?Why People Backbite

The excuse presented to them for this, rather than any other obvious transgression, is perhaps heedlessness about its being prohibited despite all the discussions of verses and narratives warning us all in its regard. This is the least excuse presented by those who are habitual in being thus heedless. Perhaps they take these sins as being not affecting their status of mastership on account of this type of contemptible behavior being hidden from those who seek a station with the ignorant ones. If Satan insinuates to them to drink wine or commit adultery with chaste women, they would not obey him because it is seen as a sin by the masses of people who see its place as being low. To them, it is one of the clearly visible sins. Had people referred to their power of reasoning and sought light from their intellects, they would have found a distant difference between both sins and a great deal of variation. Nay! There is no way to compare sins which undermine the right of Alla-h, Praise to Him, in particular and what is relevant of them to His servants, especially the latter's honor, for honor is greater than wealth and more precious. The more precious a thing is, the greater is the sin of violating it in addition to total corruption as we, God willing, will be witnessing.

I liked to place in this message a group of statements about backbiting, how the Book and the Sunnah prohibit it, how reason leads to this conclusion, naming it Kashf al-Reeba an Ahkam al-Gheeba (removing doubt about the rulings relevant to backbiting), following it with whatever relates to backbiting and some rulings about envy, concluding it with urging communication, enjoining love and kindness. I have arranged it into an Introduction, Chapters and a Conclusion. About the Introduction, its definition and a group of prohibitions which carry warnings, here below are some of them: We say that gheeba, backbiting, as an expression, has two definitions: One of them is famous: It is mentioning someone's condition during his absence in a way which he hates, attributing to him what is regarded as a shortcoming according to convention in order to belittle and speak ill of him. Beware of underestimating something wrong when you speak to the doctor, for example, or when you plead to the ruler for mercy when you condemn time or talks about a blind man and point out their shortcomings. One can do away with doing so by voicing displeasure with these things which are attributed to him.

The other is attracting one's attention to something whereby he hates to be identified. This is more general than the first because of making a statement, a reference, or narrating a tale or other things, and it is better because of what we will be explaining about backbiting not being restricted to only making statements.

asking his companions, “Do you know what (ص) A famous tradition cites the Prophet backbiting is?” They said, “Alla-h and His Messenger know best.” He said, “It is when you say something about your brother which he hates.” It was said to him, “Suppose what I say about my brother is true.” He said, “If what you say is true, it is backbiting, and if it is not, it is slandering.” This is recorded in Tanbi-h al-Khwatir, Vol. 1, p. 118. It is also recorded in Al-Targheeb wal Tarheeb, Vol. 3, p. 515.

saying, “How ,(ص) Some people mentioned the name of a man in the presence of the Prophet said, “You have backbitten your fellow.” They said, “O Messenger of Alla- (ص) weak he is!” He said, “If you wrongfully attribute something to (ص) h! What we have said about him is true!” He him, you will be slandering him.” This is stated in Ad-Durr Al-Manthoor, Vol. 6, p. 96.

There is consensus about prohibiting backbiting. It is a major sin due to both the Book of Alla-h and the Sunnah warning against it.

Alla-h Almighty clearly holds it in contempt in His Book, making a similitude between one who is guilty of it to one who eats the flesh of his dead brother. He says, “O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible), for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy on each other, nor speak ill of others by way of backbiting. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay! You would abhor it... but fear Alla-h, for Alla-h is oft-Returning, Most Merciful” (Qur'a-n, 49:12).

has said, “A Muslim, all of him, is prohibited from harming (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h another Muslim, whether shedding his blood, or robbing him of his possessions, or harming his honor” (Vol. 1, p. 115 of Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir).

has said, (ص) Ja-bir [ibn Abdulla-h al-Ansa-ri] and Abu- Sa`i-d al-Khudri have said, “He ‘Beware of backbiting, for backbiting is worse than adultery. An adulterer repents, so Alla-h accepts his repentance, but one who backbites is not forgiven unless his fellow [whom he had backbitten] forgives him’” (Vol. 1, p. 115 of Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir; p. 116 of Irsha-d al-Qulu-b).

is quoted as having said, “The recording angels (ص) In a famous lengthy narrative, the Prophet report the deeds of a servant of Alla-h, and he has a light like the rays of the sun which stays on till it reaches the lower heavens as the recording angels think greatly of his deeds and testify for him. But when it reaches the gate, the angel in charge of the gate says, ‘Smite the face of the doer of this deed! I am in charge of monitoring backbiting; my Lord ordered me not to let any good deed of one who backbites people reach my Lord’” (see p. 74, Vol. 1 of Al-Targhib wal Tarhib).

saying, “During the night of isra-', I passed by (ص) Anas is said as having quoted the Prophet people who were scratching their noses with their nails. I asked Gabriel about them. Gabriel

said, ‘These are the people who backbite others and speak ill of their honor’” (p. 115, Vol. 1 of Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir; p. 116 of Irsha-d al-Qulu-b).

