

Open a translation of the Quran by Yusuf Ali (or Arberry or Pickthall) and go to verse 4:144, and it will read: **“O ye who believe! Take not for friends unbelievers rather than believers: Do ye wish to offer Allah an open proof against yourselves?”**

Or go to 5:51, which reads: **“O ye who believe! Take not the Jews and the Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends is (one) of them. Lo! Allah guideth not wrongdoing folk.”**

For a person who is looking to portray Islam as an intolerant religion, this verse and a few other verses like these will make for a good cherry picking season!

And occasionally, this portrayal may cause a confusion in the faith of Muslims, leaving them to wonder what really is its message on their relationship with non-Muslims. (The relevant verses here are 3:28; 4:144; 4:139; 5:51; 5:57; 60:1-9; 58:22)

This misunderstanding of the Quranic message is easily defused by examining the word that has been translated as “friend” in these verses. The Arabic word in these verses is “*awliya*”. This word is translated as “protectors” in the Study Quran, and as “allies” in the translation by Muhammad Asad.

Study Quran explains the word “awliya” as: “....a multifaceted word that can mean protector, ruler, ally, client, or friend depending on the context. The subject matter here is not friendship in the ordinary sense, but allegiance and group alignment in which the political stakes go beyond mere confessional identity.

The concept of protectorship (*walayah*) was an important social principle in pre-Islamic arabia, denoting a bond of complete loyalty and mutual defense. In the Quran, the concept is powerfully invoked to express religious, rather than tribal association and alliance. The believers are repeatedly reminded that God is their ultimate protector and the Prophet and their fellow believers are their only true protectors(*awlia*) in the human realm while idolaters seek protection vainly from their idols and disbelievers seek protection with satan and each other. The believers are repeatedly warned not to seek protection of those outside their religious community including their own family members if they are not believers.” (pages 255 and 138)

When we examine the context of the revelation of these verses, we find them addressing various instances when Muslims tried to advance their self interest at the expense of the collective by taking part in alliances with the hostile tribes. These hostile tribes also included certain Jewish and Christian tribes.

Verse 5:51 warns the Muslims of these tribes: “O you who believe Take not Jews and Christians as protectors. They are protectors of one another And whosoever takes them as protectors surely he is one of them.”

Study Quran explains it thus: “*Awliya* can also mean friends or allies but here more likely denotes those whom one would turn to as a protector or dominant authority. This term and the verbal noun from the same root *walayah* are used in the Quran to denote the bonds of loyalty

,mutual protection and friendship that ideally mark the relationship between members of the same religious community. Although this is the only verse in the Quran in which believers are urged not to take Jews and Christians specifically as protectors, believers are elsewhere urged to avoid taking as protectors those who disbelieve (3:28; 4:89; 139;144), those who mock their religion (5:57), God's enemies (60:1) and even close relatives who prefer disbelief to belief (9:23). That Jews and Christians are protectors of one another indicates that they realize those bonds of loyalty among themselves as separate religious communities and in verses 80-81 they are criticized for having themselves taken disbelievers as protectors." (Page 302)

**Surah al-Mumtahanah (chapter 60):** This surah deals exclusively on the topic of relations with non-believers, and becomes very important here. It was revealed during the term of the treaty of al-Hudaybiya between the Muslims in Madina and the Quraysh in Makkah, and begins by reminding the believers not to take Allah's enemies as "*awliya*" or to offer them affection (the Arabic word used here is *mawaddah* which can also mean "love" and "friendliness"). The Quraysh had just broken the treaty, and the Prophet found out that a long time member of the community had made an attempt to disclose the Prophet's plans to the Quraish. [Hatib ibn Abi Balta'ah](#) was not a Qurayshite, but he had family in Makkah whom he was trying to protect, and to find assistance for, from the Quraysh. He had put his personal interest ahead of the interest of the believing community. The true nature of the hostility that they faced from the Quraysh is shown in verse 2: "If they gain dominance over you, they would be to you as enemies and extend against you their hands and their tongues with evil, and they wish you would disbelieve."

