73003 - Who are the storytellers?

the question

Who are the storytellers who are regarded as being weak and worthless and who are criticized for being storytellers? Does it refer to any person who exhorts people and tells stories, or is there more to the matter than that?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The storyteller is one who addresses the common folk and exhorts them on the basis of stories.

Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The storyteller is the one who makes a point by telling stories of the past and explaining them.

Reminding (tadhkeer) means telling people of the blessings of Allaah and encouraging them to give thanks to Him, and warning them against disobeying Him.

Preaching or exhortation means reminding people of the punishment of Allaah and softening their hearts.

The word qaass (pl. qassaasoon) “storyteller” applies to all three.

Al-Qussaas wa Mudhakkireen (157-159).

Storytelling and exhortation are praiseworthy in principle, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“So relate the stories, perhaps they may reflect”

[al-A’raaf 7:176]

“but admonish them, and speak to them an effective word (i.e. to believe in Allaah, worship Him, obey Him, and be afraid of Him) to reach their innerselves”

[al-Nisa’ 4:63]

“And remind (by preaching the Qur’aan, O Muhammad), for verily, the reminding profits the believers”

[al-Dhaariyaat 51:55]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) also used to remind and exhort the people, and tell them stories about the previous nations in which there were lessons to be learned.

It was narrated that al-‘Irbaad ibn Saariyah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said:

The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) exhorted us in an eloquent manner which moved us to tears and softened our hearts. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi (2676) who said: hasan saheeh. It was also classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Tirmidhi.

It was narrated from Ibn ‘Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told the people the story of three men who were trapped in cave by a rock. They asked Allaah for help by virtue of their good deeds to move the rock, until it was moved. Narrated by al-Bukhaari (2215) and Muslim (2743).

Similarly the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) used to remind the people of Allaah and recite Qur’aan and hadeeth to them, and call them to learn lessons from the stories of people of the past.

It was narrated that Abu Waa’il said: ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Mas’ood used to remind the people every Thursday. A man said to him: O Abu ‘Abd al-Rahmaan, I wish that you would remind us every day. He said: What is keeping me from doing that is the fact that I would not like to bore you. I try to choose the best time as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to do with

us, for fear of making us bored.

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (70) and Muslim (2821).

Whoever follows the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his companions, and preaches to the people and exhorts them with knowledge and insight, and does not indulge in lying, showing off, exaggerating or showing ignorance, cannot be denounced, rather he will be rewarded and is to be appreciated.

Imam Ahmad said: If the storyteller is truthful, I do not think there is anything wrong with sitting with him.

Al-Awzaa'i was asked about people who gather and ask a man to tell them stories. He said: If that is just one day, there is nothing wrong with it.

Al-Khallaal narrated that Abu Bakr al-Marwadhi said: I heard Ahmad ibn Hanbal say: I like the storytellers because they mention the Balance and the torment of the grave. I said to him: Do you think we may go to them? He said: Yes, by Allaah, if they are truthful.

He said: A man came to Imam Ahmad and complained to him that he was suffering from waswasah (whispers of the Shaytaan). He said: You should go to the storyteller, how beneficial it is to sit with them.

But because people who had no knowledge started to get involved in preaching and storytelling, and they told lies or added or took away things, and they focused on showing off and gaining a reputation, or their conduct and deeds were bad, the imams and scholars warned against such people.

It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar that he used to leave the mosque and say: Nothing forced me to leave the mosque except these storytellers; if it wasn't for them I would not have left.

It was narrated from Umm al-Darda' that she sent word to two men saying: Tell them to fear Allaah and they should exhort themselves before they exhort others.

It was narrated from Shu’bah ibn Hajjaaj that a young man came to him and asked him about a hadeeth. He said to him: Are you a story teller? He said: Yes. He said: Go away, for we do not narrate hadeeth to storytellers. He said to him: Why? He said: They take the hadeeth from us like a handspan and make it a cubit! i.e, they add to the hadeeth.

Sufyaan al-Thawri was asked: Can we listen to storytellers? He said: You should turn your back on innovation.

The reports quoted above may be found in al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah (2/82-89).

Ibn al-Jawzi said: The worst fabrication of hadeeth is done by storytellers. End quote.

Al-Qussaas (308).

Conclusion: The storyteller is not blameworthy in and of himself, rather it when he mixes lies, exaggeration and audacity with religion that he is to be condemned.

Ibn al-Jawzi said: The storytellers are not be criticized for this name, rather the storytellers are criticized because most of them mention stories without mentioning useful knowledge, and most of them mix what they narrate and perhaps rely on. End quote.

Talbees Iblees (134).

Imam Ahmad said: The storyteller who mentions Paradise and Hell, and warns people, and is sincere and speaks the truth (there is nothing wrong with him); as for those who make up stories and hadeeths, they are to be shunned. End quote.

Al-Adaab al-Shar’iyyah (2/85).

Thus you will realize that if a narrator is described as one of the storytellers (qussaas), that does not necessarily mean that he is either condoned or condemned. Some of the storytellers were trustworthy narrators, and some of them were da’eef (weak). There follow some examples:

Sa’eed ibn Hassaan al-Makhzoomi, the storyteller of the people of Makkah. Ibn Mu’een, Abu

Dawood and al-Nasaa’i said: he is thiqah (trustworthy). Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb (4/15).

‘Aa’idh-Allaah ibn ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr. Mak-hool said: I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable than him. Al-Zuhri said: He was the storyteller and judge of the people of Syria. Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb (5/74).

Thaabit ibn Aslam al-Banaani. Ahmad said: Thaabit is good in hadeeth. He used to tell stories, and Qataadah used to tell stories.

Tahdheeb al-Tahdheeb (2/3).

Ibn al-Jawzi said: We heard that Hammaad ibn Salamah said: I used to hear that storytellers did not memorize hadeeth, but I used to narrate hadeeth to Thaabit, and I would say Anas instead of Ibn Abi Layla, and Ibn Abi Layla instead of Anas to confuse him, but he corrected me every time. End quote. i.e., he tested him and found that he had memorized hadeeth well.

Al-Qussaas (260)

Those who were da’eef (weak) included the following:

Ahmad ibn ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Iyaad al-Makki, who narrated munkar reports. Abu Haatim said: he used to tell stories. Mizaan al-I’tidaal (1/248)

Darraaj Abu’l-Samh. Ahmad said: His ahaadeeth are munkar and he regarded him as weak. Ibn Yoonus said: he used to tell stories in Egypt. Mizaan al-I’tidaal (3/40).

And Allaah knows best.