



[Companionship Here and in the Hereafter](#)

Understanding the Subtleties, Duties, Degrees

Asalaam Aleikum! Insh'allah, everyone is having a nice Spring day. Allah (swt) says in Holy Qur'an in Surah al-'Isra, 'āyāt 23-24:

**And your Lord has decreed that you worship none other than Him and that you treat your parents with goodness if one of them or both of them reach old age. You do not say 'oof' to them and do not reject them. Be honorable toward them. And lower to them the wing of humility out of compassion and say, "My Lord! Have mercy upon them. They brought me up when I was small." You Lord is best aware of what is in your souls. If you are righteous, He will forgive you. For surely those who frequently return to Him in repentance, He is ever forgiving.**

Allah also says in Holy Qur'an in Surah al-Luqman, 'āyat 15:

**If they struggle with you to make you ascribe to Me a partner about which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them, but accompany them in [this] world with kindness and follow the way [of the one] who turns back to Me. Then to Me will be your return, and I will inform you about what you used to do.**

Companionship is a very, very big subject and I want to speak briefly on it again today. This word *suhbat* occurs in Qur'an almost 100 times – one hundred times! It has different facets to its meaning. Companionship implies to become friends; to accompany; to associate; to escort. It also has, in the form of *sahib*, as we have said,

used in India. You may know these from the old movies, you know the old movies where Tarzan is walking through the jungles and someone comes up and says, "Oh, sahib, *sahib*." I can't get Africa and India straight on that one. When Indians used to say *sahib*, [it was in the context of the meaning of] mastery. You have this gamut from a companion and someone who accompanies you to someone who has mastery over you or someone you serve. We talk about *suhbat* when we are in companionship. It is not just meeting, because meeting could be called *halaq/a* circle, or *jamat/* a gathering of people.

Nothing in life to the human being is unaffected by relationships; therefore, everything in life has to do with understanding of the dimension of relationships. All relationships are not the same, nor should they be the same. We have about 37 people in this room right now, all of whom come from diverse backgrounds, different families, different relatives, different number of siblings, different kinds of parents, people who believe or not believe, different nationalities, all different things. We should know that all relationships do not reach the depth that other relationships can.

I just came from a brief coffee with my friend Joe. We were talking again about our relationships, and the relationships we have with our work, and our relationships with God, and our mutual love of God, and our mutual friendship. Not everyone can make the same commitments, or have the same levels of trust and faith. The word and the concept of companionship extend over the womb to the grave and beyond. These relationships that we have in community are extremely interesting and very important ones, as we know. Often they reach beyond our own relationship with our siblings and our own parents.

We have been told that we are companions, that we have souls that have met in the *ghaib*, and that we have companionship in the grave. There is no place that companionship has no meaning. It has meaning in all aspects of life. We want to have fellow workers. We want to have good friends. At different times in our life, we think of relationships in different ways. And we want to have good partners and husbands and wives, and we want to be good parents to our children. Different things are emphasized at different times in our life. Sometimes you are lonely, and it means something else than another time when you are alone. Sometimes being alone is a great blessing. Sometimes being alone is just being lonely. We don't step back and we understand what companionship means. Sometimes our companions leave us alone to contemplate. They give us protection to go into *khilva*, for example.

We have to understand the depth of companionship and the fullness of it, especially in the world that we live in today. It includes some good things and some not so good things. Many people in the world today have companionship and misery. But at least they have the companionship. Unless we have a strong sense of our own dignity and a meaning for life, we can dilute the meaning of friendship and companionship. We can take advantage of one another. Our attitudes can be appropriate or inappropriate. We can say things that we regret or do things that we don't and realize how selfish we can be about our own desires or needs, which are usually based on a lot of fears and anxieties to the point where we become allergic to each other and to ourselves. We can find ourselves in companionship with the wrong people for the wrong reasons, or with the wrong people for what we think are the good reasons, just because we share some common interests.

So let's start with the basics. It starts with our parents. It begins with our family, of course, our blood family, our sisters and our brothers, and extends to our neighbors

and our community, our village and our school friends and our teachers, and extends beyond that to others, to the people who are with us and no longer with us and who never shared this world with us – to the *sahaba*, to the *murshids*, to the *awliya-Llāh*, to the Prophet Mohammed (sal), to the *ambiyā*, to the *shuyukh*, to the community of believers of the *jamat*. But there is also the community of disbelievers that we come into contact with, and we also have relationships with them, unfortunately. In the grave it includes what is good and what is bad, those buried next to you, which is why we want to have those buried next to us as our brothers and sisters. They may be good Muslims, and if you are in a Muslim cemetery, they may have been terrible Muslims also that are buried there just because of their name. Or they may be buried next to someone who is not even a Muslim in a grave somewhere else.

