

YAQEEEN INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

40 HADITHS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

LECTURE NOTES

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Chapter Ten The “Everyone Else Does it” Fallacy

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو هِشَامٍ الرَّفَاعِيُّ، مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ بَرِيدٍ حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ فَضَيْلٍ،
عَنِ الْوَلِيدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ جُمَيْعٍ، عَنْ أَبِي الطُّفَيْلِ، عَنْ حَدِيقَةَ،
قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ” لَا تَكُونُوا إِمْعَةً
تَقُولُونَ إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَحْسَنًا وَإِنْ ظَلَمُوا ظَلَمْنَا وَلَكِنْ وَطِنُوا
أَنْفُسَكُمْ إِنْ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسُ أَنْ تُحْسِنُوا وَإِنْ أَسَاءُوا فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا ” .
قَالَ أَبُو عِيْسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ غَرِيبٌ لَا نَعْرِفُهُ إِلَّا مِنْ هَذَا
الْوَجْهِ .

Hudhaifa narrated that the Messenger of Allah said: “Do not become ‘yes-men’ saying, ‘If the people do good then we will do good, and if they do wrong then we will do wrong.’ Instead, make up your own minds: if the people do good then you will do good, and if they do evil, then you will not behave unjustly.”

Most of the injustice that is committed in society is committed because it has become normalized. There is the concept that “everyone else is doing it so it must be okay.” For example, in some places nothing gets done without bribery. But the Prophet (ﷺ) cursed the one who bribes and the one who accepts a bribe.

Normalization of “small” injustices/transgressions

- For example, if a society functions on bribes then people are more likely to normalize it despite it being *haram*.
- People resign themselves to the notion of “If you can’t stop them, join them.” Injustice and sinning become far easier to justify because everyone else is engaging in them. For example, *tatfeef* (cheating with weights) is a corrupt business practice and in some places most people engage in it, so others say, “If everyone is doing it it is okay for me to do it, too.”

Normalization of major transgressions

- In 1910 in downtown Dallas, Allen Brooks, a 65 year-old black man was lynched publically. People took pictures and would send them as postcards. In many communities in the South, public lynchings would be community gatherings where families would come out, have a picnic and see someone lynched out in the public square.

The standards of society dictate the behavior of those living in that society and evil can come to be normalized in this way. This is why the Prophet (ﷺ) taught us that the least we can do when we see evil is to hate it in our hearts. You still have to be uncomfortable with evil even if you are surrounded by it (regardless of whether it’s a moral sin or a transgression against someone else). Even if it is normalized in society, your heart should not be comfortable with it, and you must not conform to it.

Most people become affected by widespread sins/oppression and eventually say, in effect, “Well you can’t stop them, might as well join them.” Or “I have to do this to get by.”

The message of this hadith is also seen in the Qur’an:

وَإِنْ تُطِيعُوا أَكْثَرَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِيُضِلُّوكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

And if you obey most of (those) in the earth they will mislead you from (the) way (of) Allah [6:116]

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah bestow mercy upon him), in his book *Mukhtasar Minhaj al-Qasideen*, said, “Through frequent exposure, a person begins perceiving corruption as trivial, and its effect and gravity fades. Thus, whenever a person regularly sees another person committing a major sin, he belittles the minor sins he himself commits... Similarly, if a scholar is seen wearing a silk garment or a gold ring, the people would aggressively denounce that. Yet, they can watch him sit in a long gathering where he does nothing but backbite people, yet they are not offended by that. Backbiting is far worse than wearing gold, but because of how frequently it is witnessed, hearts become desensitized to it.

We learn from this quote that sometimes we become so desensitized to major sins because of how normal they have become and pay attention to trivial things that we don’t even know for sure are *haraam*.

Ibn Masood (ra): “You should accustom yourself so that if everyone on the face of the earth disbelieved, you should still believe.”

We have to get out of the mindset of going with the flow and letting others set standards for us. We have to hold ourselves to a higher standard than what we see all around us. It’s not just about when someone does wrong to you; it’s when you see wrongdoing and you become desensitized to it. Then you make it even more normalized.

