

Smoking in the Places of Prayer

How often is it that the Sunni criticize the Shia for smoking in the mosques and say that it is an abominable doing from the deeds of the Satan?

We can say that smoking is a common phenomenon among the Shia. When you come into their mosques for the first time, you are shocked by that. [1](#)

I remember that when I traveled to Holy Najaf for the first time, I was shocked by this phenomenon. I found it odd and so I asked some of their (the Shia) *ulama* about it. They gave answers which have not convinced me until now. Some of them say that smoking is neither impermissible nor disapproved because there is no (legal) text concerning it either from the Prophet (S) or from the infallible Imams (as) and that analogy is not permissible to them. Some others say that they do not smoke in the mosques, but only in *Husayniyyahs* [2](#) which are not from mosques.

As for the first answer, a Muslim cannot accept that everything about which no religious text have been mentioned, is permissible, because the texts are either general including all prohibited vices like this saying of Allah:

Say: My Lord has only prohibited indecencies, those of them that are apparent as well as those that are concealed. (Qur'an, 7:33)

Or special, in which something is mentioned by name, like these sayings of Allah:

...And go not nigh to adultery. (Qur'an, 17:32)

..And do not kill any one whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause. (Qur'an, 17:33)

O you who believe! do not devour usury. (Qur'an, 3:130)

Or, the sayings of the Prophet (S):

He, who cheats us, is not from us. [3](#)

Whoever fabricates lies against me (as if I have said), let him take his seat in the Fire.[4](#)

Cigarettes were not available at the time of the Prophet (S) and the times of the infallible Imams (as). Therefore, it is not possible to have a religious text about smoking from Allah, His messenger or the infallible Imams. It is the same as with regard to many impermissible things available nowadays that are included by the general texts, such as lottery, horseracing and modern games that cause many profits with no effort.

Smoking can be included by this saying of Allah the Almighty:

... and do not squander wastefully. Surely, the squanderers are the fellows of the devils and the devil is ever ungrateful to his Lord. (Qur'an, 17:26-27)

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

Squandering is to spend even one dirham on what does not benefit you.

Is there squandering worse than to spend one's money on things that are harmful to his health and dangerous to his life?

Smoking is also included by this saying of the Messenger of Allah (S):

There should be no harm (against oneself) and no harming (against others) in Islam.[5](#)

Is there any harm worse than cancer, which has been proven by medicine and sciences of today to affect smokers and do away with their lives? Smoking is proven to cause dyspnea and that the nicotine in cigarettes causes addiction, which a smoker can hardly get rid of.

Sociologists in the developed countries knew the dangers of smoking; therefore, smoking was prohibited in the public halls, state centers, airplanes, trains and other means of transport. Lastly, the British government forbade smoking in the metro and the same was done by the French government.

Modern medicine has proved that a smoker, in addition to harming himself, harms others who sit with him in a place or in a vehicle during a journey. Therefore, smokers are forbidden to smoke inside public places and are forced to go out to smoke in the open air if they want to smoke, as a kind of regard for others' feelings and safety.

This is actually what the Prophet Muhammad (S) meant when he said:

There should be no harm (to oneself) and no harming (against others).

In fact, in this saying there is a prohibition for smokers not to smoke even if they are alone, because a Muslim is prohibited from harming himself, as he is prohibited from harming others.

Do you not see that Islam has prohibited suicide? Islam considers suicide as one of the major sins. A Muslim is not free to harm even his own body, because his body is a possession of Allah and a Muslim has no right to do anything to his body except that which pleases Allah the Glorified.

Nowadays, we hear that the developed countries prohibit drivers from having alcohol while driving their vehicle, because it may cause a fatal accident. In the same way as they prohibit smokers from smoking in public places because they may harm others, we see them apply the rule of “no harm to others” and they neglect the rule of “no harm to oneself” in accordance with the law of FREEDOM which considers man to be free to do to unto himself whatever he likes, as long as he keeps the condition that he does not harm others.

Islam does not acknowledge this absolute freedom and does not permit man to do anything to himself except what Allah has permitted within the limits that the Sharia has determined for him. Therefore, Allah has said:

...and cast not yourselves to perdition with your own hands. (Qur'an, 2: 195)

And, the Prophet (S) said, “*There should be no harm to oneself and no harm to others.*”

If we supposedly agree with Muslim smokers, who say that there is no any text which prohibits smoking, then we do not agree with them on allowing smoking inside the mosques and other places of prayer, worship and meeting of Muslims. Therefore, smokers must attend these places as non-smokers.

Here comes the problem of their second answer when saying that smoking is not practiced in mosques but in *Husayniyyahs*. To define a *Husayniyyah* for those who do not know it, we say that a *Husayniyyah* is a building built by the Shia and entailed for Imam Husayn (as) where ceremonies of anniversaries of births and deaths of the infallible Imams (as) are held besides the anniversary of Ashura and the Eid al-Ghadir. Other ceremonies of different occasions are also held in the *Husayniyyah*. These *Husayniyyahs* are often furnished with precious carpets and most of them have a mihrab of prayer.

