22878 - Our attitude towards rumours and news on the Internet

the question

How should we deal with the rumours that appear on the Internet? What is the Muslim’s attitude towards the news that we read here and there, and what is written in chat rooms, especially since some of it is good news for the Muslims, but the source is unknown.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

We live nowadays at a time when many rumours that bring hope are appearing in the guise of news. These appears on Internet web sites and chat rooms, so that they may be spread to the people as glad tidings and so that good-hearted people may accept them as indisputable facts coming from trustworthy sources. Even if any of them could be proven, there are still many rumours that can be classed as no more than fabrications. The one who thinks about this will understand that many of the global media, including the Arab media, exaggerate in their coverage of some events and they analyze them in a subjective manner that shows a complete bias and evident absence of objectivity, trying to take revenge by adding to the news and exaggerating, and telling weird news stories. So there is no such thing as credibility in these media, especially when emotions and wishes play a part. This is apart from the fact that media objectivity has become a victim of this current war, and western circles have rejected the lessons [of objectivity, etc.] that they used to teach others. But this does not mean that we should dispute the facts or deny what is taking place in reality, or that we should face this bias with exaggeration and hopes.

Here we should pause and remind ourselves, and the good-hearted people who hear this news and tell it to others with good intentions – and those who fabricate these rumours and take upon themselves the job of propagating them – of a few facts.

1 – We must be certain about the news we accept, and we should not accept it simply because it happens to coincide with our hopes and wishes. We have our own methodology of verifying matters, and we should be consistent with regard to what we like and dislike. It is not right for us to doubt news accompanied by pictures from the battlefield, or to shed doubts on it, when the bottom line is one's senses. At a time when you see news going around through mobiles from some internet web sites, there are some people who may accept such news but it should be noted that there are people who will never believe it. So they should beware of exposing themselves to being called liars. An old proverb says, "Whoever pursues weird news will be disbelieved."

2 – We have to be cautious about the fact that the source is anonymous. There is no information more important than that of the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), yet despite that it is not part of the Muslims' methodology to accept reports of the Sunnah from people who are unknown. Hence news must be taken from authentic sources; if it is not authentic then it should at least be known, so that people may be able to find out for themselves whether it is authentic or not. What a bad habit it is for a man to say, "I heard" or "they said."

3 – If there are people who permit the fabrication of rumours, basing that on some kind of ijtihaad, we must refuse to be the means of transmitting that by believing it and propagating it. (Whoever narrates a saying knowing it to be a lie is one of the liars).

4 – One of the reasons used by the fabricators to justify making up these rumours is that it is a kind of lying in war, which is permissible. They ignore the fact – of which they are not ignorant – that the only kind of lying that is permitted in war is that which misleads the enemy, not that which creates illusions and deceives the Muslims.

5 – If we have lost some aspects of the battle, we must not lose truthfulness which is our capital in our dealings with others. People will be astounded and amazed if they find out that this false news was transmitted through a good man. Whoever is known to have lied or to have transmitted lies will no longer be in a position to be considered trustworthy.

6 – Similarly the righteous will be astounded and will become suspicious of a narrator who

appeared to be righteous because he was telling this news and confirming it to them. At the same time, others will express joy, those who took the opposite stance to these youngsters and said, “This is their news, this is their credibility!” Everyone who was upset by the Muslim revival will find an opportunity to generalize this mistake and accuse all the pioneers of the revival of behaving like that. Please, for Allah’s sake, do not make the enemy rejoice or give them a reason to attack.

7 – If truthfulness is an Islamic virtue and part of Arabic chivalry, then telling lies is an obscenity that Islam has forbidden. Even the mushrik Arabs refrained from telling lies, as Abu Sufyaan – when he was still a mushrik – said: “Were it not that I am afraid that people may find out that I had told a lie, I would have told lies about him.” That was when he was speaking to Heraclius (about the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)). He did not want to have even one lie to be found in his history, even if it was a lie told against his enemy Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to Heraclius (the Roman ruler). We are concerned that the propagation of these rumours may lead people to record a lot of lies against us.

8 – Fabricating rumours and believing them readily is a form of escapism in the face of a reality which one dislikes and with which one does not feel comfortable.

The soul finds consolation in denying that which it does not like and in fabricating and disseminating rumours, but in the end it will have to submit to the authority of overwhelming reality. But this psychological trick is not fit to be the means of escapism for the followers of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), who taught them the virtues of truthfulness and commanded them to strive their utmost to be truthful. He said: “Truthfulness leads to righteousness and righteousness leads to Paradise. A man will continue to speak the truth and strive to be truthful, until he will be recorded with Allah as a speaker of the truth. And lying leads to immorality and immorality leads to Hell, a man will continue to tell lies and strive in telling lies, until he will be recorded with Allah as a liar.”

9 – Delaying recognition of realities and veiling reality with illusions, the greatest form of which is believing and disseminating rumours, will only multiply the amount of losses, and the greatest loss will be the loss of values. The highest and most precious of those values is truthfulness. “then if

they had been true to Allah, it would have been better for them" [Muhammad 47:21 – interpretation of the meaning]

10 – Recognizing the truth is the first step towards dealing with crises and overcoming them, but not admitting them and concealing them are among the greatest means of reinforcing them, renewing them and repeating them.

11 – Our advice is not to transmit this news. We must advise those who transmit it with the best of intentions and present them with the real facts, we should not try to spare their feelings at the expense of our reason and the transmission of truthful news, and we should try to rescue them from the anxiety of illusion and point them in the direction of reality, because truthfulness brings peace of mind and lies bring suspicion.

12 – Sayyid Qutub (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "The reality of a thing defeats the outward appearance of another thing, even if it is the reality of kufr."

How I wish that I did not have to talk in this manner, but the problem is there and must be addressed. I have tried to be truthful when speaking about truthfulness, for the dearest of speech to Allah is that which is most sincere.

"O you who believe! Be afraid of Allah, and be with those who are true (in words and deeds)"

[al-Tawbah 9:119 – interpretation of the meaning]

O Allah, show us the truth as truth and enable us to follow it; show us the false as false and enable us to avoid it. Guide us concerning disputed matters of truth by Your leave, for You guide Whomsoever You wish to the Straight Path.

May Allah send blessings and peace upon our Prophet Muhammd and upon his family and companions.