

# SURAH AL-HUJURAAT

## LESSONS IN SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Abu Hudhaifa  
Muhammad Karolia

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

## *SURAH AL-HUJURAAT* *LESSONS IN SOCIAL ETIQUETTE*

Surah Al Hujurat, the forty-ninth surah of the Qur'an, was revealed in Madinah Munawwarah and consists of eighteen âyat.

### *AYAAT ONE TO THREE*

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَقْدَمُوا بَيْنَ يَدَيِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

**1) O you who believe! Do not advance in front of Allah and His Rasul, and fear Allah. Certainly Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.**

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَرْفَعُوا أَصْوَاتَكُمْ فَوْقَ صَوْتِ النَّبِيِّ وَلَا تَجْهَرُوا لَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ كَجَهْرِ بَعْضِكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ أَن تَحْبَطَ أَعْمَالُكُمْ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ

**2) O you who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Rasul, nor speak aloud to him as you speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds are rendered fruitless while you perceive not.**

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُغْضُونَ أَصْوَاتَهُمْ عِنْدَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ امْتَحَنَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَهُمْ لِيَتَّقُوا لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةً وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

**3) Certainly those who lower their voices in the presence of Allah's Rasul, they are the ones whose hearts Allah has tested for piety. For them is forgiveness and a great reward.**

A delegation from the tribe of Bani Tamim once came to Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* requesting him to appoint a governor over them. Hadrat Abu Bakr (*Radiallahu anhu*) and Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) were also present. Hearing their request Hadrat Abu Bakr (*Radiallahu anhu*) recommended Hadrat Qa'qa' bin Ma'bad (*Radiallahu anhu*) and Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) recommended Hadrat Aqra' bin Habis (*Radiallahu anhu*). Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s disagreement annoyed Hadrat Abu Bakr (*Radiallahu anhu*) due to which he accused Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) of merely intending to oppose him. Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) denied this saying, "I did not intend opposing you!" Not realising that they were sitting with Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, they raised their voices at each other and continued arguing. The above-mentioned âyât were revealed due to this incident. [Bukhari]

***"Do not advance in front of Allah and His Rasul"***

Advancing in front of Allah and His Rasul is of two types:

1. Verbal – as had occurred in the above incident.
2. Physical

This sentence is therefore prohibiting Muslims from:

- a. Expressing their opinion in religious matters without the permission of Allah and His Rasul *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*.
- b. Walking in front of Rasul *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*.
- c. Eating before Rasul *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*.

However, all of the above are permissible if the Rasul *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* himself grants permission.

***"Raise not your voices ... while you perceive not."***

We learn from this Âyah that when Muslims attend the gathering of Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*:

1. They must not raise their voices above the voice of Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* and,
2. They must not address him in a very loud voice as they do when speaking among themselves.

The words "lest your deeds are rendered fruitless" explain the reason for this prohibition. Raising one's voice above the voice of Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* and addressing him in a very loud tone are both extremely disrespectful actions. When a person is disrespectful to Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, there is a great fear that he will gradually fall into sin and eventually forsake Islam - a move that will destroy all his good actions.

***"Certainly those who lower their voices ... and a great reward."***

Allah Ta'ala is in these words commending those who lower their voices in the presence of Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*. Saying that He has tested their hearts for taqwa (piety), Allah bears testimony that they have passed the test; their hearts are filled with taqwa and thus they deserve Allah's forgiveness and a great reward.

### **Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s reaction**

Imam Bukhari (*Radiallahu anhu*) has narrated from Hadrat Abdullah bin Zubair (*Radiallahu anhu*) that after the revelation of these âyât, Hadrat Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) used to speak so softly that Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* would have to ask him to repeat himself.

