

SECRECY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Once the household servant of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) *Hazrat Anas Bin Malik (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* was playing among children. Then the Messenger of Allah arrived and sent Anas secretly on some errand. He was delayed in the performance of his task. When he returned late to his home his mother asked him why was he late. *Hazrat Anas (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* replied that he was sent for some work by the Messenger of Allah, therefore he was delayed. The mother asked, “O my son! What was the task?” The son replied, “O my mother, this is a secret of the Prophet which I cannot tell you.” Hearing this mother was pleased greatly and she told her son, “Well done my son. Never disclose the secrets of the prophet to anybody.” [Muslim].

When the first husband of *Hazrat Hafsah (RadhiAllahu Anha)* died her father *Hazrat Umar Bin A-Khattab (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* became worried about her remarriage. He consulted with *Hazrat Uthman Bin Affan (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* who said he will think over it then reply. After some days he said no marriage was possible now. Then *Hazrat Umar (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* put this matter before *Hazrat Abu Bakr* who kept silent. He said neither yes nor no. *Hazrat Umar (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* felt aggrieved by this attitude. Some days later the Messenger of Allah proposed to Hafsah and married her. When *Hazrat Umar (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* met *Hazrat Abu Bakr (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* some days later the latter told him, “Umar did you feel aggrieved by my silence?” *Hazrat Umar (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* replied yes. Then he explained, that “I had heard the Messenger of Allah saying that he wished to marry Hafsah (*RadhiAllahu Anha*). That was the reason of my silence. Had he not married her I would have married her. I did not deem it proper at that time to divulge the secret of the Messenger of Allah.” [Bukhari].

Certain norms and controls are necessary to keep any society going. Secrecy and confidentiality is one of them. Where this is not observed, the society becomes denuded.

Secrets are of different types. Each one has its own importance in its own place. Therefore, a Muslim is always bound to keep secrets whether relating to his own person or to others in the society. Safeguarding of secrets is a sign of the maturity of personality. A person devoid of this quality loses his reputation.

People become suspicious of him and keep away from him. All secrets are in the nature of trusts. Exposure of secrets is a kind of treachery. It is obvious that people will not entrust their deposits to a person who is suspected of breaching their trust. The Messenger of Allah said:

«إِذَا حَدَّثَ الرَّجُلُ الْحَدِيثَ ثُمَّ التَّفَتَ فَهِيَ أَمَانَةٌ» (الترمذي)

Translation : "If somebody tells you something then turns away it becomes your custodial trust" (*amanat*) [Tirmidhi].


Whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) planned for a *ghazwah* [religious battle] he called for making preparations for it. But he never disclosed the time and place of the battle. Wise men say that one who divulges his secrets spoils his affairs and one who keeps his secrets retains control over his affairs. There is a saying that the weakest man is one who cannot keep his secrets. *Hazrat Umar Faruq (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* said that one who concealed his secrets remained arbiter of his affairs. *Hazrat Ali (RadhiAllahu Anhu)* said, "A secret is your captive so long as you keep it secret. But as soon as you divulge it you become its captive."

Some people have got the habit of making their plans known to others before their execution. This is unwise. In today's world of intense competition one should plan and execute his projects secretly and silently. When they are carried out successfully people will become aware of them automatically. The Messenger of Allah pronounced:

«اسْتَعِينُوا عَلَىٰ إِنْجَاحِ الْحَوَائِجِ بِالْكَتْمَانِ، فَإِنَّ كُلَّ ذِي نِعْمَةٍ مَحْسُودٌ» (الطبراني، البيهقي)

Translation: "You must rely on secrecy in the management of your affairs because every endowed man is envied" [Tabrani; Behaqi].

Some people also got the habit of disclosing their household affairs even the intimate relations between the husband and wife. This often happens between and among the close friends. This brings nothing but humiliation and other persons' unnecessary interference with one's private affairs. It is, therefore, a requirement of trustfulness to guard one's household secrets. It is unworthy of a Muslim to expose the defects and shortcomings of other Muslims. The hallmark of a Muslim is that he covers up the weak points of others. Allah (Ta'ala) has issued a stern warning to those who spread dissensions among Muslims by exposing their defects:

﴿إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يُحِبُّونَ أَنْ تَشِيعَ الْفَاحِشَةُ فِي الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾  النور: ١٩

Translation of Meaning: "Lo! Those who wish that calumnies should be spread relating to the believers, their's will be a painful punishment in this world and the Hereafter. Allah knows and you know not" (An--Nur: 19).

