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Etiquettes and Fiqh Issues in Social Media use

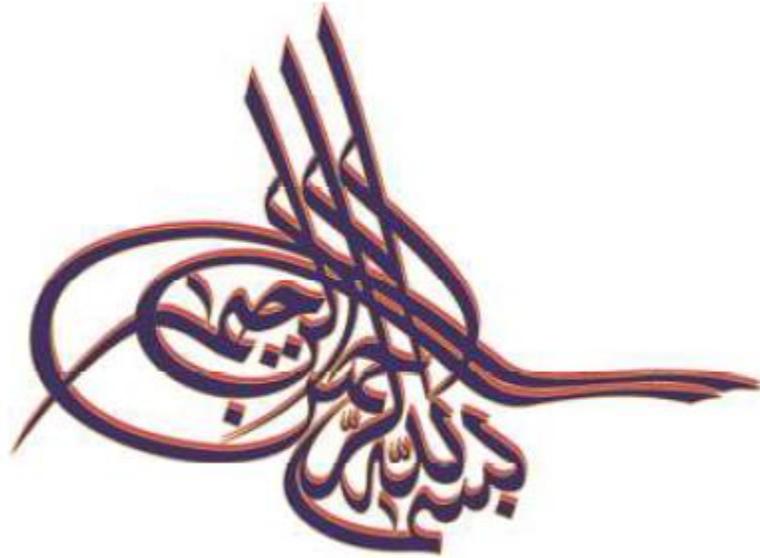
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"الأراء في هذا البحث تعبر عن رأي الباحث وليس بالضرورة عن رأي أمجا"

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1. GENERAL GUIDANCE AND ETIQUETTES FOR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

آداب و نصائح عامة في استخدام التواصل الاجتماعي

1. *Intention* أهمية النية
2. Awareness of Allah مراقبة الله في القول والعمل
3. Islamic identity and manners هوية المسلم وأخلاقه
4. Use of Time الاحتفاظ على الوقت
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8. Working towards change العمل للإصلاح على قدر الاستطاعة
9. Love of Attention and fame حب الشهرة
10. Avoiding being just a follower لا تكن امّعة

1.1 Intention أهمية النية

The intention is the starting point of all actions in Islam. It is the foundation upon which all actions are judged and rewarded. Its importance is manifested in the famous Hadith of the Prophet () that is the beginning of many of the works of Hadith, including the Sahih of Imam Al-Bukhari. It is narrated there from Umar ibn Al-Khattab that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

إنما الأعمال بالنيات، وإنما لكل امرئ ما نوى

Verily, deeds are only with intentions. Verily, every person will have only what they intended” (Bukhari). As Imam Al-Shafi mentions, “This Hadith is one third of Islam, and applies to 70 different chapters of Fiqh.” In the etiquettes of social media use, this Hadith not only applies but must be the starting point, and the intention is one of the most important things for the user to consider. To ask and answer the question of why one is using social media and what they seek to obtain and gain from it allows the user to gain the benefits and avoid the harms as best as possible. It can be the difference between social media being a tool to gain Allah’s pleasure versus it leading one away from Allah and to His punishment. Consider two people, both next to each other using the same internet connection, the same type of device, on the same social media platform, maybe even engaged in the same actions, yet one of them is earning great reward for their sincerity while the other is piling on sins with their ostentation and mischief. The difference here goes back to the intention. Additionally, a righteous and proper intention and sincerity can be the protecting factor from the many potential pitfalls and hidden harms of social media. The Prophet () tells us,

إن في الجسد مضغة إذا صلحت صلح الجسد كله، وإذا فسدت فسد الجسد كله، ألا وهي القلب

“Indeed in the body is a morsel of flesh that if it is righteous, the whole body becomes righteous and if it is corrupted the whole body becomes corrupted, indeed that is the heart” (Agreed upon).

To begin social media use with one’s intention, and to frequently return to it and be aware of it, allows the use to become one of clear goals, extended benefit, multiplied rewards, and protection from harm.

1.2 Awareness of Allah مراقبة الله في القول والعمل

One of the hallmarks of social media and internet use is the perception of privacy. A person who is behind a keyboard or by themselves on their phone believes they are alone to say and do as they please. The believer, however, recognizes that he is never truly alone. Allah (swt) says,

وَمَا تَكُونُ فِي شَأْنٍ وَمَا تَتْلُو مِنْهُ مِنْ قُرْآنٍ وَلَا تَعْمَلُونَ مِنْ عَمَلٍ إِلَّا كُنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ شُهُودًا إِذْ تُفِيضُونَ فِيهِ وَمَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَا أَصْغَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرَ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ (يونس 1:61)

“There is no activity you may be engaged in or portion of the Quran you may be reciting, nor any deed you ‘all’ may be doing except that We are a Witness over you while doing it. Not ‘even’ an atom’s weight is hidden from your Lord on earth or in heaven; nor anything smaller or larger than that, but is ‘written’ in a perfect Record” (10:61).

The awareness of this reality is what is known as Muraqaba. It is something that may strengthen or fade depending on internal and external factors but it is nonetheless always a reality. The believer recognizes that in all circumstances and situations, whether in a group or alone, offline or online, that Allah is aware of any and all good or evil they do. This motivates the believer to do what goodness he can, even when no one is watching, and to avoid evil even when it is easily accessible and no one else is watching. The anonymity of a screen name or privacy settings doesn’t delude the believer into feeling that there are no consequences for their statements and actions online, and that it is Allah who is most deserving of our consciousness. As Allah reminds us,

يَسْتَخْفُونَ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يَسْتَخْفُونَ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَهُوَ مَعَهُمْ إِذْ يُبَيِّتُونَ مَا لَا يَرْضَى مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطًا
(النساء 108:8)

“They try to hide from people, but they can never hide it from Allah—in Whose presence they plot by night what is displeasing to Him. And Allah is Fully Aware of what they do” (4:108).

The goal of the believer in all their actions, including on social media, is Ihsan as the Prophet (ﷺ) defined it,

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

“To worship Allah (swt) as if you can see Him, for if you do not, He can definitely see you.” (Agreed upon)

1.3 Islamic identity and manners هوية المسلم وأخلاقه

One of the defining characteristics of the believer is their elevated manners. The Prophet (ﷺ) was described by Allah,

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ (القلم: 4)

“And you are truly ‘a man’ of outstanding character” (68:4),

and he (ﷺ) defined his mission as **“being sent to perfect character.”** (Saheeh Al-Jaami’: 2349)

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ صَالِحَ الْإِخْلَاقِ

It is important for the believer to keep this standard in mind in all circumstances and situations. This especially applies online, where the anonymity of being behind a keyboard and perceived lack of accountability can lead to a lowering and weakening of the Islamic standard of character. The Muslim must strive to embody and represent the Prophetic model online and uphold the characteristics of truthfulness, trustworthiness, patience, humility, mercy, honor, forbearance, forgiveness, modesty, generosity, kindness and justice. In doing so, the believer lives to uphold and spread the prophetic guidance of:

وخالق الناس بخلق حسن

“Treat all people with goodness” (Tirmidhi)1

and be from amongst those the prophet (ﷺ) mentioned,

1 Classified as Hasan (Acceptable) in Saheeh Al-Tirmidhi by Al-Albani: 1987

إِنَّ مِنْ أَحَبِّكُمْ إِلَيَّ وَأَقْرَبِكُمْ مِنِّي مَجْلِسًا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ أَحْسَنُكُمْ أَخْلَاقًا

“Indeed the most beloved of you to me and the closest to me in position on the day of judgment are those of you with the best character” (Saheeh Al-Targheeb)²

1.4 Use of Time الاحتفاظ على الوقت

The most valuable capital that a believer has is his time. Time is the life of the believer and is a limited and fleeting commodity. Allah reminds us of taking advantage of this precious gift by swearing by it in Surah Al-Asr,

وَالْعَصْرِ * إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ * إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالحَقِّ وَتَوَّصُوا بِالصَّبْرِ (العصر: 1 - 3)

By the ‘passage of’ time! Surely humanity is in ‘grave’ loss except those who have faith, do good, and urge each other to the truth, and urge each other to perseverance (103:1-3).

While social media has facilitated connection and communication in a way that saves time, it also can be a place where much time is spent and wasted. If one is not vigilant and careful, they may end up wasting hours and days in that which has little to no benefit or become distracted from that which is more beneficial to them. The Prophet (ﷺ) reminds us that this is the reality of many people,

نعمتان مغبونٌ فيهما كثيرٌ من الناس الصَّحَّةُ، والفراغ

“Two blessings in which many people incur loss: health and free time” (Bukhari). It is critically important for the Muslim to be aware how much of their time is spent on social media and what they are investing their precious life in while on the internet. There is a statement that is attributed to the companion Abdullah ibn Masud that acts as a reminder of this, ما ندمتُ على شيءٍ ندمي، “I don’t regret anything as much as the regret of a day in which the sun sets and my lifespan has decreased without my (good) actions having increased.”

