

Friendship with
Non-Muslims
According to the
Qur'an



Afroz Ali

The al-Ghazzali Centre Awareness Papers

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al- Ghazzali Centre
For Islamic Sciences & Human Development
www.alghazzali.org
info@alghazzali.org

All correspondence to:
P.O. Box L-14
Mt.Lewis NSW 2200
Australia

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A Review of Muslim Interpretation of the Qur'an's Definition of 'Friendship' with non-Muslims

Author: Afroz Ali

Founder & Executive Director

al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences & Human Development

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1. Introduction

There is a growing misconception in the world that Islam, through its Revealed Book the Qur'an, advocates open animosity, or at the very least that Muslims cannot have non-Muslim as friends. It is further alleged that such a claim is particularly aimed at the Christian and Jewish community. More importantly and unfortunately, this claim is usually reinforced by the concurrence of a few Islamic scholars.

Therefore, it is considered important to alley such claims, and by reviewing the very evidential claim used by the Islamic scholars to refute it and to shed a more accurate view to the Guidance in the Qur'an.

2. The Broad Concepts of "Friendship" in the Qur'an- Definitional Semantics

The Qur'an has over forty (40) references to some form of friendship. Furthermore, the Qur'an uses six (6) different Arabic words to portray the concept of friendship.

More importantly, the term "friendship" should not be used to define each of these 6 different Arabic words. The English term "friend" simply refers to "one attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard... one not hostile" (Macquarie Essential dictionary, 1999)

This section will provide assessment of these references in the Qur'an and provide clear explanations for the contextual use of the words. The headings for each reference are the generic Arabic root word.

a) Khaleel

This term is the closest Arabic term to mean "friend" to fit the generic meaning as stated above. This is also the definition that the claim wrongfully asserts that Muslims must not have

with non-Muslims. *Khaleel* is a person who is a friend to another by feelings of affection or personal regard. The Qur'an uses this word at least 7 times in the following verses:

- i) [2:254]
- ii) [4:125]
- iii) [14:31]
- iv) [17:73]
- v) [24:61]
- vi) [25:28]
- vii) [43:67]

Without reviewing each of these verses, it may suffice to refer to two.

*“Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self To God, does good, and follows the way Of Abraham, the true in faith? For Allah did take Abraham for a **friend**.”*
[4:125]

*“There is no restriction on the blind, nor any restriction on the lame, nor any restriction on the sick, nor on yourselves, if you eat from your houses, or the houses of your fathers, or the houses of your mothers, or the houses of your brothers, or the houses of your sisters, or the houses of your father's brothers, or the houses of your father's sisters, or the houses of your mother's brothers, or the houses of your mother's sisters, or (from that) whereof you hold keys, or (from the house) of a **friend**. No sin on you whether you eat together or apart. [24:61]*

The times the word *khaleel* or its derivatives are used do not relate or refer to Muslim relations to non-Muslims. So, clearly in the verse quoted above friends, Muslims or non-Muslims, to share meals together, for example. The etiquette of dietary requirements of a Muslims is a separate matter, and is applicable to the Muslim, but is irrelevant here.

b) Saadiq

This term in Arabic means “a true and sincere friend”. One may refer to one’s closest friend, a *Saadiq*. The Prophet, upon whom be peace and blessings of Allah, referred to his closest Companion, Abu Bakr, as- Saadiq.

The Qur'an uses this term in [26:101], referring to the fact that no intimate and true friend will be of any help on the Day of Judgment. The reference has no relevance to non-Muslim relations.

c) Hameem

This term is a synonym of Saadiq, above. However it provides a feeling of warmth and intimate friendship, the best of sincere friends.

The Qur'an uses this word twice:

- i) [26:101]
- ii) [70:10]

In both of these cases it is used to emphasise that the closest of friends will be of no help on the Day of Judgment, that one's actions would be one's only possession. The word, again, has no relevance to non-Muslim relations.

d) Tawalla

This word has connotations of friendship insofar as it relates to "turning to someone to follow or for help, or someone one turns to, to follow or for help" out of trust or need. The word *Tawalla* cannot be used to suggest friendship per se'. Its root is derived from the "Wali", which is the keyword in the misconception by those who do not understand the Arabic terminology, to be discussed in detail below.

