



## Islam's Guidelines for Muslims: A Lesson for Journalists

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### Abstract

Sprouting from French Revolution and UN Charter, the political nature of human rights that provide the overall shelter to freedom of speech is the center of power for the journalistic freedom. Ethics for journalists are by their very definition hinged to freedom rather than being a limiting force of check and balance. The body of literature that has evolved in the name of Islamic journalistic ethics has also not been free from biasness. It was mostly shaped in reaction to the practices of western journalistic ethics (WJE). Consequently, the full potential of the benefits built in Islam's guidelines could not be realized. The study mainly focuses on journalistic best practices in Islam as studied by various researchers and aims at a more comprehensive list of Islamic guidelines for journalists. The study identifies salient features of Islamic guidelines that help in shaping up the societal outlook and determines Islam's rich contribution in human enlightenment.

**Key words:** Business ethics, journalistic ethics, Islamic ethics, universality of ethics, human resource management, human rights, freedom of expression, information policy, governance

### Introduction

Ethics in any kind of business has gained continued significance all over the world, especially in western tradition. Journalism is considered the fourth pillar in democracy. Unlike the judiciary, legislature and the executive, media houses are business entities and in western tradition ethics for journalists are seen as central to their duty. Journalistic work

ethics are designed for greater freedom to speak-out with lesser checks and balances. UNESCO identifies, “the Organization [i.e. UNESCO] also contributes to strengthening professional standards through capacity-building and self-regulation mechanisms (such as codes of ethics, press councils and in-house news ombuds).”<sup>1</sup> Ethics, relative to cultures, constraints human action yet in western tradition for journalists, it is the delimiting force of freedom and has resulted in many contradictions. For instance, the self-proclaimed universalistic nature of freedom of speech forces people like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden to reveal state secrets, in the name of ‘freedom’ and in the name of ‘people’s right to know’ (Kwoka 2015). Where the limits of people’s right-to-know ends and what are the limits to freedom of speech? When does poking in state affairs become a harmful act for the nation-state? Who would draw a balancing line between the people’s right to know, freedom of speech of the journalist and the protection of the state affairs. There are other similar issues; intrusion into the private life of others and chasing them like in case of Diana, where the search for scoop ended-up in death of the subject, leaving blood stain on the most common journalistic work practices (Hindman 2003). And again, how should we rationalize, in a civilized world, the ethics of Kevin Carter who left drought-struck African girl to feed the hungry vultures, and brought to the world a professional picture that won him Pulitzer Prize (Yeong 2014)? These are only a few instances that raise serious concerns on the work of journalistic ethics in western tradition. Clearly there is room for developing a guideline that draws limits to journalistic practices. Islam provides the guidelines for the members of a society that automatically can be reflected upon the people engaged in the work of reporting, analyzing pieces of information, and drawing conclusions. Western tradition of ethics is philosophical and more inclined towards Plato’s ‘*eudemonistic*’ view suggesting that all conduct that gives happiness to a human being are virtuous. In other words well-being and happiness are the highest aim of moral thought.<sup>2</sup> The freedom of speech, the way it is practiced today, is to a great extent, in the spirit and tradition of Voltaire (1694-1778) who was famous for his attack on Catholic Church and its association with French Monarchs and believed in the separation of religion from state affairs. It is clear that 18<sup>th</sup> century French Church was

criticized by philosophers who were seen as the intellectual force behind French Revolution (1789-1799) that was replacing Commands of the Church. Freedom of speech was part of the primary document of French Revolution 1789, "The Declaration of the Rights of Man". Though the British Bill of Rights 1689 gave 'freedom of speech in Parliament' but it was nothing like the freedom of speech granted to the citizens in France. Both French Revolution and American Revolutions (1765-1783) denied existence of an absolute ruler, mostly a monarch supported by the oath by ministers of Church. The American revolutionary war against the British also paved the way for protestant reformers to revolt against Church of England, while considering it religious act, and as a result came up with the First Amendment that gave Americans the Bill of Rights in 1791 guaranteeing four freedoms including, freedom of religion, speech, the press, and the right to assemble. In the absence of religious values serving as ethical bases, Ward (2009) indicates that largely WJE have bases in social responsibility and liberal theories and they also draw from activist theory and from ethics of community and care theory. These are separate theories but each one of them sprouts from the same base i.e. human intellect. Separate from this view of ethics, Muslims derive their highest virtue when their conduct pleases, Allah SWT, the Creator of whole universe.

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Say, 'My worship, my sacrifice, my life and my death are for Allah, the Lord of all the worlds. (Al-Anam 6:162)

Unlike business ethics in other industries, journalistic ethics have political connotations derived out of UN Charter of human rights; Islamic guidelines, on the other hand, have a non-political agenda. Islamic guidelines suggest a neutral approach in reporting, analyzing, and in deriving actionable intelligence out of a news item. Though Islam provides an immaculate guideline for journalistic work, yet it suffers from a lack of practice and awareness in Muslim journalists regarding the content relevant to their work. The tradition of presenting journalistic ethics in Muslims is not very old, though most of it has evolved in the backdrop of western journalistic ethics movement, built around the French revolution and formally shaped up for today's use as a means of

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protecting the right of people instilled through freedom of speech and expression. This article is an effort to have a look at Islam's guidelines for journalists and use them in addressing the contradictions introduced by the tradition and practice of WJE.

### **Literature Review**

Siddiqi (2000) has described that the earliest efforts to develop Islamic ethical code for journalists were initiated by International Conference of Muslim Journalists (ICMJ). ICMJ's first meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia in 1981 that made an agreement that all Muslim professionals associated with media should follow Islamic rules of conduct in performing their duties<sup>3</sup>. These earliest struggles didn't materialize primarily because of the Islamic movements associated with these efforts restricted the scope of 'Islamic Journalism' to fit their needs instead of upholding the requirements of the wider canvas of the term (Siddiqi 2000). The author identified other efforts in similar tradition that had relatively less impact in practice, though academically the ethical frameworks in Islamic tradition made sense (Mowlana 1989; Siddiqi 1989; Seini 1986; Schleifer 1986).