إِيَّاكُمْ وَمُحَقَّرَاتِ الدُّنُوبِ فَإِنَّمَا مَثَلُ مُحَقَّرَاتِ الدُّنُوبِ كَمَثَلِ قَوْمٍ نَزَلُوا بَطْنَ وَادٍ فَجَاءَ ذَا بَعُورٍ وَجَاءَ ذَا بَعُورٍ حَتَّى جَمَعُوا مَا
انْتَضَجُوا بِهِ خُبْرَهُمْ , وَإِنَّ مُحَقَّرَاتِ الدُّنُوبِ مَتَى يُؤْخَذُ بِهَا صَاحِبُهَا تُهْلِكُهُ ” أَخْرَجَهُ أَحْمَدُ بِسَنَدٍ حَسَنٍ

“Beware of belittling sins. Imagine a group of people who descend into a valley and they each bring their sticks. They all begin to throw their sticks into a fire until the fire becomes so huge that it consumes them all.”

This metaphor indicates that when every person contributes a small sin (and deems it insignificant), the entire society suffers as a result.

لا كبيرة مع استغفار ولا صغيرة مع إصرار

The Prophet (ﷺ) said “There is no major sin if you seek forgiveness for it and there is no minor sin if you insist upon it.”

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ الْعَلَاءِ، أَخْبَرَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ، حَدَّثَنَا مُعِيرَةُ بْنُ زِيَادٍ الْمُؤَصِّلِيُّ، عَنْ عَدِيِّ بْنِ عَدِيٍّ، عَنِ الْعُرْسِ بْنِ عَمِيرَةَ الْكِنْدِيِّ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ ” إِذَا عَمِلْتَ الْخَطِيئَةَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كَانَ مَنْ شَهِدَهَا فَكَّرَهَا ” . وَقَالَ مَرَّةً ” أَنْكَرَهَا ” . ” كَمَنْ غَابَ عَنْهَا وَمَنْ غَابَ عَنْهَا فَرَضِيهَا كَانَ كَمَنْ شَهِدَهَا

Narrated Al-'Urs bin 'Amirat al-Kind (ra):

The Prophet (ﷺ) said: “When a sin is

committed, he who saw it and disapproved of it will be like the one who was not present; but he who did not see it but approved of it will be like he who was present when it was committed.”

This hadith highlights the need to take a hard stance against injustice by disavowing and condemning it so you do not enable it in any way.

Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas'ud: The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: The first defect that destroyed Banu Isra'il was that a man (of them) met another man and said: O so-and-so, fear Allah, and abandon what you are doing, for it is not lawful for you. He then met him the next day and that did not prevent him from eating with him, drinking with him and sitting with him. When they did so, Allah mingled their hearts with each other. [Abu Dawud and At-Tirmidhi].

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ النَّفِيلِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا يُونُسُ بْنُ رَاشِدٍ، عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ بَدِيمَةَ، عَنْ أَبِي عُبَيْدَةَ، عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ مَسْعُودٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ ” إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا دَخَلَ النَّقْصُ عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ كَانَ الرَّجُلُ يَلْقَى الرَّجُلَ فَيَقُولُ يَا هَذَا اتَّقِ اللَّهَ وَدَعْ مَا تَصْنَعُ فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَجِلُّ لَكَ ثُمَّ يَلْقَاهُ مِنَ الْعَدِّ فَلَا يَمْنَعُهُ ذَلِكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ أَكِيلَهُ وَشَرِيبَهُ وَقَعِيدَهُ فَلَمَّا فَعَلُوا ذَلِكَ ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ قُلُوبَ بَعْضِهِمْ بِبَعْضٍ ” . ثُمَّ قَالَ { لَعْنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ عَلَى لِسَانِ دَاوُدَ وَعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ } إِلَى قَوْلِهِ { فَاسِفُونَ } ثُمَّ قَالَ ” كَلَّا وَاللَّهِ لَتَأْمُرَنَّ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَلَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَلَتَأْخُذَنَّ عَلَى يَدَيِ الظَّالِمِ وَلَتَأْطُرُنَّهُ عَلَى الْحَقِّ أَطْرًا وَلَتَقْصُرُنَّهُ عَلَى الْحَقِّ قَصْرًا ”

This indicates that the first man's disavowal of the other's sin was not serious; that is, he took it lightly. We should take strong stances against injustices and evil so that they do not become normalized and we do not become desensitized to them.

Question: From a *fiqh* perspective, is it permissible to sometimes participate in something that is disliked/disapproved of in the *deen* when it has become normalized in the society you are living in?

