

Relationships

Good relationships are strongly linked to well-being. It fulfills the emotional needs of a person and boosts self-worth and happiness. Connecting with others brings a lot of satisfaction to life. The opposite is also true. Having very few good relationships or having constant problems in relationships cause a lot of sadness and frustration.

Islam emphasizes connecting with others. The Quran says;

Hadith tell us;

1. *The best of you are the best in manners, those who are close to others and others are close to them.* Holy Prophet (s)
2. *Whoever does not hope to increase his friendships is in a loss.*
Imam as-Sadiq (a)
3. *There is no good in one who has no close relationships with others.*
Holy Prophet (s)

Valuing Relationships

Each relationship is like a thread in the fabric of life. It contributes to the overall design and plays a part in the personality that is formed and the growth that occurs. We are human and need to connect with other human beings. Sharing thoughts and opinions, memories and ideas etc. all help us feel better about life.

Understanding that every relationship we have is important to us helps us appreciate our relationships and strive to enhance them. It removes resentment as we realize that everything we do for that relationship actually comes back to making us satisfied and fulfilled in life.

Elements of a good relationship

The following factors help strengthen a relationship.

1) **Affection.** The need to be cared for by others is exceptionally strong in all human beings. From childhood to old age, humans want to be loved by those around them. Love connects people in the strongest of ways. It brings joy to life and eases difficulties. In close relationships people need to know they are loved by the other partner. Love should not just be assumed. It must be expressed and demonstrated, both in verbal and non-verbal forms. Islam believes in demonstrating affection. *If you love someone*, says the Holy Prophet (s), *you should let him know*. Most people respond positively to affection. They feel good and enjoy the relationship more.

2) **Attention.** In close relationships, the partners need to pay attention to what the other person is saying or implying. Sometimes people are too busy to take notice or pay attention to others. Paying attention includes:

- a) Being interested. Because we care about the people we are close to we are interested in them. We want to know how they feel, what they think, and what makes them act the way they do. By showing interest we will encourage the other person to open up and communicate better with us.
- b) Listening. Active listening means to listen with all of one's mind. We need to show that we really want to listen and have put aside other thoughts and ideas. We have also put aside preconceived ideas about the person which could be barriers to really listening. Sometimes we may be listening but are actually referring to past experiences and encounters to give meaning to the present talk. That is not true listening.

3) **Understanding**. In close relationships people often assume they know how the other person feels. They believe they have inside knowledge of the person and are able to make an informed opinion of their feelings. But really speaking, no-one knows exactly why people say and do what they do. Human emotions are very complex and the motivation that trigger certain thoughts and actions are deeper than to be understood completely by someone else. Sometimes they are not even understood by the person himself.

When the partners in a relationship try to understand the concerns and perceptions of others it makes a great difference to their relationship. It does not always mean they are happy with it but at least they attempt to understand it. Understanding means to put yourself in the other person's shoes for a moment. It means to be tolerant of their actions even when you don't like them, because you understand the reason behind it. It takes a lot of selflessness to be understanding of others.

Fixing a relationship

Sometimes a relationship goes sour. Rather than letting it slip away, think of some of the following steps:

- 1) Take the initiative to fix the relationship. Reach out, for God likes that a conflict between two people be resolved.
- 2) Acknowledge your role in the strained relationship.
- 3) Apologize and show that the relationship is important to you. This often disarms the other person and makes them more receptive.
- 4) Plan on how to avoid or minimize future problems in the relationship.
- 5) Forgive and let go of the hurt, resentment, anger etc. Unless that is done there will always be a certain awkwardness in the relationship. Islam emphasizes forgiveness as a quality loved by Allah. The Holy Prophet says; *Forgive each other, and hatred will disappear from between you.* Imam Sadiq (a) says; *Three qualities are from the most noble and generous characters of this world and the hereafter; to forgive the one who is unjust to you, to keep relations with one who cuts off from you, and to forbear when one acts ignorantly with you.*