The work of Siddiqi (2000) clearly brings out *Tawhid*, *Ammanah*, *Ummah*, and *Taqwah* as the basic elements of the journalist's ethical toolkit; besides distinctly prohibiting spying, spreading rumors, being suspicious, using slander, and ridiculing. Amanullah (2008) has identified that journalists need to be honest, just (a'dil), and their freedom of speech should be bound by the limitations of Islam on speech, advertising, criticism, and analysis etc. The author also identifies the factors to be avoided, these are speculation, espionage, action without verification, and 'saying something but not acting upon it'. The final feature of journalistic ethics drawn from Quran and Sunnah by the author refers to giving good advice to the readers. The author also determines the instances when news of crime is reported with names of arrested that are not proven by court, when crime details are mentioned that arouse feelings of committing the crime, and when punishments of such crimes is not mentioned that too encourages people to commit the crime. Perhaps this is the most significant work in terms of volume of guidelines defined by Islam for journalists. Most of these values are highly relevant but not for all types of work categories of a journalist. Nature of work of a reporter,

critic, expert, and columnist are different from each other though they may all fall under the broad category of a journalist. Islam has different guidelines for each one of the categories of journalists.

Most work in developing universal journalistic ethics and also most of the empirical work to find the journalistic practices in Muslim countries, have forced authors to make Islamic ethics translated to look-alikes of western secular ethics (Mughtar et al 2017; Abrar 2016; Hamada 2016; Pintak 2014; Ramili 2005 etc.). Ramili (2005) talked of truth, preaching, and anonymity (*amanah*) as the bases of Prophetic Journalism. It is important to understand that preaching is not the objective of reporting nor can information shared through *amanah* be compared to maintaining anonymity. Preaching may occur when news is analyzed to suggest 'what could be right path to adopt according to Islamic teaching' but in reporting of occurrence there is nothing to be preached. Similarly, *amanah* means information shared secretly to a person which the latter is not supposed to share with anyone else, however the way it has been used in the study means that information should be shared but the source should remain anonymous i.e. a news item with undisclosed source. In such a situation the news item may look like an allegation or an assumption or even a deduction, it is not the spirit of Islam.

Pintak (2014) extracted six concepts from earlier researches for his empirical study to form the bases of Islamic journalistic ethics; these include justice (a'dl), truth (haq), advice<sup>4</sup> (nasihah), balance (I'tidal), prevention of evil attitude (hisbah), and moderation (wasatiyyah). There are many issues attached to this derived framework for study of journalistic ethics. Reporters are to report any occurrence truthfully and the proper Arabic root word for it is *Sidq*, 'right' transmits more the meaning of *haq*. Similarly advice, balance, and moderation are not the characteristics of a reporter who has to report the truth but these can be attributes of the analyst and a column writer.

Studies have compared the role of the journalist with the role of the Holy Messenger SAW, in terms of bridging the gap between the occurrence and the masses that are absent from the scene of occurrence and also compared Islam's da'wah (preaching) with the mass media role of dissemination like in today's journalistic world (Saragih and Kom 2016). This and similar relationships are stretched too far in drawing

similarities in the role of journalists and the Holy Messenger SAW. For the Holy Messenger SAW didn't ask in return any reward from people whose wellbeing he SAW sought and it is unlike the journalists who do their job in return for financial rewards. The argument regarding preaching role of a journalist cannot be true for a reporter who has to simply report truthfully a news item, nor can it be applied for an analyst who tries to draw the right meaning out of the news but preaching may make more sense for column writers, or for those who have to make a decision on the basis of the reported news.

Abrar (2016), in a spree to see Muslim journalists successful has focused on conduct for success. According to point of view success or failure and limited or plentiful rewards are with the Creator and are not associated to success and true success is for one who is saved from the hellfire on the Day of Judgment. Moreover, Muslims are ordered by the Creator to tell the truth and 'honesty is the best policy' isn't an Islamic point of view. Success is a relative term and best of the conducts cannot guarantee success and therefore can be more of personal strategy for rising up the ladder rather than Islam's guideline for journalistic conduct. Muchtar et al (2017) have chosen a four factor framework to study a probable distinctive base of ethics in Muslim journalists. The four factors identified include, truth, pedagogy, public interest, and moderation. While truth may have some degree of universality; moderation and public interest are not for the reporter to get indulged in, a journalist in capacity of reporter has to simply report the facts that should be based in truthfulness. Pedagogy, here serving as a jargon for preaching, is also not the role of a reporter. As critic or analyst there are certain qualifications that demand of the analyst to be either expert of the field or have a precise decision-making position otherwise the contribution of the journalist as a common column writer or an analyst would be based on conjecturing and rumors that have no role to play in matters of truth. Though there are many other efforts in this backdrop only a few were chosen as an example to understand the gap in the framework for studying Islamic guidelines for Muslim journalists (Pintak and Setiyono 2011; Hamayotsu 2013; Hachten 1981; El Issawi 2015; Duffy 2014; Hafez 2002).

If we were to look at the journalistic ethics commented upon by Muslims or while deriving these from Islam's teachings many issues emerge clearly. The first is that some of these works have tried, rather ambitiously, to draw similarities between Islam's view on journalistic work and the WJE. It is a futile activity, since the two views originate from different worldviews and have different objectives. West sees journalists as 'the eye' on governance almost to the level of antagonism, and also sees journalism as an industry with glamour and sensation. Advertisement content, as necessary part of journalistic work to bear the expenses is somewhat an additional responsibility in Islamic point of view to watch over the content for suitability to be published. Islam sees reporting as a means of acquiring actionable intelligence for the government institutions whereas, criticism and expert opinion are seen only as means to reach the appropriate decision. The role of making public opinion or serving as a pressure group on the policies of government is associated with representatives and leaders of the public and even the government; not that of a separate institution like media house or a newspaper industry. The second is that some of the researchers have applied Islamic view of journalistic work with little or no regard for the nature of work a journalist is engaged in, since reporting, analysis, criticism, drawing actionable intelligence and even advertising are all part of the package people receive in the name of journalism. When WJE and IGJ are proposed, both are done in the absence of this categorization of a journalist's day to day work. The nature of a journalist's work makes it necessary that specific guidelines are provided according to the nature of the work. Islam distinguishes between these categories of journalistic work and gives different guidelines for each, as it will be seen later in this study.

### **Islamic Guidelines to Organize Social Norms: Lessons for Journalists**

There are many general commands of Quran and Sunnah that can be associated to special conditions of the process of reporting of news, and these commands cover a variety of areas. The existence of multiple commands covering a variety of areas concerning the general character of members of a Muslim society that can be attributed to reporting of news is indicative of multidimensionality of the phenomenon. Some of the more prominent general commands which every member of the Muslim

society is advised to follow and that have clear bearing on the work of Muslim journalists have been elucidated here. Let us have a look at these commands that are guiding principles for general masses that are equally applicable on journalists in the discharge of their duty.

