



The Eighth Peril : Cursing ¹

Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī

Translated by Sidi Abu Hasan

Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

[It is not right] to curse anyone or anything – be it animals or humans or even things. This is a deplorable thing. RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: ‘A believer does not curse.’ ² And he ﷺ said: ‘Do not curse by the damnation of Allāh, or by His Wrath or by Hellfire.’ ³

Ḥudhayfa ؓ said: ‘None has indulged in cursing, without their curses having come true.’ ⁴

‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn ⁵ said: ‘We were with RasūlAllāh ﷺ in one of his journeys, a woman from the Anṣār ⁶ was upon a camel and was vexed with it; ⁷ the woman sent damnation upon the camel. RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: “Take what is upon the camel and strip it; because it has become damned.” ⁸ And then he [‘Imrān] said: ‘I see the she-camel roaming about and none stopping it.’

Abū Dardā’ said: ‘None utters a damnation upon the earth except that it says: “May Allāh curse him who has disobeyed Allāh more than us.”’

¹ Translated from the *Ihyā’* of Imām al-Ghazālī [Part Three, Book Three, Section Eight vol.4/pg.195]

² *Al-mu’min laysa bi-la’ān*; al-‘Irāqī said: Tirmidhī graded it fair [Ḥasan] from a longer Ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Umar.

³ Even in our times – and common in English and Urdu – people take it easy and say: ‘to hell with,’ ‘what in the hell’ or ‘go to hell’ or in Urdu ‘*jahannum mein jaaye*.’

⁴ Zabīdī says, that it means they brought torment upon themselves.

⁵ With a ṣād

⁶ Those who aided RasūlAllāh ﷺ after his migration to Medina; the original inhabitants of Medina prior to Hijra and their tribes among which are ‘Aws and Khazraj.

⁷ Some people make an artificial distinction that ‘sending *la’na* is not the same as calling someone *mal’ūn*’ – RasūlAllāh said: ‘*fa’ innahā mal’ūna*’ proving that if you send *la’na* [damn] on someone, it is the same as saying it is *mal’ūn* [damned].

⁸ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported by Muslim.

‘Ā’isha رضي الله عنها said: ‘RasūlAllāh ﷺ heard Abū Bakr damning one of his slaves. He turned towards him and said: “O Abū Bakr! Does a Siddīq curse? ⁹ Never, by the Lord of Ka’bah!” ¹⁰ He said so twice or thrice. ¹¹ Abū Bakr set his slave free on that very day and he came to RasūlAllāh ﷺ and said: “I will never do it again.”

RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: ‘Those who utter damnation often ¹² shall not be amongst the intercessors and the martyrs on the day of Resurrection.’ ¹³

Anas رضي الله عنه said: ‘A man was passing with RasūlAllāh ﷺ on a camel and he cursed the camel. RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: “O slave of Allāh! Do not go on with us on an accursed camel.” ¹⁴ He said so as a censure and reproaching the man.’

To curse or to utter a damnation actually means: to expel, to exclude or to distance one from [the mercy of] Allāh ﷻ. And it is not permissible except for those who deserve to be distanced from Allāh ﷻ; and that is disbelief [*kufr*] and oppression [*zulm*]. That is one can say ‘May Allāh’s damnation be upon the disbelievers and the tyrants.’ It is necessary for one to follow the Sharī’ah in choosing words, because there is a great danger involved. It is as if one is ruling that Allāh ﷻ has distanced the person he curses; and this is a matter of unseen [*al-ghayb*] none except Allāh ﷻ knows this. Or RasūlAllāh ﷺ because Allāh ﷻ has informed him of these things [the unseen].

There are three attributes that necessitate damnation: disbelief, heresy and sinning [*kufr, bid’ah, fisq*]. And damnation falls in three categories in each of these attributes.

First: To curse by a very general attribute. As you would say, ‘Allāh’s curse be upon the infidels [*kāfirīn*], heretics [*mubtadi’īn*] and sinners.

Second: It is a more specific than the first, like you would say: ‘Allāh’s curse be upon the Jews, the Christians, the Magians, the Qadariyya, the Khawārij and the Rafidīs’ or ‘upon the adulterers, the oppressors, those who take usury.’ All of this is permitted except that there is a peril in damning the heretics – because the knowledge of heresies is very complex and there has not been a report in this regard. Therefore it is important to prevent the common folk from doing it because this leads to arguments and altercations among the people and [becomes] the reason for mischief. ¹⁵

⁹ The Arabic and in the words of the Master ﷺ are far more eloquent than any translation can do justice: ‘*al-siddiqūn wa la’anīn? kallā wa Rabb al-ka’bah*’: ‘Siddīqs and they curse? Never, by the Lord of the Ka’bah.’

