

## Nineteenth Hadith: Backbiting (Ghibah)

بِسَنَدِي الْمُتَّصِلِ إِلَى ثِقَّةِ الْإِسْلَامِ وَالْمُسْلِمِينَ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ يَعْقُوبَ رِضْوَانُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ، عَنْ عَلِيِّ بْنِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ  
النُّوفَلِيِّ، عَنْ السُّكُونِيِّ، عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: الْغَيْبَةُ أَسْرَعُ فِي دِينِ  
الرَّجُلِ الْمُسْلِمِ مِنَ الْأَكْلَةِ فِي جَوْفِهِ. قَالَ: وَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: الْجُلُوسُ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ أَنْتَظَارَ الصَّلَاةِ  
عِبَادَةٌ مَا لَمْ يُحْدَثْ. قِيلَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا يُحْدَثُ؟ قَالَ: الْاِغْتِيَابُ.

With my isnad going back to Thiqat al-Islam wa al-Muslimin Muhammad ibn Ya'qub al-Kulayni (R) from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim, from his father, from al-Nawfali, from al-Sakkuni, from Abu 'Abd Allah (A) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (S) said, "The havoc wrought by ghibah (backbiting) on the believer's faith is swifter than the one wrought by the disease of aklah in the side of his body." The Imam (A) said: The Messenger of Allah (S) said, "To sit in the mosque waiting for the (time of) prayer is worship, so long as one does not commit a misdeed." He (S) was asked, "O Messenger of Allah, what misdeed?" He replied, "Backbiting. <sup>1</sup>

### Exposition

*Ghibah* is the *masdar* (verbal noun) of *ghaba* and also that of *ighthyab*, as mentioned in the dictionaries.

Al-Jawhari says:

وَإِذَا وَقَعَ فِيهِ، وَالْإِسْمُ الْغَيْبَةُ، وَهُوَ أَنْ يَتَكَلَّمَ خَلْفَ إِنْسَانٍ مَسْتُورٍ بِمَا يُغْمُهُ لَوْ سَمِعَهُ. فَإِنْ كَانَ صِدْقًا  
سُمِّيَ غَيْبَةً وَإِنْ كَانَ كَذِبًا سُمِّيَ بُهْتَانًا.

(It is said) "ightabahu ighthyaban" when one falls into it (i.e. backbiting). The noun is al-ghibah, and it means saying such things about an absent person as well distress him if he hears them. If it is true it is called ghibah and if false, buhtan (slander).

The researcher and traditionist al-Majlisi (M) states that this meaning is a literal one. But, apparently, the

author of *al-Sihah* has given the technical (*istilahi*) meaning, not the literal one, because this is not the literal meaning of *ghaba*, *ightaba* and other related derivatives. Rather, their meaning is of a more general character. The lexicographers occasionally give the technical or Shar'i meanings in their works. The author of *al-Qamus* is quoted to have taken *ghaba* to signify 'aba. According to *al-Misbah al-munir*:

إِغْتَابَهُ إِذَا ذَكَرَهُ بِمَا يَكْرَهُهُ مِنَ الْعُيُوبِ، وَهُوَ حَقٌّ.

Ightabahu' means making a mention of someone's actual defects that he would find detestable (to be mentioned).

In the view of this author, none of the above-mentioned quotations give the literal meaning; rather, certain conditions inherent in each of them have led to the mix-up with the technical sense. In any case, there is not much benefit in discussing the literal meaning, for the main purpose here is relevance to the *Shari'ah* and religious duty, and seemingly there are certain conditions implicit in the special meaning which lie outside the literal significance of the term (*ghibah* or *ightiyab*). Later on we will have occasion to discuss this special sense.

Al-Majlisi says:

وَالْأَكْلَةُ كَفَرُوحَةٌ، دَاءٌ فِي الْعَضْوِ يَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ، كَمَا فِي الْقَامُوسِ وَغَيْرِهِ. وَقَدْ يُقْرَأُ بِمَدِّ الْهَمْزَةِ عَلَى وَزْنِ فَاعِلَةٍ، أَيْ الْعِلَّةِ الَّتِي تَأْكُلُ اللَّحْمَ، وَالْأَوَّلُ أَوْفَقُ بِاللُّغَةِ.

Aklah corresponds (in vowelization) to farhah. It is an affliction of a bodily member that consumes it, as mentioned in *al-Qamus* and other dictionaries. It has also been read with a mada on the hamzah, corresponding in vowelization to fallah, which means a disease that consumes the flesh, and the first one is more in accordance with classical usage.

In any case, that which is meant is that in the same way as this disease on afflicting a bodily organ – especially the subtle ones, such as pertain to the inner self – consumes it rapidly and destroys it, so does *ghibah*, rather more rapidly, consume a human being's faith and destroy it.

In the phrase '*malam yuhdith*', '*yuhdith*' belongs to the verbal form *if'al* and its concealed pronoun (*damir mustatir*) relates to the *jalis*, (i.e. the one sitting) implicit in the *julus* mentioned in the tradition. *Ightiyab* here is in the accusative form (*mansub*) and is the *maf'ul* (object) of the verb implicit in the questioner's speech. In some manuscripts, it is *مَا الْحَدَّثُ* instead of *وَمَا يَحْدُثُ* in which case *ightiyab* will be in the indicative case due to its being the predicate (*khabar*).

## The Definition Of Ghibah

Let it be known to you that the *fuqaha*’ (R) have offered many definitions of *ghibah*, whose discussion and close scrutiny is not possible here except with brevity. The blessed martyr and researcher, the Shaykh (Zayn al-Din ‘Ali, known as al-Shahid al-Thani) in his *kashf al-ribah ‘an ahkam al-ghibah* says, “There are two definitions for it. The first one, which is famous among the *fuqaha*’, is:

هُوَ ذِكْرُ الْإِنْسَانِ حَالَ غَيْبِهِ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ نَسَبَتُهُ إِلَيْهِ مِمَّا يُعَدُّ نُقْصَانًا فِي الْعُرْفِ بِقَصْدِ الْإِنْتِقَاصِ وَالذَّمِّ.

It is the mention of a person in his absence, ascribing to him something whose ascription he finds detestable and which is generally considered as harmful (to one’s reputation), with the intention of impairing (his reputation) and disparaging him.

The second one is:

التَّنْبِيهُ عَلَى مَا يَكْرَهُ نَسَبَتُهُ إِلَيْهِ.

Informing about something whose ascription to one is regarded as detestable by him.

