

Backbiting

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Peermohammad Ebrahim Trust

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This text describes backbiting as an enormous sin, yet overlooked by Muslims, that often take this very lightly and often freely indulge in this very sinful act. The picture of backbiting as a severe offense is made clear by highlighting its evil consequences on individuals and society. The author provides compelling evidence on the severity of this sin with numerous quotes from the Qur'an and Hadiths.

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Preface

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

- (i) *Revile not them (the idols) whom they invoke other than Allah, lest. they maliciously revile Allah without knowledge. (6: 109)*
- (ii) *There is no compulsion in religion. (2:256)*
- (iii) *Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and beware, but if ye turn back then know ye all that nothing incumbent upon Our Messenger but to proclaim. (5:92)*
- (iv) *Call to the way of thy Lord by reasoning and pleasant exhortation; and argue with them in a descent manner. (16: 25)*
- (v) *And hold ye fast by the cord of Allah all together and be not divided (among yourselves). (3: 103)*
- (vi) *Verily: I am Allah there is no god but Me, therefore submit to Me and offer prayers to mention Me. (20: 14)*
- (vii) *Recite from the Book revealed to thee and offer prayer. Prayer restrains from filth and evil.*

And remembrance of ALLAH is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt and Allah knows what you do. (29:45)

(viii) O my Son: Offer prayers and enjoin the good and forbid the evil and be patient whatever befalleth thee: for this is firmness in the conduct of affairs. (31:17)

Abu Dharr Al Ghifari relates:

The Holy Prophet (S) said: Oh Abu Dharr, a slanderer will not enter Paradise, I asked: who is a slanderer? The Prophet (S) replied: "He is a backbiter. O Abu Dharr, a backbiter cannot be safe from chastisement of The Almighty Allah, in the next world."

Let the slanderers and backbiters take a serious note of their fate as envisaged in the above quotation related by Abu Dharr. None can doubt the authenticity of the above Hadith, for it has been related by Abu Dharr who was regarded "Truthful" by the Prophet (S) himself.

Backbiting is a vicious vice; it is the sole cause of unwarranted enmity, hatred, dissension and disunity in a family, an institution, a community, etc. The backbiter in the heat of his maligned and malicious activity goes on sowing the seeds of discord, contempt and discontent in the minds of every person he meets, by speaking ill about one with others. Little does he realize that these seeds will develop deep roots and will cause collective and colossal damage to all including himself.

Remember that God will not pardon this sin of backbiting until the one who is hurt forgives him, and until he recompenses for the damage caused by him.

This nasty habit of backbiting and slandering must be shunned at the earliest and at all costs.

See what the Quran says about backbiting:

"O you who believe! Avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you abhor it: and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful". (49:12)

The booklet "Backbiting", it is hoped, will go a long way in eradicating the epidemic evil of backbiting prevalent in the modern times and consequently bring peace and amity to mankind.

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Islam And Its Perfect Code Of Conduct

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

Islam is not simply a religion in the western sense of the word “religion”. It is a way of life providing a perfect code of conduct for its votaries.

Freedom of speech and thought is now universally recognized as the fundamental right of a human being. Islam has never denied such a right. Under the Charter of Human Rights framed by the United Nations in the later part of the first half of this century one is surely guaranteed the freedom of thought and the freedom of speech. But the resulting freedom – unrestricted and unchecked – may be just as disastrous as the rash and negligent driving of an automobile.

So the Lawgiver, while revealing His Will, through His last Messenger Muhammad (S) prescribed a certain code of conduct in the matter of speaking about others and discussing their affairs.

Says the Quran:

“O ye who have believed, let not one group make mock of another, who are possibly better than them, or women (make mock of) women who are possibly better than them; do not scoff at each other, or revile each other nicknames: reprobate conduct (fisq) is a bad name after belief and those who do not repent they are the wrongdoers”. (49: 11)

"O you who believe! avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you abhor it: and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful". (49: 12)

The above are words of God – the Words with a challenge that the like of these can not be produced by genies and men, even if they pool their efforts together in this direction. According to a Persian proverb: *Mushk aanast ke khud bebooyad na ka 'attar ' begooynd.* (Mushk is that which emits its scent and not the vendor who promotes it)

Standards Of The Secular Laws

So we say about the holy book, Qur'an – the last revealed Word of Allah. Let all the civil codes of the world hitherto framed by us human beings, from the earliest times of history down to the modern age, be collected and their gist taken out.

None will be able to put forward even from among the many moral principles laid down here. This is the standard of the secular law. The same is true in the case of laws framed by other religions.

The Occasion Of The Revelation

The First Holy Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib said,

"Have a good opinion about your brother-in-faith unless it is proved otherwise."

Once some companions sent Salman Al-Farsi to the Holy Prophet (S) to fetch some food. The Prophet (S) sent Salman to Usama bin Zaid held the charge of the kitchen of the Prophet (S). Usama, unfortunately, had to apologize to Salman for there was nothing edible available in the kitchen.

When Salman returned empty-handed, the companions commented that Usama and Salman are close-fisted fellows (miser). When these companions appeared before the Holy Prophet (S), he (S) surprisingly enquired: "What is the reason, that I perceive bits of flesh stuck to your teeth?"

The companions responded, in utter amazement, as to how that could be possible when they have not eaten any meat. The Prophet replied, "It is the flesh of Salman and Usama." It was on this occasion this verse was revealed.

