

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

Walk Your Own Road

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

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SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
FOUNDATIONS &
ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

Walk Your Own Road

The peace you are chasing is not in the lives of others. It is on the road Allah gave to you alone.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Sickness That Wears a Smile

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me begin with something honest, something you may recognize the moment I say it. There is a sickness that has crept quietly into our homes and our friendships and our communities, and the strangest thing about it is that it never introduces itself as a sickness. It does not knock on the door and say, *I am here to steal your good deeds*. No. It arrives dressed beautifully. It calls itself **concern**. It calls itself **curiosity**. It calls itself *just staying informed*. And because it wears such a respectable coat, we welcome it in and we let it sit at our table and we let it feed on our tongues, and we never once suspect that it is slowly emptying the account we have been building for the next life.

I want you to imagine the last gathering you sat in. The tea was warm, the company was familiar, and somewhere in the conversation a name came up. A brother who is struggling. A sister whose marriage is delayed. A family whose finances took a turn. And notice what happened inside you, honestly. There was a small pull, a quiet leaning forward, an appetite to know a little more. Why did they do that? How much did they lose? What is really going on in that house? That pull, my beloved, is the sickness. It feels like nothing. It feels like being a caring member of the community. But Allah, the Most High, looked at that exact moment in the human heart and He warned us against it in language so vivid that it should freeze our tongues in place.

And here is what makes our age so dangerous. In the time of our grandparents, a piece of gossip died in the room where it was born. It had no legs. But you and I have handed this sickness a weapon it never had before. Today a rumour can reach a thousand hearts in the time it takes to lift a thumb. A Muslim's private fault can be broadcast to the world in a single careless message forwarded without a second thought. The group chat, the comment section, the screenshot passed along. My dear brother, my dear sister, we are living in the most efficient age of backbiting in human history, and most of us do not even realize we are participating in it.

Three Diseases in a Single Verse

Listen to how Allah gathers this whole illness together and lays it bare. He does not leave it vague. He names the disease, He names its stages, and then He gives us an image so revolting that if we truly felt it, we would never again speak ill of an absent soul.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ
الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ
أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا
اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

*O you who have believed, avoid much suspicion. Indeed, some suspicion is sin. And do not spy, nor backbite one another. **Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would detest it.** And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful.*

Surah Al-Hujurat (49:12)

Look at the order Allah chose, because it is the exact map of how we fall. First comes the **suspicion of the heart**. We assume the worst about someone. Then comes the **spying of the eye**. Because we have assumed the worst, we begin to watch, to notice, to investigate. And then comes the **backbiting of the tongue**. Because we have watched, now we have something to say. It is a staircase, my dear brother, my dear sister, and the first step is so small that we barely feel our foot land on it. A single unfair thought. But that thought is the top of a slide that ends in the ruin of another person's honour and, worse, the ruin of our own record.

And notice that Allah does not simply say, this is forbidden, avoid it. He does something far more powerful. He reaches into your very nature and He asks a question your stomach answers before your mind does. Would you eat the flesh of your dead brother? The scholars of tafsir, among them Ibn Kathir and al-Qurtubi, explained that Allah chose this horrifying image on purpose. Backbiting had become so easy on the tongue, so comfortable, so ordinary, that people no longer felt its ugliness. So Allah gave the sin a body. He said, in essence, every time you tear at the honour of an absent brother, you are crouching over a corpse and tearing at its flesh with your teeth. We would recoil in horror at the second. Yet we do the first over dinner and feel absolutely nothing.

THE EXCUSE WE ALL REACH FOR

But What I Said Was True

Now let me name the excuse. Because I know it, and you know it, and it is the very first thing our minds run to the moment we are caught. *But it was true.* He really did do that. She really is like that. I did not lie, I only stated a fact. My dear brother, my dear sister, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ closed this door before we could ever open it. He defined this sin with such precision that not one of us can hide behind our honesty.

