

The Realm of Privacy in Islam

Islam considers the safeguarding of people's privacy as not only an individual duty of all people but also as the Islamic state and government's obligation and regards any illegal interference and violation of people's privacy (either from the side of other people or the government authorities) sin and illegal. Islam invites everybody to observe this sanctuary and avoiding from its breach and transgression and for those violating others' privacy in addition to heavenly punishments considers worldly penalties.

Doubtlessly, if the area of people's privacy in all dimensions will not be defined and every one defines it according to his own taste and thoughts, it should not be expected that the safeguarding and protection of this sanctuary be actualized.

Islam by expressing the restrictions related to privacy defined the actions causing its violation and prohibits people from doing them and considers punishments for those committing such actions.

Some of such actions include: investigation into others privacy and about their secrets, entering to the privacy of people's houses and homes without their permission, eavesdropping people's conversations, suspicion and mistrust of others, illegal look in people's privacy and correspondences, gossiping, sarcasm, cursing, telling tales, fault finding and offending people's reputations.

Any of the above actions will be survived here shortly and the ways to avoid them in lofty instructions of Islam will be expressed.

1. Prohibition of investigation and inspection

In dictionaries of Farsi for the word 'investigation' (*tajassos*) in this language, there are many meanings like: touching by hand, touch, look for, inspect, and checking with hands, gathering news and research. The root or the common image of all these meanings is the attempt to gain information about others.

The literal meaning of 'investigation' is that a person is after gaining news and becoming aware of affairs that the owner of them tries to keep the hidden or concealed or doesn't desire others to have access to

them. A person attempting to gain such information is called 'spy'.

In Farsi, the term '*tahassos*' also means gaining news and becoming aware of others' information.

Some consider (*tajassos*) 'investigation' and (*tahassos*) as synonyms and takes no difference in their connotations but some know the distinguishing aspects of these two terms in this that in the investigation the spy is after the information that are denied from him but (*tahassos*) is gaining information about others without any denial.

It is also said that 'investigation' is searching and trying for gaining information from the information of internal affairs and not apparent and clear affairs of others but (*tahassos*) is about the news and information that people can with a little attempt and just by using his common sense. Sometimes these two terms are distinguished according to their aims and accordingly, 'investigation' is interpreted as searching in others' news and information with a malevolent and malicious aims and with the intention of conveying them to others but the allocated connotation of (*tahassos*) is becoming aware of the apparent affairs of others with benevolence and no malicious aim neither for oneself (nor others).

The fundamentals of investigation and inspection are:

- A. Searching and looking for concealed affairs of others which are not desired by them to be at others' access.
- B. Being personal and private of those affairs in a way that access to those is just the right and within the authority of their own.

Prohibition of investigation is stated explicitly and emphasized in the Divine words. The great Quran addressed the believers in this way that:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا

Believers... do not spy. (Quran 49: 12)

Meanwhile the respectful Prophet of Islam (S) stated explicitly: "I am not authorized to split people's heart and become aware of their hidden and internal thoughts."¹

Investigation and curiosity in others private affairs from one side are addictive for the spy and captivate him and from the other side its influence on the society is the creation of the sense of insecurity and causes the public security and trust that are the greatest assets of a society to be marred. Specially, if an illegal and unwanted investigation is managed by government in people's private affairs that results in corruption among people and in the society, according to the Prophet of Islam².

Even in the heart of the family also if the parents take such actions about their children which more than

the limits of required and conventional supervision, this will cause the sense of suspicion and distrusts pathetically and finally leads to making the family fundamentals shaky.

In Islam religion law, this right is given to the house owner to hinder a person who attempts to investigate from inside his house. If the spy will not give up his disturbance and keep investigating, the house owner stops his illegal action by throwing gravels and even if this leads to injury or unintentional death of the spy, the house owner will not be responsible for the regulations and religion law.

Besides the physical investigation of people's privacy, also inquisition is also of obvious instances of investigation and violation of the privacy of the opinion or idea owner and is forbidden by Islam sacred religion law.

It should be noted that the main reason of Islam sensitivity for forbidding the investigation in others' personal affairs and privacy is this that inspection and investigation are one of the important and effective in destruction of relations within a society and many social vulnerabilities have roots in this. A campaign against this social destructive element can have a basic and instructive role in strengthening people's relations in a society.

Distinguish between investigation in social affairs and in peoples' privacy is necessary. What is forbidden by Islam religion law and introduced as an illegal and immoral act is the investigation into people's private affairs since this is in contrast with the human honesty and greatness. While the investigation in social affairs for removal of corruption as a necessity and for the public expediency is required and is regarded the responsibility of Islamic government. Accordingly, there are differences between instances of investigation in the social area and area of people's privacy.

Instances of investigation in social affairs are: continuous supervision and inspection in people's social behavior in the society, keeping enemies' actions and provocations and trying to gain information about influential incidents in society.

Instances of investigation in people's privacy are: attempts to gain information about others' private affairs by eavesdropping or listening into their private conversations, inspection in people's personal and private things, interrogation and questioning about people's private affairs and secrets, attempts to discover personal deficiencies, sins or personal moral corruptions of people such as private drinking of alcohol and any kind of unnecessary inspection and investigation that considering the stated decree (do not inspect) is not within the absolute reverence of Islam religion law.

2. Prohibition of illegal entrance to people's privacy

Doubtlessly, home and house are of obvious and important instances of people's privacy and entering them without permission is the breach of the owner of the house or home privacy and violation of his absolute right.