Al-Bara-' [ibn `A-zib] has said, “The Messenger of Alla-h delivered a sermon to us once till the free ladies in their own homes heard him. He said, ‘O folks who have believed in tongue but not in heart! Do not backbite the Muslims, and do not trace their shortcomings, for if one keeps track of the shortcoming of his brother, Alla-h will track his shortcoming, and if Alla-h tracks his shortcoming, He will expose him even in the deepest depth of his home’” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 115).

Sulayma-n ibn Ja-bir has said, “I went to see the Messenger of Alla-h, peace and blessings of Alla-h be with him and his progeny, and said to him, ‘Teach me something good whereby Alla-h benefits me.’ He said, ‘Do not underestimate any good deed even if it is an act of pouring from your bucket into a cup of one seeking a drink, and when you meet your brother, meet him with a smile. When he goes away, do not backbite him’” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 115).

delivered a sermon to us once and (ص) Anas [ibn Ma-lik] has said, “The Messenger of Alla-h mentioned usury, touching upon its magnanimity. He said, ‘One dirham is won by a man through usury is looked upon by Alla-h as greater than thirty-six acts of adultery a man commits. The most serious type of usury is when one speaks ill of a Muslim’s honor’” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 116).

when he (ص) Ja-bir has said, “We were in the company of the Messenger of Alla-h approached two graves of persons being tormented. He said, ‘They are not being tormented because of having committed a major sin. One of them used to backbite people. The other was called for a fresh palm leaf or two (ص) too careless to cleanse himself after urinating.’ He said, ‘This will lighten their torment as (ص) which he broke, planting one on each grave. He long as they are not dry’” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 116).

ordered people once to fast then said, ‘Nobody (ص) Anas has said, “The Messenger of Alla-h should break his fast till I give him permission.’ People fasted. When it was evening, a man would come and say, ‘O Messenger of Alla-h! I have kept my fast; so, please grant me permission to break my fast,’ and he would give him permission. A man came and said, ‘O Messenger of Alla-h! Two young women from among your folks have kept fasting, but they are (ص) too shy to come to you; so, please give them permission to break their fast.’ The Prophet turned away from him. The man repeated his request, whereupon the Prophet said to him, ‘They did not uphold their fast. How can one fast while eating people’s flesh? Go and tell them that if they were fasting, they should vomit.’ The man returned to the young women and narrated the above to them. They vomited. Each of them vomited a clot of blood. The man

said to him, ‘I swear by the One (ص) and told him about it. He (ص) returned to the Prophet Who holds the soul of Muhammad in His hand that had they (clots) remained in their stomachs, they would have consumed them like fire.’” Another version of this incident says that when the Prophet turned away from the man, the latter returned and said, “O Messenger of told the man (ص) Alla-h! They, by Alla-h, have almost died [of hunger and thirst].” The Prophet to bring him the two women whom he ordered to vomit. Each vomited blood, filling a whole then said, “These women abstained from what Alla-h had permitted them (ص) container. He and broke their fast on what Alla-h had prohibited them. Each sat with the other and both kept eating people’s flesh” (Ihya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 134. Ad-Durr al-Manthu-r, Vol. 6, p. 96). It has also been reported that “One who eats his brother’s flesh in the short life will have the flesh brought near to him in the Hereafter and it will be said to him, ‘Eat it dead as you ate it alive.’ He will eat it and will cry out and frown indignantly” (Ihya-' Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 135).

stoned a man once on account of having committed adultery. (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h (ص) Someone said to his fellow, “This man used to squirt like dogs.” The Messenger of Alla-h brought them a carcass and said to them, “Eat it.” They said, “O Messenger of Alla-h! Must we said, “What you have just eaten of the flesh of your (ص) really eat a stinking carcass?!” He brother is more stinking than it” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 116).

has said, “Backbiting is prohibited on every Muslim. It consumes good (ع) Ima-m al-Sa-diq deeds as the fire consumes firewood” (Musba-h al-Shari-`a, pp. 204-205).

said, (ص) saying that the Messenger of Alla-h (ع) Al-Sadu-q has cited his forefathers citing Ali “Four persons shall add harm to the residents of the fire to the harm from which they already suffer: They shall be given to drink of the boiling water in hell. They shall lament, so much so that the people of the fire shall say to each other, ‘What is wrong with these four harming us in addition to the harm from which we already suffer?’ One of them will be dangling from a coffin made of burning timbers and a man runs with him. A man’s mouth will be dripping blood and pus. And a man will be eating his own flesh. It will be said to the man of the coffin, ‘What is wrong with the furthermost man, for he has added to our harm?’ He will say, ‘The furthermost man died owing people money; he did not feel like paying them back or fulfilling his obligations to them.’ Then it will be said to the man running with him, ‘What is wrong with the furthermost man who has added harm to our harm?’ He will say, ‘The furthermost man used not to care where his urine fell on his body.’ Then it will be said to the man whose mouth drips blood and pus, ‘What is wrong with the furthermost man, for he has added to our harm?’ He will say, ‘The furthermost man used to mimic people: He would look at every foul word, praise then repeat it.’