The second definition is more general than the first one, if *dhikr* (in the first definition) be taken to mean oral mention, as it is generally understood to mean, for *tanbih* has a wider meaning and includes speech, writing, narration and other forms of communication. But if *dhikr* were taken to mean something wider than oral speech, as it does literally signify, the two definitions become similar. The traditions also suggest these two definitions, such as the one recorded in al-Shaykh al-Tusi’s *Amali (Majalis)* and narrated on the authority of Abu Basir:

فِي وَصِيَّةِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ لِأَبِي ذَرٍّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ وَفِيهِ: قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، مَا الْغَيْبَةُ؟ قَالَ: ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ. قُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، فَإِنْ كَانَ فِيهِ الَّذِي يُذَكَّرُ بِهِ؟ قَالَ: إِعْلَمْ أَنَّكَ إِذَا ذَكَرْتَهُ بِمَا هُوَ فِيهِ فَقَدْ اغْتَبَتَهُ، وَإِذَا ذَكَرْتَهُ بِمَا لَيْسَ فِيهِ فَقَدْ بَهَتَهُ.

In (the tradition about) the counsel that the Messenger of Allah (S) gave to Abu Dharr (R), Abu Dharr is narrated to have said: I said: “O Messenger of Allah, what is ghibah?” He replied: “(It is) to mention of your brother that which he detests.” I said: “O Messenger of Allah, what if that which is mentioned of him should actually be in him?” He replied: “Know that when you mention that which is in him, you have committed his ghibah, and when you mention that which is not in him, then you have slandered him.”<sup>2</sup>

In a famous tradition of the Prophet (S) it is reported:

هَلْ تَدْرُونَ مَا الْغَيْبَةُ؟ فَقَالُوا: اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَعْلَمُ. فَقَالَ: ذِكْرُكَ أَخَاكَ بِمَا يَكْرَهُ.

(The Prophet (S) asked his companions:) “Do you know what is ghibah?” They said: “God and His Messenger know best.” He (S) said: “It is to mention about your brother that which he detests.”<sup>3</sup>

These traditions correspond to the first definition if we take the generally understood meaning of *dhikr* and to the second one if a meaning wider than oral speech is ascribed to it. No mention was made in the traditions of absence, for it was implicit in the meaning of *ghibah* and so was not necessary. It is evident that ‘brother’ here means a brother in-faith not a brother by kinship. ‘*Ma yakrahu*’ signifies the mention of things which are ordinarily regarded as damaging.

As to the intention to harm and disparage, although it is not mentioned either in the noble tradition narrated by Abu Dharr or the famous prophetic tradition, it can be understood from the context. Rather, the opening of Abu Dharr’s narration indicates it, and there was no need of an explicit mention. The narration opens in this manner:

الْغَيْبَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الزِّنَا. قُلْتُ: وَلِمَ ذَاكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: لَأَنَّ الرَّجُلَ يَزْنِي فَيَتُوبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ فَيَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ، وَالْغَيْبَةُ لَا تُغْفَرُ حَتَّى يَغْفِرَهَا صَاحِبُهَا... وَأَكْلُ لَحْمِهِ مِنْ مَعَاصِي اللَّهِ.

(The Prophet [S] said:) “Ghibah is a graver sin than adultery.” I said, “How is that, O Messenger of Allah?” “That is because a man commits adultery and repents to God and God accepts his repentance. But ghibah is not forgiven (by God) until it is forgiven by its victim.” Then he (S) said, “The eating of his flesh is a sin vis-a-vis God.”<sup>4</sup>

These two sentences reveal that the intention to injure is implicit, otherwise if someone is mentioned with kindness and compassion, it is not an offence against him so as to require his forgiveness, nor it amounts to eating his flesh.

The general character of *ghibah* is also understandable from the following narration of ‘A’ishah:

دَخَلْتُ عَلَى امْرَأَةٍ، فَلَمَّا خَرَجَتْ أَوْمَأْتُ بِيَدِي أَنَّهَا قَصِيرَةٌ. فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: لَقَدْ اغْتَابْتَهَا.

(‘A’ishah says:) A woman came to visit us, and when she turned to go away I made a gesture by my hand to indicate that she is short of height. Thereupon, he (S) said, “You have committed her ghibah.”<sup>5</sup>

It may be said that the import of the traditions concerning *ghibah*, as understood in accordance with usage, does not limit it to linguistic expression. Rather, it extends the prohibition to apply to any such kind of communication. That is, the specific mention of linguistic expression is due to its being the more common form in which, *ghibah* is committed, not because it is limited to it.

Another thing is that the general import of many traditions indicates that it is *haram* to reveal the secrets of the faithful (*mu'minun*). That is, it is forbidden to divulge and uncover their concealed defects, whether of a bodily, moral or behavioral nature, regardless of whether the person to whom they pertain is willing or not, and irrespective of whether a malicious intent is involved or not.

However, an overall examination of the traditions shows that malicious intent underlies the prohibition, except when the act *per se* should be such that its mention and its publicity are proscribed by the *Shari'ah* – such as sins against God, which not even the sinner may proclaim and whose admission amounts to publication of indecency – and this does not relate to the prohibition (*hurmah*) on *ghibah*. It is not improbable that the revelation of the secrets of the faithful even in case of their willingness should be *haram*, even when there is no malicious motive involved. In any case, further elaboration in this aspect is outside the scope of our discussion.

You should know that there is consensus about the *hurmah* of *ghibah*. Rather, it is one of the essentials of *fiqh*, being a major and mortal sin. Discussion of its *fiqhi* aspect and the exceptions that relate to it is outside the scope of these pages. That which is necessary here is to inform about the viciousness of this fatal vice and its consequences, so that, God willing, by reflecting upon them we may abstain from it, and if, God forbid, we commit it, we may desist immediately from it and repent, purify ourselves of its abomination, and not permit ourselves to remain in this filth and the affliction of this faith-consuming mortal sin while departing from this world. This is because this major mortal sin has an ugly, deformed form in the spiritual world hidden behind the veils of the corporeal. In addition to its evil, it is the cause of disgrace in front of the Sublime Company (*al-mala' al-'ala*) and in the presence of the apostles, prophets and the archangels. Its spiritual form is the same as what God, the Blessed and the Exalted, has indicated in His noble book and which has been pointed out explicitly and implicitly in the noble traditions. Allah, the Glorious and the Exalted, says:

﴿وَلَا يَغْتَابَ بَعْضُكُمُ بَعْضًا أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مِمَّا فَكَرَهُتُمُوهُ﴾

***Neither backbite one another; would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would abominate it. (49: 12)***

We are neglectful of the fact that our deeds return to us in the other world as objectified entities, with forms appropriate to their character. We do not know that this act (i.e. *ghibah*) has the form of cadaver eating. It will return to its perpetrator in the hell in its other-worldly (*malakut*) form, for he, like a ferocious dog, has torn other people's honor to shreds and devoured their (moral) flesh.

وَفِي رَوَايَةٍ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ لَمَّا رَجَمَ الرَّجُلَ فِي الزَّيْنَةِ قَالَ رَجُلٌ لِصَاحِبِهِ: هَذَا أَقْعَصُ كَمَا يُقْعَصُ الْكَلْبُ. فَمَرَّ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ مَعَهُمَا بِجَيْفَةٍ فَقَالَ: إِنَّهَشَا مِنْهَا. فَقَالَا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، نَنْهَشُ جَيْفَةً؟ فَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: مَا أَصَبْتُمَا مِنْ أَخِيكُمَا أَنْتَنُ مِنْ هَذِهِ.

