

## BACKBITING

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 4

## الغيبة

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand what it means to backbite
- Understand the difference between backbiting and slander
- Understand the motivations for backbiting and slander
- Be reminded that backbiting is forbidden in Islam and tips to avoid it
- Understand the circumstances when backbiting is permitted
- Know how to seek forgiveness for backbiting

## BACKBITING

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ  
الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ ۖ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم  
بَعْضًا ۚ أَيُّحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا  
فَكَرَهُتُمُوهُ ۚ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“...nor let some of you backbite others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? But you abhor it; and be careful of (your duty to) Allah, surely Allah is al-Tawwab (One who accepts repentance much), Merciful.” (49:12)

In the previous lessons we learnt about minding the tongue and understanding the evils we can cause by misusing our tongue in the sense of speech i.e. saying wrong or bad things.

This lesson will explore two particular evils that are caused only by the use of the tongue and unfortunately, are a very common problem. These are the evils of:

- Backbiting (Gḥbah)
- Slander (Tohmah)

## UNDERSTANDING BACKBITING AND SLANDER

To reveal the bad quality of a believer behind his back (i.e. without him knowing), which is actually found in him (is true) is called Gḥbah (backbiting). However, to accuse someone of something which is untrue is called Tohmah (slander).

Abu Dhar, a very close companion of the Prophet, once asked the Prophet (SAW):

“O Messenger of Allah, what is *ghībah* (backbiting)?”

The Prophet (saw) replied:

“It is to mention about your brother that which he detests”

Abu Dhar asked:

“O Messenger of Allah, what if that which is mentioned about a person is true?”

To which the Prophet (saw) replied:

“Know that when you mention that which is in him, you have committed *ghībah* (backbiting), and when you mention that which is not in him, then you have slandered him”<sup>i</sup>

There are different ways of committing this grave sin and they include, for instance, speaking negatively about someone in one of the following ways:

1. In person i.e. face to face, to another person or in a gathering
2. Over the phone when speaking to a friend or even a family member
3. Through all the different online methods of communication – the most relevant example of this today is using social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to insult or to publicize other people’s sins and mistakes whether they are true or not.
4. Listening to someone else backbite without doing something to stop it or discourage it is also not permissible.

The Holy Prophet (saw) has said:

“The one who listens to *Ghībah* is one of those who do *Ghībah*”<sup>ii</sup>

## THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND BACKBITING

Backbiting and slander are a result of jealousy and pride. If a person is respected, has done some good, has helped others, there will always be people who are angry and bitter that such a person is respected by all.

People backbite for the following reasons:

- To damage other people’s reputations and make themselves look better. This often occurs among colleagues.
- To gain revenge against a person who they have a grudge or grievance against.

## BACKBITING & SLANDER ARE FORBIDDEN

This is a major sin and something which is very much detested in Islam. We should avoid backbiting at all times.



The Holy Qur’an describes the reality of backbiting as eating the flesh of a dead corpse, as in the ayah above. The Prophet (saw) saw this reality when he ascended to heaven during his *Mi’rāj*.

These two actions are impermissible because they spoil people’s names and characters. When you speak badly of someone, you make others think badly of them. Another reason why it is bad is because the people are not there to defend themselves. If you hear negative things about others, you should give the others a chance to defend themselves by explaining, before you believe what you hear.

Here are some *ayāt* and narrations about the graveness of these sins:

Allah (SWT) says:

“*Wayl (Hell) is for every Slanderer, defamer,*” (104: 1)

## THE EFFECTS OF BACKBITING

Backbiting leads to scandal among the community of Muslims and also damages people’s reputation very badly. It also leads to animosity, hatred and great conflict between people and can lead to breaking of friendships, partnerships and even families.

## HOW TO AVOID BACKBITING

In order to avoid backbiting, we should try our best to *pre-plan our gatherings* and have something useful and positive to talk about. Otherwise, the conversation may unfortunately turn towards criticising people who are absent.

Not only are we not allowed to backbite ourselves, we are also not allowed to listen to backbiting. If someone is backbiting, we should take the following steps to stop them:

1. Tell them that we do not want to listen to this
2. Leave that gathering or conversation, unless we really cannot
3. Defend the person who is being criticised

Backbiting is only permitted when a person sins openly and his sins are known to all, such as if a person roams the streets with a bottle of wine on his lips. "One who sins openly is not worthy of respect and his Ghı̄bah is not *Harām*"<sup>iii</sup>

## REPENTING FROM BACKBITING

In order to repent from this sin, we have to take three steps:

1. Regret the act
2. Seek forgiveness from Allah (SWT)
3. If the person has heard of what we have said about them, we must seek their forgiveness and try to repair their reputation. However, if he has not, there is no need to ask forgiveness from him directly, but we must make sure we seek Allah's forgiveness and try to stop the things we said from spreading.<sup>iv</sup> We also need to restore the person's honour or reputation that we affected by backbiting.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.islamic-laws.com/backbiting.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> (Mustadrak ul-Wasa'il)

<sup>iii</sup> . (Makasib Muhrima page 27, Vol. 4)

### References

Islamic Ethics and Morality: Why are Gheebat and Tohmat Haraam? -

<http://www.ezsoftech.com/stories/mis56.asp#islamic>

Backbiting (Gheebah) - [http://www.islamic-laws.com/backbiting.htm#Traditions\\_on\\_Ghiiba\\_\\_](http://www.islamic-laws.com/backbiting.htm#Traditions_on_Ghiiba__)

## Review Questions

### Q1. Slander (tohmah) is:

- a. To accuse someone of something which is not true
- b. To talk about someone behind their back
- c. To steal from someone

### Q2. We can avoid backbiting by:

- a. Speaking less
- b. Pre-planning our gatherings
- c. Attending lots of gatherings where we chat and socialise with others

Greater Sins; The Complete Book, by **Ayatullah Abdul Husayn Dastaghaib Shirazi**, Chapter 44, The Forty-first Greater Sin: Backbiting - [http://www.al-islam.org/greater\\_sins\\_complete/](http://www.al-islam.org/greater_sins_complete/)  
Social Rules in Islam, 'Backbiting' – Lecture by Sheikh Mansour Leghaei  
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