

The Manners of Joking

آداب المزاح

{English- إنجليزية}

2010 - 1431

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Slaves of Allaah! One the signs of the greatness and comprehensiveness of this religion is that it does not leave any aspect of life unaddressed. It set criteria and rules which people must adhere to and live by. All of this was through the command of Allaah and the practice of the messenger sallallaahu `alaihi wa sallam.

It is a widely held belief among the non-Muslims and unfortunately, some Muslims that Islaam is a religion of suppression and harshness, where laughing, joking, entertainment and fun are not permitted.

While it may understandable for non-Muslims to think this way, due to their ignorance of Islaam or the distorted image of Islaam portrayed constantly by the media, what is shocking and a disaster, is when we come across Muslims who hold the same opinions.

O Muslims! The Sunnah of our Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) has clarified this issue and he (Peace be Up On Him) has set a wonderful example for the Muslim's life style, for those who wish to live according to this guidance. If we refer to the Sunnah, we will find that the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) used to joke with his companions, Abu Daawood and Tirmidhi reported that a man came to the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) and said:

"Give me an animal to ride on" the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) replied: **"I will give you the son of a female camel"** the man said with astonishment: "What could I do with the son of a female camel?" (i.e., thinking that he would be given a camel too small to ride). Thereupon, the Messenger of Allaah (Peace be Up On Him) replied: **"What do female camels deliver except camels?"**(i.e., that every camel, even if it is fully grown, is the product of a female camel). (Abu Daawood & Tirmidhi).

Tabaraani reported that an old woman came to the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) and said:

"O Messenger of Allaah! Supplicate that Allaah permits me into Paradise" he (Peace be Up On Him) replied: **"Paradise will not be entered by old women"** then he went off to pray. When he came back, his wife `Aa'ishah., may Allaah be pleased with her, said to him: "The old woman found what you said to be difficult" he replied: **"Allaah will bring all the women of Paradise to a young age before allowing them enter."**

Imaam Bukhaari mentioned in his book, Al-Adab Al-Mufrad, "The companions used to play by throwing watermelon skins at each other, but when it was time for seriousness, they were real men."

The Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) had the finest manners, so much so that he was always joking with and teasing children. Anas, may Allaah be pleased with him, narrated:

"The Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) used to joke with us; He would call out to my young brother: "O Abu 'Umayr! (a playful nickname), what happened to your bird (a pet that he used to keep)?" (Bukhaari).

Once, some of the companions, may Allaah be pleased with them, asked the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him): "Do you joke with us?" he (Peace be Up On Him) replied: "I do, but I only say that which is true" (Tirmidhi & Bukhaari in his book Al-Adab Al-Mufrad).

Slaves of Allaah! All that which I mentioned is only a tiny fraction of his joking with his companions. I did not want to elaborate more on this because it was only meant to be an introduction to the main topic, which is: 'Etiquettes of Joking'.

Brothers in faith! As you have heard, Islaam does not prohibit joking and teasing, but it sets criteria for it as our Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) instructed us, which are:

1) Saying only that which is true: If we look to the narrations mentioned above, he (Peace be Up On Him) never said a word which was not true, like in the story of the camel or the old woman. This is how joking should be, without lying, fabricating and concocting stories simply to people laugh. The Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) warned about this saying:

"Woe to the one who lies to people just to make them laugh. Woe to him, woe to him." (Abu Daawood & Tirmidhi).

2) It should not involve verses from the Qur'aan, Prophetic sayings, or any of fundamentals of Islaam. Unfortunately, some people have fallen into this terrible practice, we ask Allaah to guide them. These people tell jokes about the angels, Prophets, Qur'aanic verses and Prophetic sayings. This is extremely dangerous as it is tantamount to disbelief. Shaikh Al-'Uthaymeen, may Allaah have mercy on him, said, "One who mocks Allaah, His verses, His signs or His Messengers is a disbeliever because this action nullifies belief." How can someone mock that which he believes in? In fact, one who believes in something glorifies it and esteems it by making it occupy a great position in their heart. Disbelief is two types, Shunning, or turning away, from the truth and opposing the truth. The one who mocks the religion is practicing the second type of disbelief and their action is worse than the one who prostrates to an idol. This is a very dangerous issue; a person might utter a word which would cause them intense hardship and results in their destruction. They might utter a word which causes the wrath of Allaah to descend upon them and which results in them going to the Hellfire. One who mocks praying, even if they were only joking, Zakaah, fasting or Hajj becomes a disbeliever by the consensus of the Muslim scholars.