In the Great Quran verses and the Prophet's tradition and his eligible successors, determined ceremonies are considered for entering the house, home and privacy and Muslims are obliged to follow these ceremonies.

According to those customs, when a person wants to enter others' home and privacy, he must act as follows:

A. Estinas: (An Arabic term which literally means "asking for kindness." Here it means presenting acquaintance with kindness): Entering others' place of residency or privacy necessitates that the entering person firstly introduces himself to the home or privacy residents, the Great Quran states:

... يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا

Believers do not enter houses other than your houses until you first ask permission. (Quran, 24:27)

Estinas means the introducing and presenting acquaintance of the entering person with the host.

Considering this point is of importance that in the Great Quran the term 'estinas' is used which its root is 'ons' (familiarity). The connotation of this term is that the person who wants to enter the others' home or house must introduce himself kindly, softly, politely and in a friendly manner.

B. Estizan (Asking for permission): Entering the most obvious instances of people's privacy is due to this that firstly permission from the home or house residents are asked.

Muslims' conventions in the beginning of Islam following the ignorant Arabs was that they entered others' homes or houses (even the Great Prophet's home) without asking for permission. Therefore, to correct this false behavior, avoidance of offending the reverence of others' homes and guarding people's privacy, the Great Quran determined that Muslims in addition to 'estinas' and before entering others' private places, ask for permission from the home's residents and till they are not given the permission avoid from entering others' privacy:

فَإِنْ لَمْ تَجِدُوا فِيهَا أَحَدًا فَلَا تَدْخُلُوهَا حَتَّى يُؤْذَنَ لَكُمْ

And if you do not find anyone there, do not enter it until permission is given to you. (Quran, 24:28)

The Prophet of Islam (S)'s manner was that even for entering his daughter's home, her holiness, Fatima (a.s), after saluting to the home's residents, asked for her permission and the Prophet, himself, and his accompanying people never entered her home without asking for permission.

Naturally, people should not expect that the homeowner be ready for accepting them all the times and necessarily answer positively to their asking for entrance permission and let them in. The reverence of the home owner and his rights necessitate that if he is not ready to accept them and answers negatively to their asking for entrance permission, avoid from entering his home and leave there without any feeling of offence, unhappiness and sadness since sometimes people prefer to pass time in their privacy with their close relatives and away from any mind-engagements resulted from his presence in a society or others' contacts or free from conventional and existing bounds and restrictions in his secure shelter pass the time in a lonely way and keep his distance from others in particular times and feel free.

This point in the instructions of the Great Quran is explicitly stated in this way:

وَإِنْ قِيلَ لَكُمْ ارْجِعُوا فَارْجِعُوا ۖ هُوَ أَزْكَىٰ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ عَلِيمٌ

And if you are told 'return', so return that is purer for you; and Allah knows the things you do. (Quran, 24:28)

The depth of Islam view point about privacy was manifested when the Prophet's manner for asking for permission to enter another person's place of residency was stipulated some ceremonies. One of such ceremonies is that at the time of 'estizan', the person asking for permission must not stand before the door of the house. It is narrated that Islam Prophet (S) stated Abu Sa'eed, one his companions, who was asking for permission before the Prophet's house door that at the time of asking for permission not to stand in front the house door and stand on the left or right side of the door as when the door were opened, there would be no command for looking inside the house and causes no insecurity for the house's residents.

C. Saluting the home or house's residents: According to Islam's sayings, the person entering another person's home privacy after 'estinas' (or introducing himself kindly, softly, politely), should salute the home's residents and wait for their responses and never enter any homes without saluting.

The Great Quran regarding this point states that explicitly:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّىٰ تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا

Believers do not enter houses other than your houses until you first ask permission and greet with peace the people thereof... (Quran, 24:27)

D. Entering form conventional and common ways: After 'estinas' and 'estizan', it is expected that the entering person enters from the determined and conventional way to the host privacy and not from uncommon and unconventional ways.

The great Quran to emphasize this point states:

وَلَيْسَ الْبِرُّ بِأَنْ تَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهَا وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنِ اتَّقَى ۚ وَأْتُوا الْبُيُوتَ مِنْ أَبْوَابِهَا ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

..it is not righteousness that you should enter the houses at their backs, but righteousness is this that one should guard (against evil); and go into the houses by their doors and be careful (of your duty) to Allah, that you may be successful. (Quran 2: 189)

This point even in legal investigations of people's privacy must be observed and considered to result not in causes of disturbance in people's security.

The Islamic human rights declaration is pointing to the reverence of people's houses by saying that (People's houses in any case have reverence and must not without the permission of their owners enter them illegally or destroy or confiscate them and make their residents evacuee.)³

Obviously, state agents and legislators also except in some cases legalized by law due to the public interests have no right to enter a person's privacy without his satisfaction and threat his security.

3. Prohibition of revealing secrets and expansion of prostitution

Revealing secrets do not mean that people attempt to defame others and to reveal their concealed affairs and transgress or violate their privacy. The main feature of revealing one's secret is the revealing of the kind of information of affairs that people avoid from revealing them or prefer denying them over revealing or publicizing of them.

Considering the term 'kind of' instead of the term 'personal' as a qualification for such information and affairs that their revealing is revealing of secrets is because a person is satisfied or even willing in revealing of some parts of his personal affairs that people usually try to deny them. However revealing of such secrets are taken as instances of 'expansion of prostitution' in society and in these cases even the satisfaction of the privacy owner cannot be the permission of revealing these secrets as by revealing the cases that are in contrast with the public morality, violation of the public rights is actualized. For example, that is why in Islam there are many emphases on covering the nakedness and accordingly displaying of the nakedness is illegal and the disclosing person of it is found guilty of prostitution expansion and this person deserves punishment and penalty.