¹⁰ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported by Ibn Abīl Dunyā in *Kitāb as-ṣamt wa Ādāb al-Lisān* or *The Book [on Virtues] of Silence and Etiquette of the Tongue*.

¹¹ To emphasize a thing, RasūlAllāh ﷺ used to repeat it twice or thrice.

¹² *la’anīn*

¹³ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported by Muslim.

¹⁴ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported Ibn Abīl Dunyā as referenced by al-‘Irāqī. In another report by Ibn Abīl Dunyā from Bakr ibn Khunays who elevated it says: ‘The mark of the ‘*abdāl* [foremost Saints] in my nation is that they will not curse anything absolutely.’ [Itḥāf, Zabīdī]

¹⁵ and a great disturbance. [Itḥāf, Zabīdī]

Third: To curse a specific person [or by his name] and there is a great danger in it. As you would say: ‘Zayd, may Allāh damn him, he is an infidel or a heretic or a sinner.’ The ruling in this case is that it is permissible to send damnation upon an individual upon whom there is firm evidence of damnation, like you would say: ‘Fir‘awn may Allāh damn him’ or ‘Abū Jahl, may Allāh damn him.’ because it is proven that they died as infidels and this is conveyed to us by the Sharī‘ah.

However, to curse a specific person [by name] in our times, like you would say: ‘Zayd, may Allāh damn him’, even if he is a Jew, for example, there is a great danger in it; because it is quite possible that he may become a Muslim and die as someone near to Allāh ﷻ; then, how can one rule that he has become accursed?

If you say: ‘he is cursed because he is an infidel at present; like we tell a Muslim : may Allāh have mercy on you, because he is a Muslim at present even though there is a possibility of his apostasy.’

Know then, that when we say: ‘may Allāh have mercy upon him’ we mean that ‘may Allāh make him steadfast upon Islām and obedience which begets and is the cause for mercy.’ But it is not possible [permissible] to say that: ‘may Allāh make the infidel steadfast on what necessitates damnation.’

Because doing so is like petitioning for disbelief [*kufī*] which is disbelief in itself. ¹⁶ However, it is permissible to say: ‘may Allāh damn him, if he dies an infidel; and no damnation upon him if he died a Muslim.’

It is a matter of unseen and none knows it; there is a great danger in uttering damnation when the possibility could be either way. ¹⁷ But, there is no danger if one forsakes cursing. If this is the case with an infidel, it is relatively essential to abstain from cursing Zayd the sinner and Zayd the heretic.

Because cursing someone individually is potentially dangerous because there is a possibility for these individuals to change except those about whom RasūlAllāh ﷺ has informed us; because it is possible for him to know who will die as an infidel. ¹⁸ Therefore he said about a few individuals that they were accursed. When he prayed against the Quraysh he said: ‘O Allāh! Grasp [in your Wrath] Abū Jahl ibn Hishām and ‘Utba ibn Rabī‘a.’ and he mentioned a group of people who were slain as infidels.

¹⁶ To wish that an infidel remain as an infidel or that a Muslim become an apostate, is a crime and such an act is itself apostasy.

¹⁷ That is, a man could have died a Muslim or an infidel; which we know not for certain.

¹⁸ He has been informed of the *ghayb* or unseen.

He even cursed those whose end he did not know [at that time], but he was told by Allāh ﷺ to abstain, as it has been reported: He used to curse those who murdered the folk of the well of Ma'ūna for a month when the verse was revealed: '***It is not for you to rule; Allāh might accept their repentance or torment them because they are transgressors.***'¹⁹

That is, it is possible that they might become Muslims; then where did you learn that they are accursed?²⁰ Similarly, if it is manifest and known,²¹ then it is permissible to curse them and deplore them as long as it does not hurt another Muslim.²² If it hurts any other Muslim, then it is not permissible.

As it has been reported that RasūlAllāh ﷺ passed by a grave on the way of Ṭā'if and he asked Abū Bakr about it. Abū Bakr said: 'This is the grave of a man who was haughty and defied Allāh and His Messenger.' It was the grave of Sa'id ibn al-'Āṣ. His son 'Amr ibn Sa'id became furious; he said: 'O RasūlAllāh, this is the grave of a person who was more generous in feeding [the hungry] and kind to the thirsty than Abū Quḥāfah.'²³ Abū Bakr said: 'O Messenger of Allāh, how can he speak to me like that?' RasūlAllāh ﷺ said [to 'Amr]: 'Withhold from Abū Bakr.'²⁴ After 'Amr left, RasūlAllāh ﷺ turned to Abū Bakr and said: 'O Abū Bakr, when you mention the infidels, speak about them in general; if you speak about individuals specifically you risk angering their sons for the sake of their fathers.' People began to restrain themselves after this.²⁵

[A companion] Nu'aymān used to drink wine [after the prohibition] and was punished many times in the presence of RasūlAllāh ﷺ. Another companion said: 'May Allāh curse him, how many times has he done this.' RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: 'Do not aid the devil against your brother.'²⁶ In another report: 'Do not say that. He loves Allāh and His Messenger.'²⁷ And he forbade him from cursing. This proves that it is not permissible to curse a sinner, specifically by his name.