Answer: Yes, however only under certain conditions:

1. In times of dire need/necessity.
2. If your life is in danger.
3. To avert a greater evil (engaging in the lesser of two evils)
4. You cannot escape it entirely (e.g., interest/*riba*) - in this case you engage only to the extent necessary, and do not enthusiastically embrace it.

For example, if you are in a public place and you can hear things that are *haraam*. Shaykh Al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah said, “Hearing is not like listening.” What this means is that you have no control over what is being said but you can control whether you are paying attention to it and can hate it in your heart like the Prophet (ﷺ) said.

This particular hadith was narrated by the Prophet (ﷺ) about an event that took place about before the revelation had come to him. Zayd ibn Amr ibn An-Nufayl never worshipped idols, but was a follower of Ibrahim (as). The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “I remember sitting in a gathering where they would eat meat that was sacrificed for the idols and I would not partake of that meat.” When they presented the food to Zayd, he stood up and said, “Allah created you, provides for you and for your animals and yet you sacrifice for other than him.” The Prophet (ﷺ) was amazed watching Zayd take on the powerful people at that time. Similarly, when the Arabs were making *tawaf* around the Ka’aba, Zayd would stand with his back to the Ka’aba and say, “None of you is upon the religion of Abraham (as)”. He would cry and say:

اللهم لو أني أعلم أحب الوجوه إليك عبدتك به، ولكني لا أعلم

“Oh Allah, if only I knew the best way to worship you I would, but I do not know.”

He died before the Prophet (ﷺ) started calling to Islam, but he died as a monotheist. He believed in God and he went looking for the truth. His son (Saeed - ra) became one of the first converts to Islam and is one of the ten promised paradise. Saeed (ra) asked the Prophet (ﷺ) about his father’s fate. The Prophet (ﷺ) said that on the Day of Judgment Zayd will be standing all by himself as his own nation. He was the opposite of an *إمعة* (yes-man)! So he is a noble example we should emulate - he didn’t care about society’s trends; he sought very sincerely and earnestly for the truth.

His example also shows us how belief in Allah (monotheism) and the *fitrah* lead a person to justice. Ibn Abbas (ra) said that when the Arabs were about to bury their daughters, Zayd ibn Amr ibn Nufayl would go and rescue the girls and raise them until they were of age to marry and then he would marry them off. This was before the Quranic verse condemning female infanticide was revealed . He knew it was wrong, and did his part to combat the practice. He did not have the attitude of “everyone else does it...,” but rather thought outside the box and did not conform to the evil norms of his society. And the Prophet (ﷺ) praised his behavior.

من أعان ظالما بلي به

Ibn Taymiyyah said, “Whoever assists an oppressor will one day be tested by that same oppressor.” [*Majmu Al-Fatawa*]

If you enable an oppressor because it is to your benefit one day, this same oppressor or form of oppression will come back to haunt you. If you contribute to a corrupt system, it is likely that same system will end up ruining you. If you employ injustice to take advantage of a situation, a similar injustice will afflict you or your family. So, you have to maintain your own standards and not say “Everyone else does it...”

On the authority of Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr ibn Aslam, on the authority of his father who reported that his grandfather, Aslam (the son of Umar ibn al-Khattab), said: While I was with 'Umar ibn al-Khattab (ra) in al-Madinah during one of his frequent night patrols in disguise to survey the condition of his people, we overheard a milkmaid refusing to obey her mother's order to sell adulterated milk by diluting it with water. When her mother insisted that 'Umar would be none the wiser, the girl replied: 'O mother! By Allah! I would never obey him in public and disobey him in private. For if 'Umar will not come to know it, the Lord of 'Umar surely knows!' Upon hearing every word, 'Umar then gave instructions for the door of their house to be marked and to find out who they were and if the daughter was married or not. Asim was the only one son of 'Umar (ra) who was not married at that time.

The following morning, 'Umar said: 'O Aslam, pass by that house and purchase milk from the girl to see if she kept her resolve,' and so he did that and learned that the milk was unadulterated as she had vowed. 'Umar summoned the girl and her mother to his court and told them what he had heard. As a reward, he proposed to marry the girl to his son 'Asim. She accepted, and from this union was born a girl named Layla who would in due course become the mother of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz.

She basically refused to do “what everyone was doing” because she knew it was wrong and that Allah was always watching, and she was given the son of the *khalifa* as a husband and a daughter who became the mother of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz. So, she went from a very poor situation to being a daughter-in-law of the head of state and the grandmother of another head of state.