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Why People Backbite

The excuse presented to them for this, rather than any other obvious transgression, is perhaps heedlessness about its being prohibited despite all the discussions of verses and narratives warning us all in its regard. This is the least excuse presented by those who are habitual in being thus heedless. Perhaps they take these sins as being not affecting their status of mastership on account of this type of contemptible behavior being hidden from those who seek a station with the ignorant ones. If Satan insinuates to them to drink wine or commit adultery with chaste women, they would not obey him because it is seen as a sin by the masses of people who see its place as being low. To them, it is one of the clearly visible sins.

Had people referred to their power of reasoning and sought light from their intellects, they would have found a distant difference between both sins and a great deal of variation. Nay! There is no way to compare sins which undermine the right of Allāh, Praise to Him, in particular and what is relevant of them to His servants, especially the latter's honor, for honor is greater than wealth and more precious. The more precious a thing is, the greater is the sin of violating it in addition to total corruption as we, God willing, will be witnessing.

I liked to place in this message a group of statements about backbiting, how the Book and the Sunnah prohibit it, how reason leads to this conclusion, naming it *Kashf al-Reeba an Ahkam al-Gheeba* (removing doubt about the rulings relevant to backbiting), following it with whatever relates to backbiting and some rulings about envy, concluding it with urging communication, enjoining love and kindness. I have arranged it into an Introduction, Chapters and a Conclusion.

About the Introduction, its definition and a group of prohibitions which carry warnings, here below are some of them:

We say that *gheeba*, backbiting, as an expression, has two definitions:

One of them is famous: It is mentioning someone's condition during his absence in a way which he hates, attributing to him what is regarded as a shortcoming according to convention in order to belittle

and speak ill of him. Beware of underestimating something wrong when you speak to the doctor, for example, or when you plead to the ruler for mercy when you condemn him or talk about a blind man and point out their shortcomings. One can do away with doing so by voicing displeasure with these things which are attributed to him.

The other is attracting one's attention to something whereby he hates to be identified. This is more general than the first because of making a statement, a reference, or narrating a tale or other things, and it is better because of what we will be explaining about backbiting not being restricted to only making statements.

A famous tradition cites the Prophet (ﷺ) asking his companions, "Do you know what backbiting is?" They said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said, "It is when you say something about your brother which he hates." It was said to him, "Suppose what I say about my brother is true." He said, "If what you say is true, it is backbiting, and if it is not, it is slandering." This is recorded in *Tanbih al-Khawatir*, Vol. 1, p. 118. It is also recorded in *Al-Targheeb wal Tarheeb*, Vol. 3, p. 515.

Some people mentioned the name of a man in the presence of the Prophet (ﷺ), saying, "How weak he is!" He (ﷺ) said, "You have backbitten your fellow." They said, "O Messenger of Allah! What we have said about him is true!" He (ﷺ) said, "If you wrongfully attribute something to him, you will be slandering him." This is stated in *Ad-Durr Al-Manthoor*, Vol. 6, p. 96.

There is consensus about prohibiting backbiting. It is a major sin due to both the Book of Allah and the Sunnah warning against it.

Allah Almighty clearly holds it in contempt in His Book, making a similitude between one who is guilty of it to one who eats the flesh of his dead brother. He says,

"O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible), for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy on each other, nor speak ill of others by way of backbiting. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay! You would abhor it... but fear Allah, for Allah is oft-Returning, Most Merciful" (Qur'an, 49: 12).

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) has said, "A Muslim, all of him, is prohibited from harming another Muslim, whether shedding his blood, or robbing him of his possessions, or harming his honor" (Vol. 1, p. 115 of *Tanbih al-Khawatir*).

Jabir [ibn Abdullah al-Ansari] and Abi Sa'ad al-Khudri have said, "He (ﷺ) has said, 'Beware of backbiting, for backbiting is worse than adultery. An adulterer repents, so Allah accepts his repentance, but one who backbites is not forgiven unless his fellow [whom he had backbitten] forgives him'" (Vol. 1, p. 115 of *Tanbih al-Khawatir*; p. 116 of *Irshad al-Qulub*).

