

Part 22

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ، إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ، وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا، وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا، أَيُّبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا؟ فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ، وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ﴾

“O you who believe! Avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you abhor it; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful. (49: 12)”

Ignorance is no excuse

Now only a few days of this dear month are left for us to benefit from. The last verses of this Chapter give some legal rulings. These commands are for action and therefore knowing them and acting according to them is obligatory. These verses are a constitution, not mere admonition (which may only be discussed). It is not recommendatory; they are Almighty Allah's commands, which must be understood by all and obeyed sincerely.

If somebody is unaware of it, it is no excuse. If on the Day of Judgment tomorrow, someone says that he did not know about it he will be asked: “Why did not you learn?” nobody can say: I was ignorant. Ignorance is no excuse. It is mentioned in *Usul al-Kafi* that Imam Sadiq has said, “I am inclined to have a whip in my hand and to hit it on the heads of my Shias so that they become knowledgeable.”¹

The words are “Gain deep knowledge of religion.” Therefore, a Shia of the Progeny of Muhammad is one who knows the solution of religious problems, who knows what is permissible and what is unlawful. What is for trial, about what one is responsible and answerable. All these things must be known to him. This makes one a jurisprudent, the one who knows the roots and braches of religion. I want to narrate

these commands. Give due importance to them. It is obligatory to know them and to understand them properly and then to obey them or act according to them. Now be prepared and attentive so that I may proceed with the last verses of this holy chapter.

Do not take it in the wrong sense

It is mentioned that “Soo-e-Zann” (having adverse opinion) is that, for instance, one sees in a believer and hears something from him and imagines that it is not good; that it is bad or said with a bad intention. Suppose he hears a word from him but is not sure whether he abused or praised him. Yet he says, “No, he surely abused me.” Thus he takes it for corruption (trouble). He could have also said that it appeared to me like that but may be he did not abuse me; perhaps he has praised me.

In case a man has no certainty and there is scope for the matter being otherwise he has no right to take it for granted that what he saw or heard was badly intended. Even if you clearly hear a bad word you should imagine that perhaps he was not attentive enough, perhaps the poor person had become helpless. Maybe he did not recognize me. So much so that the Imam says, “Belie your hearing and your sight.”²

Even if you saw with your eyes and heard with your own ears but that person says: No, I did not say so. Then say: I heard it wrong, man makes mistake, but do not say: In my opinion you said so. Likewise man also makes mistake in seeing or observing things. You cannot say: I saw it with my own eyes. It is possible that what you saw was confusing and you had misunderstood.

Circle of fire and running of trees

For example, if a ball of fire is rotated fast it creates an illusion and it seems there is a circle of fire. The fact is that there is nothing like a circle. Since the illuminating things revolve speedily, one image sent by the eye does not reach the mind before another image comes up. This creates an illusion.

Or, perhaps, you are traveling in a car or a train. If you look out, you see that the ground runs speedily and you imagine that your car or train is stationary. This is an illusion. So even if you have seen something yourself say: Perhaps I made a mistake in seeing. Do not imagine adverse possibility. Perhaps you have to repent afterwards when you know that the matter was otherwise and not as imagined.

He did not respond because he was deaf

About thirty years ago there was an old gentleman known to me. I said to him, “Salam.” But he did not respond. I did so for quite a few times but the old man did not reply. I became uneasy and told myself, “When he is not responding to my Salam why should I go on saluting him?” That gentleman expired after some time. Then it was known in a meeting that he had become deaf a few years before his

departure. But since I did not know about it and as he did not respond to my salute, I imagined that he did that deliberately.

So, in such cases, say: Perhaps, I saluted in a very low voice or perhaps his hearing is weak. Do not say directly that he did not respond to me. If man ponders over this matter seriously he will realize that ignoring such Qur'anic commands brings troubles in society due to baseless allegations. How bad if the one whom you blamed was a friend of God. An allegation against a friend of God! Who knows what will happen to such persons. Many calamities come on account of having an adverse opinion and then reacting to it without any hesitation.