### A. Adoption of truth and prohibition of lying

The primary focus for a Muslim society in talking, communicating or reporting news arises out of truthfulness. Truthfulness is one of the most sought after traits of a Muslim society. The Holy Quran declares that Al-Sidiqeen (the truthful) is the one who is amongst the best of friends and guides:

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ  
وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَٰئِكَ رَفِيقًا

Those who obey Allah and the Messenger are with those whom Allah has blessed, namely, the Prophets, the *Siddiqin* (the truthful), the *Shuhada'*, and the *Righteous*. And excellent are they as companions. (Al-Nisa 4:69)

One of the two primary traits of the Holy Messenger SAW, accepted by the non-believers, even before Prophet-hood, was *Sadiq*, i.e. the truthful. The best of the struggles in society has been identified as being able to say truth in the face of an unjust or cruel ruler. The hadees of the Holy Messenger SAW is clear, as to how truthfulness has a special place in Muslim society:

عَنْ أَبِي أُمَامَةَ قَالَ عَرَضَ لِرَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ رَجُلٌ عِنْدَ الْجَمْرَةِ الْأُولَى فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَيُّ الْجِهَادِ أَفْضَلُ فَسَكَتَ عَنْهُ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْجَمْرَةَ الثَّانِيَةَ سَأَلَهُ فَسَكَتَ عَنْهُ فَلَمَّا رَمَى جَمْرَةَ الْعَقَبَةِ وَضَعَ رِجْلَهُ فِي الْعُرْزِ لِيَرْكَبَ قَالَ أَيْنَ السَّائِلُ قَالَ أَنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ قَالَ كَلِمَةً حَقًّا عِنْدَ ذِي سُلْطَانٍ جَائِرٍ

It was narrated that Abu Umamah said: "A man came to the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) at the first pillar and said: 'O Messenger of Allah, which Jihad is best?' but he kept quiet. When he saw the second Pillar, he asked again, and he kept quiet. When he stoned 'Aqabahh Pillar, he placed his foot in the stirrup, to ride, and said: 'Where is the one who was asking?' (The man) said: 'Here I am, O Messenger of Allah.' He said: 'A



word of truth spoken to an unjust ruler.": (Hasan)(*Ibn Maja Vol 3 No 892*)

To be truthful is the primary requirement that leads them to *Jannah* (heaven), so the ultimate success of Muslims is based on being truthful and the opposite of truthfulness is lying (*kizb*) and it leads the liar to hell. The famous Hadees from Bukhari and Muslim states:

حَدَّثَنَا زُهَيْرُ بْنُ حَرْبٍ وَعُثْمَانُ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ وَإِسْحَقُ بْنُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ قَالَ إِسْحَقُ أَخْبَرَنَا وَقَالَ الْأَخْرَاقِيُّ حَدَّثَنَا جَرِيرٌ عَنْ مَنْصُورٍ عَنْ أَبِي وَائِلٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ الصِّدْقَ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْبِرِّ وَإِنَّ الْبِرَّ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَصْدُقُ حَتَّى يُكْتَبَ صِدْقًا وَإِنَّ الْكَذِبَ يَهْدِي إِلَى الْفُجُورِ وَإِنَّ الْفُجُورَ يَهْدِي إِلَى النَّارِ وَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ لَيَكْذِبُ حَتَّى يُكْتَبَ كَذَابًا

'Abdullah reported Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) as saying: It is obligatory for you to tell the truth, for truth leads to virtue and virtue leads to Paradise, and the man who continues to speak the truth and endeavors to tell the truth is eventually recorded as truthful with Allah, and beware of telling of a lie for telling of a lie leads to obscenity and obscenity leads to Hell-Fire, and the person who keeps telling lies and endeavors to tell a lie is recorded as a liar with Allah.

(*Muslim hadees No 2138, Mutafiq-elah, Murfou' - also reported by Nisai, Ibn-Maja, Tirmazi, Abu Dawood, and Ahmad*)

An ordinary Muslim is expected to be a truthful person and the journalist is supposed to be the most truthful person, as lying is such a serious sin, in the light of the hadees narrated above. Further, lying is the opposite of truth and lying is associated to loss of sense of direction and guidance. The verse of Quran says,

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي مَنْ هُوَ مُسْرِفٌ كَذَّابٌ

Indeed, Allah does not give guidance to anyone who is an extravagant liar.(*Al-Gha'fir 40:28*)

As lying about a person or an event is to engage in false accusation which is a heinous sin.

### **B. Being to the Point**

Lying in Islam is a distant thing, saying things that carry many meaning and are not clear is not allowed either. Instead the believers are expected to speak truthfully in a straightforward manner and remain to the point. Allah SWT has ordered the believers in the Holy Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا

O you who believe, fear Allah, and talk with a statement that is straight, to the point. (*Al-Ahza'b* 33:70)

The straightforwardness narrated above is the cure of many diseases; it has been associated to, correction of matters to the advantage of people and a great success indeed (33:71)<sup>5</sup>. The word '*sadeeda*', has been translated as 'something that fills the gap', in communication it would mean that one needs to talk in such a way that it fills all the communication gap in transmitting the right meaning<sup>6</sup> (explanation of the verse 33:70 in *Tafseer Mafardaat* by Mulana Abduhu Ferozepuri 1108 AD/502 AH). Sometimes people make statements that are difficult to understand, that is also part of avoiding a 'to the point debate'. Similarly, if one is not careful in staying to the point, other concepts creep into the discussion that adds confusion to the debate. According to Ahadees, the verse of Al-Ahza'b (33:70) was frequently recited by the Holy Messenger SAW during sermons (Khutba); even today Khateeb (those who give sermons and lead the prayers on Friday) recite the same verse during Friday sermons. It is understandable that for a reporter one has to be to the point but more importantly, being to the point confines the analysts, critics and decision makers so as to avoid inconclusive or elusive debates or solutions.

