

122964 - Ruling on discussions in chat rooms about religious matters and polls concerning them

the question

Recently it has become common in many chat rooms for some who are regarded as being religiously committed to discuss various Islamic issues, such as the colour and quality of the hijab, and closing shops at the times of prayer, openly in front of ordinary people. Each person gives his view, for or against, or somewhere in between, as if it is a competition. In fact it has reached such a point that one of them described a Muslim sister in Canada who was wearing a black abayah and attracted a bunch of local people who found this off-putting look very strange! If someone argues back, they accuse him of being extreme and narrowminded, and not accepting of the other opinion. Even though the people who engage in this discussion are regarded as being religiously committed people, what is usually the case in these discussions is that no one cites shar‘i evidence to support his view, or quotes the views of the scholars. When they discuss the matter they say: This is just my personal opinion and has nothing to do with fatwas, and the like. These discussions have become a source of conflict and resentment between committed people. What is the ruling on discussing religious issues in open gatherings among ordinary people? What do you say to those who run these chat rooms in which these things happen?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

What is mentioned in the question is an important issue to which we should pay attention. We may break the matter down into a number of issues as follows:

1. Discussion of religious issues which are clear and established on the basis of religious texts or scholarly consensus.
2. Discussion of matters that are subject to ijtihad, for which the evidence is open to interpretation and concerning which there is a difference of opinion among the scholars.

3. Putting religious matters to a vote (a poll).

With regard to the first issue: it should be known that whatever has been established and proven on the basis of a verse of the Qur'an or saheeh evidence from the Sunnah, or from scholarly consensus – whether it has to do with matters of belief ('aqeedah) or fiqh – it is not permissible for anyone to doubt it or make it the subject of debate among the scholars and seekers of knowledge, let alone ordinary people. Rather people are called to adhere to these established issues and to accept whatever beliefs are connected to them.

With regard to the second issue: in many religious issues there is a difference of opinion among the scholars, with regard to the evidence used, or with regard to the way in which the evidence is to be understood. When it comes to these issues, there is nothing wrong with bringing them up in chat rooms to discuss and debate them, on condition that certain guidelines be followed, including the following:

1. The debate and discussion on these matters should be based on evidence and scholarly views, not mere whims and desires or personal opinion. Therefore it is not permissible to express any view on religious issues unless it is based on shar'ī evidence.
2. The debate and discussion should be conducted in a polite manner, avoiding any profanity or fanaticism.
3. There should be no exaggeration about the importance of an issue, and important issues should be given priority in discussions and debates.

As for polls and putting any religious matter to a vote – which is the third issue mentioned above – and giving space for anyone to express his opinion concerning them, this is not acceptable. Among people there are Muslims and disbelievers, those who are obedient to Allah and those who are disobedient, those who are knowledgeable and those who are ignorant, the old and the young. How can it be appropriate for the laws of Allah, may He be exalted, to be presented before all these people to vote according to what they think should be the law of Allah?!

The rulings of Islam cannot be proven in this way; what is right or wrong, or what is more or less likely to be the correct view, cannot be determined by putting it to a vote. Rather things are

known by means of academic discussions on the evidence concerning the matter and how to interpret the evidence in order to find out the ruling of Allah, may He be exalted, on a particular issue.

We have read in some chat rooms words such as, “Have your say: do you agree with plural marriage?” and “What do you think of the niqab; do you support it?”

If we look at the choices and opinions of the participants, we will see that this way of discussing issues is very dangerous. When it comes to the topic of the niqab, for example, the choices and comments concerning it included “it is backward”, “it is terrorism and extremism”, “it is continued oppression of women” and “I support it because women are immoral”!

Such words are offensive and are reviling the rulings of sharee‘ah which were prescribed by Allah, may He be exalted. This is a serious matter that puts the faith of one who does that in jeopardy.

We ask Allah, may He be exalted, to rectify the affairs of the Muslims.

And Allah knows best.