Hazrat Imam Musa Kazim (a.s.), the seventh Imam said, "The mention of anything evil about any one among the people who did not know it, is backbiting."

The Holy Prophet (S) have warned the people against indulging in this nefarious evil and unpardonable sin, saying,

"Abstain from backbiting for it is worse than adultery. For after committing adultery, if one seeks God's pardon, He grants it, but the forgiveness for backbiting is not granted, until the victim forgives him."

Eating Of Human Flesh

Eating of human flesh or cannibalism is forbidden in Islam and is considered as a ghastly crime in the laws of modern societies. Apart from the physical injuries, the harmful effects that it has on the various organs of human being surely shape his character.

A cannibal can never be just and normal. A child born in the family of the cannibals, when he grows into a man will be devoid of all sense on ethics. He will be cruel in his conduct, oppressive in his behaviour and aggressive in his manners and style. Tenderness of the heart, gentleness of character and moderation will be of an alien nature to him.

But this was the case of man-eater in general. According to history even cannibals do not eat the flesh of their relatives, neither by killing them for that purpose nor when they are dead. So when judged

according to these standards of cannibals, it is a crime and act of utmost cruelty to eat the flesh of one's own brother. Now *Gheebah* (backbiting) is an act similar to the eating of the flesh of one's own brother.

The Analogy And The Intensity Of The Offence

Instituting *gheebah* as a sin of this nature, Allah has drawn an analogy which might deter a person from backbiting. As a matter of fact the analogy is very precise and realistic. The destruction and harm done by eating the flesh of dead brother is analogous to the mischief and foul play done when one backbites another; so we should never nibble at his reputation when he is absent.

Let us discuss some of the points mentioned in the above verses of the holy book.

Mockery

Mocking others or laughing at others or mutual ridicule may appear to be fun. But it ceases to be fun when there is an underlying arrogance or selfishness or malice. We may laugh with people, to share in the happiness of life but we must never laugh at people with contempt or ridicule. In many aspects they may be better than ourselves.

Scoffing

Scoffing or defaming may consist of speaking ill of others by the spoken or written words, or acting in such a way as to suggest a charge against some persons whom we are not in a position to judge. A cutting, biting remark, or taunt or sarcasm is included in the word *lamaza* used in the verses quoted above (Qur'an: 49: 11-12).

An offensive nickname may amount to defamation, but in any case there is no point in using offensive nickname, or names, that suggest real or some perceived defect. They contradict the serious goals which the Muslims should strive for in life.

For example, if a man is disabled, it is wrong to address him as "O, lame one". It causes him pain and it is among bad manners. So is the case with a rude remark such as "the black man."

Suspicion

Is there anything more toxic than the poison? "Suspicion" is probably the spontaneous reply.

Most types of suspicions are baseless and are to be avoided. Some are even crimes themselves, for they bring about cruelty and injustice to innocent men and women.

Spying

Spying, or probing too curiously into the affairs of other people means either idle curiosity –and is

therefore futile, or an escalated suspicion – which almost amounts to sin.

Backbiting

To speak ill of each other in their absence is called backbiting. Now backbiting is also a brood of the same genus. It might be either futile but all the same mischievous, or it may be poisoned with malice, in which case it is a compounded sin.

No one would think of such an abomination as the eating of the flesh of his brother. But when the brother is dead and the flesh is carrion, the abomination is compounded in the same way we are asked to refrain from hurting their feelings in their presence. How much worse it is when we say things – true or otherwise – in their absence.

Divide And Rule

Backbiting cause personal bitterness and animosity. False reports and baseless accusations are the stock in trade of the sycophants and rumor mongers. Certain offices and institutions are the arena for competing groups of employees.

This evil practice may be employed as a tool for the abominable policy of "Divide and Rule". In such cases it is considered as an administrative success by some officers if their subordinates – instead of carrying out their duties and pooling their efforts together – keep flying at each others' throats. The relations between those "tin-gods" and their subordinates as well as co-workers always remains strained. Their conduct is a curse for themselves as well as for the institution under their ruthless rule.

Backbiting Is A Cause Of Enmity

Backbiting is the worst bane of human life, and makes a man the enemy of another. It is the backbiter and gossipers who sow the seeds of bitterness, intrigue and animosity. It is he who causes disruption in homes, work places and social, religious and other institutions and spells the downfall and failure of heads of families and those under who run the offices and institutions with sound administration.

A True Friend Is Like A Mirror

One should discharge the responsibilities of friendship in his friend's absence even more sincerely than when his is present, as poet says: "*Dost bayad kih az ma-aibe dost, Misle Aaeena roo broo goyad. Na kih choon Shanah ba hazaar zuban pase sar raftah moo ba goyad.*" (Tr:—A friend, like the mirror, should, tell the faults to his face, and not like the comb, which going on the back of the head tells each hair with

a thousand tongues.)

Rift In Friendship

One should try himself to act upon the qualities described above, without waiting for a friend to do it for him. Any remissness on his part may lead to a rift in friendship. The consequences of such a rift can better be imagined than described. The harm that can come from avowed enemies is nothing as compared with the harm that may ensue from the friends turning hostile.

Nothing should be done half-heartedly in relation to a friend, for that implies hypocrisy a characteristic which is reprehensible even when one is dealing with strangers. Its harmful effects in respect of friends are far more severe because of the divergence between the overt conduct of a person and the secret workings of the mind, which is fraught with mischief.