What does it mean to be a Muslim? It is not someone who has put their head on the ground. I mean someone who is a believer. What is going on there? What are we hearing, what are we feeling? Some of you may believe it is nothing, but we are told it is something. So at least we should entertain the idea to keep good companionship here and in the Hereafter. There are relationships in the Hereafter of belief, and of support, and of *du'a*, and of companionship also. How do we arrange for the good to happen? That is what we always want to do: to have good happen in our families and for our children, and our husbands, and our wives, and our brothers, and sisters. We want to have that good relationship in the Hereafter also.

As far as the companions in this world are concerned – because, *alhamdulillah*, we are here – Allah (swt) informs us that our parents are the best ones to know and get close to. As we get older, we appreciate them more. We want to understand from our childhood who they are and that we should treat them with kindness and with

love and with respect. We should love them and we should know what is true and what is false, and treat their words with great sincerity and great understanding and deference, and treat them with goodwill, no matter what. In Surah Rahman, **“If they strive to make you ascribe to a partner that you have no knowledge, obey them not.”** Well, *alhamdulillah*, that is not what happens here. Believe it or not, it does happen in some families, but it is not what happens here. Even Qur’an says that you have love and respect for your parents, but if a parent says to you to not be a good person, don’t be a good Muslim, disavow the truth, then, of course, you have to turn against them. But, *alhamdulillah*, that is not what happens here.

But you come into contact with people like that. Or you come into contact with people who believe that the only way is through accepting Jesus Christ as their only savior. Or the only way is to believe in oppression of one group over another, by whatever name they call themselves. Some of us rejected that. Do you know what happened when some of us rejected that? Our parents changed. My parents changed. They began to accept us because of the values we were espousing that were their values that got a little lost in the 1950’s. **“Consort with them in the world kindly and follow the path of him who repents to Me.”** Qur’an tells us to respect our parents.

Over the years, as they come to accept what we believe in, it is not that they are accepting a religion; they are accepting what is in the core of the heart of the human being. That is where it begins, but you have to deal with the people of this world and you have to be kind. Don’t make mistakes. Companionship has to do with lines that we draw and that we understand. What is the line that you do not go over – mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually? Even if our parents have, as some of them have had, loss of memory, some dementia, we have to treat them with kindness. We have to help them with their fears, and their worries, and their

incontinence. It is a very humbling experience. We have people in this room who can tell you that it is a very humbling experience. Excuse me! They used to wipe our backsides when we were babies. Now we wipe their backside now that they are old.

This is not just pay back; this is responsibility. We must not complain for taking care of them, but make choices in our lives that we stay near to them. We have seen the experiences here in the last couple of years of such things, *alhamdulillah*. The kindnesses that come from the hearts of people who are not blood relatives, we see even today. Allah (swt) tells us that they are the best companions for us. When we were young and in the post-modern world that we live in today, we can't say for sure that every parent was the best companion for their children, but we can say that our parents taught us something. Our parents and our *dīn* told us something, and our *shuyukh* taught us something. Even if we could not take care of our parents in that way, we can take care of somebody else's parent in that way –not to get something, to give. Hopefully most of our parents, *inshā'a-llāh*, were that way.

When we look around the world, we can see where the problems lie. **“If one of them or both of them attain old age with you, do not say, ‘oof’ unto them nor repulse them, but speak to them in gracious words.”** There is no end to that. I told you the story many times of my brother Abdu Nasr sitting, holding the hand of my mother as she passed, as if she was his own mother. We have seen that many times over now, many times over. Next to our parents are our brothers and our sisters. We see with what patience and with love and example of brotherhood and sisterhood we can have. We remember the patience of Musa (ar) with his brother Marc. We can see the brotherhood and sisterhood relationships here in the community – some that are accepted, some that are rejected. But the kindness must be there.

Our children, we want them to know that their brothers and sisters are the most important friends in their lives. [They will know it] if they are raised properly, which I hope they are. We have to treat our brothers and sisters with love and affection, and care for them whenever it is necessary. We have duty towards our relatives. We have a duty towards our extended family, and this is our extended family that we have created. You have heard it many times. You have heard it many times. As we come into these celebrations of my birthday, I hope they are not celebrations of my birth. I really do. I hope they are just celebrations of our being together as a consequence of my having been born into this world.

We should take care of everyone. We should make sure that we are not just taking care because they are our parents, or our brothers and sisters, but because of the values we hold. Nor should we capitalize on their need, and turn away from our duties and our responsibilities. We should help each other keep balance, because we can see how easily it becomes out of balance. It causes frustration and anxiety. And you have heard my warning many times: it is good what you are doing, but don't deplete your own knowledge, and your own energy, and your own capacities, because then you are not good for anyone or anything. We should care for them because they are our brothers and sisters and friends in a deeper way – because they are our companions.