In a tradition, it is narrated that once the Messenger of Allah (S) stoned a man for commission of adultery. One of the persons present remarked to his companion, “This one was finished where he stood, like a dog.” Thereafter, the Prophet, accompanied by the two men, passed by a carcass and he (S) said to them, “Now take a bite of it, you two,” They said, “O Messenger of Allah, should we take a bite of a carcass?!” The Prophet replied, “That which you have taken of your brother was more putrid than this.”<sup>6</sup>

Yes, the Noble Messenger (S) with the light of his powerful insight saw the greater putridness of their action, greater than that of a decomposed carcass, and the more abominable and repulsive character of its form. It is mentioned in another tradition that the perpetrator of *ghibah* would devour his own flesh on the Day of Resurrection. In a tradition of *al-Wasa'il*, cited from the *Majalis (Amali)* of al-Saduq (R), Amir al-Mu'minin (A) is reported to have said the following in the course of his advice to Nawf al-Bakali:

قُلْتُ: زِدْنِي. قَالَ: اجْتَنِبِ الْغَيْبَةَ فَإِنَّهَا إِدَامُ كِلَابِ النَّارِ. ثُمَّ قَالَ: يَا نَوْفُ، كَذَبَ مَنْ زَعَمَ أَنَّهُ وَلَدَ مِنْ حَلَالٍ وَهُوَ يَأْكُلُ لَحُومَ النَّاسِ بِالْغَيْبَةِ.

Nawf al-Bakali says: I said: Tell me something more. He (A) said, “Abstain from *ghibah*, for it is the food of the dogs of hellfire.” Then he added, “O Nawf, untrue is the one who claims to be of legitimate birth and yet devours the flesh of people through backbiting.”<sup>7</sup>

There is no contradiction between these noble traditions, and all these things are possible. It is possible that the backbiter shall eat the flesh of carcasses, devour his own flesh, have the form of a carcass-eating dog, and, simultaneously, be a carcass that is devoured by the hounds of hell. There, the forms are subject to the efficient dimensions and a being may possess several outward forms – something the proof of which has been given in its appropriate place.

وَعَنْ عِقَابِ الْأَعْمَالِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ فِي حَدِيثٍ: مَنْ مَشِيَ فِي غَيْبَةِ أَخِيهِ وَكَشَفَ عَوْرَتَهُ كَانَتْ أَوَّلُ خُطْوَةٍ خَطَاَهَا وَضَعَهَا فِي جَهَنَّمَ وَكَشَفَ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ عَلَى رُؤُوسِ الْخَلَائِقِ.

(Al-Saduq) in ‘Iqab al-’a’mal, narrates with his isnad from the Messenger of Allah (S) that he said in a tradition, “One who walks on the path of the *ghibah* of his brother and the divulging of his defects, the first step that he takes will be into hell and God shall divulge his defects in front of all the creatures.”<sup>8</sup>

Such is his state on the Day of Resurrection and in hell and that is how God, the Exalted, shall disgrace him amongst the creatures and in the presence of the inhabitants of the celestial realms. In *al-Wasa'il*, with a chain of transmission reaching Imam al-Sadiq (A) the Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

وَقَالَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: مَنْ اغْتَابَ امْرَأً مُسْلِمًا بَطُلَ صَوْمُهُ وَنَقَضَ وُضُوؤُهُ وَجَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تَفُوحٌ مِنْهُ رَائِحَةٌ أَنتَنُ مِنَ الْجَيْفَةِ يَتَأَذَّى بِهِ أَهْلُ الْمَوْقِفِ، فَإِنْ مَاتَ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَتُوبَ مَاتَ مُسْتَحِلًّا لِمَا حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ.

The Noble Messenger (S) said, “whoever backbites a Muslim spoils his fasts and breaks his wudu’ and shall come on the Day of Resurrection with his mouth stanching more putridly than a carcass and it shall irk those who are with him in his station (*mawqif*). If he dies before repenting, his death is like that of one who dies while considering the things prohibited by God, the Exalted and the Glorious, as permissible.”<sup>9</sup>

This is his state before his entry into hell, so that he is disgraced in front of the people of his *mawqif* and is reckoned among the *kuffar*, for the *mustahill* (one who considers *haram* as *halal*) of God’s *maharramat* (that which has been forbidden by God) is a *kafir*. The backbiter (*mughtab*) is, in effect, like him according to this noble tradition. Another tradition has been narrated from the Messenger of God (S) regarding the state of such a one in the Barzakh:

عَنْ أَنَسٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ: مَرَرْتُ لَيْلَةً أُسْرِي بِي عَلَى قَوْمٍ يَخْمِشُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ بِأَظْفَارِهِمْ، فَقُلْتُ: يَا جِبْرَائِيلُ، مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ يَغْتَابُونَ النَّاسَ وَيَقْعُونَ فِي أَعْرَاضِهِمْ.

Anas ibn Malik says: The Messenger of Allah (S) said: On the night of my celestial journey (*mi’raj*) I passed by a people scratching their faces with their finger nails. I said, “O Gabriel, who are these?” He replied, “These are those who perpetrated the people’s *ghibah* and slandered their reputation.”<sup>10</sup>

This shows that the backbiter suffers disgrace and infamy in the Barzakh and faces humiliation in front of the people of his *mawqif*. He will dwell in disgrace and dishonor in the hell too. Rather, some of its degrees will bring him disrepute in this world also, as is mentioned in the following noble tradition of *al-Kafi*:

عَنْ إِسْحَاقَ بْنِ عَمَّارٍ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ يَقُولُ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: يَا مَعْشَرَ مَنْ أَسْلَمَ بِلِسَانِهِ وَلَمْ يَخْلُصِ الْإِيمَانَ إِلَى قَلْبِهِ! لَا تَذْمُوا الْمُسْلِمِينَ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا عَوْرَاتِهِمْ فَإِنَّهُ مَنْ تَتَّبَعَ عَوْرَاتِهِمْ تَتَّبَعَ اللَّهُ عَوْرَتَهُ، وَمَنْ تَتَّبَعَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَوْرَتَهُ يَفْضَحْهُ وَلَوْ فِي بَيْتِهِ.