The Prophet of Islam (S) about censuring prostitution expansion by revealing immoral secrets of others stated: "Rightly, a person who expands prostitution is like one causes prostitution."⁴

One of the God's attributes is His "sin-covering" and The Creator covers people's shameful acts and misbehaviors and He knows covering of people's faults as a responsibility of all people and loves fault-covering people.

In Islamic instructions 'the right of fault-covering' is one of the Muslim's rights to each other and Muslims are obliged to observe this right. On this basis, a Muslim has the responsibility to cover and conceal others' faults and avoid from revealing and publicizing of them that causes Muslims' disgracing or jeopardizing of the public chastity. However, in a concealed way, Muslims are allowed to aware others of their faults and to ask them not to commit those immoral or wrong deeds to follow their responsibility of recommending doing good and enjoining not to commit what is illegal.

The main reason of sensitivity of Islam about prostitution expansion and revealing of others' affairs, besides the rational necessity and legal obligation of denial of one's faults from others and prevention of revealing of faults and secrets that their publicizing is not permitted and deserved, is the negative, social effects related to revealing of people's secrets that results in expansion of prostitution and social corruption.

Meanwhile, keeping of human beings' inborn greatness and reverence necessitates that besides banning others, the person himself also keeps away from the publicizing and revealing of his own secrets that causes his personality images damaging and faces his hidden secrets.

Thus, while Islam emphatically, prohibits state, legislators and their agents and others also from investigation and entering to people's privacy and revealing their secrets such as their moral corruption, it does not permit the privacy owner to reveal and expand that type of his secrets that as they necessitate to be kept secret, they are classified as naked or allow others to reveal them.

While perhaps in many cases the privacy owners can allow others to have access and interfere within their own privacy, where the possibility of others' access and entrance to people's privacy cause expansion of prostitution in society, this right is not available for the privacy owner.

4. Prohibition of fault-finding from others

The meaning of fault-finding is that human beings attempt to find out others faults and reveal their sins, deficiencies and faults that are hidden from others. It is obvious that the beginning and the necessity of fault-finding characteristic are an attempt to enter and violate others' privacy with the aim of becoming aware of their deficiencies and shortcomings.

One of the moral greatnesses in the instructions of Islam is the characteristic of covering others' faults. The importance of this good characteristic is to that extent that the Prophet of Islam (S) states, "Anyone who notices an unfavorable and disgraceful deeds from his religious brother and keeps it covered, God covers his faults both in this world and the world hereafter."

The Great Prophet of Islam (S) in expressing the importance of this characteristic, compared it with the value of human being's life which is the highest possession of a human in this way that, "Anyone who covers a believed person's disgracefulness is as though survived an alive-buried girl.⁵"

Keeping a person's reputation by covering and not revealing his faults from others according to the Islam's perspective is the chivalry of fault-covering the person.

It is narrated that one day the Prophet (S) asked Imam Ali (a.s) what he would do if he saw a man slept over a prostitute. Imam Ali (a.s) said that he would cover her. The Prophet stated that if you saw that again, what he would do and he stated that till three times he would cover her with his cloak.

Then the Prophet (S) praised Imam Ali's (a.s) chivalry and stated, "Cover the faults of your religious brothers."

The importance of covering the faults is to that degree that it is going to be considered even in dooms day besides in this world. And it is expressed in some narrations that in Doms day the Prophet of Islam will request God to take his followers' deeds into account away from the look of angels and other religions prophets not to let the Muslims' faults become apparent and publicized and their reputations be kept. God accepts his Prophet's request.

One of the vices, considered in Islam as the worst sins, is fault-finding.

The Great Quran in different verses attempts to avoid people from this vice. Faultfinders are addressed in the great Quran in this way:

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ

Woe to every backbiter, slanderer. (Quran, 104: 1)

... وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ...

Do not find fault with one another. (Quran 49: 11)

The Prophet of Islam (S) introduced those who are looking for finding others' faults or deficiencies the worst people and states explicitly: "Do not be faultfinders, flatterers, tongue-lashing and aggressive."[6](#)

In Islam even keeping company with those who are after degrading others' virtues and making their faults apparent is forbidden [7](#)

In Al-Miraj Tradition (Ascension to heaven) of the Holy Prophet (S), it is told from the Prophet, "When I ascended to the heavens by the command of the most high God, I have seen a group of people that their flesh were cut from their hips and forced them to eat. They were told 'eat! As you were eating your Muslim brothers' flesh in the world.'" I asked Gabriel that who they were and he answered that these were faultfinders and slanderers among your followers."[8](#)

It should be noted that faultfinding does not just result in defaming of a person. This disagreeable characteristic in addition to defaming the person having that the fault, causes the expansion of corruption or prostitution in society. And also the neglectfulness of the faultfinding person about his own weak points and faults and makes him blind to his faults and sharp-eyed to others' faults.

In most cases, faultfinders start to investigate and inspect in people's private affairs to gain information about others' faults in those investigations and inspections. They concentrated on others' negative and bad points and pay no attention to people's positive or correct points.

The vicious characteristic of fault-finding besides being a disease, rooted in personality weakness, is a physiological abnormality and a desire for materialism and wealth-gathering and it should be regarded a social abnormality. In fact and that in addition to its personal impression in disgracing and dishonoring people's privacy, changes to be a serious impediment in the path of human beings perfection and elevation in the social area. Besides disturbing of personal security, causes divergence, disunion and disorder in social security and instability in social unity. It is also the cause of the expansion of pessimism.

