

32. Brotherhood and Love with People of Other Faiths

Some Muslims object to using terms that denote affection for people of other faiths, and regard this as a form of unacceptable friendliness or association (*wala'*).

Do the Qur'anic terms for close relationships exclude people of other faiths in their scope? And is it acceptable for a Muslim to describe a non-Muslim with affectionate terms such as “dear”, “brother” or “beloved”?

The Qur'an uses different terms to express various degrees of close or positive association between people. These include terms such as *hubb* (“love”), *mawaddah* (“love”) and *akh* (“brother”), as in the following verses:

- a. **Hubb** – “love” (as in Qur'an 28:56) – “*Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love (man ahbabta), but it is Allah who guides whom He wills, and He is fully aware of all those who receive guidance.*” This verse was revealed in relation to the Prophet's uncle, Abu Talib, who was a polytheist, but still supported and protected him, and whom he loved dearly but could not convince to become a Muslim. The verse is a clear indication of the fact that people of other faiths may be among those whom we love and hold even our closest relationships with.¹
- b. **Mawaddah** – “love, friendly relations” (as in Qur'an 60:7) – “*Perhaps Allah will place love between you and those whom you hold as enemies. And Allah*

¹ Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*. Revised by The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance, King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Medina, 1411AH, p.1136, footnote no.3388.

has power over all things, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” This verse refers to Allah’s ability to place love (or at least affection and warm sentiments) between oneself and one’s enemies, which may include people of other faiths, as understood from the context of verses 8 and 9 of the same chapter, which refer to kindness to non-Muslims who do not fight against Muslims.

Qur’an 5:5 discusses the permissibility of Muslim men marrying chaste Christian and Jewish (*Ahl al-Kitab*) ladies, and Qur’an 30:21 speaks of the expected love between husbands and wives; while Qur’an 5:82 mentions Christians as being “*nearest in love to the believers*”.

- c. **Akh** – “brother” (as in Qur’an 50:12-14, etc.) - The Qur’an refers to Prophets and the people they deliver their messages to as “*brethren*”. For example, “*...the brethren of Lut...*” (Qur’an 50:12-14). The term “*their brother*” is also mentioned with respect to Prophet Nuh (Qur’an 26:106), Hud (Qur’an 26:124, 7:65, 11:50, 46:21), Salih (Qur’an 26:142, 27:46, 7:73, 11:61), and Shu’aib (Qur’an 26:176, 7:85, 11:84, 29:36).

Yusuf Ali makes the following comment on the use of the word “*brethren*”:

“Note that Lot’s people are the people to whom he is sent on a mission. He was not one of their own brethren, as was Salih or Shu’aib.

But he looked upon his people as his brethren, as a man of God always does.”²

In other words, non-Muslims also belong to the brotherhood of humanity. The affectionate term “*brother*” may thus be addressed to them, and not just to fellow Muslims.

² Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*. Revised by The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance, King Fahd Holy Qur’an Printing Complex, Medina, 1411AH, p.422, n.1049 to Qur’an 7:80