It is a state contradicting the bond of friendship, which demands complete alignment of the mind with the overt conduct. There are people who lavishly compliment the wealthy landlords and the nobles in their presence, in an exaggerated language far above and different from their actual thoughts. There is not the least sincerity in their professing of loyalty. They are indeed transgressors.

One should never be stingy with friends. Miserliness is bad even when one is dealing with strangers. It is especially reprehensible in respect of friends. Whatever the nature of this trait, whether in regard to material goods, or in regard to any kind of knowledge of craft. Miserliness in respect of the knowhow and skills can never be justified. It is irrespective of whether such attitude emerges from apprehension of competition in any particular trade or sheer envy of others profiting from that knowledge.

Such an attitude is in conflict with objective of knowledge. It was this obnoxious attitude towards knowledge that was responsible for the suppression of knowledge in the East, as compared to the western nations where research efforts are widely published to facilitate further progress (in the respective fields of knowledge).

Spying

To keep a vigilant eye on the subversive activities of disloyal citizens of a country, it is essential to have a secret service or an intelligence bureau. National security demands its existence and efficient functioning. However Allah strictly prohibits it in respect of personal matters.

He does not approve of our spying on other people with the objective of finding out their vices and weaknesses, or our "eating of the flesh of a dead brother" like vultures. If somebody speaks ill of us in our absence, Allah wishes that we should not be informed of it because, otherwise, all chances of our good relations with that person would vanish.

Just as one disease begets another – for instance constipation may cause fever which may develop into

typhoid, and that in turn may be followed by pneumonia, tuberculosis and death – in the same way, backbiting generates many other evils.

A backbiter becomes the worst type of hypocrite. In order to maintain his own prestige, he poses as a friend of those whom he actually undermines and seeks to destroy. When he is suspected of evil designs he would deceive others by taking false oath. On the other hands he flatters his superiors lest they should expose his machinations. Thus his reputation tumbles in the eyes of his superiors and his own colleagues. The presence of this accursed devil in human form at an establishment puts an end to all progress and betterment.

This faint-hearted man damages and destroys his friends. But when he himself falls into the pit he digs for others, he finds none to help or support him.

At another place says Quran:

“And yield not to any mean swearer. Defamer, going about with slander. Forbidder of good, outstepping the limits, sinful, ignoble, besides all that, base-born” (68: 10–13)

Backbiting Is Cursed With Nine Evil Attributes

Analyzing the verse it is clear that the backbiter is cursed with nine evil characteristics, namely:

- (i) He is ever ready to swear
- (ii) He is a sweet-tongued flatterer.
- (iii) One who slanders, hurting others.
- (iv) One who goes about with calumnies, and spread rumors to others.
- (v) Mischief monger
- (vi) Hindering all good.
- (vii) Transgressor. Going out of bounds. A public enemy.
- (viii) Deep in sin.
- (ix) Causing aggression to others.

Definition Of Backbiting

At this stage we would prefer to deal with the definition of backbiting in detail. A man may have certain qualities which we may like while he may have some others which we may not like.

Now if we express politely and sincerely in private with him our dislike of his certain traits, he may accept it in the spirit of friendship. It may bear positive results and harmless to the relationship.

But perhaps if someone not sincere enough to advise a friend of his flaws directly and privately, he would do speak of the flaws of his friends in his absence. This conduct of ill-speaking in his absence is

termed as backbiting. This is on the condition that it is done with the motive to defame the individual concerned. This condition is essential to judge whether the act is *gheebah* or not.

An example may explain this more clearly. A person is sick and his illness needs to be mentioned to a doctor. The causes and reasons for the illness need to be described to the physician. Moreover if he is reluctant to restrain his food intake or refuse to take medicine, the doctor needs to be informed. Negative reports in this context are not categorized as *gheebah* because it is done in the interest of safety and good health of the individual.

Similarly a man may be poor and helpless. If he is introduced to a person – with wealth or authority or both at his command – so that the latter could help him, the mention of his weaknesses, shortcomings or handicaps would not amount to *gheebah*; the reason simply being that the intention is not to degrade or insult him. It is done rather in his best interest.

Many are familiar and often involved in criticism and fault-finding of others. Some may not like to do it but they are often placed in a situation that is difficult to refrain from backbiting or abetment in backbiting. The punishment for murder and abetment of murder is the same. So is the sin of backbiting and abetment of backbiting.

Hence it is in anyone's best interest – both in this worldly life and the hereafter – he must not indulge even in the abetment of backbiting. But Satan the arch-enemy of man is always on the vigil. He is constantly in endeavours and mischief with man. That is why we must always be on guard and never let Satan succeeds in tempting us with his evil designs.

On the definition of backbiting, the Prophet (S) said: *"To speak about such a quality of his brother which he would dislike to be discussed"*.