The Great Quran while forbidding Muslims from following such vicious characteristics, states the roots of faultfinding as:

- A. Weakness of faith and trust in most high God⁹.
- B. Dissembling and hypocrisy. ¹⁰
- C. Debauchery and libertinism¹¹.
- D. Cruelty and oppression¹².
- E. Contamination to sins and crimes¹³.

Islam considers fault-finders as deserving of punishment and not only deprives them from divine guidance and blessing¹⁴, but also promises them a painful torment both and the world hereafter¹⁵. Of course, the results of faultfinding are not limited to the heavenly punishments and its effect in this world for faultfinders is public disgracing and appearing of their faults. As the great Prophet of Islam (S) said, "O! Those who apparently turned to Islam but did not let it to overwhelm your hearts, be not after Muslim's faults for disgracing them. Because the person who is seeking people's faults, God reveals his faults and he will be disgraced and defamed."¹⁶

Somewhere else the Prophet said, "Anyone who reveals a vice or fault of his Muslim brother, God will reveal his viciousness to that degree that he will be disgraced and defamed in his own home."¹⁷

Doubtlessly, faultfinders by being jealous about others and having the feeling of abjectness and humbleness before they do this disagreeable and indecent and cannot tolerate others' success and

promotion.

It should not be thought that Islam's emphasis on covering others faults means that the denial and senselessness about others' viciousness and faults and means not disgracing and publicizing others' defects and keeping their reputations. Reminding people's defects to them, on special conditions and with the aim of removing of these faults, are of human beings responsibilities. Denial of others' faults and viciousness that just causes the continuation of their disgraceful and unfavorable behavior is like the vicious act of that faultfinder person and is considered as a betrayal to humanity.

Removing of faults in accordance with exercising the principle of the 'Promotion of good and prevention of evil.' is one of the merited characteristics of believed and faithful people (moreover is of his religious and humanistic responsibilities) that besides social purification and cleansing causes people's perfection.

The difference between removing of faults and fault-finding is that removing of faults is exercised benevolently and with the aim of the purification and correction of the person having the fault. Whereas in faultfinding there is no motivation but others' humiliation and degrading. Therefore, faultfinding result is not but people's defaming and disgracing and expansion of prostitution and viciousness.

The practice of removing of faults is always based on honest and hidden reminding, private and right criticisms by a respectful considering the person's, having the fault, individual position and personality.

It is as in fault-finding people's faults and deficiencies will be appeared and by a public and incorrect criticism people's personalities will be assaulted and this will cause a reverse result.

The last point is this that in removing faults as in 'Promotion of good and prevention of evil.' this condition is made that firstly the person must start mentioning his own faults and then compassionately and in a reforming way criticize others' defects as the treatment of the faultfinding as a disease.

5. Prohibition of suspicion to others

The meaning of suspicion is that a person to suspect others' words and deeds distrustfully in the way that his suspicion and mistrust rely on an acceptable reason or actualized manifestation that prevents trust and certainty on the others' apparent deeds and actions.

The roots of suspicion as one of the important behavior abnormalities are:

- A. Disregarding others' privacy and a desire to investigate in others' personal affairs and gossiping.
- B. Slandering about others that unwillingly results in the strengthening the sense of mistrust and suspicion to others.

The reason that a person suspects others is that he suffers from psychological unbalance and agitation.

C. Dominance and prevalence of the Satan over the human beings' minds and thoughts that is the result of keeping distance from divine piety and causes temptation and the strength of negativism in the suspicious person.

In the verses of the Great Quran and the Prophet's manner of living and other great people of Islam, suspicion to others is considered as one of the main roots of investigation and inspection in others' privacy and there are emphases on avoiding from and eradicating this faithful psychological disease.

The Great Quran forbids the believers from being suspicious about others and takes many suspicions as sin and states:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ

Believers, abstain from most suspicion, some suspicion are a sin, (Quran, 49: 12)

The Almighty God regards suspicion an outstanding plague and the reason for the society corruption.

وَلظننتم ظنَّ السوءِ وكنتم قوماً بوراً

So you harbored evil thoughts, and so you are a destroyed nation. (Quran, 48: 12)

From the perspective of Quran, suspicion and mistrust do not make people needless about the truth.

وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئاً

Suspicion does not make people needless about the truth. (Quran, 53:28)

The Great Prophet of Islam (S) recommended people for avoiding from being suspicious and states, "Avoiding from suspicion be upon you as suspicion is the most form of lie."[18](#)

Doubtlessly, relying on suspicion and doubt causes disturbance of the people's personal and social relations and humiliation of people's personalities and instability of trust among people of the society. This is in obvious contrast with the policies of Islam that are after the promotion of people of the society public unity and the stability of their relations. Islam's great Prophet (S), expressing people's privacy, considered avoidance of suspicions as divine commands and stated, "Truly, the Great God takes a reverence for Muslims' lives and possessions of being suspected."[19](#)

The great Prophet of Islam (S) introduced suspicion to others as the cause of the faith destruction and states, "When you accused your Muslim brother, your faith will be eliminated like the dissolving of salt in water."

Strategies recommended in the exalted Islamic teachings for avoidance from suspicion are:

A. Suspicion to oneself: If a Muslim has always suspected his own deeds and actions and finds his faults, he will never become suspicion to others and as in the statements of the great men of the religion, suspicions and doubt to one's own self are the signs of being a believer.