Then it will be said to the one who eats his own flesh, ‘What is wrong with the furthermost man, for he has added to our harm?’ He will say, ‘The furthermost man used to eat of people’s flesh through backbiting, slandering others’” (`Iqba-l-A`ma-l, p. 294).

said once, (ص) the Messenger of Alla-h ,(ص) Through tracking the isna-d back to the Prophet “One who delves into backbiting his brother, revealing his shortcomings, will have placed his first step in hell, and Alla-h will reveal his shortcoming to all creation” (`Iqa-b al-A`ma-l, p. 337).

One who backbites a Muslim will have his fast nullified, and his ablution will be void; so, if he dies in such a state, he will be regarded as having permitted what Alla-h prohibits (`Iqa-b al-A`ma-l, p. 332).

said, “Backbiting is more swift (ص) has said that the Messenger of Alla-h (ع) Abu- Abdulla-h in undermining a Muslim’s creed than the food in his stomach” (Al-Ka-fı, Vol. 2, p. 357; see also Al-Ikhtisa-s, p. 228).

has said, “Sitting in a mosque waiting for the prayer is adoration (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h as long as one does not do something awful.” It was said to him, “O Messenger of Alla-h! What is this awful thing?” He said, “Backbiting” (Rawdat al-Wa-izeen, p. 470; see also Al-Ka-fı, Vol. 2, p. 257).

saying, “One who mentions what he sees (ع) The son of Abu- Omer has cited Abu- Abdulla-h in a believer with his own eyes and hears with his own ears is included among those about whom Alla-h has said, “Those who love (to see) scandal publicized widely among the believers will have a grievous penalty in this life and in the hereafter” (Qur'a-n, 24:19); Al-Ka-fi, Vol. 2, p. 357.

Al-Mufaddal quotes [Abdulla-h] ibn Omer saying that Abu- Abdulla-h has said, “One who tells a tale about a believer whereby he intends to dishonor him, undermine his prestige and make people think lowly of him, Alla-h gets him out of His protection to the protection of Satan, and even Satan will not accept to protect him” (Al-Ka-fı, Vol. 2, p. 358; see also Al-Ikhtisa-s, p. 32).

Alla-h Almighty has inspired to Moses son of Imran [Amram] that if a backbiter repents, he will be the last to enter Paradise, and if he does not, he will be the first to enter hell (Masa-bih al-Shari-’a, p. 205).

It has been narrated that Jesus, peace be with him, and his disciples passed once by the carcass of a dog. The disciples said, “How foul its stink is!” Jesus, peace be with him, said, “How white his teeth are!” (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 117). It is as though the prophet was prohibiting them from speaking ill of the dog, attracting their attention to mentioning only what is best of Alla-h’s creations.

It has been indicated with regard to the interpretation of this verse of the Almighty: “Woe unto every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter” (Qur'a-n, 104:1) that the scandal-monger is one who slanders people, while the backbiter is the one who eats people’s live flesh (Ihya- `Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 135).

Al-Hassan has said, “By Alla-h! Backbiting is faster in [bearing an impact on] the faith of a believer than what he eats bears on his body” (Ihya- `Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 135).

Be informed that the reason which requires emphasizing the issue of backbiting and making it look greater than many major transgressions is its inclusion of all what contradicts the goal of the Wise One, Praised is He, unlike the rest of transgressions, for these cause partial harms.

The explanation of the above is this: The important goal of the legislator is to unite the souls on one concern, one way, which is: treading the path of Alla-h in all its provisions, what it allows or prohibits, and this cannot materialize except through cooperation and solidarity among humankinds. The latter depends on their determination being united, on their innermost becoming pure, and on their collective fellowship and love so they may be like one single slave obeying his Master. This, too, will never materialize except by getting rid of grudge, hatred, envy and the like. One who backbites his brother incurs his grudge and prompts a similar reaction. This surely is the opposite of what the legislator ultimately seeks. It is an overwhelming harm; have emphasized its prohibition, warning against it, (ص) therefore, Alla-h and His Messenger and surely success comes only from Alla-h.