Hazrat Abu Dharr Al-Ghifari asked the Prophet (S): *"Will it be classed as gheebah if the quality is really present in his person?"*

The Holy Prophet (S) replied: *"If you narrate that defect of his which (actually) exists in him, then it would be gheebah. However if you say that which is not true about him, it will then be calumny"*

Forgiveness Of The Victim

Allah is no doubt the Forgiver of all sins. But one who speaks ill of another person commits a sin against the person and against Allah. So according to the Holy Prophet:

"The sin (of backbiting) is to be forgiven by Allah only after the victim himself forgives"

Types Of Backbiting

Here we may discuss some different types of backbiting:

- i) Adverse comments about lineage, such as to say that the father of a person is wicked, corrupt or close-fisted person or other degrading remarks like a cobbler, a weaver etc.
- ii) Backbiting in connection with the character and temperament of a person, such as saying that he is bad-tempered, a trickster, an arrogant, a sophist, a sensitive person, a timid etc.
- iii) Backbiting in connection with bad habits like saying that a person is a drunkard, a liar, a thief, dishonest, a wicked or that he is not prompt in offering prayers or that he does not perform *Ruku'* and *Sujood'* in prayers properly. In this connection, if we are thinking of advising him to do good (*ma'roof*) or restraining him from doing bad deeds (*munkar*), we must convey these directly to him. Telling a third person amounts to backbiting.
- iv) Backbiting concerning the material life, such as to say that he is uncultured or that he lacks manners or that he is an ungrateful person. This also includes describing him as offensive or talkative or that he is a glutton.
- v) Backbiting in connection with dressing, such as to say that he always wears shabby or dirty clothes.

Backbiting is not restricted to just to making statements. It also includes drawing attention of others to the defects of a person by way of mere gesture.

Likewise, backbiting may also be done through writing. They say: "Writing is also a tongue."

Evil Effects Of Backbiting

The mu'mineen, in order to attain the pleasure of Allah, must be friends of each other and must practice mutual love.

Allah says:

"And the believer men and the believer women, they are friends to one another; they enjoin good and forbid evil and they establish (the regular) prayer and pay the poor-rate and obey God and His Apostle (Muhammad S.), These, God will bestow on them His mercy; Verily God is All-Mighty, All-Wise". (11:71)

Likewise, for the pleasure of Allah, we may hear malice as well, i.e. if we love each other, the pleasure

of Allah must be our objective. This is the love of a *Mu'min-e-baamal* (practising believer) and likewise if we bear enmity to anyone, this too, must be for the pleasure of Allah.

This includes for instance our keeping away from the person who does not offer prayers or a person with evil habits.

The fact is that other than the Ma'soomeen (the infallibles), nobody is free from defects. Now, if we discover the defects of any person and expose it, then instead of love towards a mu'min, we have drifted to hatred and as such the purpose of love for the sake of Allah shall be defeated.

It is natural that when a victim hears of the bad things spoken about him, love and affection will turn into contempt and hatred. Relationship will be ruined, which is clearly contrary to that wanted by Islam.

Exposure Of Personal Flaws Is Against Moral Values

How true is it that we do not like that our defects are unmasked and made known to others. Then if we ourselves expose the flaws of others, it contradicts the moral values. Rather, to disclose and make known the faults of other persons while covering one's own defects is highly unethical. This has been prohibited by the Holy Quran:

“Do you enjoin people to righteousness and forget yourselves though ye recite the Book? Have ye then no sense?” (2:44)

The verse makes it clear that we should not do wrong especially when we are asking others to be righteous in their conduct.

Further, says Quran:

“Surely (as for) those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter; and Allah knows, while you do not know”. (24: 19)

So candidly the Quran prohibits gossiping among the believers. So the backbiter will only add to his sin.

Like For Others Which You Like For Yourself

According to a hadith (tradition):

Like for others which you may like for yourselves and do not like for others which you would not like for yourselves.

How obvious is it that we would never like if someone defames us by exposing our faults in our absence. So continues the hadith:

Then what right does one have to backbite a person when he does not like to be a victim of backbiting.

When we speak ill about someone to a person, the latter may communicate it to the former. And he in turn, instead of being ashamed of his shortcomings, may get enraged. He may retaliate and the result will be quarrels and factions. Allah never likes those who quarrel. Allah hates the mischief mongers.

Thus we can see how this one wicked act or ill-speaking of persons if avoided may help restore peace and friendship on this earth. Indeed the Law of Quran is from the Wise and Merciful.

Reaction To Backbiting

We may come across a person who, as a reaction to backbiting, may become obstinate in his evil deed and persist in such habit. Moreover he may commence doing so openly. This open act may encourage others to follow suit.

The objective of *Amr bil Ma'roof* (promoting others in performing good deeds) and *Nahi 'Anil Munkar* (forbidding undesirable deeds) is thus defeated. Instead, this will facilitate the opposite. It is easy to see that committing one sin namely *gheebah* would result in other sins as well. In short, *gheebah* is the factor for breeding of other sins and evils.

So far we have seen what is mentioned in the Holy Quran, the Word of Allah, revealed to His last messenger and the sayings of the Prophet (S) himself regarding backbiting. Now we quote the first Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib on the subject:

“Verily those who are (created) infallible are well protected (against sins) are worthy of taking pity on the sinful persons. The thanksgiving of these persons is the virtuous conduct and the abstention from making mention of sinful persons. (Such being the sense of moral values) what is binding upon a slanderer who backbites his fellow brothers and admonishes him for his sins? (He himself being a sinful person must avoid from slandering of others).

