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# Debates and disputations

Debates and disputations

by Al-Imam al-Ghazali (Radhi Allahu Anhu)

Know, O' Reader, that after the Holy Nabi, the Khulafa Rashideen were the leaders of the learned in the science of Allah. They were the eyes of knowledge and were experienced in the legal decisions. They did not take the help of jurisprudents except in cases where consultation was necessary. They decided on the strength of Ijtihad and their decisions were recorded in their lives. After their death, Khulafat went to those who not so experienced in legal matters and administrative affairs. They were compelled to seek the aid of jurisprudents. At that time, a band of Tabi'een were alive and they persisted in following strictly the injunctions of Deen. Whenever Khalifs called them, they fled. But some learned men used to mix with the Khalifs and consequently became humiliated. Therefore there were differences of opinion and among the learned men and there grew different mathahib as a result, and in some cases, a sect sprung up. There were argumentations and disputations over the intricate questions of religion. They composed also many works on these subjects. This induced the people to take to controversies and disputations.

# There are eight conditions of debates

1. The first condition is that where debate for search of truth is one of Fardh Kefayah duties, one who has not already fulfilled his part in duties of Farze Ain should not engage himself in the debates even for searching truth.

2. The second condition is that one should not consider debates more important than Fardh Kefayah duties.

He commits sin who does other works leaving aside a more important Fardh

Kefaya. He is like a man who does not give water to drink to people who are

thirsty and facing death even though he has got power to do so, because he

remains then busy in giving lessons of cupping. Once the Holy Nabi

(Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) was asked: When will the people give up

enjoining good and forbidding evil? The Holy Nabi (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sal

lam) said: When flattery will grow in good people among you, kingdom will go

to the meanest of you and theology to those who will be corrupt. |

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3. The third condition which justifies debate is that the debater should have ability and give decision on his own responsibility without referring to the opinion of al-Imam al-A'zam Abu Hanifah or any other Imams. He who has not the ability of independent interpretation should not express his opinion but should refer it to an Imam.

4. The fourth condition which justifies debate is that the subject for decision should be about actual cases that crop up, for example, the question of inheritance and not about future cases. The Sahabi (Radhi Allahu Anhum) also held consultations as questions arose or were likely to arise in order to arrive at truth.

5. The fifth condition is that debate should be held in private in preference to open meetings in presence of noted people and in grandeur because privacy is more suitable for clear thinking and to examine what is right and what is wrong.

6. The sixth condition is that the debater should like truth in the same spirit as a lost thing is searched for. He should not mind whether the truth is found by him or by his adversary. When Hazrat Umar (Radhi Allahu Anhu) was once giving sermon, a woman pointed out to him his mistake to which he submitted. At another time, Hazrat Ali (Karam Allah wajhu) was asked a question by a man and he replied. When the man pointed out his mistake, he admitted it.

7. The seventh condition is that the debater should not prevent his adversary from giving up one argument in favor or another and one illustration in favor of another.

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8. The eighth condition is that debate should be held with such person from whom benefit is derived and who is learned.

>From these eight conditions, you will be able to distinguish those who debate for the sake of Allah and those who debate for other purposes.

# Evils of Debates

The following evils arise out of modern debates.

1. Envy. The Holy Nabi (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) said: Envy consumes good deeds as fire consumes fuels. A debator is never free from envy and hatred. Envy is a burning fire. One who falls in it gets punishment in the world. Hazrat Ibn Abbas (Radhi Allah Anhu) said: Acquire 'Ilm wherever it is found and don't obey the shayateen who are prone to disputes.
2. Pride. The Holy Nabi (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) said: A Mu'min cannot have kibr (pride) in him. There is a Hadith-e-Qudsi in which Allah Ta'ala said: "Grandeur is My cloak and pride is My mantle. I destroy the one who snatches anything of these two from Me."
3. Rancour. A debater is seldom free from the evil of rancour.
4. Back-biting which is likened by Allahu Ta'ala to the eating of carrion (49:12).
5. Declaration of self-purity. Allah says: Don't attribute purity to yourself. He knows best who fears Him. (53:33).
6. Spying and prying into secrets of adversary. Allah says Pry not. (49:12).
7. Nifaaq. A debater expresses his friendship for his adversary outwardly but he cherishes hatred for him

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inwardly. The Holy Nabi (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) said: When the learned men do not translate their learning into action, when they profess love for one another with their tongue and nurse hatred in their hearts, when they sever ties of relationship, Allah sends Curse upon them, makes their tongues mute and their eyes blind.

8. To turn away from Haqq. The most hateful thing to a debater is to reject the truth revealed to his adversary and thus he takes to deception and deceit. The Holy Nabi (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) prohibited dispute about useless things. He (Sallallahu 'Alayhi wa Sallam) said: If a man gives up disputation in matters of unlawful things, a garden will be built for him in Paradise. If a man gives up disputations in matters of Haqq, a house will be built up for him in the highest Paradise. Allah Ta'ala says: He is more wrongful than one who devises a lie against Allah and calls the truth a lie when it comes to him. (29:68) Allah says: Who is more wrongful than he who lies against Allah and treats the truth when it comes to him as a lie (39:33).

9. Another fault of debate is show and flattering the people in an effort to win their favor and to mislead them. Nifaaq (hypocrisy) is the greatest disease with which a debator is attacked and it is a major sin.

10. Deception. Debators are compelled to deception.

These ten evils are the secret major sins arising out of debates and disputations. Besides these major offences, there arise many other guilts out of controversies leading to blows, kicks, boxing, tearing of garments, etc.

## Debates and disputations

The learned men are of three classes. One class comprise those who ruin themselves and also ruin others. Another class make themselves fortunate and make others also fortunate. Such learned men call others towards good. The third class of learned men call ruin to themselves but make others fortunate.