[**Vigilance against Transgression**](http://herkul.org/index.php/archive/10241-vigilance-against-transgression)

**Question:** What does **“*fisq*”** (transgression) mean? What are the factors to be careful against in order not to bear any characteristics of this kind?

**Answer:** In terms of the meanings it holds, *fisq* is a comprehensive word. If we make a brief definition, *fisq* means transgressing the limits set by religion; it means stepping out of the sphere of obedience to God by committing major sins or insisting on lesser sins. The Messenger of God, peace and blessings be upon him, stated: “That which is lawful is explicit and that which is forbidden is explicit. But, between the two are doubtful matters about which many people do not know. Thus, he who avoids doubtful matters clears himself with regard to his religion and honor...”1

That is, as there are forbidden zones surrounded with mine fields and barbed wire in this world, there are divinely forbidden zones in order to protect people from ruining their lives in the next life. Thus, those who disregard the limits and stray from the main road to forbidden trails commit transgression. This is the situation of those who go astray by indulging in certain weaknesses after having found guidance, as stated in the verse (which means),  “*whoever does not judge by what God has sent down, those are indeed the transgressors*” (al-Maedah 5:47).

In Arabic language, vermin such as rats, scorpions, and snakes that come out of their “holes” and harm people in their homes are termed as “*fawasiq al-buyut*” (transgressors of houses), because they transgress out of the area where they are supposed to remain. The noble Prophet named five animals that are allowed to be killed, even within the boundaries of the sacred areas in Mecca: rat, scorpion, snake, raven, and mad dog.2 This *hadith* should not be taken as a command to kill these animals wherever they are found. It is permissible to kill only the creatures that are likely to harm people. Indeed, it is forbidden to kill animals within the sacred zone of the *Haram*, or Sanctuary, in Mecca.3 Even killing a single locust there necessitates giving alms for atonement. However, as the vermin mentioned above recognize no limits and harm people, they are considered transgressors and can be eliminated. In other words, people are given permission and the opportunity to protect themselves against these creatures, which transgress out of their nature.

 **Characteristics of “*Fisq*” in Believers**

Rather than referring to individual persons, the Qur’an describes the negative qualities of those without faith; guidance requires directing the criticism to the qualities, not to individuals, so that they can correct themselves. In addition, this method conveys a very important warning to believers. As Bediüzzaman stated, just as a non-believer does not possess solely negative qualities, every quality of a believer may not be befitting for a believer. Sometimes, you see that some believers assume certain qualities of unbelief or transgression in a certain period of their lives. For this reason, believers have a lot to learn from verses referring to hypocrites or non-believers.

Sometimes, believers who observe the basic acts of worship might transgress into forbidden areas without knowing it by lying, backbiting, or slander; they stray from the main road and cause traffic problems in different alleys. Even if such people claim to have very strong faith, such acts indicate their bearing a certain quality of transgressors. As far as they keep living with that quality, it is not possible for them to guide others with the Divine teaching; God Almighty grants success in this respect only to those who adorn themselves with laudable virtues. An ideal believer’s character is in keeping with accepting faith, gaining insight into faith, elevating it to the horizons of spiritual knowledge, crowning the attained spiritual knowledge with love of God, and then crowning that love with a yearning and zeal for God; and, at the same time, deepening such faith through worship, and adorning worship with *ihsan*, or a consciousness of the omnipresence of God. When somebody possesses these laudable virtues, they can succeed at conveying the Divine message to others. Even if they cannot, God Almighty rewards them generously with His blessings as if they have succeeded. What really matters is having fulfilled one’s responsibility. There are certain Prophets that had no followers at all, while only a few people followed some others. However, even the worth of all other human beings cannot be equal to a single Prophet’s worth in God’s sight. In other words, if it were possible to extract human values from all people and make them into a statue, it would still not amount to a Prophetic one, because those blessed people are chosen ones, specially adorned with refined virtues of the highest kind. In spite of that, some of them only reached two or three people, some even none. Even so, they were never discouraged and continued their mission in a resolved fashion.

At this point, one may wonder the wisdom of sending a Prophet who would be followed by only a few people. First, let me state that since a Prophet in such a situation carries out his duty thoroughly, he still gains the reward for the Prophetic mission and becomes eligible for God’s special favors. On the other hand, if a Prophet becomes a reference for future guides with the beautiful example he presented to a handful of believers, and if those new guides achieve a moral reform by following his traces, the wisdom of that Prophet’s coming is fulfilled. In addition, pioneering ones will be granted blessings for the goodness realized by those who come later, having paved the way for them. Actually, this fact is not limited to the Prophets. For example, if it was not for Bediüzzaman Said Nursi,4 who exerted himself for making hearts awakened to the truths of faith and who blazed a trail of faith through the heart of Anatolia with the two or three hundred people behind him, the people of Anatolia would probably have not welcomed the idea of serving faith as much as they do now, and they would not go voluntarily to the far corners of the world in order to share this beauty. For this reason, let me reiterate that what really matters is a person’s walking toward sublime ideals adorned with laudable virtues, seeking the good pleasure of God with pure intention, that becomes a believer, without narrowing the issue to the achievement of certain results.

