

سوء الظن

Suspicion

Objectives >>>

Students should:

- Understand the principle of assumption in Islam and the different types of assumptions
- Understand that there is a healthy balance between suspicion/assumption and naivety
- Understand that suspicion in family life is especially
- Discuss strategies for avoiding suspicion
- Understand that being transparent and accountable in all our dealing fends off suspicion

Suspicion

In previous levels, you may have come across the subject of suspiciousness and its prohibition in Islam. However, in this lesson, we will consider this subject in more detail to give you a better understanding of its nature and help you better understand why it should in most cases be avoided.

THE DEFINITION OF SUSPICIOUSNESS

Suspiciousness or suspicion is a mental/psychological process which simply an inclination to distrust and doubt things especially the actions or intentions of people. The negative suspicion is based on having an evil inclination or perception which results in making negative or evil assumptions about people or situations – i.e. taking the pessimistic view of things. This kind of suspicion is

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 5

irrational and not usually based on evidence; therefore it is harmful and in Islam is also considered sinful.

Reasonable suspicion is a phenomenon where a person is inclined to doubt based on evidence of some sort which results in questioning certain issues. We will discuss this later in the lesson.

SUSPICIOUSNESS IN ISLAM

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ

“O you who believe, avoid most assumption, because some assumption is evil...” (49:12)

Islam encourages us to always assume the best about one another in life. When we hear a word from someone, or see them doing something, we are encouraged to interpret it in the best way possible and to avoid giving it a negative interpretation.

Unfortunately, many of us automatically think negatively and interpret things in a bad way, leading to suspicion. Suspicion can lead to a breakdown in many relationships, especially marriages. It can also become extreme, leading people to be paranoid and to always think someone is trying to hurt them or plot against them.

The Holy Qur’an commands us to avoid any suspicion so that we can overcome this problem. Whenever we are tempted to interpret things negatively, we should stop ourselves and try our best to interpret things positively.

Notice that the Qur’an again uses the word ‘avoid’, which is a very strong prohibition! The Qur’an does not only say this is impermissible, it says to ‘avoid’ it and not go near

it. The reason it says avoid 'most suspicion' is because most of our thoughts automatically lean towards negative interpretation, so we should always stop our mind from moving towards those negative interpretations. Whenever these thoughts come to our mind, we should ask for forgiveness from Allah and try to kick them out of our head.

Another way of helping to remove suspicious thoughts is to avoid associating with evil people because:

Imam Ali (as): "Association with evil people leads to suspicion about good people"ⁱ

People who are always suspicious tend to always be on the guard and have quite constricted emotional lives. Their reduced capacity for meaningful emotional involvement and the general pattern of isolated withdrawal often lead to anxiety. People with this particular disorder have a tendency to bear grudges and to interpret others' actions as hostile.

EXAMPLES OF SUSPICIOUSNESS

It is important to note that the culture in which we live contributes immensely on our perception of things. As such, it is important NOT to think like the society thinks, because this is one of the major causes of evil.

One of the most common examples of suspicion is in the instance where a perhaps a believing brother or sister is seen with a person of the opposite gender in public. Immediately, the first thought to come in mind would be that there is something suspicious going on here! However, the two could be brother and sister or have some other legitimate relationship which we are unaware of. To immediately suspect that the two are doing something wrong is in itself a sin.

Here are some other examples you may face:

- Your friend declines your invitation to play sport for a valid reason. You may think he or she does not want to spend time with you and this cause a deterioration in the relationship.
- You are working with someone on an Islamic project. You offer an idea but they do not take it up because of a valid reason. You might think they have something against you personally. This can cause the project to fail.

Suspicion is especially harmful within families. We see so much family conflict because of suspicion. A wife or husband may be too suspicious of each other about issues such as money or extended family relationships, and this can cause a lot of marital conflict.

In the wider family context, we see that relationships between a person and their in-laws are often very tense because of suspiciousness. If we learn to think positively and be less sensitive, many of these problems would solve themselves or never occur in the first place.

REMOVING SUSPICION FROM OURSELVES

While we are encouraged not to be suspicious of other people, at the same time we should also try to be an open book and remove suspicion from ourselves to make it easier for people to trust us. If we are in a situation that we think people might interpret in a bad way, we should explain ourselves to others and show them that we are not involved in anything negative.

One day, the Prophet (saw) was speaking to his aunt in the market when a man walked by. The Prophet (saw) told him: 'this is my aunt'. The man said 'of course, O Messenger of Allah', but the prophet (saw) wanted to make sure that the man did not think the Prophet (saw) was talking in a friendly way to a strange woman so he explained himself, even though he is the Prophet.

ARE ALL SUSPICIONS BAD?

As mentioned, a person needs to be intelligent to decide when suspecting about others is bad and when it is necessary. The important thing to remember is that we should avoid suspecting our family, friends and other believers.

However, when it comes to the enemies of Islam, we should not be naïve, and we should have reasonable suspicions about them so that they cannot harm us. Therefore trusting everyone without discriminating between those who love us and those who want to harm us is also wrong. We should not allow ourselves to trust people who show enmity or hostility towards us, especially because of our religion. We must be able to distinguish between enemies and friends, and exercise caution accordingly.

MAKING EXCUSES FOR OTHERS

When we see someone in a situation that looks suspicious, we must try to make as many excuses for them as possible and try to find as many justifications as possible. The Ahlul Bayt (as) tell us:

“Interpret the action of your brother in the best way possible until it becomes very clear that he is going the wrong thing, and do not interpret a word that comes from your brother negatively”.ⁱⁱ

If we really cannot find a justification, we should ask them to clarify what they were doing or what they meant.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO AVOID SUSPICION

- 1) Every time a negative thought crosses the mind, replace it with a positive one. Also actively remember that it is Satan who is contributing to this thought, and that we need to overcome him by dispelling this thought.
- 2) Consider everyone around us to be better than us. This will make it easier to justify their actions which may seem suspicious.
- 3) Make as many excuses as possible to justify the actions of others. This will help keep the relationship strong, and will give us peace of mind also.
- 4) Remind yourself of both the physical and spiritual harms of suspicion, which include:

ⁱ Beharul-Anwaar vol.74 p.191

ⁱⁱ Mizanul-Hikmah vol.4 p.1784]

ⁱⁱⁱ References

- eHawza Lecture on Suspiciousness – Sheikh Mansour Leghaei
- Holy Qur’an

- Paranoia
- Losing friends
- Conflict with family members
- Agitation and anxiety

ⁱⁱⁱAlso remind yourself of the benefits of always thinking positively about loved ones and other believers:

- Peace of mind
- Strong relations
- Close family ties

THE BENEFITS OF AVOIDING SUSPICION

Imam 'Ali (as) says that avoiding suspicion benefits us more than anyone else because it leads to calmness and tranquility of the heart.

“Interpreting things positively (ḥusnul ḍann) leads to peace of mind”^{iv}

Homework

Give an example of situations where suspiciousness can be most harmful and MUST be avoided at all costs, and explain how it must be avoided.

Give 3 ways in which suspiciousness can be avoided

In what situations or towards whom should we exercise ‘reasonable’ suspicion?

- Paranoid Personality Disorder - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranoid_personality_disorder
- Mizan ul Hikmah – book of Hadith

^{iv} Beharul-Anwaar vol.74 p.191