Does he not remember that Allah the Most High has covered his sins which were greater in magnitude? He is not entitled to defame a person due a sin which he himself had committed. Even if he had not committed the same sin, he might have committed other sins, more serious than that done by the person he slanders. By Allah, even if he has not committed a greater sin, his act of defaming another is definitely a major sin itself. O servants of Allah, do not hasten in speaking ill of others. May be he is already forgiven. Do not be unmindful of your sin however minor it may be. Perhaps, you will receive chastisement because of that. So (listen!), whoever of you is aware of some weakness or defect of another person must not mention it because he is (definitely) aware of his personal evil. Rather he must always be grateful to Allah for being free from defect inherent in his fellow brothers.”

From the above exhortation, (it can be deduced) as follows:

(i) Backbiting is major sin.

(ii) It can be avoided provided a person expresses gratefulness for the sins he had been able to avoid.

(iii) Backbiting is a sin itself. Speaking ill about a person, especially when the defect is inherent in the first person himself, makes it a multiple sin. Even from the spiritual point of view, is highly unethical.

(iv) Even if the backbiter is free of the defects he mention about the third person, he would have committed some other sin. It was said that: *“To err is human “*

Hence instead of backbiting it is more appropriate for the person to repent. Backbiting another person is the worst for him to do.

May be the sin of the other person is already forgiven by Allah while the sins of the backbiter are not. Seeking pardon for one’s sins is thus the best for him to do.

The Imam has rightfully asked his followers who have the ability to avoid sins to be grateful (to Allah for the blessing), when he sees others end up committing those sins.

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) said:

The person who speaks about the flaws of a mu’min which he has personally seen and heard will be grouped with those about whom Allah had said:

“Surely (as for) those who love that scandal should circulate respecting those who believe, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and the hereafter; and Allah knows, while you do not know”. (24: 19)

Here a point is worth considering. The Qur’an has graded backbiting as the sin of greatest magnitude, similar to eating of the flesh of one’s dead brother.

The Flesh Of A Brother

In the first place eating a man’s flesh is disgusting and abhorrent both sentimentally and rationally. The light of wisdom shall not lead to this heinous crime until a man has lost his senses. Now we know that meat is permitted of certain animals only when *zibha* (slaughtering according to Islamic way) is performed. Non-*zibha* meat is prohibited in Islam

The reason is that it is injurious for health. And the poison administered in the body through the eating of non-*zibha* meat may lead to damage of both body and soul of the individual.

Now the flesh of one's brother is as good as his own. Both are formed out of the seeds of the same parents. The harmful effects of eating such a flesh are manifold. We know that so long as the senses are intact, none of us will tolerate such a heinous act – something ultra-cannibalism.

Drawing the analogy Allah has roused the human nature. The Ma'soomeen (the Holy Prophet and the Pious Imams) have elucidated this very point.

Sitting In The Company Of A Backbiter

A question arises – suppose we do not like to backbite but we are present in a group where someone else is backbiting, then what should we do ? The Ma'soomeen have elaborated this point as well. Under the circumstances we should tactfully and politely handle the situation.

In the first place we should see if there is any danger of conflict in the company or not? If there is, we should abstain. But if there is none then we should refute the backbiting, however this should be done politely and in an amiable manner. We may:

- (i) Counter the backbiting.
- (ii) Disapprove backbiting.
- (iii) Leave the group where backbiting is being committed
- (iv) Even if none of the above three (in descending order) is possible, then pray for the salvation and forgiveness of the victim.

And this is the last alternative for the person who might have committed backbiting against someone and later on become ashamed of his evil deeds and wish for remission but unable to do so. He should proceed to *istighfar* (ask for pardon) for the victim.

Recompense For Backbiting

Says Imam Ja'far As Sadiq (a.s.):

People asked the Prophet (S) regarding kaffara (recompense) of gheebah and he replied: "Whenever you think of the person you have backbitten then seek pardon for him."

Nafs-E-Ammarah

There is not the least doubt that backbiting yields great pleasure. One does it with great relish. The mind becomes conditioned to enjoy disparaging others. The man involuntarily becomes more creative and the memory becomes more effective. And all this is at the beck and call of nafs-e-ammarah (the self commanding evil).

But for the inordinate desires, the Quran says:

"...most surely (man's) self is wont to command (him to do) evil.."(12:53)

Now, it is this 'self' that inspires man to backbite, while the "self" is inspired by the devil to commit an

evil act. Hence we must be on guard and see that the devilish tricks do not work. So let us tame or subjugate the 'self'. As a matter of fact the 'self' must be within the control of one's wisdom.

Says the Prophet (S):

"Your greatest enemy is the 'self' that lies in between the two sides".

Hence it is expedient that we should oppose the inordinate desires. Following it would lead us astray.

Jihad (struggle) may be with the sword and may be with our 'self' as well. Not to backbite is also a *jihad*, the struggle against one's self.

Serial Backbiters

As regards the persons who backbite it is often observed that usually those people who are more talkative commit backbiting more frequently. Those who do not work and do not have worry about earning a living often do it as a favourite pastime. They freely indulge in backbiting. So do those who live off the earnings of others.

Because of this Islam has laid great emphasis on earning livelihood. Every one (male member of the Muslim society) is enjoined to earn a living. And one must be earning through legitimate sources. Furthermore, a Muslim is not allowed to be engaged in wasteful talks.

Silence And Speaking

They says: *Give more to thy ears and less to thy tongue.*

Keeping quiet is a virtue in Islam. One is commanded to speak out when there is a necessity to do so.

