



Perils of Company¹
Imām Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī
Translated by Sidi Abu Hasan
Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

The third category: Acquaintances.

Be careful of your acquaintances. Because you suffer not except at the hands of those you know. Friends will help you and strangers will not bother you; and most of the time you are hurt by them, whose friendship is only lip service. Be very conservative in making acquaintances. If you ever are anguished by them in a school, a *masjid*, a market or in the city, it is important that you do not look down upon them. Because you know not - mayhap they are better than you are. Do not be overawed with their worldly possessions and standing, for it may cause your ruination. This world and all therein is insignificant and those who respect it are held low in esteem near Allāh.

Beware! Use not your religion as a means to attain their material world; those who do so are disgraced and deprived. If they antagonize you, respond not with animosity; for you cannot bear their retribution. Your religion will be destroyed in their enmity, and your suffering will be unnecessarily prolonged.

Do not feel comforted when they honor you, nor when they praise you to your face or when they demonstrate their affection; because sincere folk are very rare. Hope not that they are equal [in such emotions] both outwardly and inward. And be not surprised if they revile you behind your back; and don't be angered because of that. If you are judicious, you will notice that you yourself indulge in doing such things to your own friends and relatives; even your own teachers and parents – you speak of them behind their backs what you wouldn't in their presence.

Be not greedy of their wealth, their glory or their aid. Because the greedy ones are disgraced in the long run and are humiliated at present.

¹ Excerpt from Imām Ghazālī's book *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah*: The beginning of guidance.

If you seek someone's help and he does help, thank Allāh and thank the person who helped you. If he doesn't, do not blame him nor complain for it may lead to antipathy. Be like a believer who is eager to find an excuse to forgive, not like a hypocrite who is eager to find an excuse to revile. You must say, 'probably he has an excuse I don't know, hence he couldn't help me'

If they honor you and are good to you, thank Allāh, for He has made them to like you. If they are vile to you, seek Allāh's refuge from their mischief but don't rebuke them.

Do not advise anyone unless you are sure that he will heed it. Otherwise, he will not listen to you and will antagonize you.² If they make a mistake in things which they have already learnt, do not try to correct them. Because though they might benefit from you, they will turn into enemies [for bruising their egos]. Except when such a mistake concerns a sin and they are ignorant of it; you should let them know the righteous thing in a kind manner without being vituperative.

Say not: 'Why do you not recognize my right? I am the son of so-and-so? And I am such a master in sciences [yet you dare belittle me]?' Such speech is the characteristic of the foolish. The most foolish is one who proclaims his own righteousness and praises his own self.

You should know that Allāh ta'alā has allowed them to be impudent with you because of your previous sins. It is imperative that you seek His forgiveness. This is a punishment from Allāh [their insolent manner with you].

You should be judicious with them; be heedful of their rights; and deaf to their lies; you should speak much of their virtues and be silent about their flaws. Be warned of the newly learned, the young scholar (*mutafaqqih*). Especially those who are deeply interested in matters of difference (*khilāf*) and debates. Because they are just waiting for adversity to befall you, wallowing in jealousy. They shall hack you with their misgivings. They shall indulge in calumny and innuendos behind your back. They shall gather all your faults when they assemble and disparage you. In anger and in arguments with you they shall confront you with your flaws.

They will not aid you when you stumble nor forgive you your missteps. They won't hide your faults, and will call into account every big or small thing. They will be envious of everything, whether a little or a lot. They will provoke other brothers to censure you. They will attribute far-fetched things to you and slander you.

When they are pleased, they flatter you – and that is their exterior; if they are displeased

² Imām Shāfi'i said it so well: 'Offer not your advice or opinion to those who do not ask, For neither shall you be liked, nor will it be of any use.' [*Dīwān al-Shāfi'i* p.274; *Manāqib al-Shāfi'i of al-Bayhaqī* 2/97; *Manāqib al-Shāfi'i of Fakhr al-Rāzī* p.276, *ādāb al-Shāfi'i wa Manāqibuhū of Fakhr al-Rāzī* p.276; *Shi'r al-Fuqahā* p.362]

they will vent their fury on you [and you will realize their wrath, their inner feelings]. They wear good clothes [of friendship and meekness] and on the inside they are as wild as wolves.

This is the state of most of them as has been observed, except those whom Allah has protected. The company of such [described above] is damaging; and relationships with them is humiliating. If this is the condition of one who claims to be your friend; what can be said of those who have openly declared their enmity? Qāḍī ibn Ma'rūf (*rahimahullāh*) has said it so well:

*Be cautious of your enemy,
And a thousand times more of your friend-
Because when a friend turns foe,
He knows how to harm you even more.*

Ibn Tammām has also said something similar:

*The enemy makes use of your friends,
Therefore make not a lot of friends [so be careful in making friends].
This malady is more dangerous than you think,
More harmful than an excess of food and drink.*

And you should be like Hilāl ibn 'Alā al-Raqqī has advised:

*If I prevent myself from bearing malice towards anyone
I have relieved my own self from the misery of hatred.*

*I embarrass my enemy, when we meet,
By responding with nice words to his harsh ones.*

*And I show such cheer to those I dislike,
And smile at them as if they are the very reason for my joy.*

*I am not secure from even those I know not,
How can I be safe from the ones close around?*

*Company of men is an illness, and its remedy is to keep aloof;
Because when they turn unfaithful, it severs brotherhood.*

*If you make peace with the people you will be spared their hatred,
Therefore, try hard and earn their affection*

*Be kind to others; and be patient with their excesses,
Be deaf, blind and dumb (to their excess) and hide them.*

A wise man has said: Meet both friend and enemy with a pleasant countenance. Be neither supercilious nor in awe of them. Be mindful of your self-esteem but without

pride. Be humble, but do not degrade yourself. Be moderate in all things you do, because either extreme is deplorable as has been said:

*Be moderate in all things, for moderation –
Is best to follow, and closest to the Right path.
Don't ye be of any of the two extremes
And both of these extremes are deplorable.*

