84124 - Between hypocrisy and politeness

the question

1. I would like to know the dividing line between hypocrisy and courtesy, because in many cases I feel that there is some two-facedness in people’s behaviour and dealings, based on their interests and whims and desires, and it is said that it is just courtesy. Is this true?
2. Is it possible for true friendship to be mixed with a little hypocrisy? I have a friend who does not love me as I thought she did. She held a special place in my heart that was shared by no one else, but recently I found out that my status with her is zero, and her behaviour with me for many years was superficial. I thought, and everyone was certain about that, that our friendship was strong, and until now I do not know how to end this friendship after finding out what is really going on.
3. Can the way this friend behaved be regarded as hypocrisy?
4. What is the punishment for hypocrisy in friendship?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Some people often confuse the meanings of hypocrisy, politeness and flattery, and the reason for that is the failure to understand the true meanings of brotherhood and sincere friendship. In their minds they do not separate truth and falsehood, good conduct and bad.

Firstly:

The word hypocrisy usually indicates pure evil. Hypocrisy is never something praiseworthy in any way whatsoever. The psychologists have defined it as showing a good face in order to achieve something bad and harmful.

So the hypocrite is never seeking something good, rather he is seeking to harm people and betray them and bring evil to them, and he achieves that by showing a good face and appearing to be loving and friendly.

Allaah says, warning against keeping company with hypocrites (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Take not as (your) Bitaanah (advisors, consultants, protectors, helpers, friends) those outside your religion (pagans, Jews, Christians, and hypocrites) since they will not fail to do their best to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely. Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse. Indeed We have made plain to you the Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses) if you understand.

119. Lo! You are the ones who love them but they love you not, and you believe in all the Scriptures [i.e. you believe in the Tawraat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel), while they disbelieve in your Book, the Qur’aan]. And when they meet you, they say, ‘We believe.’ But when they are alone, they bite the tips of their fingers at you in rage. Say: ‘Perish in your rage. Certainly, Allaah knows what is in the breasts (all the secrets)’”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:118-119]

The same applies to everyone who presents a friendly face to people and appears loving, when in fact he is seeking to harm them and do something bad to them.

Secondly:

As for the one who is polite, he does not wish ill to anyone and he is not trying to harm anyone either outwardly or inwardly, but he may show a friendly, cheerful and kind face in order to soften the heart of one who has a bad attitude, or so as to ward off his harm from himself or others, but without agreeing with him in his falsehood or supporting him in any way, either by words or actions.

Ibn Muflih al-Hanbali (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

It was said to Ibn ‘Aqeel in al-Funoon: I hear the command of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): “Repel (the evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allaah orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly) then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend” [Fussilat 41:34],

but I hear people regard those who show something other than what they feel as hypocrites. How can I obey Allaah and rid myself of hypocrisy?

Ibn ‘Aqeel said: Hypocrisy means showing a good face whilst concealing bad intentions, and harbouring ill will whilst appearing good in order to cause harm. What the verse refers to is showing a good attitude in response to a bad one for the purpose of changing it to a good one.

From this it may be understood that hypocrisy means concealing ill will whilst making a show of goodwill in order to cause harm and evil. The one who shows a good attitude in response to bad treatment in order to remove evil is not a hypocrite, rather he is trying to put things right. Have you not heard the words of Allaah “then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend”? This is done in order to soften hearts, ward off enmity, extinguish the flames of hatred, create love and correct beliefs. This is how one makes friends and wins hearts.

Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah (1/50, 51).

Hence politeness is part of a good attitude, and the scholars said a great deal about it.

Ibn Battaal (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Politeness is part of the attitude of the believers, and it is lowering the wing of humility to people, speaking gently, and not speaking harshly to them, which are among the best means of creating harmony.

Fath al-Baari (10/528).

In his Saheeh, al-Bukhaari included a chapter entitled “Chapter on politeness with people” in which he said:

It was narrated from Abu’l-Darda’: We smile at people when our hearts are cursing them.

He also included the hadeeth of ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) concerning this topic:

A man asked permission to enter upon the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and he said: “Let him in, what a bad son – or brother – of the clan he is.” When he entered he

spoke kindly to him. I said to him: O Messenger of Allaah, you said what you said then you spoke kindly to him? He said: “O ‘Aa’ishah, the worst of people in status before Allaah is the one whom people leave alone for fear of his foul mouth.”