The Qur'an uses this word at least 7 times, as follows:

- i) [5:80]
- ii) [5:55]
- iii) [7:196]
- iv) [22:4]
- v) [58:14]
- vi) [60:9]
- vii) [60:13]

To understand the connotation, translations of two of these verses are as follows:

*"Verily, my Protector is Allah Who has revealed the Book (the Qur'an), and He **Supports** (helps) the righteous."* [7:196]

*"About the Evil One (Satan) it is decreed that whoever turns to him for **support and help**, he will be lead astray, And he (Satan) will guide him To the Penalty of the Fire."* [22:4]

e) **Wali**

Majority, if not all, of the misconceptions and incorrect commentary comes from this particular word, which is used 20 times in the Qur'an, in the form "Wali or "Awliya". This word requires an in depth explanatory interpretation. To use "friend" in its generic meaning to translate the word 'Wali' is not only incorrect, but very misleading.

"Wali" has the connotations of:

- Protector
- Subordinate who is unable to or unwilling to stand up to the superior, however is content with one's state of this subordination
- Favoured servant or companion
- Minion

In essence the word "Wali" refers to a two-way relationship, where one party (to whom the Wali looks to) is superior in rank and has authority, and the other party (Wali) is subordinate to this authority and does not change this relationship, either from being content or from being unable to.

The most common way this word is used is the reference to a human who submits as a true servant to Allah and is content with this close relationship with the Creator. This person is referred to as a "Wali", and generally labelled as "Friend or Saint of Allah", only to approximate to an English equivalent. In terms of society, a good example is the position of a colonial power, which is referred to as a "Wali", the intent being that the coloniser would protect the colonised for the benefit of the colonised.

In the context of the Qur'an, this word is used in the following verses:

- i) [3:28]
- ii) [4:89]
- iii) [4:139]
- iv) [4:144]
- v) [5:51]
- vi) [5:57]
- vii) [5:81]
- viii) [6:127]
- ix) [6:128]
- x) [7:3]
- xi) [7:27]
- xii) [7:30]
- xiii) [7:196]
- xiv) [8:72]
- xv) [10:62]
- xvi) [19:45]
- xvii) [33:6]
- xviii) [41:34]
- xix) [60:1]
- xx) [62:6]

In all of these verses, the word is used to show a relationship either:

- between a person and Allah
- between a person and another person

Without discussing each one of these verses, it is considered to provide a detailed analysis of those verses which has been misused to wrongly claim that Muslims are not permitted to have non-Muslim friends. This will be assessed in the next section.

3. Critical Analysis of Verses Relevant to Relationship between Muslims and Non-Muslims

The most commonly quoted verse to wrongly claim that the Qur'an prohibits friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims (particularly Jews and Christians) is:

*“O you who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians as **Awliya** (protectors to whom you have to be subordinate to), they are but Awliya to one another. And if any amongst you takes them as Awliya, then surely he is one of them. Verily, Allah guides not those people who are wrong-doers. [5:51]*

In order to understand why Jews and Christians are specifically mentioned, requires an understanding of when and why this verse was revealed. This whole chapter largely deals with the issues of open enmity to Muslims at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace. This verse 51 falls in Section 8 of this fifth chapter. This section warns Muslims of that era, and wisdom for other times, that those who show open enmity to Islam and Muslims, should not be relied upon. It empowered the minority Muslims to withstand the threat of terror boasted by the Jewish and Christian tribes at the time of Muhammad, upon whom be peace. It is important to emphasise, in addition, that the Prophet also had peaceful treaties and relationship with other Jewish and Christian tribes who were not threatening the Muslim population at the very same time. In so doing, the authoritarian Jewish and Christian tribes won over some Muslims out of injecting fear into the community, who became two-faced to the Muslim population, and are referred to as the Hypocrites. Verse 52 refers to this. The set of verses actually end in verse 55, which confirms that in the end the best of “Awliya” for the Believers are Allah and His Messenger, upon whom the community should rely on.

Given the context, the wisdom from the Qur'an is about relying on and seeking protection from an upright authority, not from that which commands subordination out of injecting fear into you. The episode with the Jews and the Christians at the time of the Prophet was the experience for wisdom to be extracted for the future that those who subordinate you will not be your “friends”, but “friends” of each other because they do not have your interests at heart.

