligent people all enjoy cheerful faces and happiness. Their manners were examples for those who adhered to them and were influenced by their conduct, hence they followed the light of’ their kindness and natural happiness”^[12]

The Honorable Messenger (S) said: “The most important traits which will lead my nation to Paradise are fear of Allah and good manners”^[13]

Consequently it is incumbent upon him whose leader is reason and who desires to lead an honorable life to achieve this priceless spiritual capital, good manners. In order to eradicate an unwanted characteristic, man needs earnest desire to reach his goal. A glance at the disadvantages that bad manners leave provides an incentive to lead him into struggling to .eradicate such manners

Notes:

[1] Rawdah al-Kafi .p.268.

[2] Nahj a1-Fasahah, p.371.

[3] Wasa’il ash-Shia v.2, p. 222.

[4] Fada’il al-Khamsah, v.1. p. 119.

[5] Wasa’il ash-Shia, v.2, p. 221.

[6] Pirozi Fikr.

[7] Musadrak al-Wasa’il, v.2, p.83.

[8] Akhlaq.

[9] Ghurar al-Hikam p. 279

[10] Khish tan Sazi

[11] Wasa'il ash-Shiah, v. 2, p. 221.

[12] Akhlaq.

[13] Wasa'il ash-Shiah, v. 2, p. 221