### C. Conjectures are of no avail in matters of truth

When there is little information about an event or a person or a place of interest, then conjecturing and speculation fill the vacuum. A more accepted norm which is part of modern day guess work, is theorizing. Theorizing sometimes is seen synonymous to scientific thinking, arising out of probabilities that are developed out of recorded past practices and are highly specific to specific social settings that are difficult to be generalized. In social sciences the application of a theory developed in a different social setting should be done very carefully but in media industry the application of theory is not sensitive to different social settings instead it is more sensitive to sensationalizing an occurrence. Islam takes as principle that narration of an event, or information about a person or place has to be based on facts and not on conjecturing or guess work. Allah SWT clearly exposes for the believers that theorizing or

conjecturing provides one with no knowledge that can help in guiding them to reality, truth or to righteous path. The principle has appeared in many verses of the Holy Quran:

قُلْ هَلْ عِنْدَكُمْ مِنْ عِلْمٍ فَتُخْرِجُوهُ لَنَا إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَخْرُصُونَ

Say: Do you have any sure knowledge that you may produce to us? You follow nothing but whims, and do nothing but make conjectures. (Al-Ana'am 6:148)

وَمَا يَتَّبِعُ أَكْثَرُهُمْ إِلَّا ظَنًّا إِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا يَفْعَلُونَ

Most of them follow nothing but conjectures. Surely, conjectures are of no avail in the matter of truth at all. (Younas 10:36)

إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ

They are following nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire. (Al-Najam 53:23)

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا

They do not have knowledge about it. They follow nothing but conjecture, and conjecture is of no avail in (the matter of) Truth. (Al-Najam 53:28)

It is clear from the verses above that like in other matters of truth, in reporting too, filling the void of information with conjecturing is of no avail, let alone finding room for speculation and glamour to make a news item juicy so that it may sell more. Avoidance of conjecturing means that analysts, decision makers and critics have to refrain from opening to many possibilities or refraining from bringing such possibilities under discussion that have not emerged from a fact. It binds all journalistic work to hold back discussion, analysis, criticism and decisions until verified information is acquired.

#### **D. Prohibition of general spying and snooping around**

A step further in this direction is the act of snooping around and gathering information indirectly, while getting too curious about the occurrence. Acts of conjecturing, assuming negatively, making speculations, and being too curious or snooping around are extremely disliked in Islamic teachings. Unfortunately these are the building blocks of follow-ups on 'breaking news'. Allah SWT instructs the believers in the Holy Quran:

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

O' you, who believe, abstain from many of the suspicions. Some suspicions are sins. And do not be curious (to find out faults of others)(*Al-Hujrat 49:12*)

The verse is a clear instruction to stop people from getting curious in individual affairs. Being curious for issues such as neutralizing hostile agencies and eliminating organized crime are different from this curiosity, as Holy Messenger SAW commanded to find and eliminate the spy<sup>7</sup>.

But the Hadees of the Holy Messenger SAW in Nisa'ee identifies that snooping around and trying to see people's family affairs without their permission is liable for punishment:

أَخْبَرَنَا عَمْرُو بْنُ مَنْصُورٍ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا مُسْلِمٌ بْنُ أَبِرَاهِيمَ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا أَبَانُ قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ أَبِي طَلْحَةَ عَنْ أَنَسِ بْنِ مَالِكٍ أَنَّ أَعْرَابِيًّا أَتَى بَابَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَالْقَمَّ عَيْنَهُ خُصَّاصَةَ الْبَابِ فَبَصُرَ بِهِ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَتَوَخَّاهُ بِحَدِيدَةٍ أَوْ عُودٍ لِيَفْقَأَ عَيْنَهُ فَلَمَّا أَنْ بَصُرَ انْقَمَعَ فَقَالَ لَهُ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَمَا إِنَّكَ لَوْ تَبَتَّ لَفَقَأْتُ عَيْنَكَ

O' you, who believe, abstain from many of the suspicions. Some suspicions are sins. And do not be curious (to find out faults of others)...(*Al-Hujrat 49:12*)

Now if we were to compare the action of media teams that fly drones around houses in order to find out what is going on inside the house of an individual or when media teams wait around the office of an individual or wait circling around the home of a person and wait like an expert ambush team to record the movement of an individual, one could imagine how far media teams go in invading private lives. One can remember the aftermath of media teams haunting Diana with a bloody car chase that killed her and her fiancé, the horrible accident, and one can only say that the world needs the teachings of Islam to make it a better place to live. The intrusion of private life by media teams is seen as a great source of extracting the news and actions and movements of the subject of interest without any concern for the individual's right to protect one's private life. Islamic code of conduct would have put bars on intrusion in private life by media teams. If a media team requires a comment of an individual, the

person could be contacted through phone call and a prior meeting should be managed, instead of bumping into individual's life without prior permission.

Allah SWT avenges the act of searching faults in other Muslims, the Holy Messenger SAW hadees clears the how adverse is this action of people.

حَدَّثَنَا عُثْمَانُ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ حَدَّثَنَا الْأَسْوَدُ بْنُ غَامِرٍ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ عَيَّاشٍ عَنِ الْأَعْمَشِيِّ عَنِ سَعِيدِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ جُرَيْجٍ عَنِ أَبِي بَرزَةَ الْأَسْلَمِيِّ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَا مَعْشَرَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِلِسَانِهِ وَلَمْ يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ قَلْبَهُ لَا تَغْتَابُوا الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا عَوْرَاتِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ عَوْرَاتِهِمْ يَتَّبِعِ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ يَفْضَحْهُ فِي بَيْتِهِ

It is narrated AbuBarzah al-Aslami (RA): The Prophet ( صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ) said: O community of people, who believed by their tongue, and belief did not enter their hearts, do not back-bite Muslims, and do not search for their faults, for if anyone searches for their faults, Allah will search for his fault, and if Allah searches for the fault of anyone, He disgraces him in his house.

(Abu-Dawood Volume 3 Hadees No 1475; also reported in Masnad Ahmad)

### **E. Back-biting (Gheebat) is eating the flesh from the dead body of your brother**

A step further beyond snooping around is knowing something in an individual and reporting it behind one's back which one may not like to get exposed with.

وَلَا يَغْتَابُ بَعْضُكُمْ بَعْضًا أَيَجِبُ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ

‘... and do not back-bite one another. Does one of you like that he eats the flesh of his dead brother? You would abhor it. And fear Allah. Surely Allah is Most-Relenting, Very-Merciful.’

(Al-Hujrat 49:12)

Gheebat/backbiting has been described in the Hadees of Sahih Muslim:

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَبِي يُوبَاقٍ وَقُتَيْبَةُ وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ عَنِ الْعَلَاءِيِّ عَنِ أَبِيهِ عَنِ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ أَتَدْرُونَ مَا الْغَيْبَةُ قَالُوا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ قَالَ

ذِكْرِكَ أَحَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ قَيْلَ أَفْرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ فِي أَخِي مَا أَقُولُ قَالَ إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ  
اِعْتَبْتَهُ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ فَقَدْ هَيْتَهُ

Abu Hurairah (RA) reported Allah's Messenger ( صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ) as saying: “Do you know what is backbiting? They (the Companions) said: Allah and His Messenger know best. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: Backbiting implies, you're talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like. It was said to him: What is your opinion about this that if I actually find (that failing) in my brother which I made a mention of? He said: If that (failing) is actually found (in him) what you assert, you in fact back-bit him, and if that is not in him it is a slander (false accusation).”