**The Blind Alley before the Transgressor**

As for transgressors, even if their lifeline somehow intersects with an auspicious circle of volunteers serving for the sake of God, they mostly dislike things that do not comply with the expectations based on their fancies and desires, and they set about different quests of their own. Even though they do not openly state it, such people have unending expectations of this kind. Mostly, they fail to meet these requirements and sulk. It is as if such a person expects those around him to read his mind, and he feels disappointed as an unappreciated genius that has been let down with respect to his wishes when they do not. On the pretext of trivial matters, such people leave their friends with whom they shared certain feelings and thoughts and, for a while, believed in the same ideal. They then try to start personal initiatives. This is a different type of *fisq*. Surely, such a renunciation does not mean forsaking one’s faith. However, their position in a circle of righteous ones is a blessing by Divine Providence. By leaving the circle out of personal fancies, such people put themselves in a perilous situation as mentioned by the Noble Prophet. At one instance, one man did not make any effort to find a place in the circle formed around the Prophet by his Companions. Instead, he turned away and left. The Messenger of God drew importance to the gravity of the matter by stating that as the man turned away, God Almighty turned away from him as well. In short, it is a type of *fisq* for people to hold different expectations, to think that their true worth is not appreciated, and to believe that they deserve a higher reward and payment than others with the abilities and capacities that they possess, not satisfied with the blessings in hand and then setting about new quests. This kind of *fisq* mostly leads one to a very different end than the one intended. And when such individuals are brought to account in the Afterlife, they will be asked why they left a righteous circle and strayed to a dangerous zone that might make them devoured by wolves.5 Along with this, if somebody backbites others in an arrogant manner and raises discord and strife, in a way it means that they are marring the beautiful activities realized by the efforts of so many volunteers.

**Love of Status and Doors Opening to Transgression**

The greatest test to pass in such slippery ground is overcoming the love of status in human nature. Sometimes, destiny brings someone—maybe someone twenty years younger than you— to a higher position. For example, this can happen between an experienced teacher and an administrator of younger age. What befalls on the administrator is to benefit from more experienced staff members and not make them feel ignored. What befalls on the staff, however, is to comply with the person in charge of them. Otherwise, they commit transgression. Even imagining to do such things is a kind of transgression in the mind. For this reason, individuals need to rehabilitate themselves continuously and do not leave any room for transgression, even in their imagination.

At this point, we can remember the example of Usama ibn Zayd. Shortly before the Pride of Humanity, peace and blessings be upon him, departed from this world, he prepared an army to stop the Roman advance under way and appointed Usama as the commander, who was about eighteen years of age. Imagine that the greatest figures among the Companions, such as Abu Bakr and Umar, were soldiers in that army. After the army reached the first stopover after Medina, the news came that the Messenger of God had passed away and Usama ibn Zayd returned to Medina, thrust the flag into the ground outside the door of the Prophet, and waited. Right after this news, Abu Bakr had become the caliph after the electoral meeting in the land of Bani Saida tribe. As soon as Abu Bakr became caliph, the first thing he did was to carry out what the noble Prophet’s initiative, and he accompanied the army until they were outside Medina. In the meantime, Caliph Abu Bakr approached Usama, who was only the age of his grandson, held his arm and humbly asked, “Could you let Umar ibn al-Khattab remain in Medina to assist me?” This is the ideal level of mannerliness to be targeted by every believer. No matter who they are, if a person is charged with a certain duty, what becomes believers—with the exception of the right and responsibility of mannerly warning in case of mistaken practices—is avoiding to question others’ eligibility and not raising strife by adopting negative attitudes. Otherwise, social harmony will be damaged. Nevertheless, the Messenger of God stated that believers are supposed to obey the person appointed as their leader, even if he is a black slave.6 This is where true triumph lies. Indeed, if everybody cherishes expectations out of their own desires and fancies, discord and rout will be inevitable. Therefore, in the name of inhibiting transgression and strife, one must virtually declare war against the love of status inside them and learn to be satisfied with whatever position and duty appointed for them.

1. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Iman 39; *Sahih Muslim*, Musaqat, 107
2. *Sahih Muslim*, Hajj, 67; *Sunan ibn Majah*, Manasiq, 91
3. The *Haram* (Sanctuary) is the region of security and safety that covers the Ka’ba and the surroundings, where any act of violence, like killing a human being, or cutting any green grass or trees, disturbing the natural environment, harming animals, or interfering with the lives of beings is *haram*, or prohibited, in conformity with the command of not violating the sanctity of this place. Its borders were defined by Prophet Abraham under the instructions of Archangel Gabriel, and later redefined by the noble Prophet. (Ed.)
4. In the many dimensions of his lifetime of achievement, as well as in his personality and character, Bediüzzaman (1877-1960) was and, through his continuing influence, still is an important thinker and writer in the Muslim world. He represented in a most effective and profound way the intellectual, moral and spiritual strengths of Islam, evident in different degrees throughout its fourteen-century history. He lived for eighty-five years. He spent almost all of those years, overflowing with love and ardor for the cause of Islam, in a wise and measured activism based on sound reasoning and in the shade of the Qur'an and the Prophetic example. (“Bediüzzaman and the Risale-i Nur” in *Belief and Worship*, Said Nursi, translated from Turkish by Ali Ünal, New Jersey: The Light, 2006, p. ii) (Ed.)
5. An allusion to the hadith stating that wolves eat the one who strays from the flock. (Ed.)
6. *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Ahkam, 4

*This text is the translation of "Fısk ve Fısktan Korunma Yolları"*