:Having completed what the Introduction requires, let us start delving into this book's Chapters

Types of Gheeba

Since you have come to know that gheeba means mentioning something which displeases your brother if he comes to know about it, or if he is informed of it or his attention is brought to it, including anything relevant to a shortcoming in his physique, lineage, conduct, or anything he says or does about his creed or worldly affairs, even if it is about what he wears or rides.

has pointed to this saying, “The facets of backbiting is that you mention a (ع) Ima-m al-Sa-diq defect in form [or conduct], deeds, treatment, sect, ignorance or the like” (Musbah al-Sharee’a, p. 205).

Regarding one's physique, you may refer to his being blear-eyed, cross-eyed, one-eyed, bald, short, tall, black, yellow and anything one can imagine as being "defective" or deforming.

As for lineage, one may say that someone’s father is a debauchee, mean, low, a shoe-mender, merchant, weaver, ignorant or the like, anything which one may dislike no matter what it is, period.

As for conduct, one may say that someone is bad-mannered, tricky, haughty, bragging, irritable, coward, weak-hearted, etc.

As regarding his creed-related deeds, you may say that he is a thief, liar, wine drinker, betrayer, oppressor, does not take his daily prayers seriously, his bowing and prostrating are not good, he takes no precautions with regard to cleansiness, unkind to his parents, does not safeguard himself from backbiting or speaking ill of people's honor, etc.

As regarding his worldly deeds, it is like your saying that he is impolite, does not take people seriously, feels no obligation towards anyone, talkative, glutton, sleeps too much or sits where he does not belong, etc.

With regard to dressing himself, you may say that his sleeves are too wide, his robe drags behind him, his clothes are not clean, and the like.

Be informed that backbiting is not confined to articulation. Rather, it is prohibited because it conveys to others a shortcoming in/about your brother, identifying him in a way which he hates. Exposing him is similar to scandalizing him about anything relevant to any action such as speech, signal, gesture, beckon, defamation, censure, motion… and everything which lets the other person form a bad impression. All these fall in the category of backbiting and are equivalent to articulation of a thought the pronouncement of which is prohibitive.

An example for this is narrated about `Aisha having said, "A woman came to us once. When told me that I had thus (ص) she left, I signaled with my hand that she was short. The Prophet backbitten her" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 118).

Another example is mimicking. One walks as though he is lame or imitating someone's gait. It is backbiting. It is even more so; it is greater in conveying a picture and thus getting an idea across. It also includes backbiting by writing. A book, it is said, is one of the two tongues. Also included is one who mentions a particular classifier and misrepresents his statements in his own book unless he mentions excuses requiring it such as ijtiha-d issues without which the goal behind a fatwa is not reached, or producing evidence for the point he drives unless he labels as "wrong" someone else's statements and the like.

Still included is one saying something like this: "One of those who passed by us, etc.," or "Someone we saw today looks like such-and-such, etc." Thus, a particular individual is understood to be implied by the statement. What one should avoid is getting others to identify who exactly he means. If such an individual is not thus identified, understood to be the one whenever he saw someone doing ,(ص) spoken about, it is alright. The Messenger of Alla-h something which he hated would say, "What is wrong with people who do such-and-such?" (Ihya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 137). He would not specify.

Among the most harmful types of backbiting is one done by pretenders who would like others to characterize them as being men of understanding. They convey their thoughts in the method employed by true righteous and pious people so they may pretend to be above backbiting while transmitting their thought. Due to their ignorance, they thus combine two sins: pretension and backbiting.

An example for it is that one hears someone mentioning the name of someone else, so he says, "Praise be to Alla-h Who did not afflict us with love for authority" or for love for this world, or to seem in a particular way similar to the individual mentioned. Or one may say, "We seek refuge with Alla-h against immodesty" or against ill luck, or "We plead to Alla-h to protect us from such-and-such." Actually, one merely praising Alla-h for not making him the opposite of what another person is characterized is regarded as backbiting in the form of supplication while hiding under the cloak of men of righteousness. His intention is actually to mention that person's fault by saying something which includes both backbiting and pretension even as he supplicates to Alla-h to rid him of sins, not knowing that he already has committed these sins; in fact, he has committed the worst of these sins.

An example for the above is when one starts by praising someone whom he wants to backbite, so he says, "How good the condition of so-and so! He never fell short of performing his acts of adoration, but lately he has slackened and has been afflicted with that whereby we all are afflicted: impatience." Thus, he speaks ill of himself while in reality he intends to speak ill of someone else. He praises himself by comparing himself with the righteous as the latter condemn their evil-insinuating selves.

Thus, he backbites; he is being a pretender. He praises himself, combining three sins while, due to his ignorance, he thinks he is among the righteous who are above backbiting others. Thus does Satan play havoc with ignorant folks if they seek knowledge but act without having become fully acquainted with the paths of such knowledge. Satan follows them and surrounds their deeds with his schemes, laughing at them and making fun of them.