In summary, there is a great danger in cursing individuals specifically [or by their name], therefore it is necessary to abstain from cursing. However there is no danger in keeping silent, even if it is from cursing the devil, Iblīs; let alone others.²⁸

¹⁹ Ṣūrat al-'Imrān, v.128

²⁰ Zabīdī mentions many reports of this event; four that were cursed were Abū Sufyān, Suhail ibn 'Amr, Safwān ibn Umayya and Hārith ibn Hishām; as the Lord Almighty had destined, they eventually became Muslims.

²¹ That they deserve to be cursed.

²² The feelings of another Muslim are also important. When people deplore the heretic relatives [Rāfiqī for example] of Muslims, they must remember this and should not go overboard.

²³ Abū Quḥāfa is Abū Bakr al-Siddīq's father.

²⁴ Hold back from arguing or deploring Abū Bakr.

²⁵ Al-'Irāqī said: It is reported by Abū Dāwūd in his *Marāsīl* reporting from 'Alī ibn Rabī'a.

²⁶ Al-'Irāqī: Reported by Ibn 'Abdul Barr in his *al-Istī'āb* through Zubayr ibn Bakār.

²⁷ Al-'Irāqī: A similar report is found in Bukhārī

²⁸ There is no blame on you even if you don't curse the devil; would you be asked if you did not curse anyone else?

If one asks: ‘Is it permissible to curse Yazīd because he murdered Ḥusayn or ordered it?’

We say: It is not proven; it is not permissible to say that he murdered Ḥusayn or ordered it, because it is not proven, let alone curse him. It is not permissible to say that a Muslim committed an enormity without evidence. True, it is permissible to say that Ibn Muljam murdered ‘Alī, and Abū al-Lulu‘a murdered ‘Umar ؓ because it has been proven unanimously [*tawātur*].

It is not permissible to accuse a Muslim of sinning [*fīsq*] or disbelief [*kufr*] without investigation and ascertaining it because RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: ‘No man accuses another of disbelief or sinning except that it returns on the sayer if the accused does not deserve it.’²⁹

RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: ‘No man accuses another of being an infidel except that one of them goes out of Islām. If the accused deserves it, then it is as it has been said. If not, the one who accused him becomes a disbeliever.’³⁰

This is the case when one accuses him of being a disbeliever in spite of knowing that he is a Muslim. If the accuser said so, on the basis of the heresy of the accused or any such reason, the accuser does not become a disbeliever even though he is mistaken and has committed an error.³¹

Mu‘ādh said: ‘RasūlAllāh ﷺ told me: “I forbid you from abusing a Muslim or disobeying a righteous ruler” or criticising the dead is worse. Masrūq says, “I went to ‘Ā’isha ؓ and she said: ‘What is he [certain person] doing, may Allāh curse him.’ I said: ‘He died.’ She said: ‘May Allāh have mercy upon him.’ I asked: ‘How can this be?’ [contradictory statements].

She said: ‘RasūlAllāh ﷺ said: “Do not swear at the dead, because they have passed towards what they have sent forth.”’³² And he ﷺ said: “Do not swear at the dead, thereby hurting the living.” And he said ﷺ: “O people! Be heedful of my companions and brothers and in-laws; do not revile them. O people! When someone dies, speak about their goodness.”’³³

If one asks: Is it permissible to say: ‘May Allāh curse the murderer of Ḥusayn,’ or ‘May Allāh curse the person who ordered the murder of Ḥusayn.’

²⁹ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported in both Bukhari and Muslim.

³⁰ Al-‘Irāqī: Daylamī in Musnad al-Firdaws through a weak chain.

³¹ See *Tanbiḥ al-Wulāt wa al-Ḥukām* of Ibn ‘Ābidīn where he discusses the Khawārij.

³² Al-‘Irāqī: Reported in Bukhārī.

³³ Al-‘Irāqī: Reported by Tirmidhī, the Ḥadīth of Mughayra ibn Shu‘bah.