If one of the Shia says that it is permissible to smoke inside a *Husayniyyah* because it is not a mosque, we say that this is a confession that smoking is not permissible in mosques first of all. Secondly, every place in which a prayer is offered is “a mosque”. When we attend on any occasion in a *Husayniyyah*, we find the meeting full of remembrance of Allah and people praying to Him to send blessings on the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny (peace be on them all), surrounded by the angels who pray Allah to forgive the believers. So, is it nice to pollute such meetings with bad smells that harm people besides the angels?

I myself find it odd from the religious authorities of the Shia who prohibit the playing with chess, but do not prohibit smoking, though there is a great difference between the harms of each of them. And I find it odd too that one of the grand authorities prohibits his followers by *ijtihad*, from smoking tobacco as a way of resisting the British companies that promote it, but does not prohibit it again, by *ijtihad* too, to

keep his followers safe from the fatal diseases and the squandering that Allah detests much!!

I often criticized this state and discussed these matters with some of *ulama*, but I did not find any one who had enough courage to prohibit smoking,⁶ neither among the Shia nor among the Sunni.

Martyr Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr (may Allah have mercy on him) never did smoke at all. When once I asked him about smoking, he said, "I do not smoke and I advise every Muslim not to smoke." However, I did not hear from him the prohibition of smoking openly.

It is said that some *ulama* have prohibited smoking for the ones who have never smoked and they want now to smoke and considered it unapproved for smokers themselves. Some *ulama* consider it impermissible, but they do not dare to announce openly for fear that they may be accused of following analogy.

I want to say that the religious authorities have to give an open, clear opinion about smoking without fearing the blame from any quarter. They have to prohibit it even by their own *ijtihad*, as long as it causes harms to smokers themselves and to others, besides the squandering and waste that it results in.

Have we not agreed from the beginning that when a *mujtahid* is right in his *fatwa*, he shall get two rewards, and if he is mistaken, he shall get one reward on condition that there is no religious text from Allah or His messenger on that matter concerned?

Let us suppose that there is no clear text on smoking and that it is not included by this saying of Allah:

...and do not squander wastefully.. (Qur'an, 17:26)

nor the saying of the Prophet (S), "*There should be no harm (against oneself) and no harming (against others)*", then the way is open before the *ulama* and religious authorities to follow their *ijtihad* and prohibit smoking because of the harms and fatal diseases it causes. When the *ulama* and religious authorities choose to keep silent just because people accept it – it is a really big problem.

Or, they may fear the reaction of smokers and so they do not give a *fatwa* for the sake of being disapproved. Someone from them has tried his best to convince me that smoking has many benefits and to disapprove this is really a dangerous thing having a dangerous effect! It encouraged a Muslim youth who knew this man, to keep on smoking.

At the same time we find that charitable societies and social organizations in the atheist countries sparing no effort against smoking and smokers, and preventing even its advertisement. They ask the manufacturers of cigarettes to write on the packets of cigarettes the word "SUICIDE" to encourage people to keep away from it. Yet we find in the Islamic religious societies widely embarking on it and encouraging others towards it. We even find women carrying packets of cigarettes with them to places of worship and religious meetings.

When a child opens his eye to see his mother and father smoke, he is likely to imitate them before he tries to follow the religious authority. When such a child becomes a youth with love of smoking and intoxicated with cigarettes, it will be very difficult to convince him to give the habit up, particularly when he becomes an adult and he is used to seeing his father smoke in places of worship.

If Muslims know how much monies they lose because of smoking and that it has been a plot against them, they will be thunderstruck!

For example and in a simple mathematical operation, we can see the danger of the situation. In the world today, there are one milliard Muslims. If we suppose that only a fifth of them smoke, we shall find two hundred millions smokers. And if we suppose that every smoker spends one dollar a day, which is the least price of an ordinary packet of cigarettes – and we do not talk about those who smoke two or three packets a day nor those who spend two or three dollars on the expensive brand of cigarettes – we shall find that two hundred million (200,000,000) dollars are spent by Muslims on smoking every day, and seventy-three million (73,000,000,000) dollars every year. Thus, Muslims squander seventy-three million dollars on smoking every year to buy fatal diseases.

If we add to that the amount which Muslims spend on the treatment from the diseases caused by smoking itself, like cancer, infection of lungs, angina pectoris, dental caries, pyorrhea, and others – the amount spent is unimaginable, something that mind cannot believe easily.

If Muslims spare these amounts for ten years, they shall have a paradise on the earth. There shall be no poor amongst them. They shall not need to beg the atheists, and they shall definitely do away with poverty, diseases and underdevelopment. They can with such monies, buy modern technology and develop in all fields.