Allah further reminds them (and us) that the believers can become a *fitna* (trial) for disbelievers when they do not stand by the principles of their faith. Further, Allah says that it is up to Him to change the hearts of the hostile enemy and it is possible that in the future, there is cause for affection and friendship with them. There is a further reminder that these injunctions do not forbid them from showing kindness and fairness to the non-believers who hadn't been hostile to the Muslims and that Allah loves those who are kind and just. (verses 8 and 9)

When looked at from its entirety, the message in this surah is totally positive in its meaning and intent. (Listen to Sh. Khaled Abou El-aFadl's tafsir of the surah [here.](#))

In the surah, the example that Allah chooses to give is of Prophet Abraham, who faced extreme hostility from his own people and was totally alone is his submission (unlike many other prophets who led a bigger community of believers).

Thus, a closer examination of the various verses in connection with this topic shows us that the Quranic imperative is to keep trust in Allah as the best of guardians, and to stand firm on our principles, and to maintain our moral identity. As we see in verse 58:22, the injunctions forbidding love and friendship are towards people who are strongly opposed to what we believe in. **"You shall not find a people who believe in God and the Last Day loving those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they be their fathers, their sons, their brothers, or their tribe. God has inscribed faith upon their hearts and strengthened them with a Spirit from Him..."**

Further exploration: Listen to **Sh. Yassir Qadhi's** take on [this topic.](#)

<https://seekersguidance.org/answers/general-counsel/friendship-with-non-muslims-explaining-verse-551/>

## Reflections

- Read verse 4:139- “As for those who take the deniers of the truth for their allies in preference to the believers - do they hope to be honored by them when, behold, all honor belongs to God (alone)?”

Muhammad Asad writes in explaining this:

“However, the term “allies” (*awliya*, sing. *wali*) does not indicate, in this context, merely political alliances. More than anything else, it obviously alludes to a “moral alliance” with the deniers of the truth: that is to say, to an adoption of their way of life in preference to the way of life of the believers, in the hope of being “honored”, or accepted as equals, by the former. Since an imitation of the way of life of confirmed unbelievers must obviously conflict with the moral principles demanded by true faith, it inevitably leads to a gradual abandonment of those principles.”

How do you understand this verse in the context of a pluralistic society? Speak from your life experiences as to how you have navigated relationships with people from other faiths, or people from your own faith who are not entirely aligned with you in beliefs.

- Read 3:28-“Let not the believers Take the disbelievers as protectors Apart from the believers, Whosoever does that has no bond with God, unless you guard against them out of prudence. And God warns you of himself and unto God, is the journey's end.”

Study Quran explains: “This verse alludes to “prudence”, that in Arabic is “*tuqah*”, which some read as *taqiyyah*; the latter is more widely known and often translated “dissimulation”, though the word itself is etymologically related to “taking care” and “being wary” and is lexically related to “*taqwa*” or reverence. Those who guard against them out of prudence, are exempted if they fear death, or great harm through persecution at the hands of the community in which they live, In which case they can hide their faith through words, but not through actions, which is to say, they can deny to others that they are Muslim, but they cannot violate the major rules of Islam by, for example, murdering, stealing or committing adultery under the cover of this denial. Elsewhere, the Quran excuses the one who is coerced , while his heart is at peace in faith. (16:106)”

“Zamakshari explains this as referring to situations in which “those who deny the truth” are more powerful than the Muslims, and are therefore in a position to damage the latter unless they become their “allies” in a political or moral sense.” (Muhammad Asad)

Taqiyya is another concept that Islamophobes love to pick on. Share your knowledge, thoughts and the message you draw from this verse.

- Discuss this prayer in the context of our discussion: “Our Lord, make us not a trial (*fitna*) for those who disbelieve, and forgive us. “ (60:5)