أَتَدْرُونَ مَا الْغَيْبَةُ؟ قَالُوا: اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ. قَالَ:
ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ. قِيلَ: أَفَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ فِي أَخِي
مَا أَقُولُ؟ قَالَ: إِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ اغْتَبْتَهُ، وَإِنْ
لَمْ يَكُنْ فِيهِ مَا تَقُولُ فَقَدْ بَهْتَهُ

*Do you know what backbiting is? They said: Allah and His Messenger know best. He said: **It is mentioning your brother with what he dislikes.** It was asked: What if what I say about him is true? He said: If what you say is true, you have backbitten him, and if it is not true, you have slandered him.*

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2589 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Do you see how completely this seals the door? The truth of the matter is not your defence, my beloved. It is your conviction. If the fault is real and you named it behind his back, that is the very backbiting Allah forbade in the Qur'an. And if the fault is false and you named it anyway, then you have committed the greater crime of slander on top of it. There is no exit here through the door marked *honesty*. The only safe path, the only one, is silence about what does not concern you. And I promise you, that silence is not a loss. It is one of the greatest freedoms a heart can taste.

THE CURE IS A SINGLE WORD

The Beauty of Leaving It Alone

Here is where I want your heart to lift, because the medicine the Messenger ﷺ prescribed is astonishingly simple. He did not hand us a twelve-step program. He did not give us a heavy discipline that only the scholars could manage. He tied a great portion of the very beauty of our religion to one

small act of restraint, an act available to a child, a labourer, a busy mother, a tired father, to every single one of us at every single moment.

مِنْ حُسْنِ إِسْلَامِ الْمَرْءِ تَرْكُهُ مَا لَا يَعْنِيهِ

Part of the excellence of a person's Islam is his leaving alone that which does not concern him.

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 2318 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

Sit with the weight of that, my dear brother, my dear sister. The Messenger ﷺ made the beauty of your Islam rise and fall with a single measure: how well do you mind your own business? The more you leave alone what does not concern you, the more beautiful, the more radiant, the more complete your Islam becomes. And the more you pry and dig and meddle and pass along, the more your Islam is chipped away, quietly, unseen, until you are left with a shell that prays and fasts but leaks its rewards through the hole in your tongue.

But I want you to notice something the hadith is hiding, something beautiful. Look at the **freedom** buried inside this teaching. The one who minds his own business is set free from a thousand burdens that were never his to carry in the first place. He is not exhausted by the dramas of other households. He is not poisoned by faults that have nothing to do with his salvation. He does not lie awake replaying a conversation about a person he barely knows. Have you ever noticed how heavy gossip makes you feel afterward? That heaviness is real, and it is the weight of carrying what Allah never asked you to carry. The believer who simply looks away has lightened his own heart. Minding your own path is not a duty that shrinks your life. It is a gift that gives you your life back.

THE QUESTIONS THAT PRY

When Curiosity Wears the Mask of Care

Let me be very practical now, because so much of our prying does not feel like prying at all. It feels like friendliness. It feels like taking an interest. How old are you now? Are you married yet? Why don't you have children? How much are you earning these days? Why did you sell the house? My dear brother, my dear sister, when these questions are asked without a genuine right, they are not warmth. They are

intrusions. They are hands pulling back a curtain that Allah Himself drew across another soul's private world.

Understand this deeply. Every single person you meet is carrying circumstances, struggles, wounds, and tests that Allah alone fully knows. The sister who is not yet married may be carrying a grief you cannot imagine, and your innocent question reopens it every time she is asked. The brother whose finances collapsed may be holding on to his dignity by a thread, and your curiosity is a scissors. Allah drew a curtain over their affairs. Who are you and who am I to pull it back so that our curiosity can peek inside? The mature believer, the beautiful believer, learns to ask after a person's wellbeing without ever digging into their private world. He learns to offer help without demanding to know what does not belong to him. There is a way to say *I am here for you* that never once says *tell me your secrets*.

The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, were people of this restraint, and they reached it by a single realization. They were so busy correcting their own hearts that they simply had no appetite left for inspecting the hearts of others. It is beautifully related from the early Muslims that they observed two kinds of people. There were those who had no faults of their own to keep them busy, so they busied themselves with the faults of everyone else. And there were those so aware of their own faults that they had no time left over for anyone else's shortcomings at all. So let me ask you honestly, and let me ask myself: which of the two do we want to be? The one whose own account is so neglected that he has all the free time in the world to audit the neighbours? Or the one who knows that his own reckoning is heavy enough to fill every hour of every day?