Also included is one who mentions someone's shortcoming, but nobody among his audience notices it, so he says, "Praise be to Alla-h! How strange it is!" The backbiter indicates so in the hope the inattentive person may listen to him carefully and get to understand his hint. He mentions the Name of Alla-h, Praise to Him, using His Name as a means to achieve his own meanness and falsehood. Due to his ignorance and conceit, he thinks he is doing Alla-h a favor by mentioning His Name.

Also included is one who says that someone did such-and-such or has been afflicted with such-and-such. He may even say, "Our fellow, friend, may Alla-h grant him and our own selves

acceptance of repentance…, etc." Thus, he pretends to supplicate for him, feeling pain on his account, being a friend and a fellow, while Alla-h is acquainted with the meanness of his inner self and the corruption of his conscience. Due to his ignorance, he does not know that he has exposed himself to a greater contempt than that to which the ignorant ones are exposed when they openly backbite.

Among its hidden types is listening to backbiting in the way of expressing amazement. One demonstrates amazement in order to energize the backbiter as the latter is at it, encouraging him to continue backbiting, as if he is extracting backbiting out of him in such a way. He may say, "I have been amazed at what you have just stated. Till now, I never knew it! I did not know that that individual is like that!" He wants to testify to the backbiter being truthful, asking him in a nice way to provide him with more. Testifying to the truth of backbiting, actually even listening to it, even remaining silent about it, is by itself an act of backbiting.

has said, "One who listens (to backbiting) is one of the two (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h has said, "One who listens to (ع) backbiters" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 119). Ima-m Ali backbiting is one of those who backbite" (Ghurar al-Hikam, p. 74).

means that if one listens to backbiting with enjoyment, not (necessarily) agreeing, or (ع) He who can deny what he hears but does not do so, is included in the sin. Since both individuals, the one who listens to, or who hears in such a way of enjoyment, actually backbite, this is due to his sharing the pleasure which the backbiter feels when he backbites. It is due to their minds, both of them, being conditioned with contemptible images which should not be there even when they differ in the fact that one of them is articulating and the other is being receptive. But each of them is using a mechanism that helps him backbite: One of them uses his tongue to express a soul that has been polluted by drawing images of lies, prohibitions and the determination to be involved in them. The other listens as his soul accepts such effects due to taking such a bad option, becoming used to them, accustomed to it, enabling the poisoning of the subconscious mind with falsehood.

An example for the above is the wise saying that the listener is the speaker's partner. In the said to one of the men who (ص) previous example, there is an indication that when the Prophet said about another that the latter squirted like dogs, "Eat of this carcass!", thus putting them both in the same box although one of them was a speaker and the other a listener. The listener does not get out of the sin of backbiting except if he rejects it by his tongue, but if he fears, he rejects it by his heart. If he can stand and leave or interrupt such talk with something else but does not, the sin will be attached to him. Had he said with his tongue, "Shut your mouth!" while inwardly he liked to hear, it would have been hypocrisy, another sin added. Nothing gets him

out of the sin (of backbiting) unless he sincerely hates it with his heart.

is reported as having said, "One who witnesses a believer being humiliated (ص) The Prophet without supporting him, while being able to do so, will be humiliated by Alla-h on the Day of Judgment as the creation looks on" (Ihya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 138).

had said, "One who (ص) Abu- al-Darda-' is quoted as having said that the Messenger of Alla-h protects his brother's honor as it is charged with backbiting, Alla-h will protect his honor on the Judgment Day" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 119).

has also said, "One who defends his brother's honor with regard to backbiting, Alla-h (ص) He will set him free from the fire" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 119).

al-Sadu-q has stated that the Prophet ,(ص) Through his isna-d to the Messenger of Alla-h said, "One who defends on behalf of his brother, because of backbiting which he had (ص) heard in a gathering and which he refutes, Alla-h will close a thousand gates of evil in his face in the life of this world and in the hereafter. But if he does not refute it while being able to do so, his burden will be seventy times as much as that of the person who had backbitten him" (Al-Sadu-q's A`ma-li, p. 350).

the Ima-m said, "One who listens to his believing ,(ع) Through isna-d to Ima-m al-Ba-qir brother being backbitten, so he defends and supports him, Alla-h will support him in the life of this world and in the hereafter. Alla-h will abandon one who does not defend such a brother, while being able to defend and help him, in the life of this world and in the hereafter" (Al-Maha-sin, p. 103, tradition No. 81).

Be informed that one is prohibited from speaking ill of a believer, and he is prohibited from mentioning the wrongdoings of others. He also is prohibited from thinking ill and from contemplating it inwardly. What is meant by the inwardly evil thought, which is prohibited, is judging one as being a wrongdoer without making sure about it.