1.5 Protecting Privacy الحفاظ على الخصوصيات

One of the important rights Allah has granted the human being is protection of their privacy.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَدْخُلُوا بُيُوتًا غَيْرَ بُيُوتِكُمْ حَتَّى تَسْتَأْذِنُوا وَتُسَلِّمُوا عَلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا ذَٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (النور: 27)

² Classified as Saheeh li ghayrihi (Authentic due to corroboration) in Saheeh Al-Targheeb by Al-Albani: 2897

“O you who have believed, do not enter houses other than your own houses until you ascertain welcome and greet their inhabitants. That is best for you; perhaps you will be reminded” (Quran, 24:27).

It becomes the responsibility of the believer to protect their own private affairs as well as the private affairs of others. Allah says,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا (الحجرات:

(12

“O you who have believed, avoid much [negative] assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other” (49:12).

Also, the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said,

يا معشر من آمن بلسانه ولم يدخل الإيمان قلبه، لا تغتابوا المسلمين، ولا تتبعوا عوراتهم، فإنه من اتبع عوراتهم يتبع الله عورته، ومن يتبع الله عورته يفضحه في بيته.

“O people, who have professed belief verbally, but faith has not yet entered your hearts: Do not pry into the affairs of the Muslims, for he who will pry into the affairs of the Muslims, Allah will pry into his affairs, and he whom Allah follows inquisitively, is disgraced by Him in his own house” (Abu Dawud)3

While social media has normalized the publicizing and spreading of almost anything and everything, the Muslim recognizes that not everything is meant to be shown and spread to the public and posted on social media. It was narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

استعينوا على إنجاح الحوائج بالكتمان أفإن كل ذي نعمة محسود

“Seek the fulfillment of your needs through keeping them private, because every carrier of blessing is envied” (Saheeh Al-Jaami’4

Understanding what can and what can't be shared, what should and what shouldn't be posted, and what should remain private both for oneself as well as for others is a much needed etiquette at a time when the rights of privacy have become overlooked and compromised.

1.6 Focusing on what concerns a person التركيز على ما يعنيه

The vastness of social media provides unprecedented access and information, both beneficial and harmful and everything in between. The Prophet (ﷺ) gave us a key piece of guidance in navigating this, when he said,

³ Classified as Hasan Saheeh (Good, Authentic) in Saheeh Abu Dawud by Al-Albani: 4880

⁴ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) in Saheeh Al-Jaami' by Al-Albani: 943

احرص على ما ينفعك

“Focus on and seek what benefits you.”

This advice is key in guiding the believer to utilize their time on social media for that which benefits him in his worldly life and his hereafter. It would also help him avoid that which will be a distraction and harmful to his worldly life and akhira. This can be applied to all elements of social media use, including what is read and watched, what is written and said, and whom one is interacting with online. Allah describes the believers as,

والذين هم عن اللغو معرضون (المؤمنون: 3)

“those who turn away from idle speech” (23:3).

This allows the believer to seek that which will benefit him and pursue and increase in goodness in all its forms. Social media provides many avenues for finding this goodness but only when directed by the guidance of the Shariah, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

من حسن إسلام المرء تركه ما لا يعنيه

“From the excellence of a person’s Islam is that they leave that which does not concern them” (Tirmidhi).

1.7 Having Optimism التفاؤل

One of the most beautiful qualities of the Prophet (ﷺ) was his optimism and his ability to inspire optimism in others. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

“There are no bad omens and the best of it is optimism. They asked him, what is optimism? He (ﷺ) said, ‘A good word that one of you hears’” (Agreed upon).

عَنْ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عُتْبَةَ، أَنَّ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: لَا طَيْرَةَ، وَخَيْرُهَا الْفَأُلُ، قَالُوا: وَمَا الْفَأُلُ؟ قَالَ: الْكَلِمَةُ الصَّالِحَةُ يَسْمَعُهَا أَحَدُكُمْ

This optimism of the Prophet (ﷺ) was rooted in certainty, a good opinion of Allah (swt) and an unshakeable belief in the promise of Allah (swt). Even in the most difficult and bleak of times, the Prophet (ﷺ) held on to this and inspired others with it. While in the cave with Abu Bakr and the enemy closing in, Abu Bakr said to the Prophet (ﷺ) If one of them were to look at his feet he would have seen us. The Prophet (ﷺ) calmly said,

“O Abu Bakr, what do you think about two of whom Allah is their third. O Abu Bakr, Don’t be sad, Indeed Allah is with us.” (Bukhari)

فيقول أبو بكرٍ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: لَوْ أَنَّ أَحَدَهُمْ يَنْظُرُ إِلَى قَدَمَيْهِ لِأَبْصَرْنَا تَحْتَ قَدَمَيْهِ، قَالَ: يَا أَبَا بَكْرٍ، مَا ظَنُّكَ بِأَثْنَيْنِ اللهُ تَالِثَهُمَا. يَا أَبَا بَكْرٍ! لَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّ اللهَ معنا

Remembering this quality of the Prophet (ﷺ) and embodying it in social media use is beneficial and needed. With the amount of information spread on social media, there can be a heavy focus on news that is negative that can lead to pessimism, cynicism and hopelessness. The believer is not careless or naive but looks at the world around them with the same certainty, good opinion of Allah and belief in the promise of Allah (swt) that characterized the optimism of the Prophet (ﷺ). This leads to the Muslim seeing the potential for good and benefit in any situation and working towards achieving that good and benefit. It also protects the Muslim from the hopelessness and ill will towards the Ummah that may come about from the constant negative news cycle and bad news that one may be exposed to on social media.

As the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "If you hear a person say, the people are destroyed then he is the most destroyed of them (and in another narration: he is the cause of their destruction5)." (Muslim)

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ: إِذَا سَمِعْتَ الرَّجُلَ يَقُولُ: هَلَكَ النَّاسُ، فَهُوَ أَهْلَكُهُمْ - وفي رواية: إِذَا سَمِعَ أَتَمَّ رَجُلًا يَقُولُ: قَدْ هَلَكَ النَّاسُ، فَهُوَ أَهْلَكُهُمْ.

1.8 Working towards change العمل للإصلاح على قدر الاستطاعة

Allah (swt) describes the Muslim community in the Quran when he says,

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ (آل عمران: 110)

"You are the best community ever raised for humanity—you encourage good, forbid evil, and believe in Allah" (3:110).

The goodness of the community is contingent on striving towards establishing goodness and removing harm. This may seem like a monumental task but the communal responsibility is based on effort and capability. The Prophet (ﷺ) establishes this for us when he tells us,

"Whoever amongst you who sees an evil should remove it with his hand. If he is unable, then with his tongue. If he is unable, then with his heart, and that is the weakest of faith." (Muslim)

مَنْ رَأَى مِنْكُمْ مُنْكَرًا فَلْيُغَيِّرْهُ بِيَدِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِلِسَانِهِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَبِقَلْبِهِ. وَذَلِكَ أضعفُ الإيْمَانِ

⁵ This version of the narration is found in Abu Dawud and classified as Saheeh by Al-Albani: 4983

As Abu Bakr said to the people, “O people you read this ayah, O believers! You are accountable only for yourselves. It will not harm you if someone chooses to deviate—as long as you are ‘rightly’ guided (5:105). And I heard the Prophet (ﷺ) say, “When people see an oppressor but do not prevent him from committing sin, it is close that Allah will punish them all” (Tirmidhi)6

عن أبي بكر الصديق، أنه قال: يا أيها الناس إنكم تقرأون هذه الآية يا أيها الذين آمنوا عليكم أنفسكم لا يضركم من ضلَّ إذا اهتديتم، وإني سمعتُ رسولَ الله صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يقول: إنَّ النَّاسَ إِذَا رَأَوْا ظالِمًا، فلم يأخذوا على يديه أوشك أن يعُمَّهم اللهُ بعقابٍ منه

This effort of rectification and calling to good must extend to social media on an individual and communal level as well. Spreading beneficial knowledge, correcting mistakes using the prophetic methodology, advising with sincerity and wisdom, and connecting the Muslims to each other and to the scholars are all ways that this effort can be established. Social media also provides the unique ability to spread awareness and information of the happenings throughout the world and thus gives the opportunity to be informed and work for truth and justice across the globe. This elevates a Muslim’s care and responsibility beyond just themselves and reflects the Islamic spirit of an Ummah being one body.