Ishaq ibn ‘Ammir reports on the authority of Imam al-Sadiq (A) that the Messenger of Allah (S) said, “O you who have embraced Islam with their tongues but faith has not entered whose hearts, don’t disparage Muslims and don’t be after their defects. Verily, God will be after the defects of him who is after their defects, and one who has God after his defects will be humiliated even in his own house.”<sup>11</sup>

God, the Blessed and the Exalted, is *ghayur* (i.e. sensitive about His honor) and the exposing of the secrets and defects of the faithful is tantamount to violation of His honor. If a man surpasses all limits in his shamelessness and violates Divine sanctities, God, the Honorable, exposes his secrets, which He had concealed before out of His concealing grace. Such a man is then disgraced in this world before the people and in that world in front of the angels, the prophets and the *awliya’* (A). In a noble tradition of *al-Kafi* whose *isnad* goes back to Imam al-Baqir (A) it is stated:

لَمَّا أُسْرِيَ بِالنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ قَالَ: يَا رَبِّ، مَا حَالُ الْمُؤْمِنِ عِنْدَكَ؟ قَالَ: يَا مُحَمَّدُ، مَنْ أَهَانَ لِي وَلِيًّا فَقَدْ بَارَزَنِي بِالْمُحَارَبَةِ، وَأَنَا أَسْرَعُ شَيْءٍ إِلَى نُصْرَةِ أَوْلِيَائِي.

Imam al-Baqir (A) said: During his celestial journey, the Prophet (S) said to God, “My Lord, what is the status of the mu'min before Thee?” He replied, “O Muhammad, whoever insults a friend of mine, has declared open war against Me, and I am the quickest of all in rallying to the aid of My friends.”<sup>12</sup>

There are many traditions in this regard. In a tradition whose *isnad* goes back to Imam al-Sadiq (A), al-Shaykh al-Saduq reports the Imam as having said:

وَمَنْ اغْتَابَهُ بِمَا هُوَ فِيهِ فَهُوَ خَارِجٌ مِنْ وَلَايَةِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى دَاخِلٌ فِي وَلَايَةِ الشَّيْطَانِ.

Whoever perpetrates the ghibah of such a person (i.e. of one who conceals his defects and is just in outward conduct, though he should be a sinner in his own eyes) will go out of the wilayah of Allah, the Most Exalted, and enter the wilayah of Satan.<sup>13</sup>

It is obvious that one who leaves the *wilayah* of God will enter the *wilayah* of Satan and will not be characterized with faith and salvation. As mentioned in the tradition of Ishaq ibn 'Ammar, the Islam of the backbiter is merely oral, not having entered his heart. It is also obvious that one who has faith in God and believes in the Day of Judgment and in encounter with the forms of deeds and the reality of sins, such a person will not commit such a major mortal sin which brings disgrace in the apparent and the hidden worlds, in the life of this world as well as in the *barzakh* and the Hereafter, leads to the evil affliction of hell, and expels him from the *wilayah* of God and makes him enter the *wilayah* of Satan.

If we perpetrate such a major sin, then we must know that it arises from a polluted source, that the reality of faith has not entered our hearts. Should faith enter the heart, things will undergo a reform and its effects will percolate to all the hidden and the manifest, the outward and the inward realms of one's being.

Hence, we must cure the ills of the hearts and the inner self. The traditions reveal that in the same manner as the weakness of faith and lack of its sincerity results in moral and behavioral vices, so do these vices in their turn lead to further deterioration or rather destruction of faith. This is in accordance with rational proofs, as demonstrated in its proper place.

And let it be known to you that this sin is graver and of greater evil consequences than other sins from another aspect. It lies in this that in addition to violating the right of God (*haqq Allah*) it violates the rights of people (*haqq al-nas*), and God does not forgive the backbiter unless the victim is propitiated by him. This theme is mentioned in the noble *hadith* through several chains of transmission.

عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ الْحَسَنِ فِي الْمَجَالِسِ وَالْأَخْبَارِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ فِي وَصِيَّةٍ لَهُ قَالَ:

الْغَيْبَةُ أَشَدُّ مِنَ الزِّنَا. قُلْتُ: وَلِمَ ذَلِكَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: لِأَنَّ الرَّجُلَ يَزْنِي فَيَتُوبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ فَيَتُوبُ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ، وَالْغَيْبَةُ لَا تُغْفَرُ حَتَّى يَغْفِرَهَا صَاحِبُهَا... وَأَكْلُ لَحْمِهِ مِنْ مَعَاصِي اللَّهِ.

It is narrated in al-Majalis wa al-‘akhbar with isnad on the authority of Muhammad ibn al-Hasan from Abu Dharr from the Prophet (S) that, in a counsel that he (S) gave to him, he (S) said, “O Abu Dharr, beware of backbiting, for backbiting is graver than adultery.” (Abu Dharr says) I said: “Why is that so, O Messenger of Allah?” He replied: “That is because when a man commits adultery and then repents to God, God accepts his repentance. But backbiting is not forgiven until forgiven by its victim.”<sup>14</sup>

In the traditions narrated in *‘Ilal al-sharayi’*, *al-Khisal*, *Majma’ al-bayan* and *Kitab al-‘ikhwān* the same or a similar point has been made. If, God forbid, one were to depart from the world with people’s rights on his neck, his task would be very difficult. As to the rights of God, one has to deal therein with the Noblest and the Most Merciful, Whose sacred being is free from hatred, enmity, vengefulness, and the urge to satisfy the thirst for revenge. But if one had to deal with creatures, it is quite possible that one will get entangled with someone with such traits, who will not easily forgive anyone or will not be placated at all.

Hence it is necessary for man to be careful of himself and pay due attention to these matters, for the danger of it is very great and the matter is of supreme difficulty. The traditions concerning the serious nature of *ghibah* are more than can be quoted here and we shall confine ourselves to a few of them.

رُويَ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ أَنَّهُ خَطَبَ يَوْمًا فَذَكَرَ الرَّبَا وَعَظَّمْ شَأْنَهُ فَقَالَ: إِنَّ الدَّرْهَمَ يُصِيبُهُ الرَّجُلُ مِنْ الرَّبَا أَعْظَمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ فِي الْخَطِيئَةِ مِنْ سِتِّ وَثَلَاثِينَ زَنِيَةً يُزْنِيهَا الرَّجُلُ. وَإِنَّ أَرْبَى الرَّبَا عَرَضُ الرَّجُلِ الْمُسْلِمِ.

In a sermon, the Prophet (S) spoke about usury and its great evil. Then he said, “Verily, a single dirham earned by a man through usury is greater (in sinfulness) than thirty-six counts of adultery. And verily, more heinous than usury is (violating) the honor of a Muslim.”<sup>15</sup>

رُويَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ، أَنَّهُ قَالَ: مَا النَّارُ فِي الْيَبَسِ بِأَسْرَعَ مِنَ الْغَيْبَةِ فِي حَسَنَاتِ الْعَبْدِ.

The Prophet (S) said, “No fire is faster in consuming dry wood than ghibah consuming a devotee’s virtues.”<sup>16</sup>

وَعَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: يُؤْتَى بِأَحَدٍ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَيُوقَفُ بَيْنَ يَدَيِ الرَّبِّ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَيُدْفَعُ إِلَيْهِ كِتَابُهُ فَلَا يَرَى حَسَنَاتِهِ فِيهِ فَيَقُولُ: إِلَهِي لَيْسَ هَذَا كِتَابِي، لَا أَرَى فِيهِ حَسَنَاتِي! فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَا يَضِلُّ وَلَا يَنْسَى، ذَهَبَ عَمَلُكَ بِاِغْتِيَابِ النَّاسِ. ثُمَّ يُؤْتَى بِآخَرَ وَيُدْفَعُ إِلَيْهِ كِتَابُهُ فَيَرَى فِيهِ طَاعَاتٍ كَثِيرَةً فَيَقُولُ: إِلَهِي مَا هَذَا كِتَابِي، فَإِنِّي مَا عَمَلْتُ هَذِهِ الطَّاعَاتِ! فَيُقَالُ لَهُ: إِنَّ فُلَانًا اغْتَابَكَ فَدَفَعَ حَسَنَاتِهِ إِلَيْكَ.

