

Summary of 7.4 "Brotherhood of Faith"

The main thrust of the topic which was a continuation of the broader are of human equality and brotherhood was the concept of Ummah. Ummah means a community of believers (Islam does not except the term nation because it is very limited by geography, time, history or language) who are part of one brotherhood of faith. We said that brotherhood of faith extends across different places and also extends throughout history. A believer belongs to all believers regardless of where they are or were located and belongs to all believers regardless of when they were alive. This manifests the unity of all prophets and the unity of all believers throughout history quite clear.

We also indicated that brotherhood of faith takes precedence over all other consideration whether the are linguistic, ethnic or otherwise. Brotherhood of faith also takes precedence over blood relationships unless the blood relationship is also part of the faith in which case blood relationship becomes more desirable. One should not sacrifice faith for the sake of blood relationships. We covered certain examples from the Quran of people who have very close familial ties (husband, wife, son etc.) which become distant when one of them is a disbeliever.

7.5 Social Relations and Choice of Friends

Host: What is the role or significance of friendship in a truly Islamic society?

Jamal Badawi:

Friendship has a very important part, not only from an Islamic point of view but from a sociological point of view of friendship's role in molding the mind, thoughts and attitude of a person. To an extent friendship shapes a person's soul (spirituality and beliefs). Spirituality is greatly influenced by what kind of people a person associates with. If this is the impact on individuals then the delicate selection of friends has to do with the overall progress or lack of progress of society. From a Muslim point of view, if a friendship is based on the love of God and commitment to faith then it is blessed by God, if it is based on trivial benefits then it is not likely to last. More specifically, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as narrated in Abu Dawood "A person follows the deeni, way of life, thinking and approach, as his close friend so be careful as to who you take as a close friend."

The Quran also warns against making friends who will push one away from the true path rather than helping him become a better believer. In (25:27-29) in the Quran it says "The Day that the wrong-doer will bite at his hands, he will say, "Oh! Would that I had taken a (straight) path with the Messenger. Ah! Woe is me! Would that I had never taken such a one for a friend! He did lead me astray from the Message (of Allah, after it had come to me! Ah! The evil One is but a traitor to man!)." There is a verse in the Quran that says people who were so close to each other, on the Day of Judgment would become enemies of each other as it comes down to the real crunch of receiving the Grace of God and salvation or being punished.

Host: How does group spirit fit within Islamic teachings?

Jamal Badawi:

Islam encourages people to interact within the boundaries of Islamic teachings for a good purpose. Islam is not an individualistic type of faith (just between a person and God) that is detached from the surroundings. On the contrary, one of the main things that Prophet Muhammad warned against is monasticism. People who live in monasteries might be holy people as they are self sacrificing and living in hard conditions just worshipping God and studying scripture. It actually sounds very nice and spiritually uplifting but even then it is not regarded as the ideal at all as the Prophet said there is no monasticism in Islam because it is an attempt to seek individual salvation away from society rather than through struggling with society. Islam is a faith which is based on collective action, on getting to know each other and working together for the common good. The case of a person getting hurt in the process of social reform or while helping the community is not an excuse to stay away from society.

Some people asked the Prophet (PBUH) about the different degrees belief and the Prophet was narrated as saying, in Al Tirmithi, that the believer who mixes with people and tries to do something useful while being patient and perseveres in the face of attacks or personal hurt is better than one who does not mix with people and has no patients. When we look at the teachings of Islam we find that many rituals are designed to inculcate the community spirit and is not a totally individualistic spirituality. For example, every male Muslim (optional for females) has to attend the Friday group prayer. By design this is meant to get the largest number of people together in order to develop a community spirit in a righteous way. Other acts such as prayers at festivities are also meant and can never be implemented without this communal type of spirit.

As narrated in Ahmad the Prophet (PBUH) indicated that even when people pray (regular prayers not just the Friday Congregational prayer) it is always better to pray in a group. He says that if two people pray together it is better than each of them praying separately, if four

people pray together it is better than each two praying separately, if eight pray together it is better than four and four praying so the more one has in a good righteous type of function it would be better.

To summaries it in one of the sayings of the Prophet he says that a true believer is easy going, gentle and friendly.

Host: Are there situations where a Muslim may not be encouraged to mix with other people?

Jamal Badawi:

There are cases and there specifications where people should not mix with others. First of all, as a believer one has no obligation to keep the company of those who take their faith as a joke or belittle it. There is a specific verse in the Quran that says don't associate with those who take their faith as a joke. Friendship is not given at any price, there should be good reason for it.

The other case is if there is lots of commotion or evil in a given society where it might be better to compare the pros and cons of mixing with it verses not mixing with it. If one finds that mixing with that particular group there is more evil taking place it might be better to keep away. However, this does not mean that one should not try to correct the evil so long as one has some power to do so. If all means fail and one is sure that those people are not trying to be on the right path it might be better to stay away. But however this must be limited to cases where to one's best judgment there is very little hope. The reason I am saying that this must be limited is because of a hadith in both Bukhari and Muslim when Prophet (PBUH) was asked what type of people are the best and he replied "A person who strive in the path of God with his life and his property." Then they asked who was next and he said "A person who is secluded in the worship of Allah." This does not contradict the discouragement of monasticism but it shows that in some circumstances it might be desirable to stay alone if you can not correct the existing situation. Practically speaking there is seldom the occasion where there is a need to be secluded in any society no matter how much evil there is. It is always possible to find a few people who uphold faith in God and to find people who uphold faith in God and believe in the laws of God and His moral standards and by joining with them one can have a smaller community and fellowship of faith.