1.9 Love of Attention and fame حب الشهرة

Allah (swt) shows us what the motivation for our lives and actions should be,

قُلْ إِنَّ صَلَاتِي وَنُسُكِي وَمَحْيَايَ وَمَمَاتِي لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (الانعام: 162)

“Say, “Surely my prayer, my worship, my life, and my death are all for Allah—Lord of all worlds” (6:162).

Social media has encouraged and popularized a very different motivation: the love and pursuit of recognition and fame. The desire for fame can negatively impact a person’s intentions, goals, and actions and can become a threat to their sincerity and Iman. The Prophet (ﷺ) addressed this danger when he (ﷺ) said,

مَا ذُئْبَانٍ جَائِعَانِ أُرْسِلَانِ فِي غَنَمٍ بِأَفْسَدَ لَهَا مِنْ حِرْصِ الْمُرءِ عَلَى الْمَالِ وَالشَّرَفِ لِدِينِهِ

“Two hungry wolves roaming freely among a flock of sheep are less destructive to them than the passion of a man for wealth and high status are to his religion” (Tirmidhi)7.

⁶ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) in Saheeh Al-Tirmidhi by Al-Albani: 3057

⁷ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Mundhiri in Al-Targheeb wa Al-Tarheeb: 4/160

Fame and recognition should never be the motivator for one's activism and work, rather the believer's goals are loftier and purer for Allah's sake and for bringing benefit to mankind.

It was narrated from the Prophet (ﷺ) warning believers that, "If anyone wears a garment for gaining fame, Allah will clothe him in a similar garment on the Day of Resurrection (in another narration, a garment of humiliation), and then it will be lit ablaze in the fire" (Abu Dawud)⁸

" مَنْ لَبَسَ ثَوْبَ شَهْرَةِ الْبَسَةِ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ثَوْبًا مِثْلَهُ (و في رواية مذلة) " . زَادَ عَنْ أَبِي عَوَانَةَ " ثُمَّ تَلَهَّبُ فِيهِ النَّارُ " .

If this is the case with seeking fame through clothing, then seeking fame through one's social media use and activism can be included as well. It must also be noted that fame and distinction are not inherently condemnable. If one gains popularity and fame and it is used to spread benefit and goodness, then this is a noble intention and endeavor. What is important here is the intention and the constant pursuit and focus on sincerity with Allah (swt). Allah (swt) tells us the supplication of the servants of the Most Merciful,

وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا (الفرقان: 74)

"and make us models for the righteous" (25:74).

As the Prophet Yusuf (AS) saw a need that required fulfillment and his qualification to fulfill that need, undoubtedly he did so for the sake of Allah (swt),

اجْعَلْنِي عَلَى خَزَائِنِ الْأَرْضِ إِنِّي حَفِيظٌ عَلِيمٌ (يوسف: 55)

"Put me in charge of the store-houses of the land, for I am truly reliable and adept." (12:55).

This is the model for the Muslim, seeking Allah and benefit, not fame and popularity.

1.10 Avoiding being just a follower لا تكن امّعة

The believer is blessed with the guidance of Islam, a light that illuminates the soul and can change the world. The Muslim is proud of this perfect system of guidance, morals, and manners and uses it as the blueprint for their life. Social media opens the door for people to blindly follow and imitate the latest trends, fads, and influencers without fully understanding or realizing why and the consequences behind such decisions. Instead, the ideas of fitting in and conforming to what is considered popular and mainstream become the ideals for people to follow.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said, "Do not be a people without a will of your own, saying: 'If people treat us well, we will treat them well; and if they do wrong,

⁸ Classified as Hasan (Acceptable) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Abu Dawud: 4029

we will do wrong,' but accustom yourselves to do good if people do good, and do not behave unjustly if they do evil” (Tirmidhi)⁹.

لا تكونوا إِمَّةً، تَقُولُونَ: إِنَّ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسِ أَحْسَنًا، وَإِنْ ظَلَمُوا ظَلَمْنَا، وَلَكِنْ وَطَّنُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ، إِنَّ أَحْسَنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تُحْسِنُوا،
وَإِنْ أَسَاءُوا فَلَا تَظْلِمُوا

For the believer, the standard is what Allah (swt) and His Messenger (ﷺ) have set and the role models are the Prophets and the righteous. The believer is a follower, but not a follower of what is popular and trending. The believer is a follower of the truth and that makes them a leader for this world.

⁹ Classified as Hasan Ghareeb by Al-Tirmidhi; Classified as Da'eef (weak in chain) by Al-Albani in Al-Jami' Al-Sagheer. Al-Albani commented in Mishkah Al-Masabeeh: It is authentic back to Abdullah ibn Masud (mawqoof).

2. OBLIGATIONS واجبات

2.1 Following rules and commitments of a group or agreement

It is obligatory for anyone who has joined a group or organization through social media to abide by the rules and conditions agreed upon in the group. This is based on the generality of the verse where Allah (swt) commands,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ (المائدة: 1)

“O believers! Honor your obligations” (5:1).

And Allah (swt) tells us,

وَأَوْفُوا بِالْعَهْدِ إِنَّ الْعَهْدَ كَانَ مَسْئُولًا (الإسراء: 34)

“Honor your pledges, for you will surely be accountable for them” (17:34).

The Prophet (ﷺ) further emphasizes this responsibility when he says,

المسلمون على شروطهم

“Muslims must abide by their conditions (which they have made)” (Abu Dawud)10.

The exception to this is given in an addition to this Hadith,

المسلمون على شروطهم؛ إلا شرطاً حراماً حلالاً أو أحل حراماً

“Muslims must abide by their conditions (which they have made), except for a condition which makes unlawful something which is lawful, or makes lawful something which is unlawful” (Tirmidhi)11.

Therefore, it is incumbent on the Muslim to abide by the rules and conditions they agree to when signing agreements and joining groups online except and unless this includes agreeing to something unlawful or there is a normative exception.

2.2 Confirming information online before believing/spreading it

التثبت للاخبار قبل تصديقها ونشرها

¹⁰ Classified as Hasan Saheeh (Good Authentic) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Abu Dawud: 3594

¹¹ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Al-Tirmidhi: 1592

It is obligatory for the Muslim to confirm news or information found online before acting on it or spreading the information. Allah (swt) says,

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْبِحُوا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ
(الحجرات: 6)

“O believers, if an evildoer brings you any news, verify ‘it’ so you do not harm people unknowingly, becoming regretful for what you have done” (49:6).

Social media and the internet in general are open and vast information sources through which anyone is able to access, contribute and spread information. There is often a lack of verification and filtration that leads to a tremendous amount of falsification, misinformation, rumors, and deception. This should make the Muslim vigilant and aware of what they believe and spread when using social media. News and important information should only be taken from trusted and verified sources and what comes from other origins should be authenticated if needed before being believed and spread. In addition to this, it is beneficial for the believer to have multiple filters when it comes to news and information found online. Beyond the authentication of the information itself, one must also consider whether the information is even worth giving attention to and verifying. If the information brings no benefit, it should be left or ignored. Also, before spreading, one must consider why and how they are spreading it and if there is benefit in doing so. Allah (swt) says,

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوِ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ ۖ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَىٰ أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنْبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ (النساء: 83).

“And when they hear news of security or fear, they publicize it. Had they referred it to the Messenger or their authorities, those with sound judgment among them would have validated it” (4:83).

Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen comments on this verse and says, “This verse perfectly applies to our situation now, as many people publicize news at its announcement. They are not concerned with what may come from it in terms of good or evil, and they do not weigh between the different levels of benefits or the different levels of harm, or between the benefits and harms within. Rather they announce and spread the information without any confirmation or examination¹².”

وقال العلامة محمد بن صالح العثيمين رحمه الله : هذه الآية تنطبق تماماً على ما نحن فيه الآن حيث إن كثيراً من الناس يعلنون الأخبار على عواهنها ولا يباليون بما ترتب عليها من خير أو شر أو لا يزنون بين المصالح بعضها مع بعض ولا بين المفسد بعضها مع بعض ولا بين المصالح وبين المفسد وإنما يذيعون الشيء وينشرونه بدون تحقيق ولا تمحيص .

This approach, along with these filters give the believer the proper methodology for engaging with the information they encounter on social media.