THE ENDLESS CHATTER

They Said, It Is Said

How much of our daily speech, if we were truly honest, falls into what the Arabs called *qil wa qal*, the endless spinning wheel of *they said* and *it is said*? Did you hear what happened? Someone told me that. People are saying. On and on it turns, and it feels so harmless, so social, so ordinary. But the Messenger ﷺ named this exact habit among the things Allah dislikes for us, and he placed it in dangerous company.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَرِهَ لَكُمْ قِيلَ وَقَالَ، وَكَثْرَةَ السُّؤَالِ، وَإِضَاعَةَ
الْمَالِ

*Indeed, Allah dislikes for you **idle gossip**, asking too many questions, and the wasting of wealth.*

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 5975 and Sahih Muslim: 593 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Notice the company Allah placed idle gossip in. He set it beside the wasting of wealth. Think about what that comparison means. When you burn your money on nonsense, everyone agrees you have been foolish. But Allah is telling you that when you burn your hours on the affairs of others, you are wasting something far more precious than money, because money can return and time never will. The tongue that is always busy with other people is a tongue that has no room left for the remembrance of Allah. The heart that is always watching others has no attention left to watch itself. Every hour you spend narrating the story of another person's life is an hour stolen from the only story you will actually be asked about, which is your own.

And so the Messenger ﷺ handed us a golden rule, a single filter that, if we placed it in front of our mouths, would silence the greater part of everything wrong we have ever said. It is so short you can memorize it right now and carry it for the rest of your life.

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا أَوْ
لِيَصْمُتْ

*Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him **speak good or remain silent**.*

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 6018 and Sahih Muslim: 47 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Speak good, or stay silent. Read it again. There is no third option offered to the believer. There is no permission slip for the careless word, the cutting joke at someone's expense, the rumour passed along just to keep the conversation alive. The Messenger ﷺ has already told you what to do with anything that is not good: leave it unsaid. And notice, this rule is not tied to knowledge or scholarship. It is tied to faith itself. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day. Which means every time we choose the harmful word over silence, a small piece of us is acting as though we have forgotten that Day is coming at all.

And how heavy this rule has become in our time, my dear brother, my dear sister, now that the tongue has been joined by the thumb. A word of backbiting once died in the room where it was spoken. Today a single message carries a Muslim's fault into a hundred homes before the sun sets, and it is forwarded a thousand times by people who never paused for a single second to ask whether it was even true. And here is the thing we forget: the message you type is speech. The comment you leave is speech. The screenshot you forward is speech. And every letter of it is being written down by the two angels who never sleep. Allah told us plainly that not a word leaves the mouth except that there is a watcher beside it, ready to record. So imagine, just imagine, that entire archive read back to you on the Day of Judgement. Every message you ever sent about another person. Every forward. Every comment. Let that imagining reach your hands before they type, and soften them.

A TERRIFYING EXCHANGE

Do Not Hunt for Faults

There is a particular kind of person I need to describe, because he might be sitting inside any one of us. This is the person who looks religious. His tongue is busy with the language of faith. He talks about the deen, he attends the gatherings, he is quick to point out where the community is going wrong. And yet his real energy, his true daily occupation, is hunting. He is searching, always searching, for the hidden faults of his brothers and sisters, so that he can bring them into the light and discuss them. The Messenger ﷺ had the most terrifying of warnings for this exact person, and it should make every one of us guard our eyes and our suspicions with our lives.

يَا مَعْشَرَ مَنْ آمَنَ بَلِسَانِهِ وَلَمْ يَدْخُلِ الْإِيمَانُ قَلْبَهُ، لَا
تَغْتَابُوا الْمُسْلِمِينَ، وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا عَوْرَاتِهِمْ، فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ اتَّبَعَ
عَوْرَاتِهِمْ يَتَّبِعِ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ، وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعِ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ
يَفْضَحْهُ وَلَوْ فِي جَوْفِ بَيْتِهِ

O you who have believed with your tongues while faith has not entered your hearts, do not backbite the Muslims, and do not seek out their faults. For whoever seeks out their faults, Allah will seek out his fault, and whomever Allah pursues, He will expose, even were he in the depths of his own house.

Source: Sunan Abi Dawud: 4880 · **Authenticity:** Hasan

What a terrifying exchange this is, my dear brother, my dear sister. The one who hunts the faults of others is, without realizing it, inviting Allah to hunt his own. The one who exposes a brother is signing a request for his own exposure, even in the privacy of the house where he thought no eye could ever see him. Think about that. You believed your sins were safe behind closed doors. But you spent your days pulling the doors off the sins of others, and so the very walls that protected you are pulled away. This is a law of the universe that Allah set in motion. You get what you give. You measure others, and the same measure is turned back upon you.

So how much safer, how infinitely wiser, is the opposite path. The path of the one who covers. Listen to the trade the Messenger ﷺ offered to the one who conceals rather than exposes.