Likewise, one who mocks the signs of Allaah by saying, for example, 'Having warm days in winter is senseless' or by saying, 'Having cool days in summer is silly' is a disbeliever because all the actions and creations of Allaah are done with His complete knowledge and comprehensive wisdom.

During the battle of Tabook, while the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) was riding to the battlefield, some of the hypocrites uttered words which had very grave consequences for them, although they claimed later to have only been joking. Allaah revealed verses in His Book, which is universally recited by all Muslims.

Imaam Ibn Katheer mentioned in his commentary of the Qur'aan, regarding the verse in which Allaah says that which translates as:

"And if you ask them, they will surely say: 'We were only conversing and playing.' Say, 'Is it Allaah and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking?' " (At-Tawbah: 65).

Imaam Ibn Katheer said: "Muhammad Ibn Ka'b, may Allaah be pleased with him, reported that a man from the hypocrites said: 'Those who memorize the Qur'aan have the biggest stomachs, are the worst liars and the greatest cowards at the time of fighting' This was conveyed to the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him), so the hypocrite rushed to the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) and found him on his camel. He said: 'O messenger of Allaah I was only joking.' Thereupon, the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) recited the verses which translate as:

"And if you ask them, they will surely say: 'We were only conversing and playing.' Say, 'Is it Allaah and His verses and His Messenger that you were mocking? Make no excuse; you have disbelieved [i.e., rejected faith] after your belief. If We pardon one faction of you – We will punish another faction because they were criminals.'" (At-Tawbah: 65-66).

The hypocrite was holding on to the camel of the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) and his feet were kicking the rocks on the ground, making them fly off in different directions, due to the speed of the camel. The Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) was on his camel and would not even look at the hypocrite, although the hypocrite was holding on to the saddle and constantly repeating that he was only joking."

This is hard evidence that joking around with any aspect of the Sharee'ah, or Islamic Law, is tantamount to disbelief.

Slaves of Allaah! When we talk about joking, we must stress on this important and dangerous issue which some people slight, either knowingly or unknowingly, which is joking

with anything that is related to the religion of Allaah. Some people invent jokes about this. Moreover, some newspapers and magazines practice this in their 'caricature' section. We have already mentioned the Islamic ruling regarding this, so people must be fearful of the dire consequences of such actions. Let us always remember the saying of the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him):

"A servant (of Allaah) would utter a word, without paying attention to it, which pleases Allaah and which results in Allaah elevating his rank in Paradise; And a servant (of Allaah) would utter a word, without paying attention to it, which displeases Allaah and which results in him going down into the Hellfire." (Bukhaari).

In another narration, he (Peace be Up On Him) said: "A slave (of Allaah) would utter a word, without paying attention to it, which would result in him going down into the Hellfire further than the distance between the east and the west." (Muslim).

1) Another criterion for permissible joking is that it should not harm others, whether physically or emotionally. Allaah says what translates as,

"O You who have believed. Let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name [i.e. mention] of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers." (Al-Hujuraat: 12).

It is because these things hurt people's feelings and may even lead to physical harm, that Allaah has prohibited it. Nowadays, people have transgressed all limits under the pretext of joking. It is sad to see that some people are eager to find out about a subject that would upset their brother and tease him about that; and this leads to their brother becoming offended, which is also prohibited.

2) The final criterion for permissible joking is that people should not do it excessively, as this leads them to commit errors and lose their dignity. One who reads through the history of the Prophet (Peace be Up On Him) will realise that he would joke but would never do so excessively. Therefore, based on this finest of examples, one should not joke excessively so that they do not become known for this trait.