As regarding illicit thoughts, and since its insinuations are forgiven, doubt in this sense is also forgiven; Alla-h Almighty has said, "O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible), for suspicion in some cases is a sin, and do not spy on each other, nor speak ill of others by way of backbiting. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay! You would abhor it... but fear Alla-h, for Alla-h is oft-Returning, Most Merciful" (Qur'a-n, 49:12).

You have no right to think ill of someone unless you see with your own eyes what has no room for interpretation. If you do not know something, yet it finds its place in your heart, Satan places it there, and you ought to belie it, for it is the worst type of sin. Alla-h Almighty has said, "O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth lest you should harm people unwittingly and afterwards become full of repentance for what you have

done" (Qur'a-n, 49:6). Eblis must not be believed.

In such a situation, the Shari-`a says that if you detect the smell of wine in someone, you cannot judge that he has drunk wine, and he is not to be penalized on its account, for it is possible he gargled it and detested it, or he was forced to drink it, and both are possible; so, a Muslim must not be the object of our suspicion.

has said, "Alla-h Almighty prohibits a Muslim from having a free hand in (ص) The Prophet another Muslim's life or possession even if he thinks ill of him" (Ihya-' Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 142). Hence, ill thoughts are not permitted unless the shedding of blood and the confiscation of wealth become permissible: One is sure by seeing or due to fair evidence, or their equivalent among matters which bring about conviction, or whatever the Shari-`a deems as being certain.

is quoted as having said, "If a believer accuses his believing brother (ع) The father of Abdulla-h of something, conviction (ima-n) melts in his heart just as salt melts in water" (Al-Ka-fi, Vol. 2, p. 361).

has also said, "If one charges his brother about his creed, the sanctity between them will (ع) He (ع) has also said, "The Commander of the Faithful (ع) be violated" (Al-Ka-fi, Vol. 2, p. 361). He has said, 'Think best of your brother till something convinces you of the contrary, and do not think ill of something which your brother says if you can at all find a good justification for it" (Al-Ka-fi, Vol. 2, p. 362), that is, think well of what your brother says or does even if it can be interpreted differently without having to spy on him till you come to know about something which has no room for interpretation, for ill thoughts can be wrong whereas spying is prohibitive.

The way whereby one can get to know what the heart contemplates, whether it is an ill thought or an insinuation, is that you subject yourself to a test. If you change and your heart is displeased with him, or if you belittle him, or if you are reluctant to look after him, to find out how he is doing, to honor him, to care about his condition and feel sad because his condition has changed…, it is a sign that doubt has entertained your mind.

has said, "Three things in a believer for which there is a way out: One's exit out (ع) The Ima-m of an ill thought is not to think of it as being certain (Ihya-' Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 143), that is, do not carry out an investigation through thoughts or actions, neither in the heart nor in the senses. As regarding the heart, it is through turning it towards revulsion and contempt. Regarding the senses, it is acting upon them. What ought to be done when an illicit thought about a believer is entertained is that one increases paying good attention to him and supplicating for him, for this angers Satan and it thus is pushed away from you. Satan will then avoid casting an illicit thought in your mind out of his fear you would supplicate for your

brother and look after him, which is the opposite of his goal.

No matter how many faults about a believer you come to know, advise him inwardly, and do not let Satan deceive you and call upon you to backbite him. If you admonish him, do not do so while you are pleased you came to know about his shortcoming so he may think highly of you while you think lowly of him, while you see yourself as being higher in status than him by token of your admonishment of him. Rather, let your objective be ridding him of the sin, and you feel sorry for him just as you would feel sorry for yourself if a shortcoming is attached to you.

You ought to think inwardly that leaving him without advising him is dearer to you than leaving him on account of an advice with which you admonished him. If you do so, you will have combined the rewards of admonishment with the rewards of feeling sad about your brother's misfortune as well as the reward for helping him keep his faith strong.

One of the fruits of ill thoughts is spying. The heart is not convinced with doubts. It demands an investigation. Thus, one occupies himself by spying, something which is prohibitive.

Alla-h Almighty says, "… And do not spy (on each other)" (Qur'a-n, 49:12). Alla-h, praise belongs to Him, has prohibited in this verse backbiting, ill thoughts and spying. The meaning of spying is that you do not leave the servants of Alla-h being shielded by Alla-h's covering, so you seek to familiarize yourself (with what they try to hide or conceal), thus tearing apart this covering. Had you kept that covering as it is, it would have been better for your heart and creed; so, think about it, may you be guided rightly, and surely success comes from Alla-h.

Preventive Treatment of Gheeba

Be informed that all ill manners are treated with a mixture of knowledge and the acting upon such knowledge. The treatment of an ailment is done with the opposite of its cause, its antidote. So, let us look first for the cause behind backbiting, we will then state how a tongue is restrained from articulating it in a way that suits the treatment of these causes.