After this brief discussion, we want to say that Muslims have to prohibit themselves from everything that harms and does not benefit them. Even if there is no clear text on that, surely their religion encourages and orders them to keep away from everything harmful and not of use to them. Allah says in the Qur'an:

...and (Allah) makes lawful to them the good things and makes unlawful to them impure things. (Qur'an, 7: 157)

The Messenger of Allah (S) forbade his companions from eating garlic on Fridays, lest the people in the mosque would be hurt by its bad smell, though garlic is permissible and it has many medical benefits. Certainly, the smell of garlic cannot be compared to the smoke of cigarettes that spreads everywhere, pollutes the space and bothers others too much. Nevertheless, the Prophet (S) forbade the eating of garlic on Fridays (for those who would mix with people) according to the rule of “no harming to others”. Those, who eat garlic, get advantages from it, but it is not liked for them to eat it when they want to mix with others especially during the Friday Prayer, lest others be hurt by its bad smell.

Moreover, only the bad smell of garlic may hurt others. It causes neither diseases nor infections, unlike it

is not with smoking. Yet, the Prophet (S) forbade it. After this example, is there any lesson in that for men of understanding?!

Mujtahids prohibit the playing with cards and chess, even if they are used for amusement and not gambling and they prohibit amusing singing, music and other things for which there is no any clear text about neither in the Book of Allah nor in the *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Could they not then prohibit something that clearly causes harm and diseases for Muslims?

But, if some Shia insists on permitting smoking and not prohibiting it, then let them observe the feelings of non-smokers and observe the sanctity of the places of worships, as their Sunni brothers do inside their mosques. Would you try that individually?

If you come into a mosque of the Sunni while having a lit cigarette in your hand, you shall be prevented and denied, and may be hurt by some of them.

I can swear that Allah and His messenger hate smoking, because reason, sound nature, and logic hate it.

This bad habit made many of the Sunni, who visited the countries of the Shia, be alienated and go back to their countries, criticizing the Shia, though they did not know anything about Shiism other than those bad habits. Therefore, I always remind of Imam as-Sadiq's saying to his followers:

*Be propagandists for us by your deeds and not your sayings. Be a cause of honor to us and not a cause of disgrace for us.*⁷

How many doings one may see and alienate and then become displeased so that afterwards he does not accept any invitation, even if it is true! What is said about some of the Shia in this concern can be said about some of the Sunni.

In the end, I say that reform is necessarily required, and returning to the truth is a virtue. Let one not be deceived by saying: Can that which has been corrupted throughout too many centuries be repaired?

Yes, it can be. If there is loyalty, and causes are available, the nation shall be recovered from this chronic disease, even if it takes a long time, by the power of Allah the Almighty.

¹. To be the truth, we should say that this custom cannot be seen in the mosques in Iran.

². Holy places like mosques but do not have the same rulings and conditions of mosques.

³. Sahih Muslim vol. 1, p. 99

⁴. Sahih al-Bukhari vol. 1, p. 38

⁵. Sunan Ibn Maja vol.2, p. 48

⁶. From the ulama, who have given a fatwa on prohibiting smoking, is Ayatollah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadhlullah, relying on this Qur'anic verse that prohibits wine:

They ask you about intoxicants and games of chance. Say: in both of them there is a great sin and means of profit for men, and their sin is greater than their profit. (Qu'ran 2:219)

It is understood that everything, whose sin (and harm) is more than its benefit, is impermissible, and according to this rule, smoking is impermissible too. Justifying it in this way, Ayatollah Sayyid Fadhlullah has given a fatwa of “obligatory precaution”, because there are many believers and ulama who have been addicted to smoking, and it may be difficult for them, or they may suffer physical harm if they give up smoking.

As for mosques and those who frequent them, it may be considered by a new Muslim, who has recently embraced Islam, in the west as a kind of binding to his freedom; this is beside the bad treatment that a smoker may face there. Perhaps out of ignorance, a smoker may be invited negatively not to smoke there.

It has been mentioned that once Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn (peace be on them) saw an old man perform the wudhu’ incorrectly. They did not scold him, but kindly said to him, “O old man, would you please watch us both and say which of us performs the wudhu’ correctly?” When they finished their wudhu’, the old man said, “By Allah, the wudhu’ of both of you is better and more correct than mine.” By this way, the old man corrected his wudhu’. Would that we learn from the Ahlul Bayt (as) the morals and etiquette of inviting others to do something!

In a very polite manner, we can invite the youth, who have been attracted by the places of gambling, impermissible amusement, and ill-educating cinemas, and who think that they enjoy their freedoms, to follow the right path. In the same way and through wisdom and goodly exhortation, we can invite our Sunni brothers who wear gold, or who do not care for impurities to correct their behaviors.

[7.](#) Bihar al Anwar vol.85, p. 136

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