Ibn Muflih al-Hanbali (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

This attitude of Abu’l-Darda’ does not mean approving of something haraam; rather it is politeness that may achieve some purpose. This is what is meant by the report narrated in al-Saheehayn and elsewhere from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her): “O ‘Aa’ishah, the worst of people in status before Allaah is the one whom people leave alone for fear of his foul mouth.”

It says in Sharh Muslim and elsewhere: Being polite to one whose foul mouth you fear. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not praise him to his face or in his absence, rather he sought to soften his heart by giving him some worldly thing and speaking gently to him.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr quoted the words of Abu’l-Darda’ with regard to the virtues of good manners.

Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah (1/50).

The scholars wrote chapters on politeness, and Ibn Abi’l-Dunya wrote an essay entitled Politeness towards people, in which he said (p, 48, 50):

It was narrated that Humayd ibn Hilaal said: I met some people who regarded politeness as an act of charity towards one another.

It was narrated that al-Hasan said: Being friendly towards people is half of reason. End quote.

Hanbal said that he heard Abu ‘Abd-Allaah – i.e., Ahmad ibn Hanbal – say:

People need politeness and kindness, and enjoining what is good without harshness, except a man who does evil openly, who must be told and stopped.

Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah (1/191).

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

In some cases politeness dictates that we should not say the truth. Is this regarded as a kind of lying?

He replied:

That depends. If the politeness will result in rights being denied or falsehood being approved, then this politeness is not permissible. But if the politeness will not result in any falsehood, and it is just kind words that are general in meaning, and it does not involve testifying falsely in anyone's favour or denying anyone's rights, then I do not think there is anything wrong with it.

Majmoo' Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn Baaz (5/280).

Thirdly:

It is also important to differentiate between praiseworthy politeness and blameworthy flattery. People mix them up because they are confused about proper manners and attitudes nowadays.

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

Some of them think that politeness is flattery, but they are mistaken, because politeness is recommended but flattery is haraam. The difference is that flattery refers to the one who shows one thing whilst concealing another. The scholars explained it as mixing with the evildoer and showing approval of what he is doing without denouncing it, and politeness is showing kindness to the ignorant whilst teaching him, and to the evildoer whilst denouncing his action, and not being harsh towards him when he is not committing evil openly, and rebuking him gently in word and deed, especially if his heart needs to be softened and so on.

Fath al-Baari (10/528).

Fourthly:

Many friends – and this happens a lot among women – misunderstand the true nature of their

friendship, and they tend to go to extremes and develop strong feelings when the other person does not feel the same way; rather the other side does not intend to form such a strong friendship, rather the aim is just an ordinary friendship as dictated by circumstances. In that case the one who felt the deeper attachment may feel pain such as could not be borne by mountains. We need to guide this friendship that could captivate our hearts because of people we love, so that we will not be surprised one day and start imagining that everything has started to collapse around us when a friendship was never like that in the first place.

‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: Your love should not reach the point of infatuation and your hatred should not reach the point of destruction.

At the same time we need to deepen our understanding of brotherhood, which dictates loyalty, honesty and sincerity, where there is no room for excessive politeness and courtesy. In the past they said: When friendship is sincere there will be no pretence.

Undoubtedly such flattery is blameworthy and has no place in brotherhood and true friendship. If there is some occasional flattery among friends, it should be only what is dictated by circumstances, so as to ward off fitnah or preserve love. But if flattery is the basis of that friendship, then it is a distortion of all the meanings of true brotherhood.

‘Ali (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The worst of friends is the one who tries too hard to flatter you and the one who expects too much courtesy from you and the one who makes you feel the need to justify yourself constantly.

It was said to one of them: Who should we make friends with? He said: The one who removes from you the burden of pretence and with whom you feel no reservations.

Ja’far ibn Muhammad al-Saadiq (may Allaah be pleased with him) used to say: The most burdensome of my brothers to me is the one who flatters me too much and I feel reserved with him. Ihya’ ‘Uloom al-Deen (2/181).

And Allaah knows best.