¹² كتاب ملتقى أهل اللغة - لا تكونوا عجلاً مذابيح بذرا - المكتبة الشاملة الحديثة 88 ص

2.3 Concealing sins and faults of others الستر لأخطاء وزلات الآخرين

The default ruling for the Muslim when it comes to his own shortcomings and faults as well as the shortcomings and faults of others is that they should be concealed. The Prophet (ﷺ) tells us in the Hadith, **“Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, is forbearing, modest and concealing, and He loves modesty and concealment” (al-Nasa’i)¹³.**

إن الله عز وجل حلیم حَيِّ سَتِيْرٌ، یحب الحیاء والستر.

Also, the Prophet (ﷺ) says, **“Whoever shields [or hides the misdeeds of] a Muslim, Allah will shield him in this world and the Hereafter” (Muslim).**

مَنْ سَتَرَ مُسْلِمًا سَتَرَهُ اللهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Concealing the sins and mistakes of the believers doesn’t mean ignoring them or not advising and correcting them, but it means doing so without exposing them or publicizing them without need. Aisha (رضي الله عنها) described how the Prophet (ﷺ) would correct a mistake when news reached him of a particular individual, **“When the Prophet (ﷺ) was informed of anything of a certain man, he would not say: What is the matter with so and so that he says? But he would say: What is the matter with the people that they say such and such?” (Abu Dawud)¹⁴.**

كان النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ، إذا بلغه عن الرجل الشيء ، لم يقل: ما بال فلان يقول ، ولكن يقول: ما بال أقوام يقولون كذا وكذا

This approach given to us by the Prophet (ﷺ) conceals the mistakes of individuals and by doing so not only protects their honor and reputation but gives them the opportunity to correct their mistakes and repent and protects the community from the normalization of sin. It also closes the door to backbiting, talebearing and slander which can be even greater sins.

This applies especially with those known for their righteousness and scholarship in the Ummah. It was narrated from Aisha (رضي الله عنها) that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **“Overlook the faults of people of good mannerisms except the legal punishments” (Nasa’i)¹⁵.**

أقبلوا ذوي الهيئات عثراتهم إلا الحدود

Imam Al-Dhahabi commentates and mentions, “The respected Imams and people of knowledge, when their goodness is widespread and they are known for seeking the truth, and for their expansive knowledge, and clear intelligence, and known for their righteousness, piety, and

¹³ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Al-Nasa’i: 404

¹⁴ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Abu Dawud: 4788

¹⁵ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Albani in Takhreej Mishkah Al-Masabeeh: 3/420

followers; then their shortcomings should be forgiven, and we shouldn't declare their misguidance or discard them or forget their merits. Yes, we do not follow them in their innovations or mistakes and we hope for their repentance from those things."

وقال الذهبي: إن الكبير من أئمة العلم إذا كثر صوابه، وعُلم تحريه للحق، واتسع علمه، وظهر ذكاؤه، وعُرف صلاحه وورعه واتباعه، يُغفر له زلته، ولا نضلله ونظره ونسب محاسنه، نعم، ولا نقتدي به في بدعته وخطئه، ونرجو له التوبة من ذلك.¹⁶

This is due to the good they are known for, the benefit they carry, and the reality that they may be targeted more than others. This does not absolve them, or anyone else, of accountability and responsibility, and if there is a greater need to reveal the sin or mistake then this is done according to the need. Examples of this would include protecting the general public from the harms of a particular individual, or if concealing the sin or mistake encourages or facilitates the evil or allows for the transgression against the rights of others. In cases such as these, preventing the harm and protecting rights takes precedence over concealing faults. Imam Al-Nawawi comments on this when he says, "As for the one who is known for their harm and evil, then it is recommended to not conceal them, rather their matter should be raised to those in authority as long as one doesn't fear a greater harm from doing so. This is because to conceal on such a person encourages them in their harm and evil, and indulgence in sin, and becomes a bridge for others to do the same actions."

وأما المعروف بذلك (الأذى والفساد) فيُستحب أن لا يُستر عليه، بل تُرفع قضيته إلى ولي الأمر، إن لم يخف من ذلك مفسدة، لأن السترة على هذا يطمعه في الإيذاء والفساد، وانتهاك المحرمات، وجسارة غيره على مثل فعله.¹⁷

Therefore, while the default is the concealing of the private sins and faults of others along with private advice, the benefits and the harms of doing so must also be analyzed to determine the best course of action in any given situation.

2.4 The extent of commanding good and forbidding evil مدى

مسؤولية الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر

Allah (swt) describes the believers in the Quran as a community built on mutual cooperation and goodness,

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

"The believers, both men and women, are guardians of one another. They encourage good and forbid evil" (9:71). This obligation of commanding good and preventing

¹⁶ سير أعلام النبلاء - الذهبي 5/271
¹⁷ المنهاج شرح صحيح مسلم بن الحجاج للنووي 16/135

evil falls on both the individuals as well as the community. The Prophet (ﷺ) makes this clear, **“Whomever amongst you sees an evil then he should change it with his hand; if he is unable then with his tongue; if he is unable then with his heart, and that is the weakest of Iman”** (Muslim).

من رأى منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده ، فإن لم يستطع فبلسانه ، فإن لم يستطع فبقلبه ، وذلك أضعف الإيمان

This Hadith shows that this obligation is based on knowledge of the evil, confirmation of its occurrence, and the ability to lessen or remove it in the best way possible. Social media provides a platform where many evils exist and are openly spread. The spread of inappropriate images, videos, false ideologies, music, mockery, and vulgarities are all found openly on social media. Additionally, evils such as mockery of Islam, people speaking on Islam without knowledge, and forged Hadith are also dangers that must be addressed and corrected. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of those who are aware and able to address these harmful matters. Although this may seem overwhelming given the scope of social media, since it is a communal responsibility it would require a communal effort to address these issues. Although social media facilitates the means for these evils to exist and spread, it also provides the means for them to be corrected and removed. Direct messaging allows for private advice to be given and corrections to be made. The ability to comment on public posts and platforms allows for public corrections to be made when needed. In closed or private groups, the responsibility falls on the admin. This may include removing participants from groups and blocking individuals if needed. If it is not addressed by the admin, then the responsibility would extend to other members or participants. On public platforms, the responsibility falls on the one who is qualified and able, if it is something amongst the Muslims that needs to be corrected. It is not an individual's responsibility to seek out evils to correct on these public platforms due to their vast amount. This would fall under the jurisdiction of larger governing bodies and organizations. However, if someone who is able comes across these violations, it is upon them to correct as best as they can especially if it is something relating to the Muslim community.

Overall, this communal effort is contingent on knowledge and capability. While the spread of evil publicly is a cause for concern and a danger for all, it provides an opportunity for the Muslims to spread good and fulfill a great service to the general community. Social media has also given great access and opportunity for dawah and calling to Allah (swt). This can take many forms and must be utilized, including connecting to scholars and people of knowledge, dawah programs, sending and forwarding beneficial reminders, and creating online communities through different platforms. The Prophet (ﷺ) reminds us of our communal responsibility in encouraging good and preventing evil in the society around us,

مثل القائم على حدود الله والواقع فيها ، كمثل قوم استهموا على سفينة ، فأصاب بعضهم أعلاها وبعضهم أسفلها ، فكان الذين في أسفلها إذا استقوا من الماء مروا على من فوقهم ، فقالوا : لو أنا خرقنا في نصيبنا خرقا ولم نؤذ من فوقنا ، فإن يتركوهم وما أرادوا هلكوا جميعا ، وإن أخذوا على أيديهم نجوا ونجوا جميعا

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"The likeness of the man who observes the limits prescribed by Allah and that of the man who transgresses them is like the people who get on board a ship after casting lots. Some of them are in its lower deck and some of them in its upper**

(deck). Those who are in its lower (deck), when they require water, go to the occupants of the upper deck, and say to them : 'If we make a hole in the bottom of the ship, we shall not harm you.' If they (the occupants of the upper deck) leave them to carry out their design they all will be drowned. But if they do not let them go ahead (with their plan), all of them will remain safe" (Bukhari).

2.5 Responding to the Salam on Social Media حكم رد السلام على الرسائل

المكتوبة

Responding to the Salam of the Muslim is from the obligatory etiquettes that Allah (ﷻ) and His Messenger (ﷺ) have mandated as the right of every Muslim. This is based on the generality of the verse,

وَإِذَا حُيِّتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا

"And when you are greeted, respond with a better greeting or at least similarly" (4:86); as well as the Hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ), **"A Muslim has five rights over another Muslim: to return the greeting of peace, to visit him when he is sick, to follow his funeral procession, to answer his invitation, and to respond to his sneeze"** (Agreed upon).

Imam Al-Nawawi comments on this Hadith in Al-Majmoo' saying, "As for responding to the Salam, it is obligatory by consensus."