(*Sahih Muslim Volume 3, Hadees No 2093, also in appeared in Abu Dawood, Tirmazi, Darmi, and Masnad Ahmad*)

'Gheebat' is a specific Islamic term and its meaning is not fully conveyed through English term of 'backbiting'. *Gheebat* means that a person has a weakness, say of character, and when someone describes it in that person's absentia then that is *gheebat* and is prohibited. Backbiting means talking maliciously in absentia of the person which may include a false accusation or a truthful negative comment about the person. It doesn't include the instances when people may ask you about a person for marriage or for doing business with in order to decide whether to get engaged in a venture or not. In such cases, a person has to make the right comment that he may have knowledge of so that suitable decision is reached at, as giving the right advice is also one the rights of fellow brethren.

Even if one finds a weakness of a fellow Muslim one is supposed to keep silent about it instead of beating the drum at it and humiliate the other person. The Hadees of the Holy Messenger SAW reported in Muslim says:

وَمَنْ سَتَرُ مُسْلِمًا سَتَرَهُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

‘...and he who did not expose (the follies of a Muslim) Allah would conceal his follies on the Day of Resurrection.’

(*Muslim Vol. 3 Hadees No. 2077, also in Bukhari, Tirmazi, Abu Dawood, Ibn-e-Majah*)

Now imagine the response of a media house when it comes to know of the folly of a person, what would the media team do to that person? Surely another breaking-news smashes the silence! Backbiting and uncovering a secret of a known person in WJE and also those in vogue in most Muslim countries is seen as a professional duty contrary to IGJ where such an action is seen as a sin. There is a marked difference between the practices in vogue in media and communication circles and those professed by Islamic instructions and teachings.

There are a few exceptions however. Pursuing complain of public against alleged mal practices a public office-bearer, is a different case and is not part of backbiting. In such a case the media house has to work in aid of the people and the state institutions that are responsible for the accountability of other government organs. In WJE the mal practices of a government office bearer are means to abuse the system and the political regime, instead of working with anti-corruption organs of the state or its law enforcement agencies or even with judiciary. In IGJ the function of exposing mal practices of public office bearers is done to protect the right of masses and to improve governance practices. Today however in Muslim countries too, journalists act as players in the hands of opposition parties used for political point scoring against the sitting regimes, instead of becoming a force against corruption in the aid of law enforcement agencies. For someone who openly violates the orders of Islam then others can be informed about his evil deeds and the principle of backbiting/Gheebat is not applicable in such cases. Holy Messenger's SAW hadees is clear guideline for such instances:

عن أنس قال: ذكر رجل لرجل عند رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقال رجل: أتغتابه؟ فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: من ألقى جليباب الحياء فلا غيبة له.

It is reported on the authority of An'as RA that a man came to the Holy Messenger and talked about another person. Someone pointed out: is this not backbiting? The Holy Messenger SAW said: One who is not shy (of doing evil deeds) there is no backbiting for him (that the rule backbiting is not applicable for him).

*(Kanzal A'mal Volume 2 Hadees No 3875, to similar effect the Hadees is also reported by Baheeqi)*

Similarly when a person is to sign a contract for business or has to work with an unknown person, one may like to know from others about truthfulness and fairness in business and about fulfilling the contractual obligations from others. In such situations one must not hide the truth and should not hide anything. In case of marriage contract for example it is important to give right guidance if one is inquired about the character and type of person in his dealings. The Hadees in this reference has been quoted in Muslim:

و حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ حَدَّثَنَا وَكَيْعٌ حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرِ بْنِ أَبِي الْجَهْمِ بْنِ صُخَيْرِ الْعَدَوِيِّ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ فَاطِمَةَ بِنْتُ قَيْسٍ تَقُولُ إِنَّ زَوْجَهَا طَلَّقَهَا ثَلَاثًا فَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ سُكًى وَلَا نَفَقَةً قَالَتْ قَالَ لِي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِذَا حَلَلْتِ فَأَذِنِي فَأَذِنْتُهُ فَخَطَبَهَا مُعَاوِيَةُ وَأَبُو جَهْمٍ وَأُسَامَةُ بْنُ زَيْدٍ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَمَّا مُعَاوِيَةُ فَرَجُلٌ تَرِبٌ لَا مَالَ لَهُ وَأَمَّا أَبُو جَهْمٍ فَرَجُلٌ صَرَّابٌ لِلنِّسَاءِ وَلَكِنْ أُسَامَةُ بْنُ زَيْدٍ

Fatima bint Qais (Allah be pleased with her) reported that her husband divorced her with three pronouncements and Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) made no provision for her lodging and maintenance allowance. She (further said): Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said to me: When your period of 'Idda is over, inform me. So I informed him. (By that time) Mu'awiyah, Abu Jahm and Usama bin Zaid had given her the proposal of marriage. Allah's Messenger (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) said: So far as Mu'awiyah is concerned, he is a poor man without any property. So far as Abu Jahm is concerned, he is harsh on women, but Usama bin Zaid...

(Al-Muslim Volume 2 hadees No 1219)

So the Hadees makes exemptions in cases when someone asks one's opinion in matters of marriage about bride or bridegroom then one need to tell the truth and it is not included in Gheebat. Similarly when one's opinion regarding doing business with someone or for signing a contract with someone or having an agreement with someone then one has to tell the truth.

**F. Making fun of fellow Muslims and calling them names is transgression (*fisq*)**



Calling names or ridiculing of fellow Muslims is aimed to humiliate others and it doesn't unite people instead it can aggravate situations to the boiling point of full-grown quarrels and conflicts. Such actions fragment the Muslim society, instead of uniting it. The Holy Quran prohibits such actions and identifies them with great sins.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ  
 أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِاللِّقَابِ بِئْسَ الْإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ  
 الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ

O you who believe, no men should ever scoff at other men; may be the latter are better than the former; nor should women (ever scoff) at other women. May be, the latter women are better than the former ones. And do not find fault with one another, nor call one another with bad nicknames. Bad is the name of sinfulness after embracing Faith. If anyone does not repent, then such people are the wrongdoers. (*Al-Hujrat 49:11*)

Humor, satire, ridiculing, political jokes, and comments etc. are frequently used in television programs, socio-political talk-shows, and on social media. Calling names to the political opponents is common and making them notorious with those names and none of it is considered bad. Late night shows are to make fun of the prominent figures of the society and their ratings are quite high (such as from Muslim world etc. ...). Muslims as a whole are to avoid calling names, and making fun of people. If someone does so it is transgression and a sinful act and one who is asked to stop doing so and yet doesn't stop is considered unjust and cruel.