Our neighbors are also companions to us. Maybe our neighbors are not so much, but certainly our neighbor across the road. How do you define neighbor? Is Joe a neighbor? Of course he is. Good people. But you have to keep the balance. Who comes first – the neighbor, or your brothers and sisters here, or your family here? I hope you know the answer to that. Whether a person is Muslim or not a Muslim, we have a duty to see, as Muslims, after their welfare and their benefits. We can say as

human beings. Yes, as human beings because a good Muslim is the best human being. And a good human being is the best Muslim, in the true meaning of that word. [The duty to the neighbor is] not to the same degree as to our family and our extended family. We have duties and responsibilities that are hierarchical.

**“... and serve Allah and ascribe nothing as a partner unto Him. Show kindness to parents, and to those near kindred, and orphans, and the needy, and unto the neighbor who is of kin unto you, and unto the neighbor who is not kin unto you, and to the fellow traveler, and to the wayfarer, and the ones who your right hand possess. Lo, Allah loves not such as are proud and boastful.”**

That is pretty comprehensive, but it is hierarchical. Don't think that the friends on Facebook are the better friends than your own brothers or sisters, or your own aunts and uncles, or brothers and sisters here. “I have a thousand friends. So and so befriended me.” Really? Really? What will you do for them, and what will they do for you?

The subtlety I want to bring to you is the ego. The subtlety is how sometimes we have the tendency to play off our own weaknesses on other people. The subtlety I want to bring to your attention is the fact that if we are companions of others, we must also be companions of our brothers and sisters. If we treat others as companions, that is our brothers and sisters and our parents, then we must understand that they are treating us in that way too; and if they are not, we must take stock of that. We should fulfill our duties, but not have too much expectation or make too much demand.

The second subtle point, if you try to grasp it, is not to try and play off your own weaknesses, your own desires, your own wants, your own confusions on others, bringing them closer to you than they should be, or putting yourself closer to them than you should be, giving them access to your heart and mind and emotions without knowing what your own border lines are, what your own boundaries are. You do not know them as you do your parents. You do not know them as you know your blood relatives. You do not know them as you know the people of this community, or as you know me, or as I know you. Do not exploit the natural tendency of companionship.

We have other kinds of companions – our peer groups, our school mates, the people we work with, all these people. What Allah tells us about this is very interesting. We need to be very, very careful about whom we select and with whom we have a companionship. Among all people, especially this group of people, if we don't select them properly for the right reason, and from the basis of our beliefs and our soul, we will be misled and they will influence us in the wrong way –not just children, but also adults. Who do you invite into your life, into your health, into your wealth, into your welfare, into your well-being? Don't grasp at straws, my dears; grasp to the rope.

Hold fast to the rope of Allah (swt). Don't grasp at the latest thing, and the latest machine, the latest healer, the latest this, the latest that. Have faith in yourself and your well-being. Have trust in God and Allah, and do what makes sense, and get the support of what makes sense. We will have strange occurrences of a sense of loyalty more to them than towards those who love us and who we love and who raised us and who care the most about us. And that, unfortunately or fortunately, means anyone – anyone. Whether or not it is the person you fall in love with, and all of a sudden your loyalties go to that person more than your own blood relatives. Be

careful. Be careful. Step by step, because our minds get twisted up. It happens. We will protect a stranger, sometimes, more than we protect the love in our home and the love in our heart. This is what leads the hell of separation, the hell of ignorance. To the hell of anesthetizing the heart and the brain from what is true.

These are all the realms of ego and the need that comes from the ego. As if you need someone who is a stranger to validate you, instead of someone who is nearest to you being a warner to you, and a guide to you, and a lover of you. Be careful. *"Tell me,"* it was said, *"with whom do you associate yourself. I will tell you who you are."* That is how we know. Our way back out of that is to associate ourselves and to have companionship with those who love us and whom we love (not to mistake the definitions of love, by the way, and friendships and companionships, as I said), those who will love you unequivocally, those who will serve you unequivocally, those who will live and die for you, who will live and die for you, who will fight beside you, who will be patient with you, who will hold to you, who will forgive you, who will speak to you of the Truth in a way they can speak it, even if you react to it. Then you come back and you say, "I thought about what you said." They don't say, "I told you so! I told you so!" Instead, they say, *"Alhamdulillah-Llāh!* Speak the truth to me, because I will have the same problem sometime, also, that you have."

[Such companions are those] who will put stake into the things that you do and what you say. [Those] people who consider the most important for the sake of you, for the sake of Truth, for the sake of Allah, for the sake of what is right, that is whom we should associate with, not what we like or don't like. It is hard for us to hear the Truth. Sometimes the Truth is couched in something else. So take it for its essence. It is said that the best among your friends is the one who reminds you when you forget and even if you remember, he or she helps you with your memory. What does

that mean? Does it mean to go and buy for only \$9.95 with shipping the sabea, the new brain thing that you see on television? "Sabea. It helped me remember."