The subject verse 51 and up to verse 55 indicates clearly that anyone who is a wrong doer mocking you, is not being guided by Allah, and that such people, whoever they may be, are not suitable to protect those who do submit to Allah. This is cemented in verse 57:

*O you who believe! Take not for **Protectors**, those who take your religion for a mockery and fun from among those who received the Scripture before you, nor from among the disbelievers; and fear Allah if you indeed are true believers. [5:57]*

In exactly the same context the Qu’ran says:

*“Let not the believers take for **Protectors**, unbelievers rather than believers...” [3:28]*

*“Those who take disbelievers for **Protectors** instead of believers, do they seek honour, power and glory with them? Verily, only to Allah belongs all honour, power and glory.” [4:139]*

In these verses the term “Awliya” is used to refer to those seeking governance for protection from non-believers who were intimidating the Muslims.

The most important thing to review and establish is that the Qur’an **does** refer to friendship with Non-Muslims, which are either conveniently or unknowingly ignored. And this is the sixth form of the word that has any connotation to “friendship”, and is the closest to meaning to “friendly relations”.

The word is “Mawaddah”, which is used in [60:7], a verse which falls under Section 2 of chapter 60, titled “Friendly Relations with Muslims”. The verses 7-9 make the matter of friendship ultimately clear:

Perhaps Allah will make friendly relations between you and those whom you hold as enemies. And Allah has power over all things, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who did not fight against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity.

It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and helped to drive you out, that Allah forbids you to befriend them. And whosoever will befriend them, then such are wrong-doers. [60:7-9]

It could not be any clearer than what these verses convey. Islam allows and recognises friendship on the basis of common interest, dignity, understanding and respect, with whosoever exercises these commendable human qualities.

4. Supplementary Evidence

There are other forms of Guidance in the Qur'an that supports respectful friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims. For example, Muslim men are permitted to marry non-Muslim (Jewish and Christian) women. The Qur'an informs us that one would find comfort with each other in marriage [30:21], and that men are apparel for the women and vice versa [2:187]. These are certainly very friendly and intimate relationship, which applies to all marriages. One could not have comfort in marriage if one was not friends with their partner.

Another example of a common humanity is in the following verse:

O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that who is most pious. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware. [49:13]

This verse confirms that human beings are equal and are in fact of benefit for each other. Like friends, people are encouraged to know one another and learn from one another.

5. Conclusion

The very term "Islam" refers to a peaceful and willing submission. In it has the connotation that peace and harmony is the norm and the means. In terms of relationships, Islam has a developed Jurisprudence which is referred to as "Mu'amalaat" (Transactional Interaction) under a sub-category of "Ma'shuraat" (Social Interaction) with all human beings, regardless of religion, race or gender. Its positive conduct revolves around one simple concept- doing right for a collective benefit. This would be the unspoken objective of any true friendship.

It is reasonable to conclude therefore, that Islam advocates goodness in friendship with whosoever can deliver this goodness. A good person would not seek a bad friend- this is common sense. And, what Islam provides further reassurance about is that if someone intends to take advantage of your courteous friendship, one should not succumb to them out of fear, for their best friend is their Creator... God... Allah.



What Is al- GHAZZALI Centre

Al- Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development is a non- profit, non- sectarian Learning Centre. The organisation is committed to the dissemination of the true Traditional Islamic Principles and Knowledge from the Prophetic Traditions, and as understood by the rightly- guided scholars of Islam. It aims to decipher information on Islamic Sciences for those searching for Truth and those who are working to raise their standards in the Personal Development of life.

The Centre recognises ignorance and misconception as the greatest inhibitor of the light of true knowledge reaching the souls of humans. The fundamental objective of the Centre is to make efforts directed at spreading the wisdom of the Prophetic Traditions to guide human lives. Our aim is to provide the tools to individuals to live lives of guidance and adherence to the Sacred Knowledge, revealed to humanity by Allah, the Creator of the universe. These tools are aimed to be implemented in everyday lives in the aspects of:

- ◆ Beneficial Education
- ◆ Ethical Practice
- ◆ Human Development
- ◆ Philanthropic Leadership

All of the training and knowledge shared by al- Ghazzali Centre is aimed to effect the following:

- ◆ Provide a higher level of understanding of Islam to Muslims
- ◆ Expose Islamic Principles to non- Muslims as a tool for a successful life
- ◆ Implement the Islamic Principles in the daily lives for the betterment of the humanity

The Revelation, formulated in the Qur'an and manifested in the actions of our Beloved Prophet, Muhammad, upon whom be peace, are the very tools needed to attend to such and other human issues.

There is a holistic Science in these two aspects that need to be sought, understood and practiced for Human Development towards sustainable peace.

This can only be done with sound and true knowledge. It is our goal to acquire and disseminate that knowledge.

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