

67. Obscene Language

Allah, the Wise, has said:

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا

“And do not abuse those whom they call upon besides Allah, lest exceeding the limits they should abuse Allah”¹

The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) said:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَحِبُّ الْفَحْشَ وَالتَّفَحْشَ

“Surely, Allah does not like obscene language and abusiveness”²

Short Explanation

Utterance of vulgar, reprehensible and dirty things is referred to as obscene language. One, who speaks obscene language lacks modesty and shame, and possesses a tongue that is filthy and impure.

Obscene language is prohibited and its evil effects are numerous. It ought to be realized that evil acts manifested by a person externally, is indicative of evil that exists within him internally.

God does not approve of obscene language and hence a (true) Mu'min can never be foulmouthed. Obscene language is an offshoot hypocrisy and Shaitaan, by means of this vice, seeks to develop a friend for himself.

Of course, there are ways by means of which man can protect himself from using obscene language such as binding himself by means of vows and oaths, staying away from foulmouthed individuals,

engaging in the remembrance of God, recitation of lofty supplications, ethical poems and the like.³

1) The Imam's Reaction

A'mr Ibn Nu'man Ju'fi relates:

Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) had a companion, who used to constantly accompany him (peace be upon him) wherever he (peace be upon him) would go, and never separate from him (peace be upon him).

Once when the Imam (peace be upon him) was travelling to a place called Hadhaain, this person together with his slave, also joined the Imam.

In the course of this journey, the person looked around but saw that his servant was not to be seen. Three times he looked for him but failed to locate him. On the fourth try he found him; as soon as his eyes fell upon him, he yelled out in anger: *O' Son of an adulteress! Where have you been?*

As soon as these words reached the ears of the Imam (peace be upon him), he slapped his forehead and said: *Subhanallah! You have ascribed an evil act to his mother! All along I had regarded you as a pious individual, however now I have realized that you have no piety.*

May I be made your ransom! But his mother is of the polytheists (and so there is nothing wrong in the allegation), said the man, trying to justify his statement.

The Imam (peace be upon him) remarked: *Do you not know that every community has its own customs of marriage, which need to be respected. Go away from me!*

The narrator of this tradition comments: *From that day onwards, I never saw him in the company of the Imam (peace be upon him) for as long as they were alive.*⁴

2) Usaamah's Reply

Usaamah Ibn Zaid was one of those who had been set free by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny), and about whom the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) said: *He is of those individuals, whom I am particularly fond of and is one of the pious ones from amongst you.* Just before his (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) death, he (peace be upon him) appointed Usaamah, despite his young age, as the commander of the army.

It has been reported that one day Usaamah was engaged in prayers in the Prophet's Mosque near the grave of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny). In the meantime, since a person had died, the people approached Marwaan Ibn Hakam, the ruler of Medinah, to lead the funeral prayers for the deceased. He arrived, led the prayers and was on the way out when he observed Usaamah

standing near the door of the house of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) still engaged in his prayers. Realizing that he had not participated in the funeral prayers that he had led, a greatly offended Marwan spoke out: *You want the people to see you engaged in prayers, isn't it?* He then followed this up with a tirade of abuses and obscene language.

After completing his prayers, Usaamah came up to Marwaan and said: *You have hurt me and used obscene and abusive language towards me. I have heard the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) say: "God abhors a person, who uses obscene and abusive language."*⁵

3) Satan in the Company of Those Using Foul Language

One day the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) and Abu Bakr were seated together when a person came up to Abu Bakr and began abusing and reviling him.

When the person had finished his outburst Abu Bakr, for the sake of defending himself, spoke out and in the process began to abuse the person.

The moment Abu Bakr began using foul language, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his holy progeny), who till then had remained a mute spectator to the incident, suddenly got up from his place in order to distance himself from him.