Having a bad opinion about a friend of God is dangerous

It is noted that in the holy Mashad city a religious minded trader intended to proceed for his obligatory pilgrimage of Hajj. In the past, Hajj journeys used to be quite long. So he wanted an honest man whom he can entrust his household and business affairs, including his family. There was a businessman, famous for his piety and righteousness. Everyone whom he asked that who was honest and pious in the town recommended him.

So the trader said to that famous Haji, "O Haji! I intend to go for Hajj. Can you help me?" The Haji replied, "Of course." So the intending Haji handed over the keys of his business premises to the said Haji and also told him, "I entrust my family also to you. Please take a daily round, supply them their requirements and if they have any problem kindly solve them." The Haji accepted. After a few days, this Haji arrived at the door of his friend who had gone for Hajj. Accidentally on that day the door of that house was open. His eyes fell on a woman whose head, face and bosom were uncovered.

This scene made him restless. God forbid, Satan plays his role at such moments. In short, this poor Haji fell madly in love with this woman and was now in a very difficult situation. On one hand his heart was inclined towards the wife of another man and on the other his prestige was in danger. Besides a danger to his Hereafter and God's anger, his life-long respect was about to go away with the wind. How ill-famed he would become if he inclined to the wife of someone else. He may not be able to continue his trade and business in Mashad. It is written that the poor fellow then sought refuge of Imam Reza so that his wild longing for that woman be removed from his heart.

He said, "O God! What a difficulty is this? O God! What should I do? O God! Relieve me from this satanic trouble." Then he was told in a dream, "You should go to such and such town: (In my opinion, it was, perhaps, Ray). There in such and such area lives a Shaykh. His name and sign is this and this. Go to him. He will cure the illness of your heart."

So the Haji went to that city and inquired about the whereabouts of that Shaykh. People spoke ill of that Shaykh and mentioned his numerous evil traits. In short, they told the trader, "O Haji! You are a respectable person coming from Mashad to see this Shaykh who is not even a Muslim? He is an

Armenian and a disbeliever. His lives in the street of Armenians and drinks wine. A bottle of wine is always found in before him. He is also a homosexual and a young boy is always found beside him.” This poor Haji had come all along from Mashad with a hope that this Shaykh would cure his spiritual ailment.

Anyhow, he found out his house and saw that there was the Shaykh having a turban on head and a bottle in front of him with glasses and also a young boy sitting near him. He asked that Shaykh, “O Sir, first of all let me know what is your religion?” The Shaykh, a servant of God, said, “By God, we are Muslim; There is no god except Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.” He again asked, “Well, if you are a Muslim. I have a problem and was advised to approach you but on arrival here I face a more serious problem. First of all, please solve that difficulty.” “All right,” said the Shaykh , “tell me.” The Haji from Mashad said, “If you are a Muslim scholar why do you stay in the area of Armenians? O Master! Why this bottle of wine in front of you? Sir! Why a young boy besides you?”

The Shaykh replied, “O Haji! By Allah, I have not come to the area of Armenians. This house, which you see is the property of my forefathers. Formerly this was a Muslim area. Then the Armenians started coming here and bought houses around our house. I did not sell my house. Does this make me an Armenian?” He said, “How shameless are the people. How they talk? What a bad opinion they form about a Muslim! Now about this bottle. Please taste from it a little so that you may know what it is.” He poured some of it in a cup. It was orange juice. Then he said, “This young boy is the son of my brother who has expired. I am taking care of him keeping him with me.”

The Haji then said, “O Master! When your deeds are so nice, just do one thing. Make your outward appearance like your inner self so that people may not talk nonsense about you. Leave this area and change your condition so that people may not have a bad opinion about you and malign you.” The Shaykh replied, “We do not want that our outward appearance should be so good that people consider us honest and entrust their women to us and go for pilgrimage and then we may develop bad intentions about the women of others and be compelled to travel such a long distance.”