B. Favor ideas about others: Favorable ideas about others and regarding oneself not higher than others and interpreting Muslim brothers' behaviors as best as possible are of the rules of Islam.

Hence, where Muslims find an opportunity, they must interpret their brothers' actions and deeds in the best way till they find evidence against such interpretations that proves their opposites.

There is no doubt that having favorable ideas and mutual respects to others create public trust in stability of human beings' relations.

C. The ignoring of suspicions to others: Considering the evil results of negativism and suspicion, till the malevolence behind the others' deeds and words are not proved, their words and deeds must be trusted.

Thinking and thoughtfulness in cases of suspicion and surveying of the possibilities of truth and optimism about others' deeds and words.

D. Avoidance of accompanying and company of those who are suffering of paranoia about others. Temptations of such people cause the provocation of evil sense of suspicion in human beings.

E. Noticing to some regulations in Islam such as 'Asalat al-Sehhah' and 'Sogh al-Muslimin' that illustrates the necessity of interpreting of others' deeds and words in a right and merited manner and not providing the opportunities for skepticism or doubt about others' deeds and words. These favorable ideas cause that if we witness a man and a woman alone instead of suspicion and doubt by relying on these principles think of a proper relation between them.

F. Having control over perceptive ways: Human beings' members and organs (as the means of his perception) have an important role in creation of suspicious about others. Attempting to violate people's privacy by eavesdropping, peeping eye and gossiping are the most important elements of catching suspicion.

The Holy Quran by reminding the responsibilities of human main members and organs makes human being avoid from any interpretation that does not rely on any right knowledge and understanding and stated:

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ ۚ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

Do not follow what you do not know. The hearing, sight and heart about all these you shall be questioned. (Quran, 17:36)

G. Not preparing the grounds of suspicion: Certainly, people's not attempts to do actions resulting in others' suspicion are of importance in decreasing of having such psychological abnormalities.

6. Prohibition of Gossiping about Others

'Gossiping' is of viciousness that Islam emphasizes a lot on quitting that.

The meaning of 'gossip' in Islamic culture is that a person talks about someone in the absence of him/her and this makes absentee unhappy and discontentment after becoming aware.

The main elements for recognizing someone's words as 'gossip' are:

- A. Expressing a subject about a person in his absence.
- B. Uncertainty about the rightness or wrongness of the gossip subject.
- C. Sadness and discontentment of the person others gossiped about.

In some statements of the religion great people, it is stated that gossip is that you say something about your Muslim brother that God covers that for him.

It should be noted that in the fulfillment of gossiping, awareness of the person gossiped about is not a criterion; however, the criterion is the person's discontentment if what is said is expressed before him.

According to the saying of the prophet (S) , the difference between 'gossip' and 'calumny' is that 'gossip' is something real said about another person that God covers it from others but in 'calumny' what is expressed about others is not real.

It should not be thought that gossiping is exclusive in 'talking' in the absence of others. Gossiping can also be realized in the form of actions or sarcasm.

According to the Holy Quran, the origins and causes of gossiping are: absence of piety, desire to inspect in others' private affairs, suspicions and doubts (49:12), desire for wealth-gathering, excessive interest in the worldly matters, and world charming manifestations (104:1 & 2).

In the teachings of Islam, gossiping is recognized as one of the greatest sins and weak-minded actions and Muslims are forbidden from doing that.

The Great Quran forbids Muslims from gossiping in this way:

وَلَا يَغْتَابَ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا ۖ أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ ۖ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ

Nor backbite one another would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely, you would loathe it. Fear Allah, without doubt Allah turns (in mercy) and he is the merciful. (Quran, 49: 12)

The Holy Prophet (S) stated to Abu Dharr, one of his followers, "O! Abu Dharr avoids gossiping as it is worse than adultery."[20](#)

The Prophet of Islam (S) also regards gossiping a sign of people's stimulator faith in Islam and not penetrating of this faith in their hearts and stated, "He who surmises that he is the child of a legal marriage is lying if he eats people's flesh by gossiping."

From the Holy Quran perspective, gossiping about others is in fact the violation of their privacy, dignity and reputation. Especially, if this wrong, disgraceful and unfavorable act is done in the absence of the people about whom are gossiped in a way that they would not have the opportunity of defending themselves about the violation of their personality and abstract privacy.

Gossiping besides the destruction of people's personality and violation of their personality, has destructive influences on people's social lives. It causes the instability of the public trust that is the greatest investment and dynamic element of society.

Moreover, moral bases of society, due to the expansion of gossiping, gets instable and weakened and finally results in disunity and elimination of social safety and causes society disunity and dispersion. Hence, the prohibition of gossiping among people of society in addition to bringing security for society people's privacy, reputation and prestige, is in fact the guarantee of social safety and promotion of public trust. The Great Prophet of Islam (S) said, "Anyone who gossips about a Muslim man or woman, God won't accept his forty-day prays and fasting till the person about who has been gossiped forgives him/her."

Noticing this point is of importance that one of the important elements of expansion of gossiping in society and encouraging elements for the gossiping person to follow this disgraceful act is the listener's eagerness and willingness for listening to others' gossip. Therefore, one of the effective ways to control the gossiping is preventing the gossiping person from doing such act with verbal reminding, in accordance with the principle of 'Promotion of good and prevention of evil'; and showing reluctance for listening to gossips as a passive resistance against gossiping people; and banishing them from society and not keeping company with them. The Great Prophet (S) stated, "Be aware that anyone who is patient for not listening to a gossip about his believed brother and prevents gossiping about him, God closes one thousand doors of worldly and heavenly viciousness for him . If he does not prevent from gossiping while having the power to do so the burden of seventy sins of the gossiping person will be on his shoulders."