### **A man from the people of Jannah**

Hadrat Thabit bin Qais (*Radiallahu anhu*) had a naturally loud voice. He was therefore very perturbed when the âyah "...raise not your voice..." was revealed. He thus locked himself at home saying, "I am the one who used to raise his voice above the voice of Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, I am from the people of the fire, all my actions are futile..." A few days later Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* sent someone to enquire from Thabit (*Radiallahu anhu*) the reason for his absence. The person returned and informed Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* of Thabit (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s predicament. Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* replied, "No! (Thabit's actions are not in vain and he is not from the people of the fire, rather) he is from the people of Jannah."

### **A few important masa'il**

A very famous Maliki scholar and commentator of the Qur'an, Qadi Abu Bakr Ibnul Arabi (*Radiallahu anhu*), explains that just as it is necessary to honour and respect Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* during his lifetime, it is just as necessary to respect him after he has passed away. Many 'Ulama are therefore of the opinion that it is extremely disrespectful to speak in a very loud tone in front of the blessed grave of Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*. The visitor to

Rasulullah's *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* grave should not raise his voice too much when greeting Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*.

It is in view of the same principle that the 'ulama explain that it is disrespectful and therefore not permissible to be noisy and shout in a gathering in which the ahadith of Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* are being discussed.

## AAYAAT FOUR AND FIVE

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُنَادُونَكَ مِنْ وَرَاءِ الْحُجُرَاتِ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ

**4) Certainly those who call you from behind the rooms, most of them do not understand.**

وَلَوْ أَنَّهُمْ صَبَرُوا حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ إِلَيْهِمْ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**5) And if they had patience till you could come out to them, it would have been better for them. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.**

The Bani Tamim delegation arrived in Madinah in the afternoon. Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* was at that time resting in the room of one of his wives. Rather than waiting for Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, members of the delegation began shouting, "Come out, O Muhammad! Come out, O Muhammad!" (Being Bedouins they did not realise that they were being disrespectful.) The âyats "Certainly those who call you..." and "Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" were revealed due to this incident.

The 'Ulama have deduced from this âyah that just as it is disrespectful to call Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* from outside his home, it is also disrespectful to address him saying, "O Muhammad!" One should rather say, "O Rasulullah!" or "O Nabi of Allah!" etc.

### **The rooms of Rasulullah's *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* wives**

This surah is named after the word *hujurât* (rooms) that appears in âyah four. *Hujurât* here refers to the rooms of Rasulullah's *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* wives.

The word *hujrah* (singular of *hujurât*) literally means a four-walled structure which is partly roofed and partly unroofed. Imam Bukhari (*Rahimahullah*) has quoted a narration in his book, *Al-Adab-ul-Mufrad* that the distance from the door of the *hujrah* till the roofed area was approximately six or seven arms long, the room itself was ten arms long and seven or eight arms high. [The famous Muhaddith Baihaqi (*Rahimahullah*) has also quoted this narration.] However, Moulana Abdur Ra'uf Danapuri (*Rahimahullah*) writes in his book, *Asahhus-Siyar* that the rooms of Hadrat A'isha (*Radiallahu anha*) and Hadrat Saudah (*Radiallahu anha*) were approximately six or seven arms wide and ten arms long. [*Asahhus Siyar* Page 549]

The famous historian Ibn Sa'd (*Radiallahu anhu*) has narrated on the authority of 'Ata al-Khurasani (*Radiallahu anhu*) that the walls and roofs of the hujurat were made from the trunks and branches of date-palms and the door-ways were draped with a piece of thick, black woolen fabric.

These hujurât were incorporated into the Masjid-un-Nabawi during



the reign of Walid bin Abdil Malik (D. 97AH \ 713CE).

## ĀYAH SIX

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ  
نَادِمِينَ

***O you who believe! If a sinner comes to you with news, verify it, lest you harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you had done.***

Many mufassirin have mentioned that this âyah was revealed regarding Hadrat Walid bin 'Uqbah (*Radiallahu anhu*) - Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* had once sent him to the Bani Mustaliq tribe to collect their zakat. As Hadrat Walid (*Radiallahu anhu*) drew closer to the place where the Bani Mustaliq lived, he became fearful that they may kill him due to the old enmity that existed between himself and the Bani Mustaliq (i.e. prior to his and their accepting Islam). He therefore returned to Madinah and told Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* that the Bani Mustaliq had refused to pay the zakat and they had intended to kill him. This report angered Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*. He thus dispatched a small army under the leadership of Hadrat Khalid bin Walid (*Radiallahu anhu*) to the Bani Mustaliq to investigate the matter.

