

Backbiting & Slandering

A Muslim is someone who declares the shahadah 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad (saw) is the final Messenger of

Allah.' This is the foundation upon which the Islamic personality is based. However today we find that amongst us in colleges, mosques and communities, the Islamic personality has been exchanged for personalities which contradict with the shahadah.

One of the major actions which Muslims do which contradicts with Islam is that of backbiting. It extends to such levels that

Muslims may talk about other Muslims in the lack of their presence. This is now common even amongst some Islamic groups, let alone individual Muslims. In many cases it becomes a social landmark to backbite Muslims to build one's own position. Sometimes people talk about someone's physical features by saying she looks like so and so, or they discuss about the lifestyle of Muslims, or they discuss what this or that group has said or done.

Sometimes such talk reaches the level of slander like "so and so is not honest" , or "so and so is a fasiq because he is not one of s " or in extreme cases," so and so is Kafir" (disbeliever).

All in all, this produces relationships amongst Muslims of distrust, disunity and of non co-operation. On top of all of this the ones

who undertake of backbiting are in a state of disobedience to Allah (swt) and are therefore sinful. Allah (swt) says: "Neither backbite one another. Would one of you love to eat the flesh of his dead brother. You abhor that (so abhor the other)! And keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is Relenting, Merciful." [EMQ al-Hujurat:12]

In one hadith, narrated by Muslim on the authority of Abu Hurairah, it is related that the Messenger of Allah (saw) asked the

Sahabah, "Do you know what is meant by backbiting? They answered, Allah and His Messenger know better. He (saw) said, To narrate such things about your brother which he dislikes. One of the audience asked, Even if my brother may be like that? He (saw) said, If such defects as you say, are present in him then you have backbited and if he does not have what you say, then you are committing slander."

In another hadith narrated by Abu Dawud on the authority of Anas, the Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "On the night of Isra I

passed by some people who had copper nails and they were clawing their faces and chests with them. I asked Gabriel, Who are these people? He said, These are the people who eat the flesh of human beings and disgraced them."

In another narration by al-Tabarani on the authority of Ibn Masood, he related, "We were sitting with the Prophet (saw). Then a

man got up and left, whereupon another person spoke ill of him. The Prophet (saw) told him: Pick your teeth. The man replied:

Why? I haven't eaten any meat. The Prophet (saw) replied: You have eaten your brother's flesh."

It should be clear to us all therefore, that the sin of backbiting is equivalent to eating the flesh of our brother or sister and is

subject to the punishment of Allah (swt) as the evidences prove. However, the Islamic personality is not only upheld by

abstaining from backbiting but if someone does backbite then you are responsible to either discourage listening to backbiting or to contradict the backbiter and, if this has no effect, then leave the company.

In a hadith narrated by Tirmidhi on the authority of Abu Darda, the Messenger of Allah said, "A person who avoids dishonouring his brother, Allah will keep his face away from the Fire of Hell on the Day of Judgement."

In another hadith in Ahmed's Musnad, the Prophet of Allah said, "If anyone defends his brother who is slandered in his absence, it will be (his) due from Allah to set him free from the Fire."

Also Allah (swt) says: "And when they hear vain talk, they withdraw from it." [EMQ al-Qasas:55]

One of the classical mufasssireen, Ibn Kathir, says regarding this ayah in his book Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim, Vol 3, Page 380, that Ibn

Ishaq narrates the asbab al-nazul (occasion of revelation) for this and the preceding ayat and says: that twenty Christians came to

Makkah to meet the Prophet and see what his Message was about. They found him and started to question him (saw). He (saw)

started to recite the Qur'an. On hearing the Qur'an and acknowledging it they began to cry and accepted Islam. After this they left

the Prophet (saw) to go back home. On the way they met Abu Jahl along with a group of people from Quraysh. The people of

Quraysh blocked the way and Abu Jahl said to the new Muslims: You're useless. Your people sent you to prove for them that their

religion is correct and the Prophet's is incorrect. You changed your religion and you believe in him. We do not know anyone who

is more stupid than you. The Muslims answered by saying: And when they hear vain talk they withdraw from it and say: Unto us

our works and unto you your works. Peace be unto you! We desire not the ignorant. The ayah was revealed confirming the statement they made.

Ibn Kathir goes further to explain that mixing with people who speak vain talk, meaning the people who are ignorant or talk with ignorance, should be avoided.

The evidences also make it clear that when suspicions or attacks against Muslims are present then Muslims should verify such information to find out the truth and not to mix with people whose topic of discussion is based on ignorance, backbiting or slander, in line with the ayah stated earlier.

Backbiting and slander are sins which affect the strength of trust in the Ummah and it is clear that Allah (swt) does not pardon Muslims until they have taken pardon from the ones who have been abused.

In one hadith, narrated by Bayhaqi on the authority of Anas, the Messenger of Allah (saw) said, "The expiation of backbiting is to seek forgiveness from the one you have backbitten, saying: O Allah! forgive us and him."

In this age it is of vital importance to hold onto the rope of Allah, namely the Qur'an and Sunnah, to have unity within the Ummah and to enable our relationships to thrive with trust. Once the Islamic personality is represented and the sins of backbiting and slander are stopped then we know that the Ummah is working to follow the Guidance.