The Prophet (S) said: A person shall be made to halt in front of the Glorious and Exalted Lord on the Day of Resurrection and handed over his book. On not seeing his good deeds therein he shall say, “My God, this is not my book, for I don’t see my virtues in it.” He shall be told, “Verily, your Lord neither errs nor forgets. Your deeds are gone for your backbiting of the people.” Then another person shall be brought and handed over his book. He will see in it many deeds of obedience (ta’at) and he will say, “My God, this is not my book, for I have not performed these deeds of obedience.” He shall be told, “So and so committed your ghibah and so his good deeds have been awarded to you.”<sup>17</sup>

وَعَنْ النَّبِيِّ، صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: أَدْنَى الْكُفْرِ أَنْ يَسْمَعَ الرَّجُلُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ كَلِمَةً يَحْفَظُهَا عَلَيْهِ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَفْضَحَ بِهَا. أَوْلَيْكَ لَا خَلْقَ لَهُمْ.

The Prophet (S) said, “A lower degree of kufr is for a man to hear something from his brother and to commit it to his memory intending thereby to cause him humiliation. Such persons shall have no share (in the Hereafter.)”<sup>18</sup>

The traditions cited here relate specifically to the subject at hand. But in case the backbiter were guilty of other sins and vices besides –such as the insult, humiliation, contempt and disparaging of a believer (mu’min), the revelation and counting of his failings, and his defamation, each of which is an independent cause of one’s destruction– the traditions condemning each of them are overwhelming and shattering. We abstain from citing them here for brevity’s sake.

## The Social Harms Of Ghibah

This greatly heinous vice and highly fatal sin, which is a destroyer of faith and morality, of the outward and the inward, which brings man disgrace and ignominy in the world and the Hereafter as alluded to in the preceding section, has also social evils and in this respect its ugliness and evil are greater than those of many other sins.

One of the great objectives of the teachings of the great prophets (A) apart from being an independent goal in itself and a means for forwarding great goals, as well as being completely essential for the formation of a perfect society (*al-madinat al fadilah*) is unity of belief and creed and solidarity in regard to all important matters, and resistance to the unjust aggressions of oppressors, which cause the corruption of humanity and ruin the foundations of wholesome society.

This great objective, on which the reform of individual and society depends, cannot be achieved except in the shadow of unity, solidarity, mutual love and brotherhood amongst the individuals of society and the sincerity of their hearts and their inner and outward purity, so that the human race and its members come to constitute a single person and personality with individuals as its parts and members. All their efforts and endeavors have revolved around this ogle great divine objective and this momentous rational goal, wherein lies the good of individual and society.

Should such love and brotherhood be born in a race or tribe, it would dominate all other tribes and nations that do not possess this quality. The truth of this matter comes to light if we study history, especially that of the battles and great victories of Islam. At the advent of this divine faith, since there was a measure of this unity and solidarity amongst Muslims and their efforts were accompanied by sincerity of intention, they could achieve great victories in a short period.

In a brief span of time they overwhelmed the great empires of that age, namely Iran and Rome. Smaller in number, they could defeat heavily armed armies with an endless number of soldiers. The Prophet of Islam established the covenant of brotherhood amongst early Muslims and the relationship of brotherhood came to prevail between all Muslims on the basis of the Quranic text:

﴿إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ﴾

**Indeed, the believers are brethren. (49: 10)**

The following traditions are recorded in the noble *al-Kafi*:

عَنِ الْعَقْرُقُوفِيِّ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَبَا عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ يَقُولُ لِأَصْحَابِهِ: اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا إِخْوَةً بَرَّةً مُتَحَابِّينَ فِي اللَّهِ، مُتَوَاصِلِينَ، مُتَرَاجِمِينَ. تَزَاوَرُوا وَتَلَاَقُوا وَتَذَكَّرُوا أَمْرَنَا وَأَحْيُوهُ.

Al Aqarqufi says: I heard Abu ‘Abd Allah (A) say to his companions, “Fear God and be righteous brethren, loving one another for the sake of God, mutually interlinked and merciful into one another. Visit one another, meet one another, remind one another about our affair (i.e. Imamate), and keep it alive.”<sup>19</sup>

وَعَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: يَحِقُّ عَلَى الْمُسْلِمِينَ الْإِجْتِهَادُ فِي التَّوَاصُلِ وَالتَّعَاوُنِ عَلَى التَّعَاطُفِ وَالْمُؤَاسَاةِ لِلْأَهْلِ الْحَاجَةِ وَتَعَاطُفُ بَعْضِهِمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ حَتَّى تَكُونُوا كَمَا أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ: ﴿رَحِمَاءُ بَيْنَهُمْ﴾

Abu ‘Abd Allah (A) said: It is the duty of all Muslims to strive in respect of mutual relations, cooperation, kindness and charity to the needy and mutual affection amongst themselves, until you become as God, the Almighty and the Glorious, has commanded you to be (saying): They are merciful unto one another.<sup>20</sup>

وَعَنْهُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: تَوَاصَلُوا وَتَبَارَكُوا وَتَرَاحَمُوا وَكُونُوا إِخْوَةً بَرَّةً كَمَا أَمَرَكُمُ اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ

Imam al-Sadiq (A) also said, “Cultivate mutual relations, be kind and merciful to one another and be such true brethren as God, the Almighty and the Glorious, has commanded you to be.”<sup>21</sup>

It is evident that which strengthens this mutual love and brotherhood is desirable, and that which

severs this tie of mutual connection and brotherhood and creates disunity is regarded as detestable by the Lawgiver and is opposite to His great objectives. It is quite clear that if this great fatal sin were to become prevalent in a society, would cause enmity, envy, hatred and hostility amongst its people and the roots of corruption will spread through it.

Then the tree of hypocrisy and two-facedness will take roots in it, which shall grow and shatter the unity and solidarity of society, weakening the foundations of piety, which in turn will increase its corruption and repulsive character.

Hence, it is obligatory upon every pious and honorable Muslim, in order to safeguard his own person against corruption, to protect his coreligionists from hypocrisy, to preserve the Islamic society, to safeguard its unity, and to strengthen the bonds of brotherhood, to protect himself from this vice and forbid others from this repulsive act.