Hazrat Luqman (a.s.) is said to have exhorted his son: *"O Son! If you take speech equal to the weight of silver, then observing silence is worth the weight in gold."*

Worship In Islam

Let us say it again. Islam does not permit anyone to remain idle. As a religion, it is only Islam and Islam that has enjoined its followers to spend their time in one thing or the other as prescribed by the shari'a (canonical law). Each and every act approved by the Shari'a is taken as *ibadah* (act of worship) in Islam.

Earning a living is also a form of worship according to Islam. Those who have sufficient for a living and need not work are commanded to perform a number of '*amaal*' (deeds) and are enjoined to recite Do'as (supplications). In short the religion does not permit its votaries to while away their time in absurdities.

Frequently Muslims are enjoined to reflect on the universe and its workings. Why? Simply because one who is engaged in some useful task will never indulge in vain talks and backbiting.

Symbols Of Weakness And Cowardice

Backbiting is a symbol of weakness and cowardice. Hazrat Ali (a.s.). said:

Backbiting is the best effort of a weak person. The backbiter intends to harm the third person, aiming at defaming him. He wants to hurt the reputation of the person and impede his progress. But the backbiter himself has no access to such means by which he could do that. As a last resort he finds contentment of his inordinate self and makes it a means for spreading malice.

Backbiting is a cowardly act because one does not have the courage to say all that in the face of the intended person. He does not have the ability to equip himself with the qualities and virtues that the other person has. Had he possessed a sincere desire to rise and progress then he would have seriously tried his level best to attain those heights of moral standards and material achievements. In such event, the motivation for defamation and slandering would not develop.

Women And Backbiting

It is a reality that women more commonly and frequently indulge in the evil of backbiting. It is usual to find that when a group of women sit together they start backbiting. Once they are free of their domestic duties they become free to talk and backbiting may be the main content of their conversations.

For women we Muslims are proud to have the life and character of an ideal woman. Hazrat Fatimah (s.a.) – the daughter of the Prophet (S) and the chief of the women of the worlds. Our Lady of Light, having finished her domestic works, used to devote her time in prayers and other rituals connected with worship.

She was found busy in swinging the cradle of her sons Hasnain – Hasan and Hussain (a.s.). Taking care of children and bringing them up, in Islam, are acts of worship. While swinging the cradle, she used to recite praises of Allah and offer *Sunnati Namaz* (optional prayers).

At other times, she would be busy in spinning with the spinning wheel or engaged in running her hand mill to grind flour, usually of barley. All these were sacred domestic duties of women in the past. The women who aspire to join the ranks of her maids must follow in her footsteps and the evil (of backbiting) will be naturally be warded off.

The Sins Of Victims (Of Backbiting) Get Transferred To The Offender

It should not to be forgotten that the virtues (from good deeds) of the one who commit backbiting will get transferred to the account of the victim, while the evils (from bad deeds) of the victim are shifted to the account of the offender (and will be borne by him).

This has come down to us through authentic hadiths. It helps us reflect on the magnitude of this sin of

backbiting and the extent of the consequences on the profile of deeds of the offender.

An Enormous Sin

From all that we have said above it becomes evident that *gheebah* is an enormous sin. Many people are misled, and they commit it so confidently (as if) overlooking the grave consequences. Some even find 'shariah-based' excuses (to rationalize) their talks, which are essentially *gheebah*. They are only contented when they could freely backbite to their satisfaction.

Once again we emphasize that backbiting is a very wicked act. But many (talks at) gathering and assemblies are packed with it. So much so that those who wish to avoid it become helpless.

It could be that the person doing it is a man of influence and status, that he could not be easily restrained. Moreover, there is probably no way to leave the gathering. Under such circumstances, the best way is to recite *istighfar* for the person who has become a victim of the backbiting act.

Backbiting Is Allowed As An Exception

The act of backbiting is however permitted in the following circumstances:

(i) Complaint by an oppressed

If anyone speaks about the injustice of a Qazi (judge etc) or of his dishonesty and corruption, he would be guilty of backbiting. However if the oppressed speaks of the injustice, dishonesty and corruption to a person who could constrain the Qazi from so doing, it would not be deemed as backbiting.

(ii) To seek help for removing (acts of) *Munkar* and sin

If someone exposes before a *Mufti* (a shariah legal expert empowered to issue rulings) that injustice is meted out to him by his father, brother or any other person so that a way is sought to redress the oppression, it would not amount to backbiting.

(iii) To save a fellow Muslim from being cheated and to exhort the seeker of truth

In such situations, if someone ends up being defamed, it would not be considered backbiting.

(iv) Scrutiny of the veracity and authenticity of hadith

Muslims could justly be proud of inventing the Science of Traditions. The science of *Ilmu-Rijal*, or character of persons, is one of its branches. It consists of the scrutiny of an individual regarding his character, veracity, authenticity and other qualities such as the integrity, the level of moral standing, the strength of his memory and so on. Factual statements in such cases do not amount to *gheebah*.

(v) Fame based on physical defects

Any person who achieves fame and is widely known due to his personal defects that people address him as "O blind man , " "O the lame one," "O deaf one," "O the crippled one." It falls out of the scope of backbiting because of popularity.

(vi) **(Giving) evidence with regard to a offence.**

To give evidence against an offender of the law in his absence is lawful, so that justice is done and the sinner is punished. Thus *hudud* (the rules and limitations set by Allah) could be preserved.