Meanwhile, Hadrat Harith bin Dirar (*Radiallahu anhu*), the leader of the Bani Mustaliq, who was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Rasulallah's *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* messenger, was quite perturbed when the messenger did not arrive. He thought that Rasulallah *Sallallahu*

*Alaihi Wasallam* was probably angry with him and therefore refused to send his messenger. Thus he decided to go to Madinah with a group of his tribesmen. During the course of the journey Hadrat Harith (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s army met Hadrat Khalid (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s army. Upon enquiring from Hadrat Khalid (*Radiallahu anhu*) of his army's destination, Hadrat Harith (*Radiallahu anhu*) learnt of the incorrect report that Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* had received from Hadrat Walid bin 'Uqbah (*Radiallahu anhu*). Harith (*Radiallahu anhu*) nevertheless proceeded to Madinah. When he met Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, he asked him, "Did you refuse to pay the zakat and did you intend killing my messenger?" Hadrat Harith (*Radiallahu anhu*) replied, "In the name of He who deputed you with the truth! I neither saw him nor did he come to me. I only came to Madinah when the messenger of Allah's Rasul failed to arrive fearing that Allah and His Rasul may be angry with me." The sixth âyah of Surah Hujurat was revealed in response to this incident. [This is a summary of a narration that Hafiz Ibn Kathir (*Rahimahullah*) has quoted from Imam Ahmed bin Hambal (*Rahimahullah*)]

### **A few related masa'il**

Quoting Imam Abu Bakr Jassas (*Rahimahullah*), Mufti Muhammad Shafi' (*Rahimahullah*) explains that it is understood from this âyah that it is not permissible to accept the report (rumour) of a fâsiq (one who publicly violates the Shari'ah) without first verifying his truthfulness.

Mufti Shafi' (*Rahimahullah*) continues to explain that just as it is not permissible to accept the report of a fâsiq (ie. without proper verification), the shahâdah (testimony) of a fâsiq cannot be accepted in a Shar'i court.

However, because the reason for the above prohibition is "...lest you harm people . . ." it will be permissible to accept the report of a fâsiq when there is no such possibility (i.e. when there is no fear of harming another person by accepting his report). For example, if a fâsiq comes to you with an item claiming that so-and-so had sent it as a gift to you, it will be permissible to take his word.

### **An Important Question**

It is learnt from many authentic narrations that this âyah was revealed regarding Hadrat Walid bin 'Uqbah (*Radiallahu anhu*). The âyah however refers to him as a fâsiq. This implies that it is possible for a Sahabi to be a fâsiq. Is this not in conflict with the general rule that "all the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) are upright"?

Allamah Alusi (*Rahimahullah*), the author of *Tafsir Ruh-ul-Ma'ani*, explains that the correct approach in this issue is the approach adopted by the Jamhur (vast majority) of the Ahlus-Sunnah 'Ulama. The Jamhur are of the opinion that the Shahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) were not ma'sum (infallible); it is possible for a Sahabi to commit a major sin and at the time of committing such a sin he/she will receive the appropriate Shar'i punishment. However, it is our aqidah that no Sahabi left the world without repenting for his/her short-comings. This is substantiated from the fact that Allah has in the Qur'an announced His eternal satisfaction for the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*), and Allah's pleasure cannot be attained without forgiveness.

In addition to the above, Muslims must also remember that the mistakes committed by a few Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) were very very minimal in comparison to all their good deeds and the rule of the Qur'an is that "certainly good deeds annul misdeeds". We therefore

conclude that even though a Sahabi was called a fâsiq during Rasulullah's lifetime, it is not possible that he/she remained a fâsiq until death. Hence, it is not permissible for us to regard any Sahabi (including Hadrat Walid *Radiallahu anhu*) as a fâsiq.