And if, God forbid, he has been guilty of this ugly act, he must repent and, in case it is possible and there is no chance of vicious consequences, seek the propitiation of the victim and his forgiveness; otherwise, he must implore God's mercy for him. He must get rid of this vice and water the roots of sincerity, unity and solidarity in his heart, so as to be amongst one of the sound members of society and one of the vital spokes of the wheel of Islam. And God is the guide of all towards the path of righteousness.

## **The Cure Of This Malady**

You should know that the remedy of this great vice, like that of other vices, is possible by means of beneficial knowledge and action. As to the knowledge, it lies in this that man should reflect over the benefits resulting from this deed and compare them with its evil consequences and ugly fruits. He must weigh them in the balance of reason and seek a Judgment therefrom. Of course, man is no enemy of himself. All his sins arise from ignorance, unawareness, and negligence of their basic nature and consequences.

As to the imagined benefit of this vice, it amounts to a few minutes of satisfaction of one's carnal desire arising from the mention of people's defects and divulging of their secrets, or an hour spent in convivial company amid pleasantries and sly gossip inspired by bestial or satanic nature and aimed to satisfy the thirst of vengeful hearts.

As to its ugly effects, some of them were mentioned in the earlier sections. Now listen to some more of them, place them in the balance of Judgment and draw lesson from it, for, of course, this comparison and reflection shall yield fair results. As to the effects of *ghibah* in this world, one of these is that it lowers a man in the people's estimation and deprives him of their confidence. The people by nature are endowed with a love of perfection, virtue, and goodness and a hatred of defectiveness, baseness, and ugliness.

Accordingly, they make a distinction between persons who avoid divulging hidden defects and refrain from tearing the veils that guard their honor and safeguard their secrets and others who are not such. Even the backbiter himself, by virtue of his reason and innate moral nature, considers one who avoids such vices as superior to himself.

Moreover, should he trespass the bounds in perpetration of this vice and tear the veils that guard people's honor, God will disgrace him in this world itself, as mentioned in the narration of Ishaq ibn 'Ammar cited earlier. And man must fear a humiliation brought about by God Almighty, for it will be irreparable. I take refuge in God from the wrath of the Forbearing Lord.

Moreover, it is very possible that the slandering of the reputation of believers and the divulging of their concealed defects' will result in a wretched hereafter for man. For when this act becomes a part of man's conduct it leaves certain effects on the soul, one of which is production of enmity and hatred towards the victim, which increase little by little.

At the time of death, when some realities become revealed to man and he observes certain supersensible realms, the veils of *malakut* having been lifted, this hatred and enmity may cause him on beholding the station of his victims and the honor and blessings granted them by God Almighty, to hate God Almighty. For it is natural for man to regard his enemy's friend as his own enemy and to hate one who loves one he hates. Thus, he will leave this world with enmity of God and His angels and depart to everlasting ignominy and wretchedness.

My dear, be friendly to the servants of God who enjoy His mercy and bounty and who have been adorned with the robes of Islam and *iman*, and cultivate a heart-felt affection for them. Beware lest you feel enmity towards the beloved of God, for God Almighty is the enemy of the enemies of His beloved one and He will throw you out of the gardens of His mercy. The elect of God are hidden amongst His servants and who knows if this enmity on your part and your violation of the honor of this man of faith (*mu'min*) and your divulging of his defects will not be considered an offence against Divine honor?

The *mu'minun* are the *awliya'* (friends) of God. Their friendship is the friendship of God; their enmity is the enmity of God. Beware of the wrath of God and the enmity of the intercessors on the Day of Judgment:

وَيْلٌ لِّمَنْ شَفَعَاؤُهُ خُصَمَاؤُهُ

Woe to him whose intercessors [i.e. those who were supposed to intercede in his favor] are his enemies.

Meditate for a while about the fruits of this sin in this world and the Hereafter. Reflect for a while about the fearsome, frightful forms that will beset you in the grave, in the Barzakh, and on the Day of Resurrection. Refer to the authentic works of Shi'i scholars (R) and the traditions narrated from the

Immaculate Imams (A); for what they have to say in this regard is truly overwhelming.

Then compare and weigh a quarter of an hour's pleasantries, idle gossip and satisfaction of the imaginative lust with thousands upon thousands of years of adversity (that, too, when you are amongst those who deserve salvation and depart from this world in a state of faith) or eternal damnation in hell and everlasting painful chastisement (and we seek refuge in God from it).

Furthermore, even if you have enmity with a person whose *ghibah* you commit, that enmity requires that you should not commit his *ghibah* if you have faith in the *ahadith*; for it is stated in the *hadith* that the good deeds of the backbiter are transferred to the book of deeds of the victim of his *ghibah* and his sins are transferred to the book of the backbiter. Therefore, your enmity of him boils down to an enmity of yourself.

Hence, you should know that you cannot fight with God. God has power to make that person endearing and respectable in the eyes of people by the very means of your *ghibah* of him and humiliate you in their eyes through the same means. He can deal with you in the same manner in the presence of the archangels. He can fill your book of deeds with vices and humiliate you. He can fill the book of deeds of your victim with fair deeds and grant him favor and honor.

Hence, understand well the extent of the power of the Omnipotent with Whom you are at war and beware of His enmity!

As to the action, it lies in this that one should for a period muster all one's power and rid his soul of this sin at all cost. He must bring his tongue under control and be fully watchful of himself, and make a covenant with himself to abstain from this sin for a certain time, being vigilant and watchful over himself and calling himself to account. God willing, it is hoped that after some time he will find himself reformed and free of its traces. Gradually the task will become easy for him and after some time he will feel that he has a natural disposition to dislike and detest it. Thereat, he will come to possess spiritual peace and delight in achieving freedom from this vice.

## **The Priority Of Abstinence From Permissible Ghibah**

Let it be known to you that the *ulama* and *fuqaha* (R) have excepted certain cases from the prohibition of *ghibah*, which, according to the statements of some of them, number more than ten. Here, we do not intend to enumerate them, for this is not a place for legal discussions. That which is essential to be mentioned here is that man should never consider himself secure from the ruses of his carnal self. He should conduct himself with total carefulness and caution and should not be after fabricating excuses in order to plunge into pleasantries and faultfinding by taking resort in one of the permissible exceptions.

The ruses of the self are most subtle. It may seduce man by fooling him through the *Shari'ah* and lead him into mortal perils. For instance, it is permissible to do the *ghibah* of one who does not conceal his

violations of Divine commands (*mutajahir bi al-fisq*), or rather it is even obligatory in some cases when it can help in restraining him and is considered one of the stages of *al-'amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an almunkar*. But one must examine whether his own personal motive by this *ghibah* is a godly and *shari* one, or if it is prompted by a satanic and selfish motive. If the motive is a godly one, his act would be reckoned among *'ibadat*.

Rather, the *ghibah* of the *mutajahir* and the sinner with the motive of his reform is one of the most evident cases of expression of kindness and munificence toward him, although he himself may not understand it to be so. But if it is tainted with evil and carnal desire, then one must turn to the purification of his intent and refrain from meddling with people's honor without wholesome intention and purpose.