It is also obligatory that the response to the Salam be audible to the one who initiated the greeting. This is due to the fact that responding with silence or with an inaudible greeting is not considered a legitimate response because it does not fulfill the intended obligation as mentioned by the majority of the scholars. In one of the explanations of Sahih Al-Bukhari, Umdatul Qari, it is mentioned, " The response is not acceptable until it is heard by the Muslim, unless they are deaf in which case the response should be by the movement of the lips."

Shaykh Abdul Aziz Bin Baz (rahimahullah) was asked this question during a session of the program "Light on the Path," If someone responds to the Salam silently and is not heard by the Muslim, then what is upon them to do? He responded saying, "In this case they did not respond to the Salam if the response was silent and they didn't raise their voice enough to be heard by the Muslim. The ruling here is that they didn't actually respond to the Salam because the objective is to respond audibly to be heard by the Muslim so that they respond to the greeting in a way that is equal or better; this might also be from arrogance and if it is, it is even more detestable."

The scholars of the past differed regarding the issue of responding to the written Salam, and that was in the context of the Salam that was in written correspondences such as letters and carried messages. A group of scholars took the position that the response to the written Salam must also be a written response, however the majority of scholars said that the obligation is to respond by statement and that it was recommended to respond in writing. It is clear here that this was to provide ease given the frequency of written communication in those times for various purposes that didn't require responses. In those cases, responding in writing to every Salam would cause hardship due to the difficulties in correspondence in that time. As a result, the majority of

scholars took the position that the response in this case by utterance was an obligation since it is the right of Allah; as for responding in writing it would be recommended due to the absence of the one giving the Salam.

Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami mentions, "As for the one being sent to: then he is obliged to respond immediately, and if he is given Salam by a message he must respond by utterance and if by letter then he must respond by letter or by utterance. It is recommended also to respond to the messenger and to start with him by saying, "upon you and him is the Salam."...And the benefit of responding by utterance when the Muslim is absent, is that in the response there are two rights: the right of Allah and the right of the creation. So even if the right of the creation drops because of his absence, the right of Allah remains and there is no reason for it to be dropped. Also if the response is in the presence of the messenger by utterance, he is able to relay it to the sender, so this is a clear benefit. As for the response in writing being mandatory, then its wisdom is clear because when the writing reaches the Muslim it is as if he responds to him then."

Our contemporary scholars differed over the ruling of responding to the Salam on social media with the following 3 opinions:

First opinion:

Some contemporary scholars, such as Shaykh Suleiman Al-Ruhaily, relied on the opinion of the scholars of the past regarding the ruling of the Salam that is written when discussing the ruling of responding to messages received through social media.

He was asked, what is the ruling on responding in writing to the written Salam on social media sites and comments?

He responded, "The obligation is to respond to the Salam with the utterance of the tongue, and it is from perfection here to respond in writing as well. Yes, some scholars obligated responding in both words and writing, however the majority of scholars are of the opinion that responding by writing is recommended and not obligatory. Therefore, responding to written Salam is obligatory by utterance and recommended by writing. And Allah knows best."¹⁸

This is the approach of other scholars as well, such as Shaykh Mohammad Al-Didu Al-Shinqeeti.

Second opinion:

Some scholars took the opinion that responding to the Salam on social media is obligatory if there is a response to the message that came with the Salam. If the response is not needed then responding by writing is recommended and responding by utterance is obligatory. This opinion is the inferred understanding of the Fatwa of Shaykh Salih Al-Fawzan.

Third Opinion:

Other scholars, such as Shaykh Waleed Rashid Al-Sa'aydan, took the opinion that responding to the Salam on social media is obligatory, due to the generality of the command of the ayah,

وَإِذَا حُيِّتُمْ بِتَحِيَّةٍ فَحَيُّوا بِأَحْسَنَ مِنْهَا أَوْ رُدُّوهَا

¹⁸ Light on the Path, نور على الدرب 2021

“And when you are greeted, respond with a better greeting or at least similarly” (4:86) and that it is obligatory to respond to the Salam of the messages on social media that contain the Salam whether the messages require a response or not. This is because it is required to respond to the one who initiates the Salam with a response that reaches them, whether it is by utterance or written.

It appears to be, and Allah knows best that this third opinion, which is that it is obligatory to respond in writing to written messages on social media, is the closest to what is correct, especially if a response is required. This is for the following reasons:

Firstly, Social media communication is closer to direct and immediate communication such as the telephone than it is to indirect and delayed communication such as letters in the mail or carried messages. Therefore, the Qiyas on written letters is not applicable because written letters require long amounts of time and effort whereas responses on social media are immediate and easy. Also, the absence of the one who is initiating the Salam is not actual absence since they are virtually present and can respond immediately, compared to written letters where there is actual absence and distance.

Secondly, the Quranic text is clear in the wisdom of the response to the Salam, which is to give an equal or better greeting, so how can this be the case if there is no seen response to the Salam while it is easy to do so? The command in the ayah is general without any additional detail while it was possible for there to be additional specification. Since there is no additional specification, the generality of the command is maintained and it remains obligatory to take the command as is in responding to the Salam whether it is written or uttered. Therefore, responding by an utterance that doesn't reach the person, while it is possible to respond directly in a way that reaches them, is actually closer to an unheard response. It would then be that responding by utterance doesn't fulfill the greeting because it doesn't reach the one who initiated the greeting (while being easy to do so) and that is the goal of this noble etiquette. This is further emphasized by what comes in the Hadith of the Prophet (ﷺ) narrated in Abu Dawud by Abu Huraira, "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, **"It is not permissible for a believer to forsake his (Muslim) brother for more than three days. If three days have passed, he should meet him and greet him; and if other responds to it they will both share the reward; but if he does not respond, he will bear his sin and the one who (has taken the initiative to) greet (the other) will be absolved of the sin of forsaking (one's brother in Faith)."** The statement of the Prophet (ﷺ), **"respond to His salam"** clearly indicates responding in a way that is heard otherwise there wouldn't be the ending of the forsaking.

Thirdly, the opinion of the past scholars regarding a verbal response to a written greeting was in the context of not responding to a written correspondence that contains the Salam, and there was no opinion found that allowed not responding to a written Salam at all.

Fourthly, this etiquette of obligating a response to the Salam comes from the importance that the Legislator gives to building the bonds of love, reconciliation and good assumptions between the Muslims and must be considered in social media as well. It is also known that in social media, it is possible for the sender to know when the message was received and read, and so to only respond with a verbal Salam that the sender doesn't see can open the door to negative assumptions and the whispers of Shaytan that the sender thinks they are being ignored. It is important to consider the consequences of such actions.

Finally, if the written response to the Salam is very difficult due an excessive amount of messages and questions, then it is possible to utilize known symbols or images that can indicate a response to the Salam. This can fulfill the intended goal of responding to the greeting and protect the feelings of the sender, while taking into consideration the circumstances of the one being sent. As Allah (ﷻ) says, **“Have Taqwa as much as you are able to”** (64:16) and the Prophet (ﷺ) tells us, **“What I have commanded you with, do of it what you are capable of.”** (Agreed upon)

3. PROHIBITIONS محظورات

3.1 Backbiting, slander and tale bearing الغيبة والبهتان والنميمة

The sins of the tongue are a dangerous category of sins that get overlooked, especially online. These are sins that translate to sins of the keyboard, even if they are not being verbalized. Backbiting, slander, and talebearing are all sins that the Prophet (ﷺ) defined and warned us about. The Prophet (ﷺ) told the companions, **"Do you know what backbiting is?" They (the Companions) said: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "It is to say of your brother what he dislikes." It was said: "What do you think if what I say of my brother is true?" He said: "If what you say of him is true, then you have backbitten him; if not, then you have slandered him."** (Muslim)

أتدرون ما الغيبة؟ قالوا: الله ورسوله أعلم، قال: ذكرك أخاك بما يكره. قيل أفرأيت إن كان في أخي ما أقول؟ قال: إن كان فيه ما تقول، فقد اغتبتته، وإن لم يكن فيه فقد بهته.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, **"A talebearer (scandalmonger) will not enter Paradise"** (Agreed upon)

لا يدخل الجنة قتاتٌ

The talebearer here is the one who spreads news between people to sow discord and cause problems between them. These are sins that can have serious consequences but are many times trivialized or underestimated. It was narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) passed by two graves and said: **"They are being punished but they are not being punished for anything that was difficult to avoid. One of them used to not take care to avoid getting urine on his body or clothes, and the other used to walk about spreading gossip."** (Agreed upon)

مرَّ النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم على قبرين، فقال: إنَّهما ليعذبان، وما يعذبان في كبير، ثُمَّ قال: بلى، أمَّا أحدهما: فكان يسهى بالنَّميمة، وأمَّا الآخر: فكان لا يستتر من بوله.