#### **G. False accusation (*Bohtan*) is a great sin especially when falsely blaming someone of losing his or her chastity**

When void of information is filled in different instances then according to the situation its impact is different on the members of the society. A very serious action in society takes place when members blame one another without any evidence. The media teams, on many occasions, fill the void of information with theorizing and assumptions in order to give their audience the feel of full coverage. It happens when on the basis of theorization or deduction one is blamed for an act or

statement or an intention that has no reality, it is a false accusation (*bohtan*). The Hadees of *Sahih Muslim* on backbiting (*gheebat*) is also applicable here as it determines the difference between slander (*bohtan* or false accusation) and backbiting.

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَبِي حَبْشَةَ وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ عَنْ الْعَلَاءِ عَنْ أَبِيهِ عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ أَتَدْرُونَ مَا الْغَيْبَةُ قَالُوا اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ قَالَ ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ قِيلَ أَفَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ فِي أَخِي مَا أَقُولُ قَالَ إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ اغْتَابْتَهُ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ فَقَدْ بَهْتَهُ

Abu Hurairah (RA) reported Allah's Messenger ( صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم ) as saying: “Do you know what is backbiting? They (the Companions) said: Allah and His Messenger know best. Thereupon he (the Holy Prophet) said: Backbiting implies, you are talking about your brother in a manner which he does not like. It was said to him: What is your opinion about this that if I actually find (that failing) in my brother which I made a mention of? He said: If that (failing) is actually found (in him) what you assert, you in fact were backbiting, and if that is not in him it is a slander (false accusation).”

(*Sahih Muslim Volume 3, Hadees No 2093, also in appeared in Abu Dawood, Tirmazi, Darmi, and Masnad Ahmad*)

The most serious blame game turns up against women regarding their chastity in incidents that are not clear. Media teams need to be extra-cautious in such matters while reporting the incidents or pronouncing names of people involved, or while attributing the incident with an assumed intention. This does not happen with the media team alone, it also happens within general masses when gossips turn into rumors and without any evidence one is blamed for a sin that one hasn't committed. The Holy Quran succinctly identifies and tells people to avoid such blame game:

لَوْلَا جَاءُوا عَلَيْهِ بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَإِذْ لَمْ يَأْتُوا بِالشُّهَدَاءِ قَالُوا لَبَّكَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُمْ الْكَاذِبُونَ

Why did they (the accusers) not bring four witnesses to prove this? So, as they did not bring the witnesses, they are the liars in the sight of Allah. (*Al-Noor 24:13*)

The honor and respect of women has been safeguarded by Islam. Quran has identified blaming pious women of adultery as one of the

major sins and it carries a very heavy penalty<sup>8</sup>. Allah SWT has elaborated the action of such people in more detail and has repeated the disapproval of the action of these people in the same Surah:

إِذْ تَلَقَّوْنَهُ بِالْئِسْمِ الْكَبِيرِ وَمَا لَكُمْ لِمَا كَفَرْتُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُمْ لَهُ هَيْئًا وَهُوَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَظِيمٌ

When you were welcoming it with your tongues, and were saying with your mouths something of which you had no knowledge, and were taking it as a trivial matter, while with Allah it was grave. (Al-Noor 24:15)

Usually when people do not find any verifiable information to share regarding something of public interest they start assuming, making conjectures. But a step further appears when people try to get something objectionable and get suspicious at things that in ordinary circumstances are overlooked. The emphasis is not on fact finding but on making an imagined association out of scattered pieces of information; in such cases truth becomes subservient to mental logic that is a function of an individual's experience and knowledge. The mental logic in some cases is improved by 'collective logic', yet it is a collection of individual logic and carries the weaknesses of all individual experiences and knowledge. This mental logic works on building assumptions, mostly negative, and make mountain out of a molehill. It is not because human nature is like this but because the demand for sensation and glamour associated to the media industry make it a desired objective. Remember the proverbial definition of news that when a dog bites a man that isn't news but when a man bites a dog that is news. Unfortunately both are news but it is the false emphasis on rare occurrence, 'man biting a dog' that forces the media team, reporters, anchors, and investigators to look for unusual associations in pieces of information to glamourize and speculate conjectures for generating more public interest. Search for truth, therefore becomes a far cry. And these assumptions become basis of false accusation (*bohtan*).

#### **H. Verification of news received from a transgressor (*fasiq*)**

The person who reports is of particular importance. Reporter, if withholds a piece of information or adds into it, can cause serious problems, especially for a state official who has to make a decision. It can

also affect how public opinion may change and can cause undue pressures that may cause deterioration of law and order situation. The misreporting can cause problems as it may directly affect the outcome of the decision. The Holy Quran directs the Muslims who receive the report to verify any content of important news which is received from an unreliable source.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَنْ تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصِحُّوا عَلَيَّ مَا  
فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ

O you who believe, if a *fasiq* (sinful person / transgressor) brings you a report, verify its correctness, lest you should harm a people out of ignorance, and then become remorseful on what you did. (Al-Hujrat 49:9)

Several *mufasssareen* have reported an incident in explaining this verse. It is reported that an envoy was appointed by the Holy Messenger SAW to collect zakat from Banu-Mustaliq. The envoy in his days of ignorance had killed one of the men of Banu-Mustaliq, so he feared that they might hurt him. When the envoy saw collection of tribesmen, he feared they had gathered to kill him so he turned back and informed the Holy Messenger SAW that the tribe had renounced Islam and had gathered to kill him. The Holy Messenger SAW appointed Khalid bin Walid (RA) as head of a contingent with clear instructions not to be hasty and verify the news first. Khalid RA rested his contingent outside the town and sent his spies to verify the news. The spies returned declaring that the news was false and Banu Mustaliq was sincere with Islam, and offering prayers. Khalid RA, himself went to see verify the news in the town and found out that they had not renounced Islam. The Holy Messenger SAW was informed about this and the verse was revealed. It is upon this verse that the reporting mechanism in Islam is a sensitive issue. A Hadith reported by a *fasiq* is not considered authentic and therefore not reported, if a liar is found within the chain of narrators of a Hadith, then the Hadith is not considered authentic, therefore it is dropped. Similarly, the news reported by a spy who comes within the purview of a *fasiq*, has to be verified first.

Fasiq is a specific category of people in Islam and they have been defined in Quran by Allah SWT

الَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ

“— those who break the Covenant of Allah after it has been made binding, and cut off the relations Allah has commanded to be joined, and spread disorder on the earth - it is these who are the losers.”(Al-Baqarah 2:27)

So there are three factors that define a *fasiq* (wrong doer/sinful person); one, the breaking of a solemn pledge (on which Allah is witness); two, severing of relations, especially blood relations; and three, spreading disorder on earth.