These utterances set the Haji aflame. Without being specific he was made to understand that outward honesty and beauty is dangerous. His heart was changed that very moment. He prepared himself for seeking forgiveness, repenting and returned with a purified heart.

Reality of backbiting and vain excuses

Another command: Some of you must not backbite others– What does backbiting mean? You speak of someone’s defect behind him. You say something, which does not make him happy, not that you make a false allegation against him. There are people who say, when they speak ill of someone, that this is not backbiting, I am talking about his real habit or condition. If you tell the untruth then it is allegation. Curse of God on you. If you make allegation it is a multiple vice. Or he says: I do not say, people talk like this. All are doing wrong like you. Truly, it is a tasteless sin (sin without pleasure) but it has an extraordinary wretchedness. So much so that the Holy Prophet has said, “Backbiting is worse than adultery.”

Perhaps you will be astonished, as adultery is accompanied by sexual pleasure but what taste is there in backbiting! Yet it is said: It is worse. They asked the Holy Prophet: How backbiting was worse even than adultery? He replied, “One indulges in adultery. Thereafter, if he really feels ashamed of it and makes true repentance and sincerely seeks forgiveness, God forgives him. But if one has backbited someone after such backbiting even if he does any amount of repentance and says, O God! Forgive me. O God! Pardon me,’ it is of no use until that person who was backbitten forgives him.”³

That is why backbiting is worse than adultery as it is bilateral whereas adultery concerns only God. Backbiting involves both God and the poor person who is backbitten. Unless that person forgives, the backbiter will not be forgiven by God. If the backbiter wants to repent, he must first approach the one whom he has backbitten and obtain his forgiveness.

Regarding the expiation of backbiting it is mentioned that if one has backbitten a Muslim or quoted a defect of a believer which has come to the notice of that Muslim or believer and then if the backbiter wants to repent, the only remedy is to win the heart of that backbitten person. If the backbiting is not heard by the backbitten person, then the sinner should not go and tell him about it as it is likely to grieve him more and it may result in fresh displeasure. So in such a case the sinner should keep the matter only between him and God. He should tell those to whom he had spoken ill about that he had made a mistake and that what he had said was not true and he would speak well of him. The repentance of backbiting is praising. So one should now speak good about that man who was backbitten and also seek forgiveness from God. This shows how big is the sin of backbiting. This matter is further emphasized in the following verse, which says:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَالْآخِرَةِ﴾

“Surely (as for) those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter;”⁴

Just as it is obligatory for the speaker to speak about these commands it also is obligatory for others to hear them and to understand them – Woe unto one who likes to spread the bad news of a shameful deed, exposing it to others in the society. The first one tells it to the second and the second tells it in a gathering and within a short time it becomes talk of the town. Then he says that so and so says so. Now who told it to ten old ladies? The talk of these ten old ladies also returns to one ignorant old lady who made this mistake.

Then they say that the whole town speaks about it. Hellfire is for the one who spreads a shameless deed by exposing it. Even if you saw it with your own eyes it is your duty to hide it. You have no right to tell about it to anyone. Curse of God on you if you say what you saw. Imam Sadiq has said: One who

spreads and talks about what he saw or heard about a believer is one of those who, as mentioned by God in the Holy Qur'an, will taste a painful chastisement as he liked to expose evil deeds.⁵

Ousted from God's shelter

It is mentioned in *Usul al-Kafi* that Imam Sadiq says: If one says what he saw by his eyes or heard by his ears of what makes one honorless, God drives him out of His shelter even if such man fasted in Ramadhan. The word used is Wilayat (of God). Wilayat is in the meaning of guardianship, love, kindness; that is, God drives him out of His help and hands him over to the devil who also does not accept him. It means such man is so mean and wicked that Satan too does not look at him. Such is a man who says what he saw and what he heard to make one honorless.⁶

The Holy Qur'an also says:

﴿إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا﴾

"...surely, the hearing and the sight and the heart, all of these, shall be questioned about that."⁷

O the ones says anything, O ones who creates adverse opinion, all this will be questioned. Another holy verse says:

﴿وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ﴾

"Wael' (woe) to every slanderer, defamer,"⁸

The Arabic word 'Wael' means a well in hell. For whom is it? – It is for a backbiter who runs after the honor of everyone like a fly buzzing around the body, from head to feet but it sits only at the spot, which is injured, where there is a wound and it feeds on it. Though the body has hundreds of beauties it overlooks all of them but sits only at the defective part. It overlooks and ignores good things and sticks to the defect even if sometimes it is not defective as will be seen in the following tale:

A beautiful mole appears ugly but...

