



# NIZAMIYE MOSQUE COMPLEX

“Where heart and mind meet”

## FRIDAY SERMON – 17 : BACKBITING (GHIYBAH)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ  
إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبَ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ  
أَنْ يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ

49:12

رَحِيمٌ

O you who have believed, 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 brother when dead? You would detest it. And fear Allah ; indeed, Allah is Accepting of repentance and Merciful. *Al-Hujurat, 49/12*

### Dear Brother / Sister,

If people talked about and discussed the truth in open and brave settings under equal conditions, if they spoke in the same way when the others were not present, there would be no wars, fights and sorrows. You will find seeds of backbiting under all disasters and even eternal destructions. All evils are accompanied by backbiting.

We are talking about such a sly, disgusting disease that it can spread faster than plague and one can get rid of it only through an insistent struggle and deep sincerity. A person who wonders whether all good deeds disappear in the trap of backbiting or not should observe conversations and meditate on the types of backbiting.

The definitions below were made based on clues in basic resources. A classification exactly like this does not exist in the texts that deal with the issue but the contents of our classification exist in the resources.

• **Open, plain backbiting:** The Prophet (pbuh) defined backbiting as follows:

“**Mentioning your brother in a way that he would not like.**” He said,

“**Saying something that you cannot say to your brother's face behind his back is backbiting.**”



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Saying something that is true about a person in his absence in a way that he would not like is open backbiting. Listen to the talks about the playing styles of footballers; listen to what celebrity fanatics who pry into private lives of artists. Pay attention to your talking style when you talk about your neighbours, relatives, friends and even your own children. Many people do not notice when they talk about other people let alone backbiting. Would you like to be mentioned like that if you were the people who were being talked about? Would you need to change your sentences and even your stance if the person you were talking about were present? Then, what you do is plain backbiting, the simplest form of backbiting if what you say is true.

• **Backbiting with slander:** The Prophet (pbuh) said:

**“If what you said about that person was true, you committed backbiting; if it was not true, you slandered.”**

**Slander** is the ugliest sin. If the information you used while backbiting was not what you saw, if you heard it from somebody else, it probably was altered until it came to you and was not completely true.

When we report what we hear from others or our friends, the probability of backbiting turning into backbiting with slander is at least 80%. For, 80% of the people do not check whether what you hear is true or not; they add their feelings and preferences to what they report; their memory is not so good; when the information passes from one person to others, it changes a lot. The probability of slandering by those who do not act sensitively regarding the issue is 100%.

• **Secret (Hidden) Backbiting:** It is backbiting through thinking, having bad thoughts about someone as we usually do. In the Quranic verse in which it is emphasized how bad backbiting is, the following is stated:

**“O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: and spy not on each other.”**

Not all thoughts and guesses but some thoughts are regarded as backbiting. Imam Ghazali described it as ‘**backbiting through the heart**’; he rejected even ‘*telling oneself another person's mistake*’; he defined backbiting through the heart as *having bad thoughts about a person without seeing, hearing anything bad about him*’.

Our compassionate Creator tells us that He will forgive us for the crimes that we commit against Him if we regret. However, if we have violated other people's rights, He does not promise to forgive us even if we are martyred. Allah regards the rights of His slaves as superior to His own rights. Having bad thoughts about a person unjustly causes the violation of his rights. Backbiting is generally a crime committed against people and it can be forgiven only by the relevant people. Therefore, if we have bad thoughts about the ethics and honor of an innocent person and if we think that our idea is right, we will be punished for it.



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The Prophet (pbuh) says,

**“If a person criticizes his believer for committing a sin, he will not die before he himself commits that sin.”**

• **Hypocritical Backbiting:** It is the most shameful kind of backbiting; Imam Ghazali called it ‘hypocritical backbiting’. The person who backbites speaks as follows: *“May Allah forgive him! He sometimes confuses like us.”* *“I hope he will improve.”* With these words, a person tries to show seemingly that he likes the person he is talking about and he wants good things for him but secretly implies that he is not so good and that he makes mistakes. The person listening to him acts hypocritically too by saying, *“Forget about it; it is backbiting.”* When he speaks like that, he does not really want to prevent backbiting; though he seems to be saying the opposite, he secretly likes it when people backbite.

• **Backbiting with Tale bearing :** It is the backbiting that involves telling a person's words about another person to each other in a way that will sow discord between them. The Prophet (pbuh) state the following regarding the issue:

**“A talebearer cannot enter Paradise.”**

The Quran warns us as follows:

**“O ye who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth, lest ye harm people unwittingly, and afterwards become full of repentance for what ye have done.”**

Hasan al-Basri says,

“A person who reports others' words to you will definitely report your words to others.... For, what he does is both backbiting and oppression, treachery and deception, jealousy and discord, mischief and trick.”

We definitely have the right to report the words of others. However, it should start with an expression of friendship like, *“My beloved friend or my dear teacher said...”* and continue with nice words of that person that will please him. Otherwise, if a person starts speaking like, *“That guy said ..... about you - or somebody else”* and expresses a sentence that will distress the owner of that sentence, he should be ready for misfortunes.

• **Mass Backbiting:** The types of backbiting classified above can be about individuals or masses and group of people. In order to be able to be freed from the sin of backbiting, it is necessary to ask for forgiveness from the whole group. Mass backbiting is the most difficult, pitiable and terrible backbiting that can be committed by man. The phrase **“...lest ye harm people unwittingly...”** in the verse above, emphasizes the danger of massive backbiting by mentioning ‘harming people’.



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The atonement to be paid by the backbiters who disdain and make fun of the members of a religious community, religion or sect, members of a race or nation will be really high in the hereafter. For instance, a person who tells a joke about a prototype of a region or nation should know that he will have to atone for it to all members of that region or nation if the joke offends them. The most horrible ends have been prepared for those who mock others. The Quran states the following in the chapter of al-Humaza for them: **“Woe to every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter!”**

The words that abase our belief system, that commit massive backbiting and slander are published almost every day in media. We regard each of these attacks as rusty spears that cause blood to come out of our spirits. These attacks against our honor keep us up at night. When we see our young children crying at schools we scream out of frustration. Everybody who shows respect to the honor of humanity are affected badly by these massive backbiting and slander.

• **Shared / Common Backbiting:** The person who commits backbiting is not the one that utters or implies it only; the one who listens to it willingly or the one who likes listening to backbiting though he himself does not utter it is also regarded to have backbitten. A person who sees a murder being committed and does not prevent it though he can is also regarded a murderer; likewise, a person who does not intervene when backbiting is committed will share the sin of backbiting. In this sense, backbiting - *except the secret type* - is like prostitution committed by more than one person.

The following statement of the Prophet (pbuh) indicates the responsibility of a person who listens to backbiting:

**“If a person does not help his Muslim brother when he is backbitten in his presence though he can, Allah will disdain him both in the world and the hereafter.”**

Besides, this hadith threatens a person who hears backbiting and does not protect the honor of his brother by interfering more than the person who backbites. We understand that those who do not interfere when someone is backbitten unjustly in their presence due to their little fears will not lead an honorable life.