مَنْ سَتَرَ مُسْلِمًا سَتَرَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ

Whoever conceals the fault of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and the Hereafter.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2580 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

What a trade! You conceal one fault of a brother, one, and Allah conceals your faults in both worlds. Now be honest with yourself. Which of us does not carry faults he prays with all his heart will stay hidden on the Day when the secrets are laid bare? Which of us wants his private struggles read aloud before all of creation? Then earn that concealment, my beloved. Earn it by becoming a person who conceals. Become a shelter for the honour of your brothers and sisters, not a window that displays their flaws to the world. The believer is not a hunter of faults. He is a coverer of them. He is not known for taunting, for cursing, for foul speech and vulgarity. Those are simply not the manners of a heart that has faith living inside it.

THE WINNERS TURN AWAY

The First Sign of the Successful

Now I want to show you something that should completely reframe how you see this whole subject. When Allah opened the description of the believers who have truly won, the believers who have succeeded, the believers who are the ultimate winners of both worlds, and He began to list their defining qualities, do you know what He placed near the very top? Not a mighty act of worship. Not standing all night in prayer or crossing deserts in charity. He placed an act of turning away.

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ * الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي صَلَاتِهِمْ خَاشِعُونَ
* وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنِ اللَّغْوِ مُعْرِضُونَ

*Successful indeed are the believers, those who are humbly submissive in their prayer, and **those who turn away from idle talk.***

Surah Al-Mu'minun (23:1-3)

Look at the order, because Allah does nothing by accident. Right after the humility of the heart in prayer, the very next mark of the winning believer is *turning away from al-laghw*, from idle talk, from everything empty that brings no benefit in this world and no reward in the next. Do you understand what this means for you? Allah connected the success of your entire soul to your ability to look away from what does not concern you. If you have started to master your tongue and your curiosity, you are not merely avoiding a sin. You are already walking the exact road of the successful. You are already wearing one of the badges of the winners.

And do not make the mistake of thinking that al-laghw is only the obvious backbiting and slander. Al-laghw is wider than that. It is everything empty. It is every hour poured into matters that will only be raised against you at the reckoning. It is every heated argument you were dragged into that had nothing to do with your path to Allah. It is every controversy you adopted as your personal cause though it never touched your family, your faith, or your future. My dear brother, my dear sister, the believer guards his time the way a careful man guards his wealth, because he knows that the hour spent dissecting the lives of others is an hour stolen forever from the only life he will ever be asked to answer for. And to turn away from all of it is not weakness. It is not being cold or uncaring. It is the discipline of a soul that has finally understood what actually matters, and refuses to be pulled off its road by every passing distraction.

The Bankrupt of the Ummah

Let me leave you with a scene the Messenger ﷺ painted with his own words, a scene so sobering that it should rise before your eyes the next moment you are tempted to speak ill of anyone. He turned to his Companions one day and he asked them a question. Who is the bankrupt person? Who is the one who is truly broke? And they answered exactly as you and I would answer. They said, the bankrupt is the one with no money, no possessions, no wealth. And then the Messenger ﷺ corrected them, and he gave them a definition of poverty far more frightening than any empty pocket.

إِنَّ الْمُفْلِسَ مِنْ أُمَّتِي مَنْ يَأْتِي يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ بِصَلَاةٍ
وَصِيَامٍ وَزَكَاةٍ، وَيَأْتِي قَدْ شَتَمَ هَذَا، وَقَذَفَ هَذَا،
وَأَكَلَ مَالَ هَذَا، وَسَفَكَ دَمَ هَذَا، وَضَرَبَ هَذَا،
فِيُعْطَى هَذَا مِنْ حَسَنَاتِهِ، وَهَذَا مِنْ حَسَنَاتِهِ، فَإِنْ
فَنِيَتْ حَسَنَاتُهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ يُقْضَى مَا عَلَيْهِ أُخِذَ مِنْ
خَطَايَاهُمْ فَطُرِحَتْ عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ طُرِحَ فِي النَّارِ

The bankrupt of my Ummah is the one who comes on the Day of Resurrection with prayer, fasting, and zakah, but he comes having insulted this one, slandered that one, devoured the wealth of this one, spilled the blood of that one, and struck this one. So this one is given from his good deeds, and that one from his good deeds, until his good deeds are gone.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2581 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

I want you to truly picture this, my beloved. Picture yourself arriving on that Day carrying a lifetime of worship on your back. Years of prayers you dragged yourself out of bed for. Ramadans of hunger and thirst. Charity you gave when it was hard to give. You arrive with all of it, proud and exhausted and hopeful. And then, one by one, you watch it handed away. Not to angels. Not thrown into some divine treasury. Handed directly to the people whose honour your tongue tore apart in the gatherings of this world. That brother you gossiped about takes a fistful of your prayers. That sister you slandered takes your fasting. The one you devoured behind his back walks away with your charity. And you stand there, watching your fortune drain into their hands, and you can do nothing to stop it.