(vii) **Simultaneous or Common Knowledge**

If two persons (already) have the knowledge about the flaws of a third person, they may talk about it as it will not amount to backbiting.

(viii) **Uncertainty (about the identity)**

If the identity about whom something adverse is discussed is not mentioned, then it is not necessary to stop the speaker unless it is established that the utterance was forbidden because it would be an act of backbiting.

Words Of Wisdom

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) said:

I cannot understand how a person can slander and asperse another man for vices and sins. Does he not remember how the merciful God has covered and concealed his sins and vices, which were of greater enormity than those of the person he is exposing? How can he vilify another man when he himself is guilty of similar ones? And if he had not committed the same type of sins, his other wickedness and offences could be of greater magnitude. Even if he had not committed major sins, and his offences against God and the religion are minor ones, he must remember that vilifying, slandering and backbiting others are major sins.

O Man! Do not hasten in libeling and reviling another man, for his sins might have been forgiven and do not lighten the gravity and seriousness of your own minor sins because you may be punished for those.

When a person knows the defects of another person, he must abstain from slandering him. He must remember his own flaws and shortcomings – which he carefully tries to hide and conceal from the public view. If he finds that he is free from those sins committed by the other person, he must be busy thanking God for this virtue – instead of disparaging others.

O People, whoever among you knows for sure about the sincerity in religion and piety of character of his brother must not lend his ears when the person is vilified, and must not encourage slander against him. Remember that the best archer may sometimes miss his mark, but arrows of slander and aspersions very seldom miss their targets and their consequences are always ruinous.

O People, blessed is he who feels so much for his own shortcomings that he has no heart and no time to probe the vices of others. Happy is the man who leads a retired life; is contented with what he gets; spends his time in the service of God and religion; is sorry for his past sins and vices; and spends his time such that none is injured or harmed by him.

(Extract From Nahjul Balaghah)

Imam Hasan (a.s.) said:

When a nation practise mutual consultations it receives proper guidance

The virtue that has no tinge of evil is being grateful (to God) for blessings and being patient during distresses.

Imam Hussain (a.s.) said:

Goodness is like the rain which reaches the good and the bad ones alike.

Beware ! Do not be unjust to a person who has no supporter except Allah

It is the proven sign of one's popularity if he keeps the company of wise men.

Imam Zainul 'Abideen (a.s.) said:

One who considers his (own) self as great, considers the world as inferior.

And verily, God has never blessed those who sow discord, be they of the past or of posterity.

The essence of all virtues lies in keeping one's own nafs (self) away from evil.

Being good to your neighbours and living in peace with them are the causes for increase of your wealth and happiness in your homes.

A woman cannot fulfill her duties towards Allah until she has fulfilled her duties towards her husband. Hold your children in high esteem and teach them good manners.

Conclusion

Reactions To Backbiting Is Bound To Occur

After all we are not (just) creatures of logic. We are made of flesh and bones. We have blood running in our veins. The reaction to backbiting is bound to occur. So instead of losing friends and increasing the number of enemies it worthwhile to behave all our life in such a way that we win friends and keep our enemies as few as possible.

Backbiting Is Also A Social Crime

As we have said backbiting is not only a sin but is also a social crime. And when the crime is committed society is harmed. Those who think rightly and behave nicely despise this act. Thus one who backbites increases his enemies. The enmity may result in grave consequences.

Consequences Of Backbiting

Backbiting results in increase in animosity. Now to destroy an enemy we may develop a method – the best and surest. It is of making him a friend.

To illustrate this practically, we may say that if someone backbites then the best thing to destroy his inimical behaviour is not to pay him in the same coins by committing the (same) major sin. Not only that we should not backbite him, but we should instead make a mention of his person in decent words.

Our pleasant conduct in return for his hostile attitude will put him to shame and he would give up his efforts and instead become friendly. An enemy is thus eliminated in the sense that he is now no longer hostile.

Backbiting Is A Source Of Immense Pleasure

There is no monetary cost for this pleasure. One may have some hitch or hesitation in entertaining himself when he has to pay for it, but for this no expense is to be incurred. It needs no prior arrangements – only a simple occasion for idle talk is required and the people get going with it.

The crime being of a cankering nature – the principal enemy of man the Satan instigates and inspires people to commit it.

But we should be very mindful of the grave consequences and serious effects this habit has on us, individually and collectively in this world which would make us live a wretched and miserable life.

Moreover, because of the evil deed done deliberately despite so oft-repeated warnings from Allah, His Last Messenger and the infallible Imams, our place in the Hereafter will be in one of the hottest corners of Hell.

Hence let us take heed and do not be amongst the losers – both here and in the Hereafter. Instead we must strive to have a life of peace and tranquility here and gain salvation and bliss in the Hereafter.

To say it again – because the reminder is of immense value in this case – *gheebah* is a sin so manifest and of a enormous magnitude. The act is heinous. This is why Quran draws an analogy between backbiting and cannibalising one's own dead brother (49: 12).

As we have said, backbiting is a very common practice. The act yields pleasure and is a source of enjoyment, satisfying for the soul – the soul governed by an evil self.