As he (peace be upon him and his holy progeny) moved away, he commented: *O' Abu Bakr! When that person was abusing you, an angel of God, was answering the person in your defense, but the moment you began abusing him, that angel left you and his place was taken over by the Shaitaan; and I am not of the persons, who would sit in a gathering in which the Shaitaan is present.*⁶

4) Conduct

A person approached Imam Sadiq (peace be upon him) and said: *Your such and such cousin was talking about you, but whatever he spoke was nothing except for abuses and obscene language.*

The Imam (peace be upon him) said to his slave-girl: *Bring me some water for ablution.* He then performed the ablution and stood up for prayers.

The narrator said: *I thought to myself that the Imam (peace be upon him) would curse the person.*

When the Imam (peace be upon him) had concluded his two-raka'h prayer, he beseeched: *O' Lord! It was my right (which he had transgressed) and I have forgiven him (for his invectives and abuses). Your munificence and benefaction is much more than mine, so forgive him and do not chastise him for his conduct.*

The narrator says: *Seeing this compassion of the Imam (peace be upon him), I was overcome with*

5) Ibn Muqaffa'

Ibn Muqaffa' was an erudite and intelligent person, who had translated several academic and scholarly books into Arabic. His superior acuity and excellence had caused him to become conceited such that, in public gatherings, he would end up belittling others and at times, even resort to speaking dirty and vulgar things.

One of those, who found themselves the object of his offensiveness, was Sufiyaan Ibn Mua'wiyah, who had been appointed the governor of Basrah on the part of Mansur Dawaaniqui, the second Abbasid Caliph.

Sufiyaan had a disproportionately large nose and whenever Ibn Muqaffa' would arrive before him, he would call out loudly: *Salutations to both of you* (meaning Sufiyaan and his large nose).

At times, he would humiliate him by making references to his mother; one day, in a gathering of people, he addressed him in a loud voice by saying: *O' Son of a lecherous woman!* In other gatherings, he would hurt him by various forms of humiliating and abusive language.

Sufiyaan constantly awaited an opportunity to pay him back.

It so happened that Abdullah Ibn Ali initiated an uprising against his nephew and the Abbasid Caliph – Mansur Dawaaniqui. Mansur dispatched Abu Muslim Khorasani to Basrah to quell the rebellion. In the battle that ensued, Abu Muslim emerged victorious and Abdullah Ibn Ali took to flight, eventually taking shelter with his brothers Sulaiman and Isa.

They interceded on his behalf before Mansur and requested that they be pardoned; Mansur accepted their intercession for Abdullah Ibn Ali and pardoned him. The uncles of Mansur returned to Basrah and approached Ibn Muqaffa' so that he could write for them the official letter of pardon (for Abdullah Ibn Ali).

Arrogant that he was, he wrote in the letter of pardon: *In the event that Mansur Dawaaniqui deceives his uncle Abdullah Ibn Ali and troubles him, all his wealth would be considered as having become the property of the people, all his slaves would be considered free and all Muslims would be considered as free from their pledge of allegiance to him.*

When the letter of pardon was brought before Mansur for signing, he was immensely disturbed; while he refrained from signing it, he covertly ordered its writer to be killed.

Sufiyaan, who had for long, been exasperated by the utterances of Ibn Muqaffa', ordered him to be taken into a room. Arriving before him, he taunted: *Do you recall the abuses and obscene language that you had used for my mother and me?*

He then ordered a furnace to be lit up and the thirty three year old Ibn Muqaffa', as per the orders of Mansur Dawaaniqi, was hurled into the flames and killed.⁸

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1. Holy Qur'an, ch. Al-Ana'am (6), vs. 108.
 2. Jaame' Al-Sa'adaat, vol. 1, pg. 314.
 3. Ihyaa al-Quloob, pg. 65.
 4. أَمَا عَلِمْتَ أَنَّ لِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ نِكَاحًا .
 5. Paighambar Wa Yaaraan, vol. 1, pg. 194.
 6. Iblees Naameh, vol. 1, pg. 73; Ihyaa al-U'loom, vol. 3, pg. 370.
 7. Muntahal Aa'maal, vol. 2, pg. 127; Miskaah al-Anwaar.
 8. Dunyaa-e-Jawaan, pg. 64; Jawaan, vol. 2, pg. 21.

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