Moreover, to habituate the self to cases of permissible *ghibah* is also harmful for it, for the self is inclined toward mischief and indecency. It is possible that the absence of restraint in the permissible cases gradually leads it to another stage belonging to the prohibited cases. This is similar to entry into *shubuhah* (cases where doubt exists as to an act's permissibility), which is permissible but not desirable for its proximity to that which has been prohibited (*maharramat*). For it is possible that man may be led into *maharramat* through entry into them. Man must restrain his self as far as possible from these matters and refrain from everything when there is a possibility of its becoming unruly.

True, one must certainly act in cases where *ghibah* is obligatory, as in the aforementioned case and some other cases pointed out by the *ulama*; but one must also purge one's intention of the desire of the carnal self and the promptings of Satan. However, in cases of permissibility, it is better and preferable to abstain from it. Man must not commit everything that is permissible, especially in such matters as these where the seductions of the self and Satan are very effective.

It is narrated that Jesus (A) in the company of his disciples once passed by the carcass of a dog. The disciples said, "How badly does this carcass smell!" Jesus (A) declared, "What white teeth it has!" Of course, a teacher of the human species must possess such a purified self. He did not like that one of God Almighty's creations should be mentioned in a disparaging fashion. They saw its defect, and that Hadrat pointed out to them one of its excellences. I have heard that it is narrated in *hadith* that Jesus (A) said, "Don't be like a fly that sits upon filth. Don't be such that you notice only the defects of people."

It is narrated that the Noble Messenger (S) said:

طُوبَى لِمَنْ شَغَلَهُ عَيْبُهُ عَنْ عُيُوبِ النَّاسِ.

Blessed is the man who has been detained by his own defects from noticing the defects of other people.[22](#)

It would be good if one were as inquisitive about one's own defects as he is about the defects of people. How ugly it is of a man with thousands of defects to neglect his own and attend to those of others adding

them to the heap of his own defects! Should man explore his own states, conduct and acts and devote himself to their correction, his affairs would be reformed. But should he regard himself as free of defect that is the height of his ignorance. For no defect is worse than this that man should be unaware and negligent of his own defects yet be attentive to the defects of others, while he himself is a mass of defects and shortcomings.

## On The Prohibition On Listening To Ghibah

In the same manner as *ghibah* is prohibited, so also listening to it, being its companion, is also prohibited; rather, as some traditions show, the listener is like the backbiter in all the evil respects, even in regard to his act being a major sin and the obligation to propitiate the victim.

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: الْمُسْتَمِعُ أَحَدُ الْمُغْتَابِينَ

The Prophet (S) said, “The listener is one of the two backbiters.”

وَعَنْ عَلِيٍّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ: السَّامِعُ أَحَدُ الْمُغْتَابِينَ

Ali (A) said, “The listener is one of the two who engage in backbiting.”<sup>23</sup>

Hence, one who listens to *ghibah* is also a backbiter. *Sami*’ here means *mustami*’. Therefore, as many traditions indicate, it is obligatory to refute *ghibah*.

عَنِ الصَّدُوقِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنِ الصَّادِقِ، عَنْ آبَائِهِ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ – فِي حَدِيثِ الْمَنَاهِي – أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ نَهَى عَنِ الْغَيْبَةِ وَالْإِسْتِمَاعِ إِلَيْهَا، إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ: وَمَنْ تَطَوَّلَ عَلَى أَخِيهِ فِي غَيْبَةٍ سَمِعَهَا فِيهِ فِي مَجْلِسٍ فَرَدَّهَا عَنْهُ رَدَّ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَلْفَ بَابٍ مِنَ الشَّرِّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، فَإِنْ هُوَ لَمْ يَرُدَّهَا وَهُوَ قَادِرٌ عَلَى رَدِّهَا كَانَ عَلَيْهِ كَوْزُرٌ مِّنْ اغْتَابِهِ سَبْعِينَ مَرَّةً.

In a tradition reported by al-Saduq with his isnad from Imam al-Sadiq (A), the Noble Messenger (S) is once said to have forbidden *ghibah* and listening to it as well. Then he (S) said, “Lo, whoever does a favor to his brother by refuting his *ghibah* on hearing it in a gathering, God shall save him from a thousand kinds of evils in this world and the Hereafter. And if he doesn’t do so in spite of his ability to refute it on him shall be the burden of one who commits his *ghibah* seventy times.”<sup>24</sup>

وَعَنِ الصَّدُوقِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنْ جَعْفَرِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ، عَنْ آبَائِهِ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّلَامُ – فِي وَصِيَّةِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ لِعَلِيِّ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ –: يَا عَلِيُّ، مَنْ اغْتَابَ عَنْهُ أَخُوهُ الْمُسْلِمُ فَاسْتَطَاعَ نَصْرَهُ فَلَمْ يَنْصُرْهُ خَذَلَهُ اللَّهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ.

In a tradition reported by al-Saduq with his isnad from Imam al-Sadiq (A), the Prophet (S) is reported to have said to Amir al-Mu'minin (A) in the course of a counsel that he gave him: "O 'Ali! When someone hears the ghibah of his Muslim brother and it is committed in his presence, yet he does not rally to his assistance despite being capable of doing so, God shall humiliate him in the world and the Hereafter."<sup>25</sup>

وَعَنْ عِقَابِ الْأَعْمَالِ بِسَنَدِهِ عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ: مَنْ رَدَّ عَنْ أَخِيهِ غَيْبَةً سَمِعَهَا فِي مَجْلِسٍ رَدَّ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَلْفَ بَابٍ مِنَ الشَّرِّ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ، فَإِنْ لَمْ يَرُدَّ عَنْهُ وَأَعْجَبَهُ كَانَ عَلَيْهِ كَوْزَرٌ مِنْ اغْتَابَ.

In Iqab al-'a'mal, al-Saduq reports with his isnad from the Prophet (S) that he said, "Whoever refutes the ghibah of his brother that he hears in a gathering, God shall turn away from him a thousand kinds of evils in this world and the next. But if he fails to refute it and is even pleased thereat, his burden of sin is like that of the backbiter."<sup>26</sup>

The *Allamah* of the latter-day *ulama*, the great researcher and embodiment of the merits of knowledge and deed, al-Shaykh al-'Ansari (R) says:

It appears that by 'refutation' (radd) here is meant something other than forbidding ghibah, and it implies defending and offering assistance to the absent person with something related to the ghibah. For instance, if the defect mentioned is one related to worldly affairs, he may say in his defense, "A defect is one which God Almighty has reckoned as such, such as sin, and the biggest of sins is that which you yourself are committing by doing ghibah of your brother by ascribing to him something which God has not considered a defect of his." And if it is one related to religion, he may explain it in such a way as not to be counted a sin on his part. And if it cannot be explained away, he must defend it by saying, for instance, "A believer is at times guilty of sin, and it is fitting that we pray to God to forgive him rather than expose his faults. Perhaps your exposing of his fault is a bigger sin before God Almighty than his."