Because of the gratification derived from this act, many people do indulge freely in it disregarding the evil effects it has on the individuals and ultimately the society, and the severe punishment in the hereafter that awaits both the backbiter and those abetting his actions; abetting means listening with interest too. The criterion “with interest” is significant because someone may be present at a particular place and some others could be backbiting in his presence. But he is not in the position to either stop them from doing it. Neither could he leave their company. Rather he is forced by circumstances and listens only reluctantly.

One of the factors leading one to this sinful act is curiosity. His eagerness to know the affairs of another person drive him to indulge in this act. Speaking or hearing about the faults and (misfortunes) of another somehow yields so much pleasure to him, such that he would stoop so low to do it. It is best to restrain the curiosity so that the urge to speak ill of others is suppressed, and one can save himself from the grave consequences of backbiting.

Sins Please Satan

Now, as we know Satan is the arch-enemy of man and will remain so till the time appointed by Him. So he does entice people to commit sins. The sinfulness of man pleases the Satan much.

We are warned not only of the great chastisement that the backbiters shall receive in return for the sin. Not only it is similar to the eating of a dead brother's flesh, but the consequences may be grave. It ruins an individual, a family, a community, a nation or a group of nations.

It is therefore necessary to realize the gravity of the sin and its grave consequences and discourage people from indulging in it.

May Allah help us in our determination not to indulge in backbiting. It is otherwise very difficult to resist the temptation especially when instigated by the Tempter himself.

So let us not indulge in backbiting.

Publisher's Note

The Trustee of the Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, have undertaken to present to the general public good reading materials, appropriate for their physical, mental, moral and spiritual needs.

The sensational pornographic reading materials that go by the name of literary product in the market has served to vitiate the whole social milieu, so that the restraints on social conduct are ever being relaxed, with resultant indiscipline in the home atmosphere, no less than in the wider fields of human activities outside the home.

If such a situation is allowed to go on flourishing unchecked, a veritable hell on earth is the natural outcome, as we are witnessing a wave of crimes sweeping over some of the so-called civilized countries of the West which are already affecting us.

“Back to Religion” is now the watch-word for the saner elements among them. It is with this sense of anxiety that the Trustees have embarked on the venture of publishing books, which are intended to fight the baneful effects of the cheap anti-social types of reading materials, and to inculcate a taste for, and appreciation for sound and healthful mental food.

This endeavour is not intended for commercial gains and this is apparent even to the most superficial observer from the prices of the books. The books are still sold at certain prices – albeit below the actual costs – since distributing them for free would only diminish their value in the eyes of the reading public and would also result in wastage.

The Trustees are concerned that despite all precautions on their part to avoid errors that something goes amiss in the form of errors of judgment involuntarily – for no one can be in the position to comprehend the entire field of knowledge on any subject

Of one thing they can assure the discreet readers that of the material for reading is being presented with the best of intentions for the benefit of the public and for the pleasure of the Almighty Allah.

If any reader finds anything which contradicts this objective, his observations in this regard will receive the maximum possible care to redress any shortcomings that may be pointed out as having crept into the reading materials with the best of wishes for the reader, we remain.

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

"Shall I not let you know of the worst person among you?" The people said, "Surely, let us know". He said: "The worst is one who often backbites, sows discord among his friends and finds faults with the faultless persons".

Any person having of any one of the following three defects in the worst of all:

- (1) Backbiting
- (2) Causing dissension among friends
- (3) Seeking defects in good persons.

Whatever mishap befall thee, it is on account of something which thine own hands have done.

The wicked man thinks no good of anyone; for how should he imagine that others possess what he himself lacks?

Hazrat Ali (a.s.) said:

Beware of backbiting: it sows the seeds of bitterness, and separates you from Allah and men.

There is no sincerity in a backbiter.

He who listens to backbiting is a backbiter himself.

Backbiting is the food of dogs of hell and long hopes are bad cheat.

Reject all malicious speaking, be there justification for it or be there none.

He who hears tales to you, certainly hears tales about you.

Be on your guard against abominable words: they make hearts to burn with rage.

The most detestable man is he who returns evil for good, and the most praiseworthy, he whose answer to villainy is a generous deed.

The most wicked man is he who finds no excuse for anyone, nor ever pardons.

Imam Ja'far As Sadiq (a.s.) said:

That the Prophet (S) when asked, "What is the expiation to backbiting?" said, "Ask pardon from him whom you have backbitten whenever you remember him."

O you who believe! avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you abhor it; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is Oft-returning (to mercy), Merciful. (49: 12)

And whoever commits a fault or a sin, then accuses of it one innocent, he indeed takes upon himself the burden of a calumny and a manifest sin. (4:112)

And those who speak evil things of the believing men and the believing women without their having earned (it), they are guilty indeed of a false accusation and a manifest sin. (33:58)

Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea on account of what the hands of men have wrought, that He may make them taste a part of that which they have done, so that they may return. (30:41)

Whoever does good, it is for his own soul, and whoever does evil, it is against himself; then you shall be brought back to your-- Lord. (45:15)

... and whoever goes beyond the limits of Allah, he indeed does injustice to his own soul. (65:1)

The Holy Prophet (S) said:

In the religion of a Muslim, backbiting is more pernicious a sin than the disease that ruins his stomach.

A backbiter will not enter the heaven.

Backbiting vitiates ablutions and fasting.

Hazrat Ali (a.s) said:

Disunity is the buddy of polytheism and backbiting is the worst lie. Whoever listens to slander is himself a slanderer.

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