Mufti Muhammad Shafi' (*Rahimahullah*) also explains that although the âyah "O you who believe! If a sinner..." was revealed in response to the incident of Hadrat Walid bin 'Uqbah (*Radiallahu anhu*), the âyah is not necessarily calling him a fâsiq - it is merely explaining a basic Shar'i rule.

## AYAAT SEVEN AND EIGHT

وَأَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ فِيكُمْ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَوْ يُطِيعُكُمْ فِي كَثِيرٍ مِنَ الْأُمْرِ لَعَسْتَمْ وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ حَبَّبَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْإِيمَانَ  
وَزَيَّنَّهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَكَرَّهَ إِلَيْكُمُ الْكُفْرَ وَالْفُسُوقَ وَالْعِصْيَانَ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الرَّاشِدُونَ ، فَضَلَّ اللَّهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ  
وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

**7) And know that among you is Allah's Rasul: Were he to follow you in many matters, you would certainly suffer. But Allah has endeared Iman to you and has made it beautiful in your hearts, and He has made hateful to you Kufr (disbelief), wrongdoing and rebellion. Such indeed are the righteous ones. 8) A grace and favour from Allah, and Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.**

These Âyah are to a certain extent related to the previous âyah. The Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) were infuriated when they heard Walid bin 'Uqbah (*Radiallahu anhu*)'s incorrect report of the Bani Mustaliq - that they had turned apostate, refused to pay the zakat and intended to slay Walid (*Radiallahu anhu*). They therefore desired that Rasulullah

*Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* should send an army to punish the Bani Mustaliq. Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* however favoured first sending an investigative team under the leadership of Hadrat Khalid bin Walid (*Radiallahu anhu*). Rasulallah's *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* decision proved more fruitful than that of the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*). Allah Ta'ala therefore reminds the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) that although it is permissible to advise Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* in such issues, they should not insist that he necessarily accept their advice because if he will comply with all their desires, they will certainly find themselves in abundant difficulty. Allah Ta'ala thereafter consoles the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) telling them that He has, by His grace and favour upon them, saved them from such obstinacy. Instead, He has filled their hearts with Iman and made Kufr and sin hateful to them. This âyah is thus a proof of the lofty status of the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) in the Shari'ah. (Those who have Iman and hate Kufr and sin are "...indeed the righteous ones.") May Allah bless us also with these qualities. *Âmîn*.

Maulana Shabbier Ahmed 'Uthmani (*Rahimahullah*) writes in his *Tafsir*: "Do not feel bad if Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* does not accept your counsel because Haq (the truth) can never be subservient to the wishes of the people... In short, verify the news (that has reached you) and do not subject the truth to your desire and opinion - rather subject your desire to the truth. All disputes can be resolved in this manner. Hadrat Shah Sahib (*Rahimahullah*) writes: Do not feel bad if Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* does not accept your counsel because he follows the command of Allah and your welfare lies only in following the command of Allah."

Maulana Shabbier Ahmed (*Rahimahullah*) continues: "You (i.e. the Sahabah *Radiallahu anhum*) would experience great difficulty if you

desire that Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* must accept everything that you say. You should however thank Allah because He has by His grace and favour endeared Iman to your hearts and He has made Kufr and sin detestable to you - you are thus not so foolish. . ."

## AAAYAAT NINE AND TEN

وَإِنْ طَائِفَتَانِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ اقْتَتَلُوا فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ فَاءَتْ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ ، إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

**9) If two parties among the believers fall into a fight, make peace between them. And if one of them transgresses against the other, then fight against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah. If it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair for Allah loves those who are fair.**

**10) The believers are but a brotherhood: so make peace between your two (contending) brothers, and fear Allah so that you may receive mercy.**

Maulana Shabbier Ahmed 'Uthmani (*Rahimahullah*) explains in the *Tafsir* of these âyât that if two groups from among the Muslims are unable to settle their differences, the rest of the ummah should exert themselves in trying to reconcile the two groups. If such reconciliatory efforts fail and one group attacks the other, the rest of the ummah should not sit silent. Instead, they should unite and oppose the group that is guilty of transgressing the Shari'ah until such time that it reverts to the command of Allah and decides to make peace. In such conditions Muslims must be fair and just i.e. they should not stray from

the straight path by siding with the transgressor.