It is critical for the believer to be aware of and recognize this category of sins while on social media and online, and to avoid taking part in them. This can occur through initiating, spreading, forwarding, posting, or any other method online that may happen with the click of a button but can have grave consequences in this world and the next. The Prophet (ﷺ) told us **"Do you know who is the bankrupt?" They said: "The bankrupt among us is one who has neither money with him nor any property". He said, "The real bankrupt of my Ummah would be he who would come on the Day of Resurrection with Salat, Saum and Sadaqah (charity), (but he will find himself bankrupt on that day as he will have exhausted the good deeds) because he reviled others, brought calumny against others, unlawfully devoured the wealth of others, shed the blood of others and beat others; so his good deeds would be**

credited to the account of those (who suffered at his hand). If his good deeds fall short to clear the account, their sins would be entered in his account and he would be thrown in the (Hell) Fire". (Muslim)

عن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه، أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال: "أتدرون من المفلس؟" قالوا: المفلس فينا من لا درهم له ولا متاع فقال: "إن المفلس من أمتي يأتي يوم القيامة بصلاة وصيام وزكاة، ويأتي قد شتم هذا، وقذف هذا وأكل مال هذا، وسفك دم هذا، وضرب هذا، فيعطى هذا من حسناته، وهذا من حسناته، فإن فنيت حسناته قبل أن يقضي ما عليه، أخذ من خطاياهم فطرحت عليه، ثم طرح في النار (رواه مسلم)

3.2 Vulgar and immoral talk or behavior الكلام والسلوكيات المبتذلة

والفاحشة

The believer is one who avoids vulgar and immoral speech and behavior. The Prophet (ﷺ) tells us, "**Allah (swt) does not love immoralities and vulgarities**" (Muslim).

إن الله لا يحب الفحش ولا التفحش

And he (ﷺ) said, "**There is nothing heavier on the scale than good manners. Indeed, Allah detests the one who is indecent and foulmouthed** (Tirmidhi)¹⁹.

ما شيء أثقل في ميزان المؤمن يوم القيامة من خلقٍ حسنٍ، فإنَّ الله تعالى لِيُبْعِضُ الفاحشَ البذيءَ

In light of these narrations and many like them, it is necessary for the believer to avoid any and all types of vulgarities and immoralities while online. Social media may provide easier access to these behaviors, and so the Muslim must remain vigilant in their interactions and engagements with others. This is emphasized further in communication with members of the opposite gender as well as in disagreements with others. The believer must keep the same standard of respect and righteousness in online interactions as they would have in person.

3.3 Speaking without knowledge الكلام بغير علم

One of the hallmarks of social media is that it has given a platform to anyone and everyone to be able to speak on anything and everything. This includes speaking on issues and matters that a person may not be qualified or able to discuss. Allah (swt) has prohibited the believer from this, when He (swt) says,

¹⁹ Classified as Saheeh (Authentic) by Al-Albani in Saheeh Al-Tirmidhi: 2002

ولا تقف ما ليس لك به علم إن السمع والبصر والفؤاد كل أولئك كان عنه مسئولاً (الإسراء: 36)

“Do not follow what you have no `sure` knowledge of. Indeed, all will be called to account for `their` hearing, sight, and intellect” (17:36).

When this extends to matters of the religion, the harm can be great and the consequences can be severe. Allah (swt) says,

قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّيَ الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَّنَ وَالْإِثْمَ وَالْبَغْيَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَأَنْ تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزَّلْ بِهِ سُلْطَانًا
وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (الاعراف: 33)

Say, “My Lord has only forbidden open and secret indecencies, sinfulness, unjust aggression, associating `others` with Allah `in worship`—a practice He has never authorized—and attributing to Allah what you do not know” (7:33).

Ibn Al-Qayyim comments on this verse and says, “Then the fourth and the most severe in what is prohibited is to speak without knowledge, and this includes speaking about Allah without knowledge in His names, attributes, actions, and His religion and legislation.”

ثم رَّبَّعَ بها هو أشدُّ تحريماً من ذلك كله وهو القول عليه بغير علم، وهذا يُعَمُّ القول عليه - سبحانه - بلا علم في أسمائه وصفاته وأفعاله وفي دينه وشرعه²⁰

It is therefore necessary for the Muslim to recognize their limits when it comes to speaking on and spreading matters related to the deen of Allah. One should ensure that what they are saying, sharing, or forwarding is authentic and accurate and not be afraid or shy to remain silent, say they don't know, or refer matters to those who are qualified and able to address them.

3.4 Sharing private information without permission نشر المعلومات الخاصة من غير إذن صاحبها

الخاصة من غير إذن صاحبها

It is not a secret to those who use social media how easy it is to obtain and share information online. However, it is upon the Muslim to consider the right of Allah (ﷻ) in how they use someone's personal information that they wouldn't want to be shared or spread to others. This is what we would call private information. It can be information that is clearly stated or implicitly indicated as secret, or information that is shared in private gatherings with specific individuals, or even information that is obtained in a private manner that is not open to the public or spread to the masses.

It comes in the declaration of the Islamic Fiqh council in the year 1993: “A secret is what an individual shares with another, with a request of concealment before or after, and this includes what also implies a request of concealment if the norm indicates secrecy; such as if the information

²⁰ إعلام الموقعين عن رب العالمين لابن القيم الجوزي 1/38

contains the private matters of the individual and their flaws that they would dislike others to know.”

Ibn Al-Haaj (Rahimahullah) said, “The doctor must be trustworthy when it comes to the secrets of the ill individual, and so he shouldn’t inform anyone what the individual mentioned, because he wasn’t given permission to share that information.”

Ibn Al-Muflih (Rahimahullah) said, “As it is impermissible for the one who washes the deceased, as well as the doctor and other than them to mention the defects (of the individual).”

Allah (ﷻ) has made the spreading of these secrets and private information a betrayal of trust, and He warns us of this in His Book,

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَخُونُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ وَتَخُونُوا أَمَانَاتِكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“O believers! Do not betray Allah and the Messenger, nor betray your trusts knowingly” (8:27). Ibn Kathir comments on this when he said, “They used to hear from the Prophet (ﷺ) a statement and spread it until it reached the polytheists.”²¹

Some mentioned that this was revealed regarding the Hypocrite who wrote to Abu Sufyan revealing to him the secrets of the Muslims.²²

It’s also mentioned in the meaning of the verse: “Do not betray your trusts between yourselves, from your business dealings and others, including your communal affairs; because spreading secrets is an impermissible betrayal.” (Tafsir Al-Maraghi 9/139).

It is understood from this verse that the intended meaning of betraying the trust here is sharing what is a secret and private information whose spreading will harm the one whom it is regarding.

The Prophet (ﷺ) commanded trustworthiness, and from it is protecting secrets, and he (ﷺ) warned from betrayal and from it is spreading secrets. Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from the Prophet (ﷺ), **“When a man tells something and then turns, it is a trust”** (Abu Dawud). It comes in the explanation of ‘Aun Al-Ma’bood that Ibn Raslan said, “because his turning is a sign to the one he is speaking to that he fears someone else may be listening and that he is specifying this individual with his secret, so the turning takes the place (of the statement): Conceal this with you as a trust.”

The Prophet (ﷺ) also said, **“A people do not sit together except that it is confidential”** (Saheeh Al-Jaami). Al-Manawy explained this by saying that, “it is not befitting except that, so it is not allowed for any of them to spread the secret of the others.”²³

Al-Mubarikfoori (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Tuhfatul Ahwadhi, “the letter baa in the statement that “gatherings are confidential” indicates something that is omitted which is that the goodness of a gathering is in the trust of its participants in what is said and done in such a

²¹ Tafsir Al-Quran Al-Adheem 4/42

²² Al-Tabari 11/120

²³ Fayd Al-Qadeer 3/226

gathering, so its as if the meaning is a command to the one in the gathering to be trusted in what they hear and see.”

It is narrated from Abdullah ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with both of them) that he said: When Hafsa was widowed, Umar said, “I met Abu Bakr and said: If you wish I will marry you to Hafsa the daughter of Umar, and it was a few nights after that the Prophet (ﷺ) engaged her, so when Abu Bakr met me he said: Nothing stopped me from responding to what you proposed, except that I knew the Prophet (ﷺ) had mentioned her and I could not reveal the secret of the Prophet (ﷺ) but if he had not proceeded I would have accepted.” (Bukhari)

In spite of the fact that the Prophet (ﷺ) did not explicitly inform Abu Bakr that it was a secret, Abu Bakr saw that concealing it was a trust and he did not tell Umar even though he was from the closest of people to the Prophet (ﷺ). This is due to the deep understanding of Abu Bakr that this information from the Prophet (ﷺ) reached him in a private gathering and that it is confidential information even though it wasn't explicitly stated as such by the Prophet (ﷺ). Therefore it is imperative for the Muslim to protect what is said or what reaches them through social media or other sources that is private information not known to the public or obtainable through public sources. This type of information should not be spread even if they aren't explicitly told that it is a secret.