Like Greece, wisdom was also found in India in olden days. It is said that in one of the Indian cities, there were two statues erected at its main gate. One of them was very good-looking, full of niceties. One of its beauties was a black mole on its right cheek. In front of this nice statue they had also erected a very ugly statue, which looked frightened and two long horns were arose from its head. This ugly statue extended its finger pointing to the black mole on the face of the other beautiful statue saying: How

ugly you are. Just look at this black mole. Then they had written these words: This is the condition of man – he does not look at two ugly horns on his head.

He does not see the beauties of others. He looks only at a little black mole though this mole also, at its place is a mark of beauty. You dislike it and see ugliness in it! How sweet are the words of Shaykh: Stop finding faults of others. Look at your own defect and criticize it. (Persian couplet)

Look at your horns. When you see defects in others, also look at your own defects. Be equitable. If you can see one or two drawbacks in others, truly speaking, you can find hundreds of defects in your own self. But who looks at one's own drawbacks? One always thinks nice about oneself (Love of something makes one blind and deaf). For example, Criticizing others he says: that man is ungrateful, he does not observe rights of others, he does not act as one should act with his friends. But, have you observed the rights of God, have you been thankful to Him?

They do not observe the rights of God

A trader, who was a follower of Allamah Majlisi, came to him and said, "O Sir! I have fallen in a difficult situation. Some jugglers are sent to me from Isfahan and they say, 'We want to visit your house tonight.' I am also unable to run away (escape) as these jugglers have connections with the government and are likely to harm me and I am compelled to provide means of play and pastime for them when they arrive. Now what should I do?" Majlisi (may God raise his ranks) replied, "Never mind. I myself will come to that gathering first. Everything will be all right." Then Majlisi offered his evening and night prayer before going to the house of that trader.

The chief juggler arrived with his students but when they saw Majlisi they were displeased as obviously it would not be easy or possible for them so sing and dance in his presence. Majlisi told the chief juggler. What kind of things are you doing? They replied angrily, "Our behavior is better than yours." Majlisi asked, "How is it so?" They replied, "We are grateful and know who has helped us. If we have eaten the salt of somebody (are helped by someone) we remain grateful to him till we breathe our last. We do not become dishonest. We are thankful people. We have magnanimity." Majlisi remained silent for a while, then after a little pause asked them, "Well if you are a grateful lot tell me how much gratefulness you have shown towards your God? Have you not eaten His salt? How much thankful have you been to Him? Have you broken the salt-pan? How many sins have you committed against His Will? Somebody gave you something and you appreciated it. Is this, in your opinion, thankfulness? Realize the kindness of God. Begin from a piece of bread and then go further in appreciating God's beneficence. You have benefited from Him not on one or two days but for the last sixty years. Now you say I am a thankful man! What have you done with regard to the Creator of salt and bread, the Lord of the Universe? Have you thanked Him? Have you served and worshipped Him? Have you not disobeyed Him by sinning?" Hearing these true words, the jugglers rose up one by one and went out. Majlisi also departed.

Next morning after the call for prayer Majlisi heard a knock at his door. He saw that the chief juggler had

come to him, but in what condition? How fortunate is the chief juggler who repents and makes repentance. And woe unto the Haji Sahib who becomes proud. Good end depends on repentance whereby one does not consider himself pious. In brief, the juggler came, sought pardon and said, "O Sir! My entire life passed in negligence. Last night I realized that all of us are totally ungrateful. Now, I have come to repent." The late Majlisi also behaved very nicely with him, took him in his house and showed him the path of repentance saying, make a firm decision not to sin again. Make a promise with God that you will not miss prayer and fasts and that you will not be unmindful of your Lord's commands and duties imposed on you by Him. If you want to thank Him appropriately then never disregard His Commands, give up whatever He orders you not to do.