At times the listener, besides abstaining from absolving the absent person from the *ghibah*, induces the backbiter to commit *ghibah*, or he may encourage the backbiter by going along willingly with him by such oft-repeated interjections as "Strange!" Or if he is one of the pious ones, by uttering some sacred formula such as '*Astagh firullah*' or something else, acts which are in fact the Devil's artifices. It is probable that the noble tradition which mentions the burden of the listener as being seventy times that of the backbiter refers to such persons as these. And we take refuge in God from it!

## Al-Shahid Al-Thani's Discourse

The honorable shaykh, the precious researcher and the blessed martyr al-Shahid al-Thani (R) has a discourse in this regard and with this noble discourse, we conclude this section. He says:

Of the filthiest kind of ghibah is that which is committed by some hypocritical persons in the garb of men of knowledge and understanding, for they carry out their (evil) intentions in the garb of righteousness and

piety. They commit ghibah and yet pretend to abstain from it. Due to their ignorance and neglect, they don't know that they are guilty of two indecencies at once: *riya'* and ghibah. Similar to it is the case of the person who when somebody is mentioned before him says, "Al-humdulillah, that we are not afflicted with the love of office," or "...that we are not afflicted with the love of the world" or that "we do not possess such and such a quality." Or, for instance, he will say, "Na'udhubillah, from lack of shame," or "from incapability," or he will say, "May God safeguard us" from such and such an act.

Sometimes the praise of God is by itself ghibah if the fault of someone is understandable from it. However, it is a ghibah expressed in a pious and self-righteous form. This kind of person wanted to mention the fault of someone through an utterance that all at once carries ghibah, *riya'* and the claim to be free from defect, although he has these defects which are greater than the one he ascribes to another.

One of the ways of ghibah is that at times he (the backbiter) will praise the person whose ghibah he wishes to commit. For instance, he will say, "So and so enjoys elevated spiritual states. He does not fall short in his worships, but due to lack of endurance, which afflicts us all, he has become somewhat lethargic in his ritual duties." In this way he himself pretends to be blameworthy while he intends to find fault with the other person. In fact, his purpose is to extol himself by simulating to be one of the pious through his apparent self-criticism. This man has involved himself in three indecencies: ghibah, *riya'*, and self-righteousness. He imagines himself to be one of the righteous and one who refrains from ghibah. This is how Satan plays games with the ignorant and the unaware who are outwardly involved in the pursuit of knowledge and righteous action without having attained firmness on the path. Hence, Satan pursues them and brings their good deeds to nothing and laughs at them.

And to this category belongs the one who, when someone's ghibah is done in a gathering and some of those present have not heard, says "Subhan Allah, what an amazing thing" in order to call their attention to the ghibah. This person makes the remembrance (dhikr) of God a means to realize his corrupt vain purpose. Nevertheless, he imagines having done a service to God Almighty by this dhikr, and this is nothing but ignorance and vanity.

Also to this category belongs the one who says that such and such a thing happened to so and so, or rather, such and such a thing happened to "our friend" or "our companion" and then adds, "May God forgive him and us." This person makes a pretence of sympathy and friendliness and perpetrates ghibah under the cover of prayer. But God knows the wickedness of his heart and the viciousness of his intention. He does not know that God is more wrathful toward him than the ignorant man who commits ghibah openly.

Among the concealed kinds of ghibah is listening to it with amazement, for such a person expresses his amazement in order to make the backbiter more lively in his descriptions and his amazement encourages the latter in his act of ghibah. For instance, he will say, "This really makes me amazed!" or "I didn't know that!" or "I didn't know he would do such a thing!" These expressions are meant to affirm

the backbiter's statements and to encourage him subtly to add something more, whereas to affirm ghibah is also ghibah; or rather to listen to it or even to keep silent on hearing it is also ghibah.

At times, other vices are also added to *ghibah*, adding to its perversity, ugliness and punishment, like the backbiting person who expresses friendship and intimacy in front of the victim of his *ghibah* and praises and extols him. This is a kind of hypocrisy (*nifaq*) double-facedness and double-tonguedness that have been condemned in unambiguous terms in the traditions:

فِي الْكَافِي الشَّرِيفِ بِإِسْنَادِهِ عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ قَالَ: مَنْ لَقِيَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ بِوَجْهَيْنِ وَلِسَانَيْنِ جَاءَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ  
وَكُلُّهُ لِسَانَانِ مِنْ نَارٍ.

In the noble al-Kafi, al-Kulayni reports with his isnad from Imam al-Sadiq (A) that he said, “Whoever encounters Muslims with two faces and two tongues, he will come on the Day of Resurrection with two tongues of fire.”<sup>27</sup>

Such is the form of this ugly act and the result of such a hypocrisy in the Hereafter. I seek refuge in God Almighty from the evil of the tongue and the carnal self. And all praise is God's, at the beginning and the end.

1. Al-Kulayni, al-Kafi, ii, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab al-ghibah wa al buht”, hadith no. 1.
2. Al-Hurr al-’Amili, Wasai’l al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 16312.
3. Al-Fayd al-Kashani al-Mahajjat al-bayda, v, 266.
4. Wasai’l al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 18312.
5. Al-Naraq, Jami’ al-sa’adat, ii, 294.
6. Al-Mahajjat al-bayda’, v, 263.
7. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 16319.
8. Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, ‘Iqab al-’a’mal, 340.
9. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 16316.
10. Al-Mahajjat al-bayda; v, 261.
11. Al-Kafi, ii, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab man talaba ‘atharat al mu’minin”, hadith no. 2.
12. Al-Kafi, ii, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab man adha al-Muslimin”, hadith no. 8.
13. Al-Majlisi, Bihar al-’anwar, lxxv, “bab al-ghibah”, hadith no. 12, from al Saduq’s al-’Amali’
14. Wasail al-Shiah, viii, hadith no. 18312.
15. Al-Mahajjat al-bayda’, v, 263.
16. Al-Mahajjat al-bayda’, 264.
17. Jami’ al-’akhbar, 171, with some difference of wording.
18. A similar tradition in al-Kafi, ii, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab man talaba’ atharit al-mu’minin.”
19. Al-Kafi, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab al-tarahum wa al-ta’atuf”, hadith no. 1.
20. Al-Kafi, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab al-tarahum wa al-ta’atuf”, hadith no. 4.
21. Al-Kafi, “kitab al-’iman wa al-kufr”, “bab al-tarahum wa al-ta’atuf”, hadith no. 3.
22. Sharh Shihab al-’akhbar, 306; al-Mahajjat al-bayda’, v, 264.
23. In Ghurar al-hikam, ii, 12.
24. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 16316.
25. Wasa’il al-Shi’ah, viii, hadith no. 16336.

[26.](#) Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, viii, hadith no. 16340.

[27.](#) Al-Kafi, ii, "kitab al-iman wa al-kufr", "bab dhi al-lisanayn", hadith no. 1.

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