Host: What is a sound basis for friendship in Islam?

Jamal Badawi:

Brotherhood of faith must be in God and for God. This fellowship stems from the love of God, the shared belief in God and pursuit of the true path and the fellowship is intended to cement the proper attitude towards faith. These are basic points that allow for a lasting and acceptable friendship in Islam. This implies that friendship should not be based on benefit, or because they belong to a particular club, social class, ethnic group or for sheer materialistic benefits. These points alone are not excepted as sound basis for friendship. Indeed there are beautiful citations that we find in the Quran and in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) about the foundation of friendship. In a Hadith Qudsi God reveled to the Prophet "Those who love each

other in my Glory will be under the shadow of my protection on The Day of Judgment where there is no protection but Mine.” In a similar saying narrated in Abu Dawood the Prophet indicated that a number of people would be envied (not in a negative sense) their position on the Day of Judgment who are neither prophets nor martyrs: these people are those who loved each other for the sake of Allah and then he recited from the Quran (10:62) “Behold! Verily on the friends of Allah there is no fear, nor shall they grieve.” Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) indicated clearly that one of the signs of true faith is when one loves a brother or sister of faith only for the sake of God. He also says that there are three things that if are found in a person would be a sign of faith and one of them is that a person loves the other for no benefit but for the sake of God.

Host: What measures can nourish friendship?

Jamal Badawi:

First of all, one should avoid corruption, hypocrisy and egotistic attitudes because these are the things that might change the hearts and destroy the existing friendship. In one of the very interesting sayings of the Prophet he says “In the name of He in Whose hands is my soul: if two people loved each other and then separated, the separation must be because of a sin done by one of them.” In other words if both friends keep on the path of God their friendship will remain but if there is deviation by one or both of them this would be the beginning of the crumbling of their friendship.

The Prophet (PBUH) recommended that as a social courtesy that people should try to get to know each other. Fore example in Al Tirmithi he said “If a person takes another as a brother, close friend, he should ask him about his name, his fathers name and where he comes from

because this provides for more closeness and friendship.” Sometimes people think that social courtesy is a recent development but this is something that the prophet said was important 1400 years ago. The other thing that he recommended as is found in Ahmad is that if a person feels that he really loves someone for the sake of God that he should tell him. Another recommendation that the Prophet made is that one should visit with his close friends. In one of his sayings narrated in Muslim he says if a brother goes to visit his brother for no reason but for the sake of Allah, there will be an angel calling to him that he has good tidings of good place in paradise. Also, God would say “My servant visited another servant of Mine only for My sake and there is no reward for him less than Paradise.”

Another recommendation of the Prophet is the exchange of gifts. In one of his sayings in Al Tirmithi he says “tahadow” which means exchange gifts among each other. This was recommended because it would remove any ill feeling from the hearts. There is also a reference in the Quran that one should try to reciprocate kindness with kindness. For example if a person greets another with AsalamuAlikum (Peace unto you) one should respond in a better way WaalikumAlslalam WarahmatuAllah (Peace and Mercy unto you). The Prophet also recommended that if a person is invited for food unless there is a very good excuse one should not refuse and humbly go to it and eat and thank them for the invitation. In Abu Dawood we find that it is greatly recommended to eat with other believers.

One of the most noble things that keep friendships going is the feeling of unselfishness. A higher degree of nobility is giving preference to one's brother over ones own needs. The Quran describes some of the early Muslims who would need something but would sacrifice it in order to help another who is in need. One of the very famous sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is “None of you would be a true believer until he loves for his brother or sister what he loves for himself.” This becomes an obligation when one's brother is in need or suffering. In this context the Prophet says that “God will look after you needs so long as you look after your brother's need.”

Host: What are acts that should be avoided in order to protect friendship?

Jamal Badawi:

One is not to belittle or mock of one's brother (this applies to other people as well). We find lots of recommendations in chapter 49 of the Quran. Secondly, one should avoid taunting others with the deliberate attempt to hurt their feelings. Do not call people names that they don't like, in fact the Prophet says that one should call a person with the name that he loves best. Fourth one should avoid back biting which the Quran compares to eating the flesh of one's dead brother. Spying should be avoided. One should be humble and avoid snobbishness as the Quran and the sayings of the Prophet indicate. One should avoid attributing evil motives to what another is doing and give the benefit of the doubt. Abide by the prohibitions of drinking, gambling, monopoly and cheating which are all acts that threaten brotherhood and create hard feelings between individuals or groups of people. The Prophet was so sensitive that he said if three people are sitting together it is not proper for two of them to have a discrete conversation while making the third person feel left out. Finally, one should always try to make peace between people who are in a dispute and try to protect this brotherhood from these casual yet inevitable problems.