In a famous lengthy narrative, the Prophet (ﷺ) is quoted as having said, "The recording angels report

the deeds of a servant of Allāh, and he has a light like the rays of the sun which stays on till it reaches the lower heavens as the recording angels think greatly of his deeds and testify for him. But when it reaches the gate, the angel in charge of the gate says, ‘Smite the face of the doer of this deed! I am in charge of monitoring backbiting; my Lord ordered me not to let any good deed of one who backbites people reach my Lord’” (see p. 74, Vol. 1 of *Al-Tarhib wal Tarhib*).

Anas is said as having quoted the Prophet (ﷺ) saying, “During the night of *israʿ*, I passed by people who were scratching their noses with their nails. I asked Gabriel about them. Gabriel said, ‘These are the people who backbite others and speak ill of their honor’” (p. 115, Vol. 1 of *Tanbih al-Khawṭir*; p. 116 of *Irshād al-Qulūb*).

Al-Barʿī [ibn ʿAzib] has said, “The Messenger of Allāh delivered a sermon to us once till the free ladies in their own homes heard him. He said, ‘O folks who have believed in tongue but not in heart! Do not backbite the Muslims, and do not trace their shortcomings, for if one keeps track of the shortcoming of his brother, Allāh will track his shortcoming, and if Allāh tracks his shortcoming, He will expose him even in the deepest depth of his home’” (*Tanbih al-Khawṭir*, Vol. 1, p. 115).

Sulaymān ibn Jubayr has said, “I went to see the Messenger of Allāh, peace and blessings of Allāh be with him and his progeny, and said to him, ‘Teach me something good whereby Allāh benefits me.’ He said, ‘Do not underestimate any good deed even if it is an act of pouring from your bucket into a cup of one seeking a drink, and when you meet your brother, meet him with a smile. When he goes away, do not backbite him’” (*Tanbih al-Khawṭir*, Vol. 1, p. 115).

Anas [ibn Mʿlik] has said, “The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) delivered a sermon to us once and mentioned usury, touching upon its magnanimity. He said, ‘One dirham is won by a man through usury is looked upon by Allāh as greater than thirty-six acts of adultery a man commits. The most serious type of usury is when one speaks ill of a Muslim’s honor’” (*Tanbih al-Khawṭir*, Vol. 1, p. 116).

Jubayr has said, “We were in the company of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) when he approached two graves of persons being tormented. He said, ‘They are not being tormented because of having committed a major sin. One of them used to backbite people. The other was too careless to cleanse himself after urinating.’ He (ﷺ) called for a fresh palm leaf or two which he broke, planting one on each grave. He (ﷺ) said, ‘This will lighten their torment as long as they are not dry’” (*Tanbih al-Khawṭir*, Vol. 1, p. 116).

Anas has said, “The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) ordered people once to fast then said, ‘Nobody should break his fast till I give him permission.’ People fasted. When it was evening, a man would come and say, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! I have kept my fast; so, please grant me permission to break my fast,’ and he would give him permission. A man came and said, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! Two young women from among your folks have kept fasting, but they are too shy to come to you; so, please give them permission to break their fast.’

The Prophet (ﷺ) turned away from him. The man repeated his request, whereupon the Prophet said to him, 'They did not uphold their fast. How can one fast while eating people's flesh? Go and tell them that if they were fasting, they should vomit.' The man returned to the young women and narrated the above to them. They vomited. Each of them vomited a clot of blood. The man returned to the Prophet (ﷺ) and told him about it. He (ﷺ) said to him, 'I swear by the One Who holds the soul of Muhammad in His hand that had they (clots) remained in their stomachs, they would have consumed them like fire.'"

Another version of this incident says that when the Prophet turned away from the man, the latter returned and said, "O Messenger of Allāh! They, by Allāh, have almost died [of hunger and thirst]."

The Prophet (ﷺ) told the man to bring him the two women whom he ordered to vomit. Each vomited blood, filling a whole container. He (ﷺ) then said, "These women abstained from what Allāh had permitted them and broke their fast on what Allāh had prohibited them. Each sat with the other and both kept eating people's flesh" (*Ihyā' Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 134. *Ad-Durr al-Manthūr*, Vol. 6, p. 96).