Al-Jasas has identified in the explanation of this verse that in terms of determining rights of people with reference to others or with reference to any *Shara'ee* matter, it is illegal to act on the news brought by a *fasiq*. The verse clearly asks for assessing and evaluating the authenticity of the news brought by a *fasiq*, consequently any action on the news is forbidden until the authenticity of the news is determined.

It is therefore clear that in electronic or print media too, the reports must not fall in the purview of *fisq*. Everyone in the reporting chain should only be appointed if they can be testified not to have the characteristics of a *fasiq*. Reporting false news, knowingly dropping any part of a news item, conjecturing from few pieces of a news item about what may have occurred or fabricating a news have to be avoided. A *fasiq* is prone to commit all such actions. If one is unable to comment about a person or a reporter's state of *fisq*, one should verify the news content before broadcasting, forwarding, or acting on the news for making a decision. In recent past, an electronic news magazine, *Dabiq*, claiming to be the official news source of ISIS made many claims of war successes. Many Muslim men and women, from all across the world, migrated and acted on to the news content of the magazine without having any idea about the authenticity of the source. It resulted in great loss in terms of life and property in huge numbers.

In a conflict situation, truth is the first casualty. It is upon reporters to determine what the truth is and report only a factual occurrence and not to add or subtract anything from the scene. A news agency, a channel, a news team, an anchor, an analyst, or a reporter found committing such actions should be dropped from the media house or news network. Further, the selection of Khalid RA by Holy Messenger SAW indicates that officer designated for verification should not be an average selection but someone who is well aware and well versed of the situation at hand. Moreover, Khalid RA was a nominee of the state and not of some private entity.

Same is the case with social media tools. The sources that provide you with unconfirmed news or sources that forward any piece of information that has not been verified should be gradually degraded from the friend's list. After all, one is known by the company one keeps.

#### **I. Withholding news and prohibition of spreading rumors – News be transmitted to those who can extract its meanings**

When an incident occurs or a statement is issued, its true meaning is clearer to the one who has expert knowledge of the issue being dealt with, the person should also know the context, the sequence, and has capability to put things in a perspective; such people can be those who are decision makers or those who have the wisdom to differentiate right from wrong. News, as it occurs, shouldn't be out in general masses without having it interpreted first from a credible source so that masses are not left helpless in construing the meaning and filling the gaps in news to draw the larger picture. Hot worded statements by USA and North Korea against each other and the entry of a US aircraft carrier in South Korean waters may only mean escalation of tensions and may not mean that a war is imminent but only people with greater understanding of the region and government officials can interpret the situation properly. So news, for masses, isn't a happening but to what ends and what intensions has that happening occurred. Consequently, happiness or fear, the news may carry, requires proper understanding and interpretation of the knowledgeable people or decision makers on the subject matter. The Holy Quran has given clear guidelines for such situations and has determined the path to be adopted by those who possess the knowledge of an occurrence.

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوِ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ  
الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ لَاتَّبَعْتُمُ الشَّيْطَانَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

“When news concerning peace or fear comes to them, they go about spreading it. Had they referred it to the Messenger and to those having authority among them, the truth of the matter would have come to the knowledge of those of them who are able to investigate. But for Allah’s grace upon you, and mercy, you would have followed the Satan, save a few.” (*Al-Nisa* 4:83)

The verse specifically tells that news regarding peace or fear (some have interpreted fear as in war) should not be spread directly in the masses. The verse necessitates that the news first be sent to men of authority, so that it is brought to the knowledge of those who are capable of deducing the right meaning from the news (استنباط). With reference to officials on the position of authority the point of view for Al-Qartabi is that these are like governors (i.e. people on key government positions) who are to make important decisions. For Al-Jasas these are people with knowledge of religion and worldly affairs who are to make the right decisions from a given news item. According to Al-Jasas, *Istanbat* is associated to extraction and there is no extraction in clear commands of Quran and Sunnah. But extraction is required when deduction is required through Quran and Sunnah. Al-Qartabi has brought up similar meanings too but has also associated it to general meanings where individual’s rational approach is required to reach the real meaning of a news report. And this situation of turning the news to the people of authority has been associated to the blessings and mercy of Allah SWT upon the believers. And the lack of this situation is associated to the followership of Satan, i.e. if the news of peace or fear were to spread directly in the masses it would mean that society at large would have started following Satan except a few. With the advent of electronic, print and social media there are so many news items that reach the masses directly without proper deciphering act by relevant people in authority. There are innumerable occasions that have proven the value of meanings drawn out of the verse. This verse is a great source of protection from following the Satan, from wrong doers, and people with ill intentions working for enemies, knowingly or unknowingly, especially in the era of 5<sup>th</sup> generation

warfare. So this is the shield with which rulers need to protect the believers and themselves from getting distracted.

There are news items that need to be withheld until its proper angle to be covered is known for the masses, especially in crisis situation or in a state of war. In the Tafseer of Surah Al-Ahzab (33:9), Al-Qartabi identifies that when the news of Jews siding with Mushrikeen (polytheists) of Mecca reached the Holy Messenger SAW, the Holy Messenger sent an envoy to confirm the news with specific instructions. The Holy Messenger SAW instructed that if the news were true (i.e. if the Jews had decidedly broken the treaty with Medina and joined hands with Mushrikeen of Mecca) then inform only in vague terms “and do not let the power of Muslim unity disintegrate”; but if the news is false (i.e. the Jews had not broken the treaty with Medina) then say it loudly from distance. Holy Messenger’s SAW instructions indicate that news even if it were true was to go through the Holy Messenger SAW so that it may not result in discord, disunity or degradation of Muslim power and unity in the rank and file. This was the care Holy Messenger SAW devoted to Muslim power and unity and restricted news to keep the morale of the troops high.