The gossip felt free in this life. That is the great deception of it. It felt free, it cost nothing, it was even enjoyable. But its true price is paid in the only currency that will ever matter on that Day. So here is the question I want you to plant in your heart, a question to ask before every rumour, before every exposure, before every prying step into an affair that was never yours. Ask yourself simply: *Is this worth my prayers?* Is this piece of gossip worth handing my good deeds to the very person I am talking about? Because make no mistake, my dear brother, my dear sister, that is precisely what you are doing.

A REMINDER CARRIED HOME

Return to Your Own Road

There is a beautiful story that captures everything I have tried to say. A man once came to a scholar of the Qur'an with a question about the meaning of a single verse. And instead of answering right away, the scholar asked him gently, tell me, what is the verse that comes before it? The man did not know. And the verse that comes after it? He did not know that either. So the scholar asked, tell me, what is your trade, what do you do with your days? The man said, I repair vehicles. And the scholar said, softly and without any mockery, then go back and repair vehicles. He was not belittling the man. He was teaching all of us a lesson that could save our whole lives. There is dignity, there is safety, there is peace in tending to what Allah has actually placed in your hands, rather than wandering off into matters that were never yours to carry.

That is the heart of everything, my beloved. Every single one of us has been given a path by Allah. Your own prayers to perfect. Your own heart to purify. Your own faults to repair. Your own family to raise. Your own knowledge to grow. Your own reckoning to prepare for. And your peace, your real and lasting peace, is not found in watching everyone else walk their road. It is found in walking yours. The cure for minding everyone's business is beautifully simple: become busy, gloriously and completely busy, with your own. If we gave to our own souls even half the attention, half the energy, half the passionate scrutiny we so freely give to the affairs of others, we would be among the righteous by nightfall. So turn the gaze inward. Turn away from the empty talk. Cover what you would want covered. Speak good, or stay silent. And walk, with a light heart and clean hands, the one road that is truly your own.

☰ Your Action Plan: Mind Your Own Path

Don't just read — choose what you will act on this week.

1 Install the two-word filter

Before any sentence about another person leaves your mouth or your thumb, run the Prophet's rule ﷺ: speak good or stay silent. If it is not clearly good, leave it unsaid.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

2 Let the message die with you

When a forward, screenshot, or rumour about a Muslim reaches you, do not pass it on. Stop it at your device and delete it. Be the wall the gossip cannot climb over.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

3 Answer suspicion with a du'a

The next time a bad assumption whispers in your heart about someone, immediately replace it with a good assumption and a quiet prayer for that person. Turn the poison into a good deed.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

4 Excuse yourself from the tearing

When a gathering or a chat turns to backbiting, change the subject once. If it continues, quietly leave. Protect your good deeds the way you would protect your wealth.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

🚩 The 7-Day Mind Your Own Path Challenge

For seven days, take a firm vow: not a single word of backbiting, not one prying question, and not one forwarded rumour will leave you. Each time you feel the pull to discuss someone else's life, redirect that exact energy inward: make an extra du'a for them, then work on one of your own faults instead. Keep a one-line note each night of what you left unsaid and what you did for your own soul in its place. Do this for a week and watch your heart grow lighter, and then let it become who you simply are for the rest of your life: a coverer of faults, a guarder of the tongue, and a walker of your own road to Allah.

Make it stick – and make it last

- ✓ **Write it down.** Put your chosen action on a sticky note on your mirror, desk, or fridge – somewhere you cannot miss it.
- ✓ **Print this plan** and tick each action off as you do it.
- ✓ **Set a daily reminder** on your phone or calendar so it never slips your mind.
- ✓ **Keep a one-line journal** each night – did I do it today? how did it go? – and watch your streak grow.

Don't aim for one good day or week – aim to keep it for life. A habit only counts once it outlives the challenge.