

## Backbiting and Exposing Sins of Others

By Riyaz Ibrahim

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*All praise belongs to Allāh, and may the choicest salutations and blessings be upon the Final Prophet, Muḥammad ibn Abdillāh and his family, as is the right of blessings to be invoked upon them.*

One of the most liked characteristics of a Muslim is that he refrains from evil talk, slander, backbiting and that which avails no benefit. Allah Most High states in the Glorious Qur'an, '...nor let some of you backbite others.' (*Qur'an*, 49:12)

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ says, 'Whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day should either speak what is good or remain silent.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, Musnad Aḥmad, Jāmi' Tirmidhī, Sunan Ibn Mājah*)

Imam Nawawī رحمه الله has gone as far as saying that exposing people's sins and mistakes is the work of hypocrites, whilst Sayyidunā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه says, 'When you want to mention your companion's faults, remember your own faults.'

Exposing the sins and faults of others harms two parties. The person that is spoken about will no doubt lose face in society, feel victimised and, even more so, humiliated amongst friends, family and wider society – regardless of what is being alleged is true or not. This no doubt triggers a much bigger problem. It is perceived as kicking someone whilst their down; in other words, humiliating and degrading the individual, whereas Islam, on the other hand, requires us in such instances to display gracious and courteous manners by first and foremost putting a STOP to further exposure of the sin/fault in question if it has already become public, otherwise it is not for us to speak ill about anyone.

Secondly, the, acquainted, well-informed and those who have this person's good at heart should, in private, advise, guide and make the accused and exposed conscious of the magnitude of the sin committed. If we, the general public are truly sincere, then what right do we have to expose sins, faults and transgressions of others when we ourselves are a burden on society, the land we walk on and the skies that shade us, due to the weight and magnitude of our own sins!

Sayyidunā Abu Bakrah رضي الله عنه reports the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ saying, 'Indeed, your blood, property and honour are sacred, like the sanctity of this day of yours, in this city of yours.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim*)

Explaining backbiting, the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ in no uncertain terms says, 'To say something about your brother which he dislikes.' Someone asked him, 'Even if what I say is true about my brother?' He replied, 'If he possesses what you mention, then you have backbited him and, if in him does not contain that which you say, then you have slandered him.' (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, Jāmi' Tirmidhī*)

Someone who takes interest in backbiting is a partner to it. He is not absolved of the sin of listening unless he objects to it. He should leave the gathering or change the course of the conversation if he is able to. The Glorious Qur'ān states, 'And, when they hear vain talk, they turn away from it.' (*Qur'ān, 28:55*) 'And who turn away from vain talk.' (*Qur'ān, 23:3*)

The reward of the person who 'conceals the faults and sins of a believer is similar to the reward of the person who has brought to life a girl buried alive. (Abū Dāwūd). The rewards are so great!

If, inadvertently, a sin of someone is exposed then the embarrassment and humiliation it will bring to the sinner will no doubt prevent him from committing that sin again for fear of bringing more shame upon himself. However, it sometimes also has the opposite effect in that the sinner feels no more shame and commits sins openly without fear of a reprisal or condemnation.

What is clear is that a Muslim should not expose the sins or faults of others by speaking about them, circulating text messages, video clips on whatsapp app or through other electronic devices or means, as this will be encouraging others to do the same. People tend to fire away on keyboards and typepads without considering the consequences their actions could have, though how trivial the action of forwarding something may seem. The Glorious Qur'ān clearly warns against this, 'Verily, those who like that obscenity should circulate among those who believe, they will have a painful torment in this world and the hereafter.' (*Qur'ān, 24:19*)

Yes, sins are widespread in society and its effect is spreading like wildfire due to our failure to adhere to the teaching of the Glorious Qur'ān brought to us by our Beloved Prophet ﷺ, coupled with the fact that we have left ourselves exposed to all avenues of sin and vices. Giving publicity and exposure to avenues and channels through which sins are propagated has played a damning role in how society views and projects sin. When sin is committed openly, immorality becomes commonplace, society begins to accept it, and some will go as far as revealing one another's sins and faults openly or to the extent of attributing sins to themselves, and then revel in it!

The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ says, 'Obscenity does not ever manifest in a people to the extent that they become brazen about it except that epidemics

and suffering unprecedented in their forebears spread among them...' (*Sunan Ibn Mājah*)

If we cannot be good towards our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters, then should we really expect any better from those who are not from amongst us? We seem to be failing at every level.

May Allāh Most High safeguard us and the Muslim Ummah from committing sins, adultery, immorality, immodesty, indecency, exposing the sins and faults of others and all *fāḥishah* and obscenities that society is embroiled in and unashamed of. May He enable us to use all means of communication such as whatsapp, facebook etc responsibly. May Allāh Most High guide us all to His pleasure. *Āmīn*.

I herewith attach an excerpt on the causes of backbiting penned by Mawlāna Ibrahim Mia Ṣaḥeb, khalīfah of Shaykh al-Hadith Hadhrat Mawlana Muhammad Zakariyya ﷺ:

### **There are eight causes of backbiting:**

1. **Anger:** Anger is the main cause of backbiting and other spiritual diseases. When a man tells another a thing that he dislikes, it fills hatred in his mind and heart. To avenge this feeling, he begins to backbite.
2. **Pleasing others:** The next cause is to please and satisfy his friends and associates.
3. **Freeing from guilt:** The third cause is to free oneself from blame and guilt by backbiting about others.
4. **Attribute:** The fourth cause is to attribute sins to others whilst showing one's own innocence.
5. **Express glory:** The fifth cause is to praise and glorify oneself by making fools of others in the process.
6. **Hatred:** The sixth cause is hatred towards others. Hatred drives one to 'revenge' and what better way to take revenge than to revile the name of another?
7. **Jest and ridicule:** The seventh cause is jest and ridicule, trying to prove oneself to be superior and more intelligent than others.
8. **Contempt:** The eighth cause of backbiting is due to dislike or disrespect. In such a case one would consider the person's honour to be unworthy of protection and would not think twice about dragging his name through the mud.

Besides the above eight, there are three additional causes for those who are learned and religious. These causes are very subtle and difficult to pinpoint and Shaytaan disguises them as being 'good deeds':

1. **Faults:** The first cause is pointing out the faults of those in authority. When the people notice some faults in a religious and pious man, they would compliment all his good qualities but ... mention that he has one

unfortunate fault. If they express that one fault it would be backbiting.

2. **Sympathy:** The second cause is the sympathy that is shown towards the pious person who was backbitten about. If one had to say that: "The affairs of that unfortunate man have caused anxiety" and then elaborate on the things that were said, mention the name of the person or make any reference to what was said, that will also be considered as backbiting.

3. **Anger:** The third cause is to express anger for Allāh's pleasure. If an incident is mentioned and the person's name is mentioned, then it will be backbiting, even if the anger is justified and you are trying to defend the person who is in the right, but if the name of the person who is in the wrong is not mentioned, then it will not be backbiting.