It has also been reported that "One who eats his brother's flesh in the short life will have the flesh brought near to him in the Hereafter and it will be said to him, 'Eat it dead as you ate it alive.' He will eat it and will cry out and frown indignantly" (*Ihyā' Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 135).

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) stoned a man once on account of having committed adultery. Someone said to his fellow, "This man used to squirt like dogs." The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) brought them a carcass and said to them, "Eat it." They said, "O Messenger of Allāh! Must we really eat a stinking carcass?!" He (ﷺ) said, "What you have just eaten of the flesh of your brother is more stinking than it" (*Tanbīh al-Khawātir*, Vol. 1, p. 116).

Imām al-Sādiq (ع) has said, "Backbiting is prohibited on every Muslim. It consumes good deeds as the fire consumes firewood" (*Musbḥ al-Sharī'a*, pp. 204–205).

Al-Sādiq has cited his forefathers citing Ali (ع) saying that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, "Four persons shall add harm to the residents of the fire to the harm from which they already suffer: They shall be given to drink of the boiling water in hell. They shall lament, so much so that the people of the fire shall say to each other, 'What is wrong with these four harming us in addition to the harm from which we already suffer?' One of them will be dangling from a coffin made of burning timbers and a man runs with him. A man's mouth will be dripping blood and pus. And a man will be eating his own flesh. It will be said to the man of the coffin, 'What is wrong with the furthestmost man, for he has added to our harm?'

He will say, 'The furthestmost man died owing people money; he did not feel like paying them back or fulfilling his obligations to them.' Then it will be said to the man running with him, 'What is wrong with the furthestmost man who has added harm to our harm?' He will say, 'The furthestmost man used not to care where his urine fell on his body.' Then it will be said to the man whose mouth drips blood and pus, 'What is wrong with the furthestmost man, for he has added to our harm?' He will say, 'The furthestmost man used to mimic people: He would look at every foul word, praise then repeat it.'

Then it will be said to the one who eats his own flesh, ‘What is wrong with the furthestmost man, for he has added to our harm?’ He will say, ‘The furthestmost man used to eat of people’s flesh through backbiting, slandering others’” (*‘Iqbal-A`m*, p. 294).

Through tracking the *isnad* back to the Prophet (ﷺ), the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said once, “One who delves into backbiting his brother, revealing his shortcomings, will have placed his first step in hell, and Allāh will reveal his shortcoming to all creation” (*‘Iqbal al-A`m*, p. 337).

One who backbites a Muslim will have his fast nullified, and his ablution will be void; so, if he dies in such a state, he will be regarded as having permitted what Allāh prohibits (*‘Iqbal al-A`m*, p. 332).

Abū Abdullāh (ع) has said that the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) said, “Backbiting is more swift in undermining a Muslim’s creed than the food in his stomach” (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 357; see also *Al-Ikhtisās*, p. 228).

The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ) has said, “Sitting in a mosque waiting for the prayer is adoration as long as one does not do something awful.” It was said to him, “O Messenger of Allāh! What is this awful thing?” He said, “Backbiting” (*Rawdat al-Wazeen*, p. 470; see also *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 257).

The son of Abū Omer has cited Abū Abdullāh (ع) saying, “One who mentions what he sees in a believer with his own eyes and hears with his own ears is included among those about whom Allāh has said, “Those who love (to see) scandal publicized widely among the believers will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the hereafter” (*Qur’ān*, 24: 19); *Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 357.

Al-Mufaddal quotes [Abdullāh] ibn Omer saying that Abū Abdullāh has said, “One who tells a tale about a believer whereby he intends to dishonor him, undermine his prestige and make people think lowly of him, Allāh gets him out of His protection to the protection of Satan, and even Satan will not accept to protect him” (*Al-Kafi*, Vol. 2, p. 358; see also *Al-Ikhtisās*, p. 32).

Allāh Almighty has inspired to Moses son of Imran [Amram] that if a backbiter repents, he will be the last to enter Paradise, and if he does not, he will be the first to enter hell (*Masabih al-Shar’a*, p. 205).

It has been narrated that Jesus, peace be with him, and his disciples passed once by the carcass of a dog. The disciples said, “How foul its stink is!” Jesus, peace be with him, said, “How white his teeth are!” (*Tanbih al-Khawtir*, Vol. 1, p. 117). It is as though the prophet was prohibiting them from speaking ill of the dog, attracting their attention to mentioning only what is best of Allāh’s creations.

It has been indicated with regard to the interpretation of this verse of the Almighty: “Woe unto every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter” (*Qur’ān*, 104: 1) that the scandal-monger is one who slanders people, while the backbiter is the one who eats people’s live flesh (*Ihyā’ Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 135).

Al-Hassan has said, “By Allāh! Backbiting is faster in [bearing an impact on] the faith of a believer than what he eats bears on his body” (*Ihyā’ Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 135).

Be informed that the reason which requires emphasizing the issue of backbiting and making it look greater than many major transgressions is its inclusion of all what contradicts the goal of the Wise One, Praised is He, unlike the rest of transgressions, for these cause partial harms.

The explanation of the above is this: The important goal of the legislator is to unite the souls on one concern, one way, which is: treading the path of Allāh in all its provisions, what it allows or prohibits, and this cannot materialize except through cooperation and solidarity among humankind. The latter depends on their determination being united, on their innermost becoming pure, and on their collective fellowship and love so they may be like one single slave obeying his Master.

This, too, will never materialize except by getting rid of grudge, hatred, envy and the like. One who backbites his brother incurs his grudge and prompts a similar reaction. This surely is the opposite of what the legislator ultimately seeks. It is an overwhelming harm; therefore, Allāh and His Messenger (ص) have emphasized its prohibition, warning against it, and surely success comes only from Allāh.

Having completed what the Introduction requires, let us start delving into this book's Chapters:

Types of Gheeba

Since you have come to know that *gheeba* means mentioning something which displeases your brother if he comes to know about it, or if he is informed of it or his attention is brought to it, including anything relevant to a shortcoming in his physique, lineage, conduct, or anything he says or does about his creed or worldly affairs, even if it is about what he wears or rides.

Imām al-Sādiq (ع) has pointed to this saying, "The facets of backbiting is that you mention a defect in form [or conduct], deeds, treatment, sect, ignorance or the like" (*Musbah al-Sharee'a*, p. 205).

Regarding one's physique, you may refer to his being blear-eyed, cross-eyed, one-eyed, bald, short, tall, black, yellow and anything one can imagine as being "defective" or deforming.

As for lineage, one may say that someone's father is a debauchee, mean, low, a shoe-mender, merchant, weaver, ignorant or the like, anything which one may dislike no matter what it is, period.

As for conduct, one may say that someone is bad-mannered, tricky, haughty, bragging, irritable, coward, weak-hearted, etc.

As regarding his creed-related deeds, you may say that he is a thief, liar, wine drinker, betrayer, oppressor, does not take his daily prayers seriously, his bowing and prostrating are not good, he takes no precautions with regard to cleanliness, unkind to his parents, does not safeguard himself from backbiting or speaking ill of people's honor, etc.

As regarding his worldly deeds, it is like your saying that he is impolite, does not take people seriously,

feels no obligation towards anyone, talkative, glutton, sleeps too much or sits where he does not belong, etc.

With regard to dressing himself, you may say that his sleeves are too wide, his robe drags behind him, his clothes are not clean, and the like.

Be informed that backbiting is not confined to articulation. Rather, it is prohibited because it conveys to others a shortcoming in/about your brother, identifying him in a way which he hates. Exposing him is similar to scandalizing him about anything relevant to any action such as speech, signal, gesture, beckon, defamation, censure, motion... and everything which lets the other person form a bad impression. All these fall in the category of backbiting and are equivalent to articulation of a thought the pronouncement of which is prohibitive.

An example for this is narrated about `Aisha having said, "A woman came to us once. When she left, I signaled with my hand that she was short. The Prophet (ﷺ) told me that I had thus backbitten her" (*Tanbih al-Khawtir*, Vol. 1, p. 118).

Another example is mimicking. One walks as though he is lame or imitating someone's gait. It is backbiting. It is even more so; it is greater in conveying a picture and thus getting an idea across. It also includes backbiting by writing. A book, it is said, is one of the two tongues. Also included is one who mentions a particular classifier and misrepresents his statements in his own book unless he mentions excuses requiring it such as *ijtihād* issues without which the goal behind a *fatwa* is not reached, or producing evidence for the point he drives unless he labels as "wrong" someone else's statements and the like.

Still included is one saying something like this: "One of those who passed by us, etc.," or "Someone we saw today looks like such-and-such, etc." Thus, a particular individual is understood to be implied by the statement. What one should avoid is getting others to identify who exactly he means. If such an individual is not thus identified, understood to be the one spoken about, it is alright. The Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ), whenever he saw someone doing something which he hated would say, "What is wrong with people who do such-and-such?" (*Ihyā Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 137). He would not specify.

Among the most harmful types of backbiting is one done by pretenders who would like others to characterize them as being men of understanding. They convey their thoughts in the method employed by true righteous and pious people so they may pretend to be above backbiting while transmitting their thought. Due to their ignorance, they thus combine two sins: pretension and backbiting.

An example for it is that one hears someone mentioning the name of someone else, so he says, "Praise be to Allāh Who did not afflict us with love for authority" or for love for this world, or to seem in a particular way similar to the individual mentioned. Or one may say, "We seek refuge with Allāh against immodesty" or against ill luck, or "We plead to Allāh to protect us from such-and-such."

Actually, one merely praising Allāh for not making him the opposite of what another person is characterized is regarded as backbiting in the form of supplication while hiding under the cloak of men of righteousness. His intention is actually to mention that person's fault by saying something which includes both backbiting and pretension even as he supplicates to Allāh to rid him of sins, not knowing that he already has committed these sins; in fact, he has committed the worst of these sins.

An example for the above is when one starts by praising someone whom he wants to backbite, so he says, "How good the condition of so-and so! He never fell short of performing his acts of adoration, but lately he has slackened and has been afflicted with that whereby we all are afflicted: impatience." Thus, he speaks ill of himself while in reality he intends to speak ill of someone else. He praises himself by comparing himself with the righteous as the latter condemn their evil-insinuating selves.

Thus, he backbites; he is being a pretender. He praises himself, combining three sins while, due to his ignorance, he thinks he is among the righteous who are above backbiting others. Thus does Satan play havoc with ignorant folks if they seek knowledge but act without having become fully acquainted with the paths of such knowledge. Satan follows them and surrounds their deeds with his schemes, laughing at them and making fun of them.

Also included is one who mentions someone's shortcoming, but nobody among his audience notices it, so he says, "Praise be to Allāh! How strange it is!" The backbiter indicates so in the hope the inattentive person may listen to him carefully and get to understand his hint. He mentions the Name of Allāh, Praise to Him, using His Name as a means to achieve his own meanness and falsehood. Due to his ignorance and conceit, he thinks he is doing Allāh a favor by mentioning His Name.

Also included is one who says that someone did such-and-such or has been afflicted with such-and-such. He may even say, "Our fellow, friend, may Allāh grant him and our own selves acceptance of repentance..., etc." Thus, he pretends to supplicate for him, feeling pain on his account, being a friend and a fellow, while Allāh is acquainted with the meanness of his inner self and the corruption of his conscience. Due to his ignorance, he does not know that he has exposed himself to a greater contempt than that to which the ignorant ones are exposed when they openly backbite.

Among its hidden types is listening to backbiting in the way of expressing amazement. One demonstrates amazement in order to energize the backbiter as the latter is at it, encouraging him to continue backbiting, as if he is extracting backbiting out of him in such a way. He may say, "I have been amazed at what you have just stated. Till now, I never knew it! I did not know that that individual is like that!" He wants to testify to the backbiter being truthful, asking him in a nice way to provide him with more. Testifying to the truth of backbiting, actually even listening to it, even remaining silent about it, is by itself an act of backbiting.

The Messenger of Allāh (ص) has said, "One who listens (to backbiting) is one of the two backbiters" (*Tanbīh al-Khawṭir*, Vol. 1, p. 119). Imām Ali (ع) has said, "One who listens to backbiting is one of

those who backbite" (*Ghurar al-Hikam*, p. 74).

He (ع) means that if one listens to backbiting with enjoyment, not (necessarily) agreeing, or who can deny what he hears but does not do so, is included in the sin. Since both individuals, the one who listens to, or who hears in such a way of enjoyment, actually backbite, this is due to his sharing the pleasure which the backbiter feels when he backbites.

It is due to their minds, both of them, being conditioned with contemptible images which should not be there even when they differ in the fact that one of them is articulating and the other is being receptive. But each of them is using a mechanism that helps him backbite: One of them uses his tongue to express a soul that has been polluted by drawing images of lies, prohibitions and the determination to be involved in them. The other listens as his soul accepts such effects due to taking such a bad option, becoming used to them, accustomed to it, enabling the poisoning of the subconscious mind with falsehood.

An example for the above is the wise saying that the listener is the speaker's partner. In the previous example, there is an indication that when the Prophet (ص) said to one of the men who said about another that the latter squirted like dogs, "Eat of this carcass!", thus putting them both in the same box although one of them was a speaker and the other a listener.

The listener does not get out of the sin of backbiting except if he rejects it by his tongue, but if he fears, he rejects it by his heart. If he can stand and leave or interrupt such talk with something else but does not, the sin will be attached to him. Had he said with his tongue, "Shut your mouth!" while inwardly he liked to hear, it would have been hypocrisy, another sin added. Nothing gets him out of the sin (of backbiting) unless he sincerely hates it with his heart.

The Prophet (ص) is reported as having said, "One who witnesses a believer being humiliated without supporting him, while being able to do so, will be humiliated by Allāh on the Day of Judgment as the creation looks on" (*Ihyā' Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 138).

Abū al-Dardā' is quoted as having said that the Messenger of Allāh (ص) had said, "One who protects his brother's honor as it is charged with backbiting, Allāh will protect his honor on the Judgment Day" (*Tanbīh al-Khawātir*, Vol. 1, p. 119).

He (ص) has also said, "One who defends his brother's honor with regard to backbiting, Allāh will set him free from the fire" (*Tanbīh al-Khawātir*, Vol. 1, p. 119).

Through his *isnād* to the Messenger of Allāh (ص), al-Sadūq has stated that the Prophet (ص) said, "One who defends on behalf of his brother, because of backbiting which he had heard in a gathering and which he refutes, Allāh will close a thousand gates of evil in his face in the life of this world and in the hereafter. But if he does not refute it while being able to do so, his burden will be seventy times as much as that of the person who had backbitten him" (Al-Sadūq's *A'mālī*, p. 350).

Through *isnād* to Imām al-Baqir (ع), the Imām said, "One who listens to his believing brother being backbitten, so he defends and supports him, Allāh will support him in the life of this world and in the hereafter. Allāh will abandon one who does not defend such a brother, while being able to defend and help him, in the life of this world and in the hereafter" (*Al-Mahṣin*, p. 103, tradition No. 81).

Be informed that one is prohibited from speaking ill of a believer, and he is prohibited from mentioning the wrongdoings of others. He also is prohibited from thinking ill and from contemplating it inwardly. What is meant by the inwardly evil thought, which is prohibited, is judging one as being a wrongdoer without making sure about it.

As regarding illicit thoughts, and since its insinuations are forgiven, doubt in this sense is also forgiven; Allāh Almighty has said,

"O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible), for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy on each other, nor speak ill of others by way of backbiting. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay! You would abhor it... but fear Allāh, for Allāh is oft-Returning, Most Merciful" (Qurʾān, 49: 12).

You have no right to think ill of someone unless you see with your own eyes what has no room for interpretation. If you do not know something, yet it finds its place in your heart, Satan places it there, and you ought to belie it, for it is the worst type of sin. Allāh Almighty has said,

"O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth lest you should harm people unwittingly and afterwards become full of repentance for what you have done" (Qurʾān, 49:6).

Eblis must not be believed.

In such a situation, the Sharʿa says that if you detect the smell of wine in someone, you cannot judge that he has drunk wine, and he is not to be penalized on its account, for it is possible he gargled it and detested it, or he was forced to drink it, and both are possible; so, a Muslim must not be the object of our suspicion.

The Prophet (ص) has said, "Allāh Almighty prohibits a Muslim from having a free hand in another Muslim's life or possession even if he thinks ill of him" (*Ihyāʾ Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 142). Hence, ill thoughts are not permitted unless the shedding of blood and the confiscation of wealth become permissible: One is sure by seeing or due to fair evidence, or their equivalent among matters which bring about conviction, or whatever the Sharʿa deems as being certain.

The father of Abdullāh (ع) is quoted as having said, "If a believer accuses his believing brother of something, conviction (*imṣn*) melts in his heart just as salt melts in water" (*Al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, p. 361).

He (ع) has also said, "If one charges his brother about his creed, the sanctity between them will be

violated" (*Al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, p. 361). He (ع) has also said, "The Commander of the Faithful (ع) has said, 'Think best of your brother till something convinces you of the contrary, and do not think ill of something which your brother says if you can at all find a good justification for it' (*Al-Kāfi*, Vol. 2, p. 362), that is, think well of what your brother says or does even if it can be interpreted differently without having to spy on him till you come to know about something which has no room for interpretation, for ill thoughts can be wrong whereas spying is prohibitive.

The way whereby one can get to know what the heart contemplates, whether it is an ill thought or an insinuation, is that you subject yourself to a test. If you change and your heart is displeased with him, or if you belittle him, or if you are reluctant to look after him, to find out how he is doing, to honor him, to care about his condition and feel sad because his condition has changed..., it is a sign that doubt has entertained your mind.

The Imām (ع) has said, "Three things in a believer for which there is a way out: One's exit out of an ill thought is not to think of it as being certain (*Ihyā' Ulūm ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3, p. 143), that is, do not carry out an investigation through thoughts or actions, neither in the heart nor in the senses. As regarding the heart, it is through turning it towards revulsion and contempt.

Regarding the senses, it is acting upon them. What ought to be done when an illicit thought about a believer is entertained is that one increases paying good attention to him and supplicating for him, for this angers Satan and it thus is pushed away from you. Satan will then avoid casting an illicit thought in your mind out of his fear you would supplicate for your brother and look after him, which is the opposite of his goal.

No matter how many faults about a believer you come to know, advise him inwardly, and do not let Satan deceive you and call upon you to backbite him. If you admonish him, do not do so while you are pleased you came to know about his shortcoming so he may think highly of you while you think lowly of him, while you see yourself as being higher in status than him by token of your admonishment of him. Rather, let your objective be ridding him of the sin, and you feel sorry for him just as you would feel sorry for yourself if a shortcoming is attached to you.

You ought to think inwardly that leaving him without advising him is dearer to you than leaving him on account of an advice with which you admonished him. If you do so, you will have combined the rewards of admonishment with the rewards of feeling sad about your brother's misfortune as well as the reward for helping him keep his faith strong.

One of the fruits of ill thoughts is spying. The heart is not convinced with doubts. It demands an investigation. Thus, one occupies himself by spying, something which is prohibitive.

Allāh Almighty says, "... **And do not spy (on each other)**" (*Qur'ān*, 49: 12). Allāh, praise belongs to Him, has prohibited in this verse backbiting, ill thoughts and spying. The meaning of spying is that you do not leave the servants of Allāh being shielded by Allāh's covering, so you seek to familiarize yourself (with

what they try to hide or conceal), thus tearing apart this covering. Had you kept that covering as it is, it would have been better for your heart and creed; so, think about it, may you be guided rightly, and surely success comes from Allāh.

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