We are stating below some of the causes that have been indicated as resulting in backbiting, has drawn attention to it by saying that the (ع) and they are ten in number. Ima-m al-Sa-diq root of backbiting is of ten types: 1. seeking satisfaction for one's anger, 2. agreeing with some people, 3. believing a report without verifying it, 4. an accusation, 5. ill thinking, 6. jealousy, 7. ridicule, 8. conceit, 9. displeasure, and 10. bragging (Misbah al-Shari'a, p. 205).

Now we point out to them in detail:

First: One seeks to satisfy his anger. If one has a reason to be angry, and when his anger rages, he seeks to quell it by mentioning the faults of the individual who caused him to grow angry, and he would first do so by his tongue unless he is pious, God-fearing. One may avoid having

to satisfy his anger, so his anger is stored inwardly, turning into a fixed grudge. This will become a permanent cause for mentioning those faults.

Grudge and anger are major causes for backbiting.

Second: Agreeing with some companions and being nice to fellows by assisting them with such talk. If they have fun speaking ill of some people's honor, one may see that if he disagrees or terminates a gathering, he will be belittled by the others who will avoid him, so he agrees with them, seeing that doing so is indicative of good companionship, and he thinks he is just being nice to his companions. His companions may get angry, so he, too, feels he should be angry, too, seeing it as a sign of good companionship when sharing with his fellows their sentiments openly as well as inwardly. He, therefore, takes part in mentioning others' faults and shortcomings.

Third: One may sense that someone targets him and speaks ill of him or of his condition in front of a good person, or he may testify against him, so he takes the initiative and speaks ill of him in order to foil the impact of his testimony and action. Or he may start by mentioning how one truly is so after that he may tell lies about him. Thus, he circulates his lies by first being truthful. He seeks support from facts saying, "It is not my habit to tell a lie, for I have told you such-and-such about his conditions, and he has been just as I had said."

Fourth: Something may be attributed to someone, so the latter wants to clear himself of it. He, hence, speaks ill of the person who had done so. He had the right to clear himself of the charge without mentioning the name of the person who charged him. He does not have to make a connection between the charge and the person who made it. He does not have to tell others that he was a partner in an action in order to pave the way for finding for himself an excuse for his deed.

Fifth: Affectation and bragging: One may try to raise his status above that of others, so he labels someone as ignorant, weak of understanding, weak in stating something with the goal being to prove that he is better than him. He wants to show others that he is better than that person, or he may thus take a precaution against people honoring someone as much as they honor that person, so he belittles him.

Sixth: Jealousy: One may feel jealous of someone praised, loved or honored by others, so he wants these blessings to be removed from that individual. He finds no way to do so except by speaking ill of him. He wants to discredit that person to people so they may stop honoring and praising him because it is heavy on his heart to see people praising him, honoring him. Such is jealousy, and it is anger and grudge. One may be jealous of a benevolent friend or a relative who is in harmony with him.

Seventh: Sporting, jesting, agreeing with others and having fun laughing at others: One may mention someone else in a way that prompts the listeners to laugh when he imitates him or seeks to show that he is better than him.

Eighth: Ridiculing, making fun of someone in order to downgrade him: This may take place in the presence of someone or behind someone's back as well, and it originates in one being arrogant and desiring to belittle one whom he ridicules.

Ninth: This is difficult to detect and may cause even the elite or cautious persons to fall into speaking ill of others: One may feel sad because of something with which someone is afflicted, so he says, "Poor so-and-so, I am really sad about what has happened to him and about his affliction." He would then mention the cause of his sadness. He will then be truthful if it comes to the reason behind his grief, but his grief distracts him from taking precaution, so he mentions his name and says something which that person hates. He will in that case be backbiting him. His grief and his seeking Alla-h's mercy for him are acts of righteousness, but they led him to evil without being aware of it. Seeking Alla-h's mercy for someone and feeling sad about someone are both possible without one having to mention the name of an individual then attributing to him what he dislikes. Satan stirs him to mention his name in order to void the rewards of his grief and his pleading to Alla-h to have mercy on him.

Tenth: Feeling angry for the sake of Alla-h Almighty: One may feel angry because of something wrong which someone did, so he shows his anger and mentions that person's wrongdoing, thus committing a wrongdoing himself without prohibiting a wrong deed. What he should have done is to show his anger specifically in that manner. This is a pitfall in which even the elite may fall. They think that feeling angry for the sake of Alla-h Almighty is an excuse no matter how it is expressed, but it is not so.

If you come to know that these are the causes of backbiting, be informed that the path towards preventing the tongue from backbiting is of two types: One of them is general, whereas the other is particular: Regarding generality, one must know that he exposes himself to the wrath of Alla-h Almighty when he backbites, as you have already come to know from the previous reports. And he must be informed that such wrath voids his good deeds, his acts of righteousness. On the Day of Judgment, backbiting shifts his good deeds to the scales of those whom he had backbitten. If he has no good deeds, the backbitten person's wrongdoings will then be shifted to the backbiter's scales, and he remains the object of the wrath of Alla-h Almighty and will be like one eating dead flesh.

that he said, "Fire burning what is dry is not faster (ص) It has been narrated about the Prophet than backbiting as it burns the good deeds of a servant of Alla-h" (Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p.