O the ones who sin with these God-given eyes by looking at prohibited things! You have, by so doing, been ungrateful to God for this great bounty. O the one who has used the God-given ears for hearing impermissible sounds! You are thankless to God. O the one who beats an innocent child with this God-given hand! You are ungrateful. Thankfulness is in using the God-given things for which God has created them. God gave you hands so that you may serve God's creation with them and always perform good deeds. But you did evil things with these hands.

How fortunate is one who, in this holy month of Ramadhan, repents for each and every ungratefulness and makes sincere repentance. The door of Divine Mercy is always open. He forgives the repentant. He does not take back the bounty of tongue, which could make you dumb. Suppose a man is thirsty and is unable to move and is also unable to tell that he is thirsty. What to do? How difficult is this situation! Woe unto one, when the bounty of this tongue will be withdrawn. One may also not be able to say or convey anything by signals. Woe unto you if you become thankless by misusing this tongue by backbiting others and attacking someone's honor. All this is thanklessness and ungratefulness. It is so if you uttered indecent things and sang shameless songs.

Now, come, let us repent over the past. O Lord! You have, so kindly, opened the door of Your Mercy. Zainul Abideen prays: O Lord! If You had not given us anything except the Door of repentance, it would have been enough for us.⁹ This door of repentance is an extraordinary bounty. Man can benefit limitlessly from this door. But woe unto us if we do not take its benefit. How spacious is this door when it is said: Whatever you have done, come and turn towards your Lord and improve yourself, repent, do not get disappointed. Do not say: My tongue cannot count my sins. If your sins are many, God's forgiveness is greater than them, more and higher. Come once with a heavy and repenting heart and see how God forgives you.

Paradise is prohibited for a backbiter

It is written that Paradise has been proclaimed inadmissible to some groups: drunkards, usurers and backbiters.¹⁰ O God! I seek Your refuge from being in any of these groups. Corpse eater is not allowed to enter Paradise. The place of a corpse eater is in dirty places. Dogs gather around a corpse. Some of

them also sit at a distance. Those who backbite believers are all carrion-eaters. There are a number of testimonies to this statement. It is indeed very dangerous. If you are in a meeting and if anyone wants to talk evil of any believer (who is absent) get up at once and run away from that gathering. Try your best to stop them from backbiting. If you prevent them God will close doors of evils for you.¹¹ If you did not try to prevent them and if you helped him, God will chastise you 70 times more than him. The sin of such hearer (of backbiting) is seventy times severer than the speaker. This will be explained in detail tomorrow.

Injuries of Husain on Ashura Day

Now let us hold the skirt of Husain for forgiveness and mercy. Sometimes the tongue utters a word. It inflames fire. One says a word, which burns the heart of people. Some words were spoken against Husain on the day of Ashura, which were more painful than the wounds of swords and spears for the heart of Husain. A disbeliever who inflicted such injury said, “O Husain! Did you not say, ‘My father will distribute water of Kauthar?’ Now ask him to quench your thirst.” Another oppressor inflicted another wound saying; at the time of burning Husain tents: You made haste to enter fire.

1. Usul al-Kafi, chapter ‘Obligation of knowledge’ pg. 31

2. Safinatul Bihar, vol. 2; pg. 11

3. Biharul Anwar, vol. 6, pg. 187

4. Surah Nur 24:19

5. Usul al-Kafi, pg. 357

6. Kafi, pg. 358

7. Surah Isra 17:36

8. Surah Humazah 104:1

9. Sahifa Sajjadiya

10. Safinatul Bihar 1:124

11. Layaliyal Akhbar, pg. 597

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