

29) Backbiting

One of the factors which leads to the dismemberment of a society and causes division and requires Taqwa is backbiting which has been prohibited by religion and disapproved by reason. Backbiting is that two or more persons speak of others (in their absence) in a way that if they hear it, they will be annoyed. It does not really make a difference whether what they say is related to a physical or a moral defect, or it is related to speech or deeds.

The late Naraghi in Jami' as-Sa'adaat says: "...even if defect might be in his clothes, house, or mount."

Backbiting is an indecent act and it is improbable that a devoted Muslim commits such a blameworthy act. In this connection, God has said: ***"... 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."***^{[1](#)}

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported by Imam Sadiq (AS) as saying: "Backbiting a Muslim is worse than canker is inside one's abdomen. In the same way that leprosy eats away the body members, backbiting too eats away one's faith."

After defining backbiting and mentioning its kinds, Allamah Majlisi says: "Backbiting is that when people speak ill of a person with reference or sarcastic statements. The prohibition of backbiting has been agreed on by all jurists. It is a major sin and its punishment is the Fire according to the Holy Quran and the Sunnah.

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported by Jabir and Abu Sa'eed al-Khidri as saying: "Avoid backbiting, for it is worse than adultery is. A man, who commits adultery, may repent and God may accept his repentance, but one who backbites will not be forgiven unless the one who has been backbitten will forgive him."^{[2](#)}

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported by Imam Ali (AS) as saying: "Paradise is forbidden for three groups of people: those who often remind others of the favors they do to them, those who backbite, and those who drink wine."^{[3](#)}

The Holy Prophet (SAW) has also been reported as saying: “Will anything throw people into fire on their face except the results of their tongues?”[4](#)

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has said: “To abandon backbiting is better than ten thousands of recommended prayers for God.”[5](#)

Imam Reza (AS) has been reported as saying: “God revealed the following to one of his prophets: ‘When you get up in the morning, eat the first thing you see, conceal the second thing you see, receive the third thing you see, do not disappoint the fourth thing you see, and escape from the fifth one.’”

When the morning came, the first thing the prophet saw was a big black mountain. He said to himself: ‘God Almighty has ordered me to eat it.’ However, he wondered how he could do that. Then, he said to himself: ‘My Lord does not order anything that I cannot do.’ So, he started to walk to the mountain. The nearer he walked toward the mountain, the smaller became the mountain until it became like a morsel. So he ate it up. It was the most delicious morsel. He walked on until he reached a tub of gold. He said to himself: ‘My Lord has told me to cover it.’ He dug a ditch and buried it. When he walked away, he found out that the tub was out. He said to himself: ‘I did what My Lord had ordered.’

He walked further away when he saw a bird with a hawk behind it. He said to himself: ‘My Lord has told me to receive it.’ He let his sleeve open and the bird went into it. The hawk said: ‘Did you catch my bird while I was after it for several days?’ The prophet said to himself: ‘My Lord has told me not to disappoint it.’ So he cut off the leg of the bird and threw it to the hawk.

He walked further when he reached stinking corpse. He said to himself: ‘My Lord has ordered me to escape from it.’ So he escaped from it and returned to where he was.

In his dream, it was said to him: ‘You did what I had ordered. Do you know the story?’ The prophet said: ‘No.’ It was said to him: ‘As for the mountain, it is anger. A servant, who gets angry, cannot see himself because of the intensity of his anger. If he has self-restrain and he controls his anger, his anger will become a pure morsel which he can eat. As for the tub, it is a righteous deed. Whenever a servant conceals it, God Almighty will reveal it as an ornament for him in the hereafter. As for the bird, it is a man who gives you an advice. Accept it. As for the hawk, it is a needy man who comes to you. Do not disappoint him! As for the stinking corpse, it is backbiting. Escape from it.’[6](#)

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) has been reported by Sa’eed ibn Jubair as saying: “On the day of judgment, a man is brought before the divine justice; he is given the Record of Deeds. When he does not see his good deeds, he shall say: ‘My Lord! This is not the record of my deeds. I do not see my acts of obedience.’ It shall be said to him: ‘Your Lord neither errs, nor does He forget anything. Your deeds are gone by backbiting.’ Then another man is brought; he is given his record of deeds. Many acts of obedience shall be seen. He shall say: ‘O Lord, this is not the record of my deeds! It shall be said to him: ‘So-and-so person had backbitten you. His good deeds were written for you.’”

Sheikh Baha'ee has related: "One day, my name was mentioned in an assembly. A man, who claimed to be my friend, backbit me and attributed something indecent to me, not knowing that God has said: ***"Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?"*** Finding that the news had reached me, he wrote a long letter, regretting his act. I wrote to him: 'May God reward you for having sent a gift for me. Your gift will make my good deeds weighty on the Day of Judgment. The Messenger of Allah has said: 'On the Day of Judgment when a God's servant is brought for reckoning, his good deeds are put on one pan of the scales and his wrong deeds are put on the other pan of the scales. The pan of sins becomes heavier. At this time, a record is put on his good deeds. His good deeds become more than his sins. He shall say: 'My Lord! What I had of good deeds was in the pan of good deeds. What is this record then?' God will say: 'This is due to what they have said about you, but you were free from it.' This traditions makes me thank you. Even if you would do something worse than this, I would not retaliate, but forgive you. The remaining years of my life are too precious than to be spent on revenge. One should think how to make up for the past and missed things."⁷

It is worth mentioning that every human being should analyze the root of sins to see the stimulation to abandon it.

Moralists have said that the factors behind backbiting are: anger, rancor, jealousy, suspicion, derision, satisfying one's revenge, and the like. Therefore, human beings should do their best to eradicate these factors and to purify themselves from them. It is in this way that they will strengthen their Taqwa.

It is worth mentioning that both the one who backbites and the one who hears backbiting have a share of the sin, for they both deal a blow on society and they both disgrace a Muslim.

It is mentioned in traditions that "there is no meeting built on backbiting, except that many things from religion are destroyed in it. Therefore, purify your ears from listening to backbiting, because the speaker and the listener (of backbiting) are participant in the sin"⁸

Evidently, there are certain exceptions about the forbidden act of backbiting mentioned by moralists in their books of jurisprudence. In his book Ghawa'id, Shahid has said: 'Backbiting is permissible and even obligatory in seven cases as follows:

- 1- When someone deserves backbiting like those who openly talk about their debauchery and corruption
- 2- When an oppressed person complains of the oppressor
- 3- In consultation when a suitor or trade partner counsels with others about someone
- 4- When evaluation a narrator of Hadith
- 5- When mentioning the people of heresies and misleading thoughts
- 6- When bearing witness about debauchery and vices before the judge

7- When two persons know about a third one's sin and they talk to each other about that sin

Perhaps, backbiting in the above-mentioned cases is permissible because it does not cause division among Muslims, rather it shall be a source of unity and honor of Islam and Muslims. What is forbidden in Islam and requires observance of Taqwa is everything that causes division, dispersion and humiliation of Muslims and Islam.

- [1.](#) Qur'an, 49:12.
- [2.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 222.
- [3.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 260
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Ibid., p. 261
- [6.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 68, p. 418.
- [7.](#) Kashkool, vol. 5, p. 161.
- [8.](#) Jami' al-Akhbar, p. 172.

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