There is no doubt that the severity of this crime varies depending on the sensitivity and consequences of the spread of the information but all private information is considered a trust. This includes private individual information such as phone numbers and email addresses that were given individually and that are not publicly available or spread amongst the public, if the individual does not want this information spread. If there is uncertainty with the one who has this information, then the least of their obligation is to confirm the privacy of the information before sharing.

Therefore, private information is either explicitly or implicitly stated to be a secret or is private based on what is understood, what is normative, or what is indicated as such. As a result, it is possible to categorize private information according to how it reaches an individual into 3 categories: 1. What is explicitly stated to be a secret. 2. What is indicated or normatively known to be a secret. 3. What is obtained directly from an individual and the individual does not reveal that information in public gatherings, so it is not known publicly and spreading it may result in harm or discomfort for the individual.

To summarize the research on this issue, in the first two categories the obligation to conceal the information is clear. As for the third category, it is incumbent on the Muslim to take precautions in protecting their faith and the trust they have been entrusted with by Allah (ﷻ) in the information they have obtained through private means from individuals or in private groups on social media. The caution should be there even if there isn't certainty that the spread of the information would result in difficulty or harm. It is upon the Muslim to not spread these types of information until they are sure from who the information came that they can be spread. Therefore taking the safer approach necessitates the consideration of what is obtained on social media through private means remains confidential until it is confirmed that it can be shared or spread. This approach is taken in order to avoid betraying trusts and agreements and being included in what the Prophet (ﷺ) said, **“The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, “Four are the qualities which, when found in a person, make him a sheer hypocrite, and one who possesses one of them, possesses one characteristic of hypocrisy until he abandons it. These are: When he is entrusted with**

something, he betrays trust; when he speaks, he lies; when he promises, he acts treacherously; and when he argues, he behaves in a very imprudent, insulting manner."
(Agreed upon)

3.5 Undutifulness and cutting the ties of kinship on social media

العقوق وقطيعة الرحم

Dutifulness (Birr) of the parents is a comprehensive phrase for excellence towards parents and gaining their approval. It is mentioned in the Kuwaiti Fiqh encyclopedia, "From the meanings of Birr in the language are: goodness, grace, truthfulness, obedience, and righteousness. And in the technical definition: It is used generally for excellence using soft, kind words that show gentleness and love as well as avoiding using harsh words that cause aversion; along with compassion, kindness and showing love. It also includes excellence with one's wealth and other righteous actions."²⁴

This shows that the rights of the parents are great, and dutifulness towards them is from the greatest of obligations. Conversely, undutifulness towards them is from the greatest of sins and must be avoided because of the great status and rights parents have on their children. This is why the teachings of Islam warn in the most severe way of undutifulness as one of the major sins, with many dangerous consequences in this world and the next: restriction in provision, a lack of extension of lifespan, and the closing of the doors of the heavens for their deeds.

Undutifulness towards parents includes any action or statement that brings harm or annoyance to the parents from the child. Examples of this include desertion, raising of one's voice, disobeying commands, hitting them, and many other forms of harm. Undutifulness towards parents also has many manifestations, such as making them sad or causing them to cry with one's words or actions, chastising and criticizing them harshly, expressing annoyance or disdain towards their commands, frowning or giving them inappropriate looks, commanding them and looking down on them, ignoring their words, cursing them, criticizing them in front of people, harming their reputation, staying away from them for long periods when they are in need without permission, wishing for their death, abandoning them during their frailty, being stingy towards them, and reminding them of one's favors on them.

Examples of Undutifulness on Social Media

All of the etiquettes mentioned in the texts of the Quran and Sunnah have the same ruling on social media if it can be applied in the virtual world. For example, the ruling of responding to the Salam (mentioned in a previous section here) is obligatory whether it is written or spoken just as it would be for responding to the Salam in person. This also applies to actions that have the same objectives even if the manifestation may be different on social media and in the virtual world. For example, since frowning in the face of one's parents would be considered undutiful, anything that indicates that type of frowning through words or images on social media would carry the same ruling. Therefore, everything mentioned previously that constitutes being dutiful that can be applied on social media would also be considered dutiful. For example, messages and kind words whether through text or images would be considered dutifulness, in the same way that words in person would be dutifulness. Conversely, all written phrases that would sadden or hurt one's

²⁴ Kuwaiti Fiqh encyclopedia (8/63)

parents because of the way they are written or through the use of images and video clips that indicate mockery or cause aversion would all be undutiful in the same way if any of these things were done in person. This general principle must be taken into consideration in all circumstances, because different means do not mean different rulings if the end results are the same. Rulings are attached to their effective causes, in presence as well as absence, and wisdom is the lost property of the believer in all situations.

The Shariah does not allow for children to harm their parents even if the parents harm them or wrong them, as is mentioned in the following Fatwa from IslamWeb,

All praises is for Allah and peace and blessings upon the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and his family and companions, as to what follows:

It is not permissible for you to exhibit bad manners towards your parent nor to show aversion, because Allah (ﷻ) says,

فَلَا تَقُلْ لَهُمَا أُفٍّ وَلَا تَنْهَرْهُمَا وَقُلْ لَهُمَا قَوْلًا كَرِيمًا. وَأَخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذَّلِيلِ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا
رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

“Never say to them ‘even’ ‘ugh,’ nor yell at them. Rather, address them respectfully. And be humble with them out of mercy, and pray, “My Lord! Be merciful to them as they raised me when I was young.” (17:23-24) This includes turning away from them and ignoring them, and this is all from the cutting of kinship that is prohibited in the Shariah. As Allah (ﷻ) says,

وَالَّذِينَ يَنْقُضُونَ عَهْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مِيثَاقِهِ وَيَقْطَعُونَ مَا أَمَرَ اللَّهُ بِهِ أَنْ يُوصَلَ وَيُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ
الْعَنَةُ وَلَهُمْ سُوءُ الدَّارِ

“And those who violate Allah’s covenant after it has been affirmed, break whatever ‘ties’ Allah has ordered to be maintained, and spread corruption in the land—it is they who will be condemned and will have the worst abode.” (13:25). However if he falls short in his obligation as a parent, it is not allowed to cut the ties of kinship or be undutiful or have bad manners towards him. It is possible that you fell short with respect to his rights, and that is what caused him to turn away from you and towards your brother. So it is upon you to strive in dutifulness and excellence towards him, even if he does wrong towards you, because his right over you is great.”²⁵

One form of undutifulness is not responding to one’s parents or ignoring their calls or communications on social media

Shaykh Sa’d Al-Khathlan, a member of the council of senior scholars, clarified in an answer given to a questioner the extent to which not answering the call of one’s parents would be considered undutifulness even while one is in a gathering or reading Quran.

He said during the program “Fatawa” on the Majd channel, that not answering the call of one’s parents under the justification of reading the Quran would be considered undutifulness

²⁵ IslamWeb (69070)

especially if it is an urgent matter. This is because the reading of the Quran is considered a recommended act and a person is able to excuse themselves from their class and answer the call. They can also send a message that they will call them later if the matter is not urgent, but in all instances they must answer their parents and not ignore them.

If this is the case with not answering a call, then what about in the case of the one who hangs up or ends the call, or ignores the messages and calls of their parents for extended periods of time. That is from the most severe forms of undutifulness.

Undutifulness includes using words or images while addressing one's parents on social media that indicate mockery and ridicule.

One of the forms of undutifulness that has spread recently through social media is mockery, ridicule, and making fun of parents. This happens frequently with the intention of making others laugh at the expense of the parents through sharing images and videos that show them in vulnerable moments, or saying or doing something embarrassing, or dressed in a certain way while in the privacy of their home, or anything else related to them that is meant to make them the object of mockery and ridicule. Many times this is done as a way to gain views and followers on social media regardless of the lack of respect it may show. Some researchers indicate that it is much more likely that the fathers are the target of this type of mockery, but it also targets the mothers as well.