***"The Believers are but a brotherhood ..."***

Under all circumstances Muslims are brothers unto each other. A Muslim should therefore never treat his/her fellow Muslim brother/sister as an enemy or disbeliever. Similarly, because all Muslims are brothers, they should always hasten to make peace between two contending individuals or factions among the Muslims.

***"And fear Allah ..."***

Muslims must fear Allah when trying to make peace lest they stray from the truth and side with the wrong-doers.

**The Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) and their differences**

Imam Abu Bakr Ibnul Arabi (*Rahimahullah*) explains that these âyât refer to all possible disputes that may transpire between any two Muslim parties. It therefore also includes such disputes wherein both the contending parties are arguing / fighting on the basis of the Shari'ah. The differences that occurred between some of the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) are of this type.

Imam Qurtubi (*Rahimahullah*) has, after quoting Ibn 'Arabi (*Rahimahullah*)'s explanation, mentioned a number of statements from some of our *Aslaf* (pious predecessors). In short, these quotations represent the correct and safest approach to this delicate issue. We reproduce below a few of these quotations.

- i. One of the Ulama was asked of his opinion regarding the

bloodshed that occurred between the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*). He recited the following âyah of the Qur'an in reply: "*That is a nation that has passed away. They shall reap the fruit of what they earned, and you of what you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do.*" [Al-Baqarah, Âyah 141]

- ii. A similar question was posed to another learned man. He replied that "it is a blood from which Allah has kept my hands clean. I therefore do not wish to soil my tongue with it (by criticising any of the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*))."
- iii. Muhasibi (*Rahimahullah*) said that it is difficult for us to say anything regarding the bloodshed that occurred between the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) due to their differences.
- iv. Hasan Basri (*Rahimahullah*) was asked regarding the fighting that took place between the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*). He replied, "The Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) were present in these wars and we were absent. They were therefore fully aware of the situation and we are totally ignorant (because we were not present....We therefore follow them when they agree and we keep quiet when they disagree."

In other words, the correct approach to the issue is that we keep quiet and do not discuss it at all.

In addition to the above, it should also be remembered that:

- a. Although the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) were not ma'sum (infallible), they were most certainly maghfur (forgiven) as was explained in the *tafsir* of âyah six.
- b. Our good deeds can never compare to their good deeds.



Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* said: "Do not speak ill of any of my Sahabah because if any of you were to spend the equivalent of Mount Uhud in gold, he would not reach the *mudd* of any of them nor would he reach half of it." [Tirmidhi]

The *mudd* is a measurement that was prevalent during the time of Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* and the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*). According to present-day usage it would equal 1, 6 kg.

- c. Rasulallah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* did not only praise the Sahabah (*Radiallahu anhum*) on a number of occasions, but he also prohibited us from speaking ill of them.

## AAYAH ELEVEN

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ  
يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَمْ  
يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

***O you who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former): nor let some women laugh at others: it may be that the (latter) are better than the (former), nor slander each other, nor call each other by (offensive) nicknames. Sin is an evil name after Iman, and those who do not desist are doing wrong.***

Three very common social illnesses have been prohibited in this âyah. They are:

- i. Mocking fellow Muslims,

- ii. Defaming / slandering other Muslims, and
- iii. Calling people by offensive nicknames.

### **Mocking fellow Muslims**

Imam Qurtubi (*Rahimahullah*) explains that mockery includes the mentioning of a person's physical defect in a manner that causes others to laugh. Mockery can be verbal as well as physical; for example, imitating a person or using one's hands to indicate to his/her being short or fat etc. Similarly, laughing at the speech of a fellow Muslim in a manner that invokes laughter is also mockery. Islam prohibits all forms of mockery.