### **Key features of Islamic guidelines helpful for Journalistic Ethics**

Point A and B are on *adoption of truthfulness*, as straight forwardness and being to the point are attributes of truthful. In point A, the emphasis is on telling truth and *prohibition of lying*. Lying is the opposite of being truthful and it is vital to include its negation as it could be possible to emphasize truthfulness but not disallowing its opposite in a code of ethics. So truth exists to the exclusion of lying. The focus of point B is on being to the point which is also an attribute of being truthful. Point G is an extreme form of lying, where someone may be blamed (*bohtan*) for something he/she may have not done. Point C and D are attributes of *human nature*. In the absence of sufficient information the gaps in information are filled with assumptions, which may or may not be true, in order to reach a conclusion or to form an opinion. So, it is in human nature to infer sometimes with little information to draw a complete mental picture which would have otherwise remained incomplete. Inquisitiveness is also an attribute of human nature, where in the absence of vital information one try’s to get it through snooping



around or through spying. So conjecturing and spying are prohibited. Points E is a prohibition that include talking about a person's short coming behind his or her back and point F refers to prohibition of calling names that are actually found in the person, like calling a person shorty due to one's less height. Both points E and F are about types of truth prohibited in Islam, placed to avoid social conflict and maintain a peaceful living. Point H is about news verification when the *character of reporting person* is not up to the mark. Verification of news from an unreliable source is about strength of human character engaged in the process of gathering, reporting or dissemination of information, as it can be a source of distortion or twisting of the news facts. Point I is about the exceptional cases of withholding information temporarily from direct disclosure to public so that *extraction of correct meaning* from the news content is possible through interpretation by experts or government officials. Once correct meaning is derived of the news content, the news is dispersed with an angle that facilitates social cohesion and unity, especially in a state of war. It is a *mechanism to control harmful effect of spreading rumors* and news release is about maintaining unity and social cohesion.

### **Implications**

The content of IGJ has many implications for the journalists, owners of media houses and government organs that deal with media and information policy of the state. For the human resource departments of media houses it would be vital to recruit media people with honest background that are straight forward in their reporting. In their ineligibility criteria the reputation of being a liar or a storyteller should be a major disqualification. Reporters are supposed to avoid snooping around, like spies to gather information. They should instead use formal means to take views or report incidents. Reporters must avoid filling in the gaps in their report with conjecturing or self-concocted stories. Analysts should be area experts and good in digging out the information well in order to reach a conclusion and make good use of the information. Islamic knowledge and worldly knowledge are both required of them in their specific area of analysis. The columnists need to be well versed regarding the topic they write about, their knowledge of current situation about the topic and Islamic judgments should be known to them, in order

to give their advice. At the moment columnists and analysts are mostly generalists. They comment, criticize and give advice on virtually anything that may interest them; their specialized knowledge of the matter at hand and their knowledge of Islamic interpretation regarding the subject of discussion are not considered important nor at the time of recruitment are these considered to be criteria of eligibility. In talk-shows the comments are way beyond the real content of the news report, heavy reliance of conjecturing and hypothetical debate is the basis of speculative discussion and truth becomes the first casualty. Reporter, analysts, and columnists use their informers to bring out information without disclosing the informers, such information is the right of official state espionage networks. When media houses step-in this jurisdiction they endanger their employees without having the right of doing so. The state apparatus can snoop around all types of anti-state actors that may have foreign links. For local criminal networks even the state actors should investigate openly instead of hidden espionage apparatus. But media houses or any private entities have no question of engaging in such activities. If they are in possession of any such information they must hand it over to the state machinery. When news of war or peace are to be reported these must first be placed before the state's officials who are at the helm of affairs or those who are experts of that area before breaking it in the news channels to avoid any such views that may result in discord or disunity. Advertising is also part of journalism but Islamic guidelines regarding it are very well established by Amanullah (2008). Reporting crimes in a Muslim society also has specific guidelines and those are well covered by Amanullah (2008).

### **Conclusion**

The paper has identified that journalistic work includes reporting, analysis, and using information for decisions such as those placed in columns. These three categories of journalists have clear guidelines and limitations prescribed by Islamic teachings. These teachings are generally for all members of Muslim society but are equally relevant for journalistic work. IGJ determine and address the domain of state and access of information for the masses. The article helps in reducing the conflicts introduced by WJE and the concept of nation-state in the modern world. In light of IJG it is inevitable for governments to have as

many offices as many departments there are to verify news items, extract right meaning of the reported content and give proper advice in the light of the news respective to their areas and for dissemination in the masses. Islamic guidelines have also described recruitment preferences for reporters, analysts, and columnists therefore the media houses have clear course of action to recruit appropriate human resources in the journalistic chain.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-ethics/>

<sup>3</sup> Unpublished proceedings of the First International Conference of Muslim Journalists, jointly organized by the Organization of Islamic Conference, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia and the Ministry of Information, Government of Indonesia, held at Jakarta, September 1981

<sup>4</sup> Though *nasihah* was translated by author as independence instead of advice

يُصْلِحُ لَكُمْ أَعْمَالَكُمْ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ فَازَ فَوْزًا عَظِيمًا<sup>5</sup>

(If you do so i.e. talk to the point,) Allah will correct your deeds for your benefit, and forgive your sins for you. Whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger achieves a great success. (Al-Ahz'ab 33:71)

<sup>6</sup> explanation of the verse 33:70 in *Tafseer Mafardaat* by Mulana Abduhu Ferozepuri 1108 AD/502 AH

<sup>7</sup> Finding spies necessitate existence of organization with committed human and material resources to locate probable spies at all times and giving them the punishment, in light of the Hadees

حَدَّثَنَا الْحَسَنُ بْنُ عَلِيٍّ حَدَّثَنَا قَالَ أَبُو نُعَيْمٍ حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو عُمَيْسٍ عَنْ ابْنِ سَلَمَةَ بْنِ الْأَكْوَعِ عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ قَالَ أَيْ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَيْنٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَهُوَ فِي سَفَرٍ فَجَلَسَ عِنْدَ أَصْحَابِهِ ثُمَّ أُنْسِلَ فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اطْلُبُوهُ فَأَقْتُلُوهُ قَالَ فَسَبَقْتُهُمْ إِلَيْهِ فَقَتَلْتُهُ وَأَخَذْتُ سَلْبَهُ فَتَقَلَّبِي إِيَّاهُ

Ibn Salamah bin Al Akwa' reported on the authority of his father. A spy of the polytheists came to the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) when he was on a journey. He sat near his Companions and then slipped away. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said "look for him and kill him". He said "I raced to him and killed him. I took his belongings which he (the Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم) gave me (as reward/ghaneemah).

(Abu Dawood, Vol. 2 Hadees No: 88, with different words, Hadees has been narrated by Muslim and Bukhari too)

٨ وَالَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَا يَأْتُوا بِأَرْبَعَةِ شُهَدَاءَ فَاجْلِدُوهُمْ ثَمَانِينَ جَلْدَةً وَلَا تَقْبَلُوا لَهُمْ شَهَادَةً أَبَدًا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ  
الْفَاسِقُونَ ٥

Those who accuse the chaste women (of fornication), but they do not produce four witnesses, flog them with eighty stripes and do not accept their any evidence any more.

They are the sinners

(Al-Noor 24:04)