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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 ve 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 guarrels and factions. Allah never likes those who guarrel. 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 a 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 backbites 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 arc 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 spinnning 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-Rijaal*, 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.

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