Conclusion of the research on this issue

Undutifulness to parents is a dangerous matter and one of the greatest sins that brings about the anger of Allah in this world and the next. The Prophet (ﷺ) told us, **"Shall I not tell you of the greatest of major sins?"**

We said, "Yes indeed, O Messenger of Allah." He said, "Associating others with Allah (shirk) and disobedience towards parents." (Agreed upon). The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned undutifulness towards parents immediately after Shirk, showing the great evil of this action. Every action that would be considered undutifulness in the physical world would also be considered the same on social media. This would include many of the actions that can get overlooked on social media such as the sharing of images and videos that may be insulting, saddening, or hurtful. Along with this would also be actions specific to social media such as cutting off virtual communication or capturing and spreading inappropriate or undignified material meant to disrespect, mock or harm others.

These rulings and etiquettes also apply in the same way in relationships with relatives on social media. This includes the obligations of maintaining ties of kinship and excellence towards them and the prohibition of breaking the ties of kinship through ignoring them or neglecting their attempts at communication. It is important here to remember Allah (ﷻ) and His Messenger (ﷺ) have promised the one who maintains the ties of kinship great grace and reward, and warned the ones who break the ties of kinship with severe punishment in this world and the next. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, **"The bond of relationship is suspending from the Throne, and says: 'He who keeps good relations with me, Allah will keep connection with him, but whoever severs relations with me, Allah will sever connection with him'"** (Agreed upon), and he (ﷺ) also said, **"The one who severs (the ties of kinship) will not enter Paradise"** (Agreed upon). This severing can be through turning away, neglect, and a lack of goodness through good words and actions.

This reminds us how important it is for the Muslim to uphold the right of Allah (ﷻ) with one's parents and relatives at all times, especially when utilizing these technologies. It can be what leads a person to be from the righteous and gain the benefits of this world into the next. The guided individual is the one whom Allah guides to His obedience and towards dutifulness and goodness to their parents and relatives.

3.6 Ruling of storing digital photos of female relatives without Hijab on one's electronic devices حكم الاحتفاظ بالصور الرقمية لنساء غير

محجبات من المحارم في الهاتف المحمول او الكمبيوتر

Despite the established difference of opinion regarding taking and storing photographic pictures, many scholars agree that pictures and videos on phones and computers do not take the same ruling of photographs because they are not physical and tangible (unless they are printed). As such, there is no harm in saving them on one's phone, as long as they do not contain anything impermissible (such as inappropriate pictures of women).

The focus in this research is on the issue of a woman (or one of her mahram relatives) saving her personal digital photos in which she is uncovered or without her Hijab on her personal device or phone. The potential violation in this action comes in the possibility of these photos being seen or falling into the hands of unrelated (non Mahram) men, either through accidental means or by intentional information theft. It might be said that these pictures are safely stored and inaccessible and the possibility of them being seen by strangers is not possible, therefore they are a protected trust according to them. However, this perception is mistaken and an improper estimation of reality. These types of pictures can be mistakenly shared and can spread from one device to another without the permission or knowledge of their owner by way of untrustworthy friends or relatives. There is also the well known reality of information being stolen from the devices themselves. There are institutions, companies and governmental and non governmental groups whose work and specialty is in penetrating electronic devices. By just connecting directly without needing to send a message or get a response it is possible to access the device and its contents. These information hackers may be hired by individuals or even government authorities seeking the information. These types of groups specializing in hacking are widespread and can be accessed by anyone seeking pictures or information for extortion or revenge. There are many real life stories of individuals who have experienced this information hacking of private pictures of family members.

Consequently, the belief that the owner of a device is the only one who controls the release of information on that device is incorrect and the average person cannot guarantee that to be the case. The ease and spread of hacking and its availability to individuals and groups makes this reality something that must be considered and not overlooked.

Since a matter such as this may have grave consequences for individuals and the society in violating sanctities and spreading evil, the wise Legislator has legislated for us the principle of "blocking the means" to prevent evil and close the doors to the impermissible by limiting the permissible if the expected harm is greater than the perceived benefit. A Quranic example of this principle is in Allah's statement,

وَلَا يَضْرِبْنَ بِأَرْجُلِهِنَّ لِيُعْلَمَ مَا يُخْفِينَ مِنْ زِينَتِهِنَّ^{٢٦}

“Let them not stomp their feet, drawing attention to their hidden adornments.”

(24:31) Women were prohibited from stomping their feet, an action that itself is normally allowed, in order to prevent men from hearing the sound of their bangles and becoming enticed by the women. Also, Allah (ﷻ) prohibited the Muslims from cursing the idols of the disbelievers, an action that is by its default allowed, in order to prevent it from becoming a means through which Allah (ﷻ) is cursed by the disbelievers. Allah (ﷻ) says,

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ^{٢٧}

“Do not insult what they invoke besides Allah or they will insult Allah spitefully out of ignorance.” (6:108).

As such, the principle of “blocking the means” is from the comprehensive principles derived from the Quran and Sunnah and utilized by consensus of the scholars due to its practical importance and application. Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) asserted that this principle constitutes a quarter of Islam.

The Dharee’ah is translated as a means towards something. In the technical definition of jurisprudence, it is defined as “what is externally or apparently permissible, but leads to or causes a harm or something impermissible.”

Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have Mercy on him) says, “The Dharee’ah is a means or path to something, and in the norm of the jurists became a phrase for what leads to an impermissible action, and if it was free of that consequence then it wouldn't have a harm. For that reason it is said: The Dharee’ah is an action that appears to be permissible but it is actually a means to an impermissible action.”²⁶

Al-Shatibi (may Allah have Mercy on him) says, “Its reality is that it is using something that has a benefit to reach a harm.”²⁷

Al-Qarafi (may Allah have Mercy on him) says, “‘Blocking the means’ is putting an end to the source of the ways of corruption, in order to protect from it. So whenever an action that is free from corruption is a way to corruption then Imam Malik prevented that action.”²⁸

Therefore what is intended by “Blocking the means” is preventing harm by blocking its paths and cutting off the means that lead to it and putting an end to its origin.

Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have Mercy on him) says, “The pathway to evil must be closed, as long as it is not opposed by a prevailing benefit. This is why the glance that leads to Fitnah is prohibited, unless there is a prevailing benefit, such as the glance towards a prospective spouse, the glance of the doctor, and the likes. In these cases the glance is allowed due to need, but without it being lustful.”²⁹

²⁶ Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra (6/172)

²⁷ Al-Muwafaqat (5/183)

²⁸ Al-Furooq (2/32)

²⁹ Al-Fatawa Al-Kubra (1/287)

Applying this general principle to a specific case requires assessing the possibility and size of both the harm and benefit connected to an action. If, for example, the possibility of the occurrence of a harm is actualized and is great in magnitude (or greater than the magnitude of the benefit) then by consensus the principle of "Blocking the means" is applied due to the prevailing harm.³⁰

In applying the principle of "Blocking the means" to this issue, a woman (or any of her Mahram relatives) storing her pictures (or videos) when she is uncovered (i.e. not wearing the legislated hijab) on any electronic device without digital protection such as information encryption is from the prohibited actions that is not allowed for the following reasons: Firstly, because of the ease in which these pictures may be obtained through digital hacking. Secondly, because of the resulting individual and societal harm of exposed sanctities and family privacy. Thirdly, because the leaking of this information would be considered a violation of trust since those who carry these pictures would be trusted to protect this sensitive information from being used improperly. Fourthly, because generally there is no necessity or need or actualized benefit from saving these types of pictures for the woman herself or her mahram relatives.

Consequently, it is obligatory for the Muslim to protect their religion and honor and not allow for the storage of these types of pictures except if they have the ability to encrypt them or store them in a way that they cannot be infiltrated except by a very limited subset of people with rare capabilities. In that way the possibility of this harm taking place is much more rare and can be overlooked. It is mentioned in the Encyclopedia of Fiqh, "The neglect of an entrustment that leads to its destruction or loss necessitates liability." It also comes in the Fiqh text, "Issues for those with understanding" (مطالب أولي النهي): "The skilled, trustworthy carrier is not liable for accidents, whether they are doing so voluntarily or with payment because they are considered trustworthy. But if they are not skillful or trustworthy then they are liable as if it were lost intentionally."

There are also Fatawa that allude to this ruling, such as the one found on the "Islamic Site,"

"As for if it is allowed to store a picture of a Mahram relative such as the mother or sister, or a picture of one's wife...The ruling here is based on the established difference of opinion in the permissibility of photographs, however there is another problem here even based on the opinion of the permissibility of photographs with their set conditions. That problem is the possibility of others seeing what would not be permitted for them to see from those pictures."³¹

And Allah (ﷻ) knows best

³⁰ Blocking the Means in the Islamic Shariah by Hisham Al-Burhani (may Allah have Mercy on Him)

³¹ Shabaka Islamiya 2004, page 7

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