#### **Note:**

1) Mufti Muhammad Shafi' (*Rahimahullah*) writes that although the Qur'an only says "*...let not some men among you laugh at others...Nor let some women laugh at others...*" it does not mean that men are permitted to laugh at women and vice-versa. The Qur'an is however indicating, in a very subtle manner, that because Islam prohibits the intermingling of the sexes, it is almost impossible that a *ghair mahram* man will find an opportunity to mock a Muslim lady and vice-versa.

2) The words "*... It may be that the latter are better than the former...*" form the basis of a very important principle in life - that we must never judge a person on the basis of his outer appearance and actions. Allah Ta'ala is the Knower of all secrets; He alone knows the true state of our sincerity. It therefore very often happens that an apparently very sinful person is held in high esteem by Allah and a person who outwardly seems very pious and Allah-fearing is despised in the court of Allah. Therefore, if we see a sinful Muslim, we must despise his/her

actions, but we do not have permission to hold any Muslim in contempt.

### **Slandering fellow Muslims**

The Qur'an is teaching us another very important, yet seldom remembered lesson in social conduct. We love fault-finding and slandering others but we fail to realize that we too have faults; no person (besides the Ambiya) are free from fault and error. A pious 'alim reminds us that *"you have faults and people have eyes!"* The Ulama say that the fortunate person is he who ponders over his own faults and tries to rectify them thus finding no time to find faults in others.

### **Calling people by offensive nicknames**

The third social illness that has been prohibited in this âyah is the usage of offensive nicknames e.g. shorty, fatty etc.

According to Hadrat Abdullah bin Abbas (*Radiallahu anhu*) this also refers to a past sin from which the person being spoken to has already repented. For example, if a person was once a habitual drinker but has now repented, it will not be permissible to call him a drunkard. In fact, we learn from a Hadith that when a person insults another on the basis of his/her past sin (from which he/she has already repented), Allah will cause him/her to fall into the same sin. [Qurtubi]

### **An exception to the above rule**

Some people become so famous with unpleasant nicknames that they are only recognised / identified by such names. The Ulama are

unanimous that it is permissible to use such nicknames (in the above situation only) provided one's intention is mere identification and not to insult the person being spoken to. The names Hamid at-Tawil (the tall) and Sulayman al-A'mash (the blear-eyed) etc. appear frequently in the books of Hadith (i.e. in the chain/s of transmission). Hadrat Abdullah bin Mubarak (*Radiallahu anhu*) was asked whether it is permissible to use such names or not. He replied that it is permissible provided one's intention is mere identification and not to insult.

**Note:** The shortening of proper names (e.g. Suli in place of Sulayman and Fati in place of Fatimah), even though not offensive, is not permissible.

## AAyah TWELVE

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا  
أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

***O you who believe! Avoid much suspicion for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? No, you would abhor it. So fear Allah for Allah is Most Relenting, Most Merciful.***

This âyah is also prohibiting three very common social diseases. They are:

- i. Suspicion
- ii. Spying
- iii. Gheebah (backbiting)

After commanding Muslims to avoid suspicion, the Qur'an explains the reason for this command - "*suspicion in some cases is a sin*". The words "*suspicion in some cases is a sin*" also tell us that not all forms of suspicion are prohibited. It is therefore necessary for us to differentiate between permissible and impermissible suspicions.

Sufyan Thawri (*Rahimahullah*), a famous faqih (jurist), says in this regard that an impermissible suspicion is when a person expresses his suspicion and a permissible suspicion is when he does not express his suspicion. [Saawi]

Imam Qurtubi (*Rahimahullah*) says that an impermissible suspicion is when you accuse a fellow Muslim of doing something haram without any valid Shar'i evidence.