We say: The correct way to say that is: ‘May Allāh curse the murderer of Ḥusayn if he died without repentance.’³⁴ Because, the possibility of [the murderer’s] repentance before he died exists and it is possible that he died after repentance. Waḥshī murdered Ḥamza the uncle of RasūlAllāh ﷺ when he was still an infidel; and then he repented from both disbelief and murder and it is not permissible to curse him [now].

Murder is an enormity; yet, it is not in the same category as disbelief. If one does not say this³⁵ with a condition of repentance, and curses freely, there is a great danger in it. But there is no danger in keeping silent and this is a more meritable thing.

We have mentioned this here to prevent people from considering cursing as an insignificant matter and indulging in cursing freely and without restraint. A believer is not a damner and it is not worthy for his tongue to utter curses except upon those who have died as infidels or upon those groups [of sinners, heretics] who deserve to be cursed. He does not curse someone individually and specifically [or by their name]. It is better to keep one’s tongue employed in the remembrance of Allāh; if he cannot do that, remaining silent is the safest path.

Makki ibn Ibrāhīm³⁶ said: We were with Ibn ‘Awn³⁷ and they mentioned Bilāl ibn Abī Burda³⁸ and began cursing him and reviling him; but Ibn ‘Awn was silent. The assembled folk said: ‘We are talking about him because of what he has done to you.’³⁹

He replied: ‘Verily two phrases⁴⁰ will be read out from my book of deeds on the Day of Judgment: ‘There is no God but Allāh’ and ‘May Allāh curse such a person’. It is more desirable to me that the first ‘There is no God but Allāh’ be read out rather than the second ‘May Allāh curse such a person.’

³⁴ This is a clear refutation of those who accuse Imām Ghazālī of having something against Imām Ḥusayn and having sympathy towards his killers

³⁵ Allāh’s curse upon the murderer of Ḥusayn ﷺ.

³⁶ Zabīdī: Makkī ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Bashīr ibn Farqad al-Taymī al-Balkhī; reliable and trustworthy narrator. Passed away in 215 AH and he was 90 years old at that time. Bukhari and others have narrated from him. Suyūṭī in *Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥuffāz* / entry 354: He has narrated from Ja‘far as-Ṣādiq, Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, Ibn Jurayj and others; Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn, ibn al-Muthannā, Ibn al-Bashshār, al-Bukhārī and others have narrated from him. Passed away in 214 or 215 AH.

³⁷ Zabīdī: Abū ‘Awn ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Awn ibn Arṭabān al-Muzanī; He saw Anas ibn Mālik, though it not proven that he narrates from him. Ibn al-Maḥḍī says: There was none in Irāq more knowledgeable about sunnah than him. He died in Baṣra in the year 151 AH. Dhahabi in *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāz* [1/152]: Qurra says: We mention the austerity of Ibn Sīrīn but forget Ibn ‘Awn.

³⁸ Zabīdī: Bilāl ibn Abī Burda ibn Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī, Abū ‘Amr; the ruler and chief justice of Baṣra. He is the brother of Sa‘īd ibn Abī Burda. His rule extended for a lengthy period. Many poets have praised him, among whom are: Ru‘ba, Dhul Rimmah and Farazdaq. Bukhārī has mentioned him in *al-Aḥkām*.

³⁹ Zabīdī: Because Ibn ‘Awn suffered on account of Bilāl.

⁴⁰ Literally, *kalimatān* or two words.

A man said to RasūlAllāh ﷺ: ‘Advise me.’ He said: ‘I advise you against damning.’⁴¹

Ibn ‘Umar said: ‘The person most disliked by Allāh is the maligner and the damner.’

Someone said: To curse a man is like murdering him. Ḥammād ibn Zayd after reporting this said, ‘I could say that it is an authentic tradition [*marfū*] and not worry about it.’ Because it has been reported from an elevated chain from RasūlAllāh ﷺ as Abū Qatāda has narrated: ‘Whosoever curses a believer is as if he has murdered him.’⁴²

Praying for destruction against another person is similar to cursing him. Even if one says this about a tyrant; it is reprehensible to say: ‘May Allāh never give him health or vouchsafe him.’ It has been reported in a tradition: ‘The oppressed keeps praying against the tyrant until he has absolved him; and the tyrant is left with better [deeds] on Judgment Day.’⁴³



⁴¹ Zabīdī: Al-‘Irāqī said: This has been reported by Aḥmed, Ṭabarānī and Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim from the Ḥadīth of Jarmūz al-Hujaymī.

⁴² Al-‘Irāqī: Reported in both Bukhārī and Muslim through the Ḥadīth of Thābit ibn al-ḍaḥḥāk.

⁴³ Al-‘Irāqī: I do not know of this Ḥadīth but there is a similar narration from ‘Ā’ishah in Tirmidhi through a weak chain: ‘Whosoever prayed against the oppressor has helped him’.