There is a subtle communication in refining the subtle understanding through tenderness and kindness. It is most important not to take the way of laziness, not to take the way of assumptions, not to take the way of expectations that are warranted or unwarranted. Rather, [it is like] the subtlety of the fragrance of a bouquet of flowers in the Spring. There should be expectations, of course, among friends, and family, and we should know all about what they are and strive to fulfill them. But not to transfer them to the neighbor, or to the distant person, or to the new person that all of a sudden you just fell in love with, or you think is the greatest person in the world, that you just met in reality, or virtual reality, face to face on Facebook. You have heard my speech on that many times.

There is another group of people with whom we should associate, those with real knowledge. Sometimes we are blessed. Sometimes they are among us. Sometimes we have to seek them out. I hope that in some way our knowledge helps you, but I also know that [you may gain knowledge] by bringing others here. I pray that Allah allows me to do that more, for Muslims should be people of knowledge, and I don't mean just the people of the *ulema*. Those who are the nearest and dearest to us, those who we have the most intimate, trusting, caring relationship with, where we do not have to be on guard, where we have committed to understanding, where we have committed to share our lives with, they are the true companions, the true partners in this world and in the Hereafter. Sometimes we agree with them, and sometimes we don't; but nonetheless, they are who they are to us.

The Qur'an is full of instructions, advice and commands, full of admonitions on how to have human and humane relationships. At the core of it, we find that to be able to

live peacefully and happily, and to be able to share a good life and reach understanding and agreement, is not to be adversarial or defensive, but to be companions and partners in our lives in these dimensions I have discussed. It is promised that in Paradise with this companionship and partnership, we will be sitting together in pleasant shade, on thrones and reclining. Although, I think we have to sit up and eat, because there is a *hadith* about not eating when you are lying down. If we read more of the Qur'an, the information that is there, we find many things. Like when the Prophet Yusuf had to be taken to prison for no reason, supposedly falsely imprisoned, he made friends there and talked to them about Allah.

In the grave, people will live peacefully and have a happy life, or they will have punishment and the pressures of the grave against their wrongdoings. Muslims should be buried in Muslim cemeteries like we have, and receive the blessings of good people. But understand: life doesn't stop. It doesn't stop today, and it doesn't stop in the grave. On the Day of Resurrection, every person will have to account for themselves, but all that goodness and those good intentions will be spoken of. Making friendships and companionships doesn't end. You may think, "I have all these friends now," but one thing we know is we must select the best of friends and companions and peer groups, the best partners and partnerships. We must make sure the people we choose are like those described by the Prophet (sal) in a *hadith*. I want you to remember this, because it is a very important *hadith*.

***The similitude of a good companion is like the owner of misk. If you do not get anything, you will get the smell of it. The similitude of a bad companion is like that of a blacksmith's bellows. If you are not affected by the black dirt, you will be touched by its smoke.***

You can think about it this way. You are cooking for the next couple of days, a beautiful meal, but you come out stinking like onions! But the taste will be gone and you are going to bathe, I hope. The Prophet (sal) said, ***“Do not take a companion unless he is a believer. And do not let your food be eaten except by a godly person.”*** In another *hadith*, ***“Therefore he should look for one who is associated with to be a friend of.”*** Here it clearly means there are degrees of association, and unless you know the guidelines, you are going to make a mistake. Just because a person calls themselves a Muslim is not what I’m talking about. Who is a believer? Who has your interests at heart? How do you test that before you get caught in the web?

I always tell people who are meeting people in order to find someone to marry, please get through the 100 questions in the first few weeks, before you fall in love with the person and think you are going to “hurt” that person if you ask them the hard questions. You abandon your values, because you don’t want someone to think ill of you. It reminds me when I was in law school (a thousand years ago). I admonish those of you who are starting businesses. A good lawyer is your friend, not your enemy. A good contract protects both parties, not just one party. I know that “good” and “lawyer” in the same sentence sometimes is an oxymoron! But it’s a hard thing to get through your head. “I don’t want to talk about contracts with that person. They won’t trust me.” No, that’s the way you build the trust.

It’s the same thing with friendship. If you are afraid to ask the question about how do you want to raise the children, how do you want to deal with the money, what does spiritual growth mean to you, you will suffer for it. And there is a timeline, a horizon – the first week, the second week, the third week. Now you are into 400 hours of phone conversations... and you reach the point where you don’t want to hurt or reject that person. Then it comes back at you later, believe me. So that’s it. I

can say more, but you don't want me to and I don't want to. You got the message,  
*inshā'a-Llāh. Asalaam aleikum.*