Jalalud-din Mahalli (*Rahimahullah*), the co-author of Tafsir Jalalayn, writes that entertaining unfounded evil thoughts of pious Shari'ah-abiding Muslims is not permissible. However, it is permissible to entertain such thoughts regarding people who frequently violate the Shari'ah in public.

Discussing the impermissible suspicion mentioned in this âyah, Imam Abu Bakr Jassas (*Rahimahullah*) has together with false accusation, also included the bad thought that people entertain regarding Allah e.g. "Allah will always punish me", "Allah will always keep me in difficulty", "Allah will never forgive me" etc. Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* said, "None of you should die except with good thoughts regarding Allah." (In other words, never lose hope in Allah's mercy and forgiveness.)

## **Spying**

The second act that has been prohibited in this âyah is spying i.e. secretly seeking the faults of others. Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* said, "Do not backbite the Muslims and do not seek their faults because, whoever seeks their faults, Allah will seek his faults. And the person whose faults Allah will seek, Allah will disgrace him in his own home." [Qurtubi] Rather than seeking the faults of fellow Muslims, we should rather hide their faults because:

- a. Whoever will hide the fault of his (Muslim) brother, Allah will hide his fault on the day of Qiyamah. [Muslim]
- b. Hiding the fault of a fellow Muslim is like restoring life to a girl who was buried alive. [Abu Da'ud, Nasa'i and Ahmed]

### **Note:**

1. Eavesdropping is also spying and hence haram.
2. Spying and eavesdropping are both permissible when the aim is to defend the Muslims from possible harm (as in jihad).

## **Gheebah (Backbiting)**

The third act that has been prohibited in this âyah is gheebah – discussing one's Muslim brother in his absence in a manner that will offend him (even though what is being said is true). Emphasising the severity of the sin in backbiting, Allah Ta'ala likens it to eating the flesh of one's dead brother.

Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* said that backbiting is a greater sin than adultery. The reason being that Allah will forgive the adulterer if he seeks forgiveness from Allah, but he will only forgive the backbiter

if, together with seeking Allah's forgiveness, he also seeks forgiveness from the person that he had backbitten. [Tirmidhi, Abu Da'ud]

Some Ulama are of the opinion that if the person who was backbitten is unaware of the backbiting, it will not be necessary to seek his forgiveness. It will however still be necessary to clear his name in the presence of those with whom he was backbitten. [Bayaan-ul-Qur'an]

According to a Hadith narrated by Hadart Anas (*Radiallahu anhu*) the atonement of backbiting is that one should seek forgiveness for the person of whom he had backbitten. [Baihaqi, Mazhari]

### **Gheebah is sometimes permissible**

The Ulama are unanimous that gheebah is sometimes permissible. Examples of such instances when gheebah is permissible are:

- a. If a person desires to seek a fatwa (religious ruling) regarding a particular incident.
- b. If a person is being harassed by someone, it is permissible for him to complain to the relevant authorities who may be able to help him.
- c. It is permissible for the wife and children to complain of the husband and father to a person who may be able to assist them.
- d. It is permissible to make gheebah of a person if the intention is to warn the general public of his evil and mischief.
- e. When an evil man seeks the hand of a girl in marriage, it is

permissible to inform the girl's guardian of his evil habits.

## ĀYAH THIRTEEN

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ  
أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

***O mankind! We created you from a single male and female, and made you into nations and tribes so that you may recognize each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware.***

Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* had on the day of Fath-e-Makkah (the conquest of Makkah) commanded Hadrat Bilal (*Radiallahu anhu*) to ascend the roof of the Ka'bah and proclaim the adhan. Many people from the Quraish who had not yet accepted Islam did not feel happy over this. Thus one of them said, "All praise be to Allah that my father passed away without having to witness this day." Another person said: "Could Muhammad not find anyone else besides this black crow to give the adhan?" Hadrat Abu Sufyan (*Radiallahu anhu*) said: "I will not say anything because I fear that Allah will inform him (i.e. Muhammad *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*)." This āyah was revealed in response to the above statements reminding such people that true honour and dignity depends only on Iman and Taqwa, and not on race, colour or family lineage etc. Because Hadrat Bilal (*Radiallahu anhu*) is already blessed with Iman and Taqwa, he is much better than you.