If somebody commits a sin he simply ought to repent and atone for it as soon as possible. It is absolutely undesirable to narrate one's sins before others. This brings nothing but infamy. Those who narrate their sinful acts with pride have been described by the Messenger of Allah as *mujahireen* [publicizers]. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) pronounced:


"كُلُّ أُمَّتِي مُعَافَى إِلَّا الْمَجَاهِرِينَ ، وَإِنَّ مِنْ الْمُجَاهِرَةِ أَنْ يَعْمَلَ الرَّجُلُ بِاللَّيْلِ عَمَلًا ، ثُمَّ يُصْبِحُ وَقَدْ سَتَرَهُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فَيَقُولُ : يَا فُلَانُ ، عَمِلْتُ الْبَارِحَةَ كَذَا وَكَذَا ، وَقَدْ بَاتَ يَسْتُرُهُ رَبُّهُ ، وَيُصْبِحُ يَكْشِفُ سِتْرَ اللَّهِ عَنْهُ" (متفق عليه)

Translation: "All of my community will be pardoned [on the Day of Judgment] save *mujahireen*. It is a matter of *mujahirah* [publicization] that a man commits some sin during the night time and Allah keeps his wrong-doing covered up till morning but in the morning he boasts to the folk about his adventures of the last night. His Lord covered up his wrong-doing till morning but he removed the cover of Allah in the morning" [unanimous].

Exceptions to the Norm of Secrecy:

Secrecy and confidentiality are, as a rule, a desirable quality. But there are certain exceptions from the rule. Observation of secrecy on the following occasions is tantamount to commitment of a crime and is, therefore forbidden [*haraam*]:

Tendering of evidence: Concealment of evidence is unjustifiable. Giving of true evidence is a religious obligation. Allah (Ta'ala) proclaims:

﴿وَلَا تَكْتُمُوا الشَّهَادَةَ ۚ وَمَنْ يَكْتُمْهَا فَإِنَّهُ ءَاتَمَّ قَلْبُهُ ۚ﴾  البقرة: ٢٨٣

Translation of Meaning : "Conceal not your evidence. One who concealed it is a sinner at heart" (Al-Baqarah: 283).

Commercial Transactions: In every commercial exchange it is incumbent upon the seller to disclose to the buyer all particulars of his merchandise correctly. It is forbidden to conceal the defects of goods. The Messenger of Allah said, "The parties to a sale transaction have an option till they part. If both of them are honest and have clarified everything their trade will be graced. But if they concealed and lied the grace of their trade will be erased." [Bukhari].

Knowledge: Concealment of knowledge is unjustifiable. It is rather a major sin. The concealer and denier of knowledge shall deserve the damnation of Allah. Allah (Ta'ala) has proclaimed:

﴿ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَكْتُمُونَ مَا أَنزَلْنَا مِنَ الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَهْدَىٰ مِنْ بَيِّنَتِهِ لِلنَّاسِ فِي الْكِتَابِ أُولَٰئِكَ يَلْعَنُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَلْعَنُهُمُ النَّعُونَ ﴾ البقرة: ١٥٩

Translation of Meaning : "Those who hide [our] clear proofs and the guidance We revealed, after We had clarified it in the Scripture; such are damned by Allah and damned by the damners." (Al-Baqarah: 159). In another place it is proclaimed:

﴿ وَلَا تَلْسُؤُوا الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكُنُوا الْحَقَّ وَأنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴾ البقرة: ٤٢

Translation of Meaning : "Confound not truth [haqq] with falsehood [baatil] nor conceal the truth knowingly." (Al-Baqarah: 42). The Messenger of Allah has pronounced:

«مَنْ سُئِلَ عَنْ عِلْمٍ، فَكَتَمَهُ أَلْجَمَهُ اللَّهُ بِلِجَامٍ مِنْ نَارٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ» (أبو داود ، الترمذي ، ابن ماجه)

Translation: "If one concealed the knowledge asked for, Allah will rein him with a rein of fire on the Day of Rising." [Abu Daud; Tirmidhi; Ibn Majah].

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