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# Backbiting

Backbiting is to speak ill of a believer behind his back, including matters concerning his moralities, appearance, or personality. Not only is backbiting restricted to words, but also it includes every behavior and deed, whether suggestive or direct The Prophet (S) defined backbiting by saying:

"Do you know what is backbiting? It is to mention things that your brother dislikes. To mention things that are really found in the personality of your brother is backbiting. To mention things that are not found in the personality of your brother is slander."

Backbiting is however one of the meanest manners and most serious crimes and sins. God likens the backbiter to the one who eats the flesh of the dead:

***"Believers, stay away from conjecture; acting upon some conjecture may lead to sin. Do not spy on one another or backbite. Would any of you like to eat the disgusting dead flesh of your brother? Have fear of Allah; Allah accepts repentance and is All- merciful (49:12)."***

***"Allah does not love public accusation unless one is truly wronged. Allah is All-hearing and All-knowing. (4:148)"***

The Prophet (S) said: "Backbiting destroys the religion in a way that is more destructive than canker[1]."

"He who publicizes an ill matter is regarded as him who originated it, and whoever disregards a faithful believer for a matter will not die before that very matter sticks to him[2]."

Imam as-Sadiq (a) said: "For him who publicizes an affair of a believer for disgracing and disrespecting him, Allah will dismiss him from His custody and deliver him to the Shaitan's[3]."

"Do not backbite (others) so that others will not backbite you. Do not dig a hole for making your brother fall in it, lest you yourself may fall in it. As you condemn others, others will surely condemn you[4]."

## Disregard of Backbiting

It is necessary to avoid being in conformity with the backbiters or listening to them, for the listener of backbiting is regarded as partner in the sin. To do so can be achieved by denying backbiting verbally, changing the subject into another innocent one, leave the session of backbiting, or, in the least, deny backbiting in heart, so as to be saved from the partnership of that sin.

A wise man said: “Try your best to avoid introducing yourself to the backbiter, because the greatest share of harm is burdened by the closest to him.”

In the same manner, it is important to honor the dignity of the believer who is backbitten.

The Prophet (S) said: “Paradise is unquestionably the share of him who defends the honor of his believing brother.”

It is worth mentioning, here, that the illegality of backbiting does not include the deviants and apostates.

## Incentives of Backbiting

● Enmity and envy are the strongest incentives of backbiting.

● Joking is another incentive of backbiting, because it is regarded as fresh subject for arising joking and laughter at others.

● Boasting is also an incentive of backbiting, because the boastful, in most cases, tries to refer to the others’ defects to prove that he disdains and does not enjoy such defects.

● It frequently happens that an individual who associates with backbiters tries to be in conformity with them by according them in their ill speech of others so that they may not reject him.

## Disadvantages of Backbiting

Through its regulations, Islam intends to reinforce fraternity of Muslims to make it a never-ending constitution. Thus, it has gone on enjoining to cling to all matters that develop mutual amicability and achieve fraternity; such as well mannerism, truth, fulfillment of trusts, and paying attention to Muslims’ affairs and general interests. Islam also has warned against any matter that roils the pure hearts or arises malice, such as lying, cheating, treachery, and contempt.

Since backbiting is a destructive element that devastates the social construction and spoils the tied up relations, the Islamic code has forbidden and regarded it as a grand sin. It sow’s the poisonous seeds of spite among Muslims. When the ill speech reaches the one about whom it is said, it will arise the feelings of hatred in his inner self; so, he tries to revenge himself upon the backbiter by answering him

by ill speech. In so many cases, backbiting has caused serious problems and unwelcome tragedies.

The Prophet (S) said: “On the Day of Resurrection, one of you will not find the good deeds that he did in his life in his record[5] when he will be interrogated. He will ask the Lord about this, and the Lord will answer him: ‘Your Lord never makes a mistake and never forgets. Because you backbit people, your good deeds were erased from your record.’ Another one will find many good deeds that he did not do in his record. He will ask the Lord about such deeds, and the Lord will answer: “Because you were backbitten by so-and-so, I added his good deeds to you[6].”

## Reasonable Grounds of Backbiting

Backbiting is decided as forbidden so long as it is intended to disgrace others, but if it is not intended for so or if a reasonable ground relies upon it, it is not forbidden. Muslim jurisprudents have mentioned a number of reasonable grounds for backbiting:

● If backbiting represents the complaint of a wronged person so as to prove his right before a judge, it is not forbidden, even if it includes the ascription of injustice and criminality to the other party.

● The person whose advice is sought in definite matters, such as marriage or trust, is permitted to backbite the other party by mentioning his defects-. It is also acceptable to warn a believer against the association with deviants, by referring namely to their defects, provided that such reference is intended to protect the believer. It is also acceptable to defame a testifier when it is necessary.

● Backbiting is acceptable when it is intended to disavow the claim of a false lineage.

● Backbiting is acceptable when it is intended to refute an untrue saying or an illegal claim.

● Backbiting is acceptable when it takes the form of testimony against wrongdoers.

● It is acceptable to mention certain epithets (such as ‘the blind’, ‘the one-eyed’, and the like) of certain people if this is necessary for introducing them.

● Backbiting is acceptable when it is intended to forbid evil, by mentioning the defects of a person before somebody who is able to guide him.

● It is acceptable to backbite those who declare publicly their commitment of sins, such as the drunk and gamblers, provided that such backbiting should not exceed the limits. It is said that to backbite a sinful is not offensive.

Finally, well intention and sound objective must be proposed. Likewise, it is improper to aim at evil intentions, such as enmity, envy, and the like.

## Treatment of Backbiting

● It is necessary to keep in mind the foresighted disadvantages of backbiting.

● It is necessary to pay the greatest attention to self– discipline by applying the noble traits to oneself.

As he was asked about his educator, Muhammad Ibn al–Hanafiyya said: “It is my Lord Who educated me in myself. I have followed and imitated any element that is enjoyed by men of sense when I found good, and I have avoided any element that is practiced by the ignorant when I found ugly. Hence, I could attain the treasures of knowledge7.”

● It is advisable to speak of joyful things, such as pleasant stories and nice purposeful talks, instead of backbiting.

● It is worthwhile, finally, to control one’s wording and abstain from the initiatives of backbiting.

## Penance of Backbiting

To make amends for it, one must feel regret and repent from the sins of backbiting. Then, he must curry favor with the one he backbit and ask him for acquittal. If the backbitten forgives, it will be satisfactory. If not, to curry favor with him and apologize will be equivalents of the commitment of backbiting. The previous acts should be done when the backbitten is alive and when such confessions before him do not arise his rage. If they do, or if he is dead, it is necessary to seek God’s forgiveness to him.

The Prophet (S) said: “The penance of backbiting is to seek Allah’s forgiveness to him the backbitten–whenever you mention him8.”

1. Quoted from Bihar ul–Anwar; Kitab ul–Ashara, page 177 (as quoted from al–Kafi).
2. Quoted from Bihar ul–Anwar; Kitab ul–Ashara, 177 (as quoted from Thawab ul–A’mal and al–Barqi’s al–Mahassin).
3. Quoted from Bihar ul–Anwar; Kitab ul–Ashara, page 177 (as quoted from Thawab ul–A’mal, al–Barqi’s al–Mahassin, and as–Saduq’s al–Amali).
4. Quoted from Bihar ul–Anwar; Kitab ul–Ashara, 177 (as quoted from al–Amali).
5. ‘Record’, here, stands for the record of the good and bad deeds of every human being that will be shown to him on the Day of Resurrection and according to which he will be judged. In the holy Quran, there are indications to this record, such as in God’s saying: (On the day when We call every nation with their leaders, those whose record of deeds are given to their right hands will read the record and the least wrong will not be done to them. 17:71)
6. Quoted from Jami us–Saadat; part 2 page 301.
7. Quoted from Safinat ul–Bihar; vol. 1 page 324.
8. Quoted from Bihar ul–Anwar; Kitab ul–Ashara, page 184 (as quoted from al–Kafi).

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