In the Holy Quran, three points are recommended for Muslims for quitting the unfavorable habit of gossiping:

A. Following Godly piety, as the most important preventive element of human being from committing all sins such as the sin of gossiping about others. (*Quran, 49: 12*)

B. Considering and recognizing the reality of gossiping about others that in the Holy Quran it is interpreted as eating one's own flesh.

C. Noticing the constant presence of God and his perfect and absolute knowledge and awareness about all human deeds, actions and even thoughts such as gossiping about others.[21](#)

Islamic precepts regard gossiping in some cases not only legal but also necessary and are exceptions of prohibition of gossiping about others.

Some of these exceptions are:

A. Gossiping about the cruel and expressing his cruelty, when people are in the stance of pleading for justice or litigation as the Prophet of Islam (S) said, "The right and one whose right is lost can gossip regardless how disturbing gossiping can be."

B. Gossiping about a sinner with the aim of his correction and returning him from misleading way and his salvation provided its necessity.

C. Gossiping about a person who commits debauchery and libertinism and is known for such acts.

D. Gossiping about others in the stance of adduction of witnesses in a court and with the aim of claiming the right.

E. Gossiping about others with the aim of consulting and taking counsel when necessary.

F. Expressing of something which is apparent in a person (like being hasty) and is obvious to others too in not taken as gossiping.

7. Prohibition of Any Assault against People's Reputation

From the viewpoint of Islam, people's reputation is the reason of the lifetime of their identities and personalities.

Believers have a special place before the almighty God to that degree that the Holy Quran states:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدَافِعُ عَنِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

Allah will defend those who believe. (*Quran, 22:38*)

Hence, how people have such daring to tear up the curtain covering one's reputation that the Unique

God is his defender, to reveal his secret, to publicize his defects and to slander and to disrepute him?

Respect to a believer's reputation and dignity is so important that the respected Prophet of Islam (S) considers that of more importance than respect to Kabaa. Doubtlessly, keeping others' reputation and respect as one of the most important teachings of the surviving school of Islam is of such emphasis that the glorious Prophet of Islam (S) in the last pilgrimage to Kabaa (Hujjat al-Wida') sermon, presented in the last trip to Kabaa in the temple of Mecca while addressing a great number of Muslims announced, "O! People as these days- time of Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) - and this city- the great Mecca - are respectful, your bloods and reputations are respectful too. You do not have the right of shedding your bloods and offending to your reputations till the time of visiting God."

Before God, the importance of a person's reputation who observes divine commands and restrictions is to that degree that God of all worlds conceals his faults even from His angels and makes him respectful before others.

It is stated in narrations that the respected Prophet of Islam (S) demands God's court to bestow him the surveying of his followers' deeds in the doomsday to him so that if they had any deficiency or fault, not to become disgraced before other prophets.

In response to the Prophet (S) comes this answer that I [God] take the surveying of your followers' deeds, myself, so that if they have a fault even you will not be aware of.

The religion of Islam respects a believer's reputation in this way and for keeping humanistic personality and respect conceals his faults.

In Islamic lofty teachings, protecting of others' reputations has a particular value before God and a person who rises to protect another person's reputation is a neighbor of Him as respected Prophet of Islam (S) said, "Anyone who prevents his believed brother dishonor, God prevents his face from the hell fire."

He also stated, "Anyone protecting his brother's reputation while he is absent. It is upon God to keep him from hell."

Imam Ali (a.s), the successor of the respected Prophet of Islam in expressing the stage and position of a person who respects and safeguards others' dignity by sacrificing his own reputation states, "Grant your possession to one who disregarded his reputation for you since nothing can be equal to keeping the reputation."

Sacrificing lives for protecting of a Muslim's reputation is allowed in Islam the Holy Prophet (S) said, "Everything of Muslims such as lives, reputations and bloods are illegal for other Muslims, even in some cases possessions and lives can be sacrificed for keeping a believer's reputation and prestige."

Considering this point is of importance that human beings besides their obligation to keep others

reputation and dignity, must always attempt to keep their own reputation and honor. In other words, from the perspective of Islam, people not only do have the right of assaulting others' reputations but also do not have the right of belittling his own personality and is upon him to shun any deed or action that causes his humanistic value and greatness before others.

Imam Ali (a.s) about the necessity of keeping one's own honor and reputation said, "Your reputation is on your forehead and your requests causes to drip that drop by drop [like drops of your sweet]. Hence, look before whom you let it fall."

The Great God determined a heavenly remuneration for those people striving to keep their humanistic greatness as the Holy Prophet stated, "Instead of what people keep their reputation by that, alms and charity are considered for him."

As mentioned before, human's reputation and prestige as his identity and spiritual dimension are regarded an important part of people's privacy. Violation of it from the perspective of Islam penal law are among the worst sins and even are taken worse than incest. One who did this act not only deserves worldly punishments but also as a person who proclaimed war against God by assaulting a Muslim's reputation is promised of a divine painful torment.

The religion of Islam's sensitivity for observing the privacy of people's reputation is because the beginning of violation to others' reputation is inspection and interference within their privacy area which finally leads to the violating person's error and misleading. According to some narrations from the religion's great men the closest position of person to blasphemy is when he counts a person who is his religion brother's faults to blame him a day for these faults.

