

Lying, Backbiting and Slander (part 2 of 2)

Description: The lesson explains backbiting and slander in Islamic ethics.

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Objectives

- To learn the definition of backbiting and slander and the difference between them.
- To understand why we gossip.
- To understand the Islamic prohibition of backbiting.
- To learn when backbiting is allowed.

Islam is a religion of peace, love and compassion which teaches us that we should respect the honor, reputation and privacy of others. Lies, suspicion, backbiting, slander, and gossip are destructive, major sins that go against what Islam stands for and sow enmity and discord among Muslims. They cause hostilities between family members, neighbors, and friends. Therefore, Islam clearly defines and prohibits them in the severest of terms.

What exactly is Backbiting & Slander?

Our Prophet has clearly explained them. One time he asked his companions:

“Do you know what is backbiting?” They said, “Allah and His Messenger know best.” He said, “Saying something about your brother that he dislikes.” It was said, “What if what I say about my brother is true?” He said, “If what you say is true then you have backbitten about him, and if it is not true, then you have slandered him.” (*Saheeh Muslim*)

‘Backbiting means that a man mentions about a person something which is true behind his back.’ (*Silsilah as-Sahihah*)

Making fun of people by making negative facial expressions or by hand gestures while they are unaware is also a form of backbiting.

Why Do We Gossip And Backbite?

- To get things off one’s chest especially in case of hatred.

- To join in with a group of friends.
- To show our superiority and put others down.
- To act funny and joke.
- Out of jealousy or anger.
- Out of pity for someone.
- To relieve boredom.
- To impress others.
- Out of arrogance.

Strict Prohibition of Backbiting

Allah prohibits backbiting in the Quran by comparing to the disgusting act of cannibalism: **“O you who believe! Avoid much (negative) assumption. Indeed, some assumption is sin. And do not spy or backbite each other. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful.” (Quran 49:12)**

Often times we backbite and gossip about others without thinking much of it. We treat it lightly, however, Allah reminds us that in fact it may be a serious sin in the sight of Allah! The Quran says: **“When you were propagating it with your tongues, and uttering with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, you counted it a little thing, while with Allah it was very great.” (Quran 24:15)**

Many people are so busy spreading slander they hear that they do not stop for a minute to ponder whether it is true or not. Allah says: **“And why, when you heard it, did you not say: ‘It is not for us to speak of this. Exalted are You, [O Allah]; this is a great slander?’” (Quran 24:16)**

We need to be careful of letting our tongues slip. Prophet Muhammad said: **“When man wakes up in the morning each day, all his body parts warn his tongue saying: ‘Fear Allah with regards to us, for we are under your mercy; if you are upright, we will be upright and if you are corrupt, we will be corrupt.’” (Tirmidhi)**

The reward of controlling our tongue is Paradise. Prophet Muhammad said: **“He who protects his tongue from unlawful utterances and his private parts from illegal sexual intercourse, I shall guarantee him entrance into Paradise.” (Saheeh Al-Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim)**

Prohibition of Listening to Gossip

We should not pay attention to gossip that is criticizing a fellow Muslim or listen to it with enjoyment and hope to hear more. Allah says, **“And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge. Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart - about all those [one] will be questioned.” (Quran 17:36)** The Prophet said, **“Whoever defends the honor of his brother, Allah will protect his face from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.” (Silsilah as-Sahihah)**

We should remember the qualities of the best Muslim as defined for us by our Prophet. He said, **“He is the one from whom Muslims are safe from the evil of his tongue and hands.” (Saheeh Muslim)**

When is Backbiting Allowed?

Islam teaches us that if people are being ridiculed or backbitten in our presence, we should defend their honor. If we neglect doing so, we risk depriving ourselves of the ever-needed help and mercy from Allah. Yet, some situations allow us to inform others of what someone has done.

1. Complaint to someone in authority who can address the wrong when an injustice has been done.
2. Seeking religious guidance from a Muslim scholar.
3. To get help in changing a wrong or to prevent a disaster.
4. Consultation in matters of marriage, business, asking about a neighbor before moving, etc.

In these cases we are allowed to reveal only as much as necessary about the person. All these forms of 'backbiting' are allowed.

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