Hadrat Abdullah bin 'Umar (*Radiallahu anhu*) has narrated that after



making tawaf on the day of Fath-e-Makkah, Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* addressed the people saying, "All praise is due to Allah who has cleansed you from the pride and arrogance of Jahiliyyah. People are of two types: the pious, Allah-fearing who are honoured by Allah, and the sinful and wretched who are disgraced by Allah." Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* thereafter recited this âyah.

The âyah thereafter informs us that although all mankind have been created from one father and mother, Allah has divided them into nations, tribes and families so that it is easier to recognize each other. For example, if two people have the same name, we differentiate between them by their surnames or nationalities etc.

## AAYAH FOURTEEN TO EIGHTEEN

قَالَتِ الْأَعْرَابُ آمَنَّا قُلْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا وَلَكِنْ قُولُوا أَسْلَمْنَا وَلَمَّا يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ لَا يَلِتْكُمْ مِنْ أَعْمَالِكُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**14) The desert Arabs say, "We brought Imaan," Say, "You have no Iman; therefore say: 'We have submitted' because Iman has not yet entered your hearts. And if you obey Allah and His Rasul, He will not belittle any of your deeds for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."**

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَرْتَابُوا وَجَاهَدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الصَّادِقُونَ

**15) Only those are believers who have believed in Allah and His Rasul, and have never since doubted, but have striven with their wealth and persons in the path of Allah: such are the sincere ones.**

قُلْ أَتَعْلَمُونَ اللَّهَ بِدِينِكُمْ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

**16) Say: "Do you inform Allah about your religion? Allah knows all that is in the skies and the earth. He has full knowledge of all things.**

يُؤْتُونَكَ أَنْ أَسْلَمُوا قُلْ لَا تَمْنُوا عَلَيَّ إِسْلَامَكُمْ بَلِ اللَّهُ يَمُنُّ عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْ هَدَاكُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

**17) They impress on you as a favour that they have embraced Islam. Say, "Count not your Islam as a favour upon me; rather Allah has conferred a favour upon you that He has guided you to Iman, if you are true.**

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ

**18) Verily Allah knows the unseen of the skies and the earth, and Allah sees all that you do.**

According to many Mufasssirin these âyât were revealed regarding a group of disbelievers from the tribe of Bani Sa'd. There was a drought at that time and people were experiencing great difficulty. These people went to Madinah seeking help from Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* under the false pretext of being Muslims. Although they behaved like Muslims while in Madinah, their hearts were void of Iman. Upon meeting Rasulullah *Sallallahu alaihi wasallam* they swore that they were Muslims. They thereafter claimed that they deserved more help than others because, while the others only accepted Islam after opposing Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* and waging war against him, they brought Iman without even waging war against him. They were thus guilty of the following crimes:

- a. Taking false oaths
- b. Trying to deceive Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*
- c. Boasting of their fake Iman and insinuating that their bringing Iman was a favour upon Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*.

These Âyah were revealed informing Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam* of their deception and warning these bedouins not to betray the Muslims by saying that they had brought Iman. Rather than bringing Iman they had merely displayed fake obedience. (The literal meaning of Islam viz. obedience is implied in this âyah. It is not possible to take the Shar'i meaning in the context of these âyah because Islam and Iman go hand-in-hand; you cannot have Iman without Islam or Islam without Iman.)

***"Say: Do you inform Allah about your religion?"***

This sentence is warning them not to try to deceive Allah because *"Allah knows all that is in the skies and all that is in the earth"* - none can ever deceive Him.

***"They regard as favour upon you . . . if indeed you are true."***

This âyah is reminding them that even if they are sincere in their claim that they brought Iman, they must remember that their bringing Iman is no favour upon Rasulullah *Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam*, rather it is Allah's favour upon them that he has guided them.