The Holy Prophet (S) about the evil influences of assaulting a Muslim's reputation and prestige in offended person's beliefs and faith said, "When a believer accesses his religion brother, his faith will be eliminated like the dissolving of salt in water."

8. Prohibition of Tale-bearing

Tale-bearing is of moral viciousness that are the result of the revealing of people's secrets and violation of their privacy and avoidance of committing such acts are emphasized in Islam.

The meaning of the term 'tale-bearing' here is expressing and revealing a subject about a person that results in making his faults or deficits become apparent in a way that if he becomes aware of this, he will be upset and sad about what is said about him.

In fact, tale-bearer expresses a talk that another person said about the listener while he does not allow its revealing.

'Tale-bearing' may happen orally or verbally or in a written form or even by other means such as signs

or body language.

Meanwhile, there is no difference between what the aims or purpose of the 'tale-bearing' is. Either with the aim of assaulting the personality of one, who is the victim of his secrets revealing, or with the aim of fun or sycophant and supererogatory service to the listener, or bearing tales for others or having an undue sense of curiosity.

The Great Prophet of Islam (S) introduces tale-bearers as the worst people and emphasized that tale-bearers will not enter the paradise.[22](#) (

From the viewpoint of the Glorious Quran the act of the talebearer is cutting what God commanded for its connection:

وَالَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ اللَّعْنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ

As for those who break the covenant of Allah after accepting it, who part what he has commanded to be united and worked corruption in the land, a curse shall be laid on them, and they shall have an evil abode. (Quran, 13:25)

The influence of tale-bearing is that it changes the kindness and intimacy among people to hatred and hostility and turns society people's unity and unanimity to disunity and dispersion.

In the statements of the religion of Islam's great men, tale-bearing is interpreted as sorcery which causes the separation between friends and relatives, planting the seeds of hostility and disharmony among people who have been unanimous and in agreement with each other and also blood-shedding and ruining of homes and revealing of people's secrets. Therefore, the Holy Prophet of Islam stated, "one who occupies himself with telling others' tales among people, the Great God will put a great fire over his grave."[23](#)

In fact, the main reason the Islamic religious law regards tale-bearing illegal and considers it as capital sin and pledges Godly punishments for tale-bearer is the destructive and irreparable influences of his act.

It is narrated from the great Prophet (S) that he stated, "I saw on the paradise door it was engraved that "you are illegal to talebearers."[24](#)"

In Islamic teachings confronting with this inauspicious and destructive phenomenon is emphasized in this way that Muslims be ignorant to what tale-bearers tell and take their words either right or wrong as lie to make tale-bearers dissuaded by such passive resistance.

The Great Quran forbids following of tale-bearers by stating:

وَلَا تُطِيعُ كُلَّ حَالِفٍ مَهِينٍ هَمَّازٍ مَشَاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ

And do not obey every mean swear, the backbiter who goes about slandering. (Quran, 68: 10-11)

The manner of the great Prophet of Islam (S) was also like that and it is narrated from him, “No one of my companions must tell me something about the other one as I like when coming to you my chest be free from the talks about people²⁵.”

Even in the prohibitions of the Holy Prophet (S), it is mentioned that the Prophet prohibits Muslims from tale-bearing and listening to tales about others²⁶.

9. Prohibition of Eavesdropping

Eavesdropping that in Farsi is ‘esteraq e sam’. The first part of this term ‘esteraq’ comes from the infinitive of ‘serqat’ which literally means ‘stealing’ and idiomatically means ‘doing something in a hidden way’.

The meaning of ‘esteraq e sam’ is ‘listening to someone’s talk in a hidden way’ and includes unlawful and hidden listening to peoples’ conversations or controlling them by using instruments like environmental or phone conversations bugging or recording tools.

Today methods of bugging include: using technologies and listening to conversations by means of fixed or mobile phones, satellite, computer, internet or other developed instruments.

From Islamic religious law, bugging is illegal and one who attempts to control people’s conversations in a hidden way and becomes aware of their secrets in this way, committed inspections in others’ privacy and according to the explicit wording of the Quran his act is sin and illegal. (Quran, 49:12)

The Great Quran about the responsibility of human body organs states:

إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

The hearing, sight and heart about all these you shall be questioned. (Quran, 17:36)

In the Great Prophet’s interpretation of eavesdropping it is stated, “There is a share of adultery for any member of human members and the adultery of the human ear is listening to some talks in a concealed way.”

In Islamic precepts while some punitive punishments are determined for those eavesdropping in this world, there are heavenly punishments for them too. As the Great Prophet (S) stated, “During dooms day, in the ears of anyone listening to others’ talks in a hidden way while they are dissatisfied or hears

others talks and the speakers keep distance from him and hate him melted copper is poured.[27](#)”

10. Prohibition of eyes peeping

‘Eyes peeping’ means a concealed and illegal look at everything located in people’s privacy and the owner of the privacy has no desire and satisfaction if others look at that and because of that he did not expose it to others look publicly. This includes what is of people’s privacy automatically or a person, himself, puts it into his privacy.

In the precepts of Islamic religious law, ‘eyes dropping’ is known as a disgraceful act and one of the capital sins and Muslims are prohibited from converting of their eyes and having hidden look at others’ privacy and one doing them deserves punishment.

The Great Quran blames eyes betrayal and states:

يَعْلَمُ خَائِنَةَ الْأَعْيُنِ وَمَا تُخْفِي الصُّدُورُ

God knows treacherous eyes and what concealed in the breasts. (Quran, 40: 19)

Doubtlessly one of the obvious instances of eye betrayal is eyes peeping and without–permission looks to people’s privacy.

