

14212 - Beware of rumours at times of crisis

the question

There are some writers, especially on the Internet, who spread news without verifying it, which is confusing the Muslims and making them despair, such as the claim that one of the Muslim cities has fallen, or that one of their leaders has been killed, and other reports which lead to despair and weakening of morale... All of that is without any proof or certainty that the news is true... Some of them even write at the end of their articles, “This is what I have heard but I am not sure whether the report is true”!

What is your advice to these people?.

Detailed answer

Undoubtedly at times of tribulation there is a lot of propaganda and excitement, hence the role of rumours.

It is well known that verifying news is required according to sharee’ah, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! If a Faasiq (liar — evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done”

[al-Hujuraat 49:6]

The Lawgiver issued a stern warning against passing on all that one hears. It was narrated that Hafs ibn ‘Aasim said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “It is enough lying for a man to speak of everything that he hears.” Narrated by Muslim in al-Muqaddimah, 6; Saheeh al-Jaami, 4482.

It was narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “It is enough sin for a man to speak of everything that he hears.” Al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 2025.

Al-Nawawi said: Usually a person hears truth and lies, so if he speaks of everything that he hears, he is lying by telling of things that did not happen, and lying by speaking of something other than the way it happened; and he does not have to do that deliberately (in order to be regarded as telling lies).

It was narrated that al-Mugheerah ibn Shu’bah said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah has forbidden you to disobey your mothers, to bury your daughters alive, to not pay the rights of others and to beg from others. And He dislikes gossip for you, asking too many questions, and wasting money.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 2231.

Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar said:

With regard to the words ‘and He dislikes gossip [qeela wa qaala – lit. it was said and he said] for you’ al-Muhibb al-Tabari said, there are three points of view as to the meaning of this hadeeth:

1 – That it indicates that it is makrooh (disliked) to speak too much, because it leads to mistakes.

2 – That it refers to wanting to pass on what people say and looking for that in order to tell others of it, so that one can say, “So and so said such and such, and Such and such was said...” The prohibition on this is either a rebuke for doing too much of it or it refers to a particular type of talk, which the person spoken of dislikes to have mentioned.

3 – That it refers to narrating differences of opinion concerning religious matters, such as saying, “This one said such and such and that one said such and such.” The reason why this is disliked is that speaking of such matters may lead to mistakes. This applies especially to those who transmit such views without verifying them, merely imitating those whom they hear without exercising any caution. I say: this is supported by the saheeh hadeeth, “It is enough sin for a man to speak of everything that he hears.” (narrated by Muslim).

It was narrated that Abu Qalaabah said: Abu Mas'ood said to Abu 'Abd-Allah, or Abu 'Abd-Allah said to Abu Mas'ood: What did you hear the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say about saying "they say..."?

He said: I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: "How bad it is for a man to keep saying, 'They say...'. " al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 866.

Al-'Azeemabaadi said: This means, it is a bad way to reach one's objective, by saying, 'they say...'. Saying 'they say...' is akin to conjecture, i.e., the worst habit of a man is to use the phrase 'they say' to serve his purposes, so he tells of something, merely repeating what others have said without verifying it, and thus he transmits lies ... this was the view of al-Manaawi.

Hence our righteous forebears were keen to establish proof and were wary of rumours.

'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "Beware of fitnah, for a word at the time of fitnah could be as devastating as the sword."

History shows us the danger of rumours when they spread among the ummah. There follow some examples of that:

1 – When the Sahaabah migrated from Makkah to Ethiopia, they were safe, but then a rumour spread that the kuffaar of Quraysh in Makkah had become Muslims, so some of the Sahaabah left Ethiopia and travelled until they reached Makkah, where they found that the report was not true, and they met with persecution at the hands of Quraysh. All of that happened because of rumours.

2 – During the Battle of Uhud, when Mus'ab ibn 'Umayr was killed, there was a rumour that it was the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) who had been killed, so the army of Islam withdrew because of a rumour, and some of them fled to Madeenah and some stopped fighting.

3 – There was the rumour of the slander incident (al-ifk), when the pure and innocent 'Aa'ishah was accused of immoral conduct, which led to the distress felt by the Messenger of Allah (peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the Muslims with him. All of that was because of rumours.

So what is the proper shar'i method of dealing with news?

There are ways of dealing with news which we will look at in brief:

1 – Deliberation

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Deliberation is from Allah and haste is from the Shaytaan.” *Al-Silsilah al-Saheehah*, 1795.

The one who deliberates may meet some of his needs whilst the one who is hasty may slip.

2 – Verifying news

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! If a Faasiq (liar — evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done”

[al-Hujuraat 49:6]

The reason why this verse was revealed:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent al-Waleed ibn ‘Uqbah ibn Abi Mu’eet to Banu al-Mustaliq, to collect the zakaah from them. When news of that reached them they rejoiced, and they came out to meet the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). When al-Waleed heard that they had come out to meet him, he went back to the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, “O Messenger of Allah, Banu al-Mustaliq have withheld the zakaah.”

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) became very angry at that, and whilst he was thinking of launching a campaign against them, the delegation came to him and said, “O Messenger of Allah, we were told that your envoy returned after coming only half

way, and we were afraid that he came back because he received a message from you saying that you were angry with us. We seek refuge with Allah from the anger of Allah and the anger of His Messenger.”

Then Allah excused them in His Book and revealed the words (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! If a Faasiq (liar — evil person) comes to you with any news, verify it, lest you should harm people in ignorance, and afterwards you become regretful for what you have done”

[al-Hujuraat 49:6]

See: al-Silsilah al-Saheehah, 3085.

What is meant by verifying is making the effort to find out the truth of the matter, so as to establish whether this can be proven or not.

Verifying means making certain of the truth of the report and its circumstances.

Al-Hasan al-Basri said: “The believer reserves judgement until the matter is proven.”

Finally: we advise everyone to verify matters and not to rush to pass on news until they are sure that it is true, even if the news is good news, because if it becomes apparent that the one who passed it on is mistaken, he will lose credibility before the people... and anyone who bears a grudge towards him will use it against him. May Allah help us all to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

And Allah knows best.