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Home > Backbiting > Backbiting Is A Cause Of Enmity > Types Of Backbiting

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 n 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 endevours 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."

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