Meanwhile the Great Quran commands Muslims to control their eyes and looks:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ وَقُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَغْضُضْنَ مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِنَّ وَيَحْفَظْنَ فُرُوجَهُنَّ وَلَا يُبْدِينَ زِينَتَهُنَّ إِلَّا مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا ۗ وَلْيَضْرِبْنَ بِخُمُرِهِنَّ عَلَىٰ جُيُوبِهِنَّ....

Say to the believers they should lower their gaze and guard their private part that is purer for them. Allah is aware of the things they do. And say to the believing women, that they lower their gaze cast down their eyes and guard their chastity, and do not reveal their adornment.... (Quran, 24:30 -31)

The great Prophet (S) regards looking at the way of misdemeanor a kind of adultery and states, “There is a share of adultery for any member of human members and the adultery of the eye is looking.”

The importance and role of looks in human beings’ spiritual health are to that degree that Imam Ali introduced eyes as the Satan ambushes that the eyes disobediences causes the grounds for human beings misdemeanor and Satan’s prevalence.

The Prophet of Islam states about hidden and without–permission looking at others’ correspondences said, “Whoever looks at his brother’s letters is like he is looking at his nakedness.[28](#)”

Considering the importance determined by the Islam for keeping others' privacy, it is necessary that people attempt to recognize the preventive elements of this disease and moral and spiritual misdemeanor and try to eliminate the grounds and beginnings of having it. For instance, observing 'estizan' ceremony and asking for permission from the house or privacy owners before entering there is one of the preventive elements of eyes dropping in people's privacy.

11. Prohibition of Cursing and Swearing

'Sabb' meaning cursing and swearing to others and in Islam not only Muslims but also non-Muslims are prohibited from it explicitly.

The Great Quran about forbidding cursing to non-Muslims states:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۗ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ
فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Do not say crude words to those who call upon other than Allah, lest they use crude words about Allah in revenge without knowledge. As such we have made the actions of each nation seem pleasing. To their Lord they shall return, and he will inform them of that they were doing. (Quran, 6: 108)

The Holy Prophet (S) considers cursing and swearing as disobedience from God and debauchery and stated, "Cursing to a believer is disobedience from God and fighting with him is a blasphemy and eating his flesh-gossiping about Muslims is a sin against God and a respect to a believer's possession is like a respect to his blood."[29](#)

When a person expresses a subject about another person in a way that listening it causes his sadness and offense, that person is committed the sin of gossiping, even if he does not mean to assault or curse him. In the case that the gossiping person had the aim of assaulting and cursing, besides the sin of gossiping, he committed the sin of assaulting and cursing him.

As mentioned before, from the Islamic perspective, the reverence of human beings' reputation is equal to his life and soul. Cursing a person is a violation of his reputation and dignity and is an obvious instance of violation of people's privacy.

The sin of cursing is known disgracing and defaming to that degree that is introduced as the cause of the death of cursing the person in narrations as the Great Prophet (S) said, "Cursing a believer puts people at the edge of perdition and destruction."[30](#)

Moreover, cursing will have an irreparable evil impression of the cursing person such as creating disunity and hostility among the people. The great Prophet (S) said, "Do not curse at people as you will make

them your enemies and foes.”

The Glorious Quran also states explicitly that cursing at others causes them to swear at the beliefs of the cursing person due to their ignorance and nescience.

It is narrated that the Holy Prophet (S) never was abusive and it was not exclusive to Muslims as he never cursed at non-Muslims too.

- [1.](#) Mizan al-Hikma, Reyshahri, P. 391.
- [2.](#) Sunan Ibn Dawood, V.4, P.272.
- [3.](#) Paragraph. C, Article. 18.
- [4.](#) Tahrir al-Wasilah, Khomeini, P.94.
- [5.](#) Mizan al-Hikmah, Vol.9, P. 422.
- [6.](#) Makarem al-Akhlaq, P.467
- [7.](#) Ghurar al-Hikam: 9565
- [8.](#) Plague of the Tongue, Vol.1, P.251
- [9.](#) See Quran, 49:11.
- [10.](#) See Quran, 9:80 and 83:30 & 36.
- [11.](#) See Quran, 9:80.
- [12.](#) See Quran, 49:11.
- [13.](#) See Quran, 83:30 & 29.
- [14.](#) See Quran, 9:80.
- [15.](#) See Quran, 9:79, 83:29 & 36 and 2:16.
- [16.](#) Usul al-Kafi, Vol.3, P.355.
- [17.](#) Al-Targhib va Al-Tarhib, Vol. 2, P.293, Tradition 9
- [18.](#) Mizan al-Hikmah, P. 293.
- [19.](#) Bihar al -Anwar, vol.72, P.201.
- [20.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, Vol.8, P. 55.
- [21.](#) See Quran, 4:148.
- [22.](#) Al-Targhib, Vol. 3, P. 496 and Sahih Muslim, Vol. 1, P. 101.
- [23.](#) Wasail al -Shiah, Vol.11, P. 203.
- [24.](#) Irshad al-Qulub, Tradition. 1391.
- [25.](#) Riyaz al- Salehin, P.585.
- [26.](#) Safinat al- Bihar, Vol. 2, P. 613.
- [27.](#) Sajestani, Vol. 2, P. 883.
- [28.](#) Safinat al-Bihar
- [29.](#) Wasail al-Shi'ah, Sheikh Hurr Ameli
- [30.](#) Wasail al- Shi'ah, Sheikh Hurr Ameli

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