140).

It has been narrated that a man said to a man of virtue, "It has come to my knowledge that you speak ill of me behind my back." The virtuous man said, "Your status in my eyes does not permit me to let you fare thus with my own good deeds!"

No matter how much one believes in reports coming to him, his tongue must not articulate backbiting. He must fear for his good deeds being thus burnt. It also avails him if he looks at his own self. If he finds fault with himself, he ought to feel ashamed lest he should leave himself out while speaking ill of others. Rather, he ought to know that if others are unable to rise above committing backbiting, whether it is relevant to something which he did by choice or because of a deformity or shortcoming in him, he likewise is unable to rise to admit his own defects and shortcomings.

If the matter is relevant to his physique, speaking ill of it is actually speaking ill of its Creator, for when one faults something, he faults its maker. Someone once said to a wise man, "How ugly your face is!" The wise man said, "I had no choice in creating my face so I would make it very good." If one does not find fault with himself, let him thank Alla-h and not pollute himself with the greatest of faults, for finding fault with people and eating their dead flesh is surely the greatest of all faults. He will then be faulty. Had he been fair to himself, he would have realized that his belief that he is faultless proves the extent of his ignorance of himself, which is one of the greatest of all faults.

It behooves him to know that when others suffer because he backbites them, he likewise suffers when others backbite him. If he does not like others to backbite him, he ought not accept others to be backbitten.

Such are general remedies.

As regarding delving into the details, one ought to look into the reason that prompts him to backbite and deal with it, for an ailment is treated by eradicating its cause. And you have already come to know the causes behind backbiting:

o Regarding anger, he can treat it by saying, "If I overlook my anger with him, perhaps Alla-h Almighty will overlook His wrath against me because of speaking ill of others behind their backs, for He has prohibited me from doing it, yet I dared to defy his prohibition, taking His has said, "There is a gate to hell which is entered only by those who (ع) prohibition lightly." He satisfied their personal anger by angering Alla-h Almighty through committing a transgression" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 121). In one of the Books which Alla-h Almighty has revealed, it is stated: "O son of Adam! Remember Me when you are angry so I may remember you when I am angry, perhaps I will not include you among those whom I obliterate" (Tanbi-h al-Khawa-tir,

Vol. 1, p. 121)

o Regarding agreeing with others, you must come to know that Alla-h Almighty is angry with you if you seek to anger Him by thus pleasing others. So, how can you honor others while dishonoring your Lord? How can you avoid pleasing Him by seeking to please them, unless your anger is solely for the sake of pleasing Alla-h Almighty, and this requires you not to speak ill of one with whom you are angry? Rather, you ought to feel angry for the sake of Alla-h: If your fellows speak ill of Him, they commit the most foul of all sins: backbiting.

o Regarding one trying to raise his status at the expense of that of others, without mentioning the name of those others, this situation is treated by knowing that if you expose yourself to the wrath of the Creator, it is much more severe than being exposed to the contempt of His creation. If you backbite, you are for sure exposing yourself to the wrath of Alla-h Almighty while not knowing if you will get rid of people's wrath or not. So, you save yourself in this life by your whim while permitting yourself to perish in the hereafter. Or you for sure lose the rewards of your good deeds while earning the contempt of the Almighty, expecting people to remove their speaking ill of you, which is the utmost ignorance and loss of all.

o Regarding your statement that you consume what is prohibitive because so-and-so does it, and if you do such-and-such, someone else is doing the same, or if you fall short in an act of obedience to the Almighty, someone else is likewise guilty of the same…, it is an indication of your ignorance because you are seeking to emulate those whom you are not supposed to emulate. Anyone who violates the command of Alla-h is not to be emulated whoever he may be.

If someone else is hurled into the fire while you are able not to avoid entering it, you should not be in agreement with that person. Had you agreed with him, you would have lost your wits. What you state is backbiting and an additional transgression which you piled up on that from which you sought an excuse for yourself. The Almighty will then have recorded your name as having combined two sins due to your ignorance and stupidity. You were like a she-camel looking at a goat that fell from the mountain, so it, too, throws itself from up high. Had she had a tongue and articulated an excuse, she would have said, "The goat was wiser, yet she perished, and so did I." You would then have laughed on account of her ignorance. But your condition is similar to hers, yet you do not wonder, nor do you laugh at yourself.

o When it comes to your objective behind bragging and praising yourself in order to gain more recognition by speaking ill of others, you ought to know that due to what you stated, