

Backbiting

The Almighty Allah says in the Quran:

وَلَا يَغْتَابَ بَعْضُكُمُ بَعْضًا أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَحِيمٌ-

Do not backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would abhor it. Fear Allah; for Allah is the Acceptor of repentance, the Merciful.

This verse defines the boundary of personal freedom and self-respect in a peaceful and caring society. It also teaches us the method to purify our conscience and character. Violation of human freedom and self-respect is not allowed in Islam.

Quran forbade backbiting and termed it as a heinous act of eating flesh of our own brother after his death.

Definition of Backbiting

Raghib Isfahani (a famous compiler of Quranic dictionary) defines the backbiting as, “A person describing the factual negative things in personality of other person. Abu Dawood narrates from Aisha Siddiqa (the wife of Prophet صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم), she said:

قلت لنبى صلى الله عليه وسلم حسبك من صفية كذا وكذا. قال عن مسدد، تعنى قصيرة، قال صلى الله عليه وسلم، لقد قلت كلمة لو مزجت بماء البحر لمزحته- (ترمذى، كتاب البر و الصلة و الادب)

Aisha (رضى الله عنها) narrated that I said to the Prophet, Safya has several attributes which are enough for you [to leave her]. Musaddid said that she meant that Safya was a short woman. Prophet replied, “You have said something which if you put in the water of a river, it will change the taste of that river.”

[It means that backbiting is telling the negative attributes of a person which are factual. If someone speaks about non-factual attributes of a person, than it is a defamation which is a greater sin as compared to backbiting.]

Reasons for Backbiting

There are various reasons for backbiting; however following are more common and relevant to our society:

- A person describes the other person’s negative attributes in state of anger.
- People commit the sin of backbiting as a social trend, sometimes in supporting their friends.
- When a person feels that the other person would complain about me in my social circle or else where, and in order to create bad impression about him or to put a question on his credibility, the first person starts doing backbiting.
- In order to implicate someone in a crime falsely, people do his backbiting.
- Some people commit backbiting in order to raise their own position in the society. The objective is to prove themselves better than others.

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Tirmidhi narrates from A'qbah Bin Amir (رضى الله عنه):

يا رسول الله! ما النجاة؟ قال امسك عليك لسانك و ليسعك بيتك و ابك على خطيئتك.

I asked, "O Prophet! What is salvation?" He replied, "Control your tongue and make your home easy for you [by improving your relationship with your family] and weep on your weaknesses."

How to avoid backbiting?

- One should spend his/her maximum time in remembering God. (S)he should concentrate more in his/her prayers.
- Person should visualize the punishments of backbiting described in the Quran and the Hadith.
- Concept of death [and God's Accountability after death] should be kept in mind.
- One should consider that his/her reputation will be lost in the society due to backbiting.
- People often commit backbiting of their enemies. It becomes a habit. After that, they start backbiting of their friends. They should consider that the relationship of their friendship could be broken because of backbiting.
- Good deeds of a person doing backbiting are to be transferred to the account of the backbitten person. He should consider that he would have nothing on the Day of Judgment due to backbiting.
- Main reason to avoid backbiting is that the Almighty God has forbidden it. Success in this world and hereafter is not achievable by violating the God's commandments.

I am not jealous with the people more knowledgeable than me but I am sympathetic to the people having less knowledge than me. Salman Farsi رضى الله عنه

Kinds of Backbiting

Religious scholars describe four types of backbiting;

- Backbiting is denying the faith: For example a person is doing backbiting of his/her brother. (S)he is asked to avoid it, but (s)he says, "I am doing it, it is lawful." That person has changed the right and wrong of the Almighty's law, and the person changing the Almighty's law is the one who denies the faith.
- Backbiting is hypocrisy: For example, a person considers other as a pious person but commit his/her backbiting. It is a form of hypocrisy.
- Backbiting is a sin: When a person knows that backbiting is a sin but commits it, he becomes a sinner. He has to repent.
- Backbiting is allowed: In certain circumstances, backbiting is not only allowed but it is required. When a person commits sins in an overt manner and his character is harmful for others, his/her backbiting is allowed. Prophet said that tell the people the bad deeds of a bad person to let them avoid that person.

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Listening Backbiting?

It is essential for the person who is listening other's backbiting, to refuse listening the backbiter. If it is not possible for him/her, then (s)he should avoid such sittings. As the backbiter will be accountable in the court of the God, similarly the listener will also be accountable for listening that backbiting.

If the listener is a healthy and powerful person, (s)he must stop the backbiter. If (s)he is not a powerful person, then at least, (s)he should consider this act as a wrong act. Sometimes, a person is refuting the other's backbiting apparently but he wants it to be continued, such attitude is a form of hypocrisy and sin.

If the listener is not able to refute the backbiter or leave that place, (s)he should not listen it with attention. (S)he should start remembering the in his/her heart. By this method, if some backbiting comes to his/her ear, (s)he will not be accountable for it.

Permissible Backbiting

- Complaining about an offence to the Police or other legal authorities is not a form of backbiting.
- Seeking help to stop an evil practice is also not a form of backbiting.
- In order to get a legal opinion from a jurist, describing one's behavior is not backbiting. But a person should be careful while specifying the names of other people at that time.
- A person whose evil practices are already exposed and well known e.g. evil practices of the ruler, its description is not included in the definition of backbiting.
- If someone is about to deal with a dishonest person, informing him/her about the evil element of that person in order to protect the interests of dealing person is not backbiting. This must be done with a positive attitude of well-wishing and not with a negative attitude of harming someone.

(Excerpts from the work of Justice Karam Shah Al-Azhari, Selection and Translation by: Mubashir Nazir, Reviewed by: Muhammad Amir Khan, Courtesy: www.zia-ul-ummat.com)

Your experiences and comments may change other's life. Send an email at mubashirnazir100@gmail.com

Think about it!

- List two reasons for backbiting other than those mentioned by the author.
- A person needs your advice. In his workplace, his boss is fond of backbiting. The boss compels his subordinate to listen the backbiting of others. How should this subordinate deal with his boss?