

4. The Manners of conversation

4.1 SELECTING SUITABLE TOPICS In Sura Al-Hajj¹, Allah described the believers "And they have been guided to the purest of speeches; and guided to the path of Him who is worthy of all praise." When you talk during your visit, say only what fits the situation and be brief. If you are the youngest among those sitting, don't speak unless you are asked to, or unless you know that your speech and words will be well received and will please the host and other guests. Don't prolong your speech. Use a proper tone of voice. Anas reported that "the Prophet's talk was clear and concise. Not too much nor too little. He disliked loquacity and ranting." Bukhari narrated a Hadith in which Aisha said "The Prophet's talk [was so little] that you can count his words".

If you hear the Azan you must listen and respond to the call of Allah. Many people, even those with Islamic knowledge continue talking while the Azan is being called. This is rude, since those hearing the Azan should listen to it and quit speech, study and even Quran recitation. Solemnly they should repeat the words of the Azan and reflect on the words of this highest call.

We should listen to the Azan, whether we are at home, office, shop, or attending a lesson, even if it is a religious lesson. Imam Al-Kasani in *Badaiu Al-Sanaei*² said: "Those hearing the Azan or Iqama should not talk. Even if reading Quran or doing other noble things, everything should be stopped to listen and respond to the Azan".

The Azan is the food of the soul nourishing it with faith and elevation. Do not forgo your share of it. Teach this to your children and friends. Al-Bukhari narrated a Hadith by Abu Saeed Al-Khudri that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "If you heard the call say like what the Muezzin is saying." In another Hadith reported by Jaber that the Prophet said "He deserves my help on the day of judgment who said when hearing Azan: O' Allah, the Lord of this perfect call and imminent prayer, please award Mohammad the help, nobility, and the desired status you promised him."

Imam Abdul Razaq narrated in his *Musanaf*³ that Ibn Juraig said: "I was told that people used to listen to Azan like they would listen to recitation of Quran. They would repeat after the Muezzin. If he said: come to prayer, they will say: with the help and power of Allah. If he said: come to the good deed, they will say: with the will of Allah.

¹ AL-Haj 22:24

4.2 TALK IN A SUITABLE TONE If you speak to a guest or any other person, whether in a gathering or alone, make sure that your voice is pleasant, with a low, audible tone. Raising your voice is contrary to proper manners and indicates a lack of respect for the person to whom you are talking. This manner should be maintained with friends, peers, acquaintances, strangers, the young and the old. It is more important to adhere to this with one's parents or someone of their status, or with people for whom you have great respect. If appropriate, smile while talking to others. This will make them more receptive to what you have to say, and may dispel the impression that practicing Muslims are stern and humorless.

The Quran tells us that the advice of Luqman the Wise to his son was, "...and lower your voice⁴," directing him to speak in a gentle manner, for speaking loudly is detested and ugly. Verses two and three of Surat Al-Hujurat read: "Oh you who believe! Raise not your voices, above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him as you speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and you perceive not. Those that lower their voices in the presence of Allah's apostle, Allah has tested their hearts for piety, for them there is forgiveness and a great reward." ⁵ Imam Al-Bukhari in his *Sahih* reported that 'Abdullah bin Al-Zubair said that after the revelation of this verse, whenever Omar bin Al-Khattab wanted to speak to the Prophet (PBUH), he would talk as if whispering. The Prophet would hardly hear him and he would inquire about some of what Omar said, since he did not hear him well.

Your talk should be clear, concise and to the point. Do not talk and talk and talk. Bukhari and Muslim reported that Anas said "The Prophet's talk was precise clear, and succinct without undue elaboration."

Al-Hafiz Al-Zahabi⁶ wrote in his biography of Imam Ibn Sireen, the great scholar and eminent follower of the companions, that: "Whenever he was in his mother's presence, he would talk in such a low voice that you would think that he was ill." In his biography of Abdullah bin Awn Al-Basri, a student of Imam Ibn Sireen and one of the famous scholars Al-Hafiz Al-Zahabi,⁷ noted: "One time his mother called him and because he responded with a voice louder than hers, he was fearful and repentant and he freed two slaves." 'Asim bin Bahdelah Al-Koofi, the reciter

² 1:155

³ 1:480

⁴ Luqman, 31:19

⁵ Al-Hujurat, 49: 2-3.

⁶ Tarikh Al-Islam. 4:197.

⁷ Tarikh Al-Islam. 6:213.

of the Quran, said: "I visited Omar bin 'Abdul Aziz, and a man spoke loudly, and Omar replied: "Stop it. You need not talk loudly. Talk loud enough to make your listeners hear."⁸

4.3 THE ART OF LISTENING If a person started telling you or your group something that you know very well, you should pretend as if you do not know it. Do not rush to reveal your knowledge or to interfere with the speech. Instead, show your attention and concentration. The honourable follower Imam 'Ata ibn Abi Rabaḥ said: "A young man would tell me something that I may have heard before he was born. Nevertheless, I listen to him as if I have never heard it before."

Khalid bin Ṣafwan Al-Tamimi, who was with the two caliphs Omar bin Abdul Aziz; and Hisham bin Abdul Malik, said: "If a person tells you something you have heard before, or news that you already learned, do not interrupt him or her to exhibit your knowledge to those present. This is a rude and an ill manner." The honourable Imam 'Abdullah bin Wahab Al-Qurashi Al-Masri, a companion of Imam Malik, Al-Laith bin Sa'd and Al-Thawri, said: "Sometimes a person would tell me a story that I have heard before his parents had wed. Yet I listen as if I have never heard it before." Ibrahim bin Al-Junaid said: "A wise man said to his son: 'learn the art of listening as you learn the art of speaking. Listening well means maintaining eye contact, allowing the speaker to finish the speech, and restraining yourself from interrupting his speech."

Al-Hafiz Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi said in a poem:

A talk never interrupt
Though you know it in and out

4.4 DISCUSSIONS AND DEBATES If you have trouble understanding some of what has been said in a meeting, restrain yourself until the speaker finishes. Gently, politely, and with proper introduction, ask for clarification. Do not interrupt a person's talk. This is contrary to the proper manner of listening, and stirs up contempt. However, this is not the rule if the meeting is for study and learning. In such a case, asking questions and initiating a discussion is desirable if conducted respectfully and tactfully and only after the speaker finishes. Caliph Al-Ma'mun said, "Discussion entrenches knowledge more than mere following."

Al-Haitham bin Adi, a known scholar, and historian, and one of the entourage of the four Caliphs Abi Jafer Al-Mansour, Al-Mahdi, Al-Hadi, and Al-Rasheed, said: "The men of wisdom said it is an ill manner to overwhelm someone while speaking and to interrupt them before they end their speech."

⁸ Ibn Assaker. Edited by Abdul Qader Badran. Tahdhib Tarikh Dimashq. 7:123.

If a colleague did not understand a matter and asked a scholar or an elder to explain, you should listen to what is being said. From the repeated explanation you may gain additional benefits to what you already know. Never utter any word belittling your colleague, nor should your face betray any such emotion.

When an elder or a scholar speaks, you should listen attentively to them. Never busy yourself with a talk or discussion with other colleagues. Do not let your mind wander somewhere else. Keep it focused on what is being said.

If you did not understand something that was said, wait until the talk is finished. Then and only then, ask the speaker, with respect and politeness, to explain it. Never raise your voice with the question, or be blunt to draw attention to yourself.

Never interrupt a speaker. Never rush to answer if you are not very confident of your answer. Never argue about something you do not know. Never argue for the sake of argument. Never show arrogance with your counterparts especially if they hold a different opinion. Do not switch the argument to belittle your opponent's views. If their mistaken understanding became evident, do not rebuke or scold them. Be modest and kind. A poet said,

Who could get me a person
When I offend him, his answer will reflect calmness
Who would listen intently to what I have to say
When he knows it better than I.

4.5 SWEARING BY ALLAH To confirm a statement, many resort to swearing by the name of Allah (SWT) or one of His attribute. This is a bad habit that should be resisted. The name of Allah should not be used so lightly, and to swear by it is a very serious matter. Allah (SWT) in Sura Al-Nahil⁹ says “ And do not take your oath to practice deception between yourselves, with the result that someone's foot may slip after it was firmly planted” Always remember the hadith of the Prophet reported by Bukhari and Muslim “ Whoever believe in Allah and the Last Day should say something good or remain silent.”

4.6 ANSWERING A QUESTION If a colleague was asked about something that you know, do not rush to answer. Instead, you ought not to say anything until you are asked. This is a better manner, and a nobler attitude. It generates interest in what you say, while enhancing your respect.

⁹ Sura Al-Nahil 16:94

The honourable follower Mujahid Ibn Jabr recalled that Luqman the Wise said to his son: “If another person was asked a question, never hasten to give the answer, as if you are going to gain booty or to win a precious prize. By doing so, you will belittle the one who was asked and will offend the inquirer and you will bring the attention of the obnoxious people to your stupidity and ill-manner.”

Sheikh Ibn Battā, a Hanbali scholar, said: “I was with Abu ‘Omar Al-Zahid Mohammed ibn ‘Abdul Wahed Al-Baghdadi - the Imam and linguist known also as Ghulam Th‘alab. He was asked about an issue. I rushed and answered the inquirer. He turned toward me and asked: “Do you recognize an officious character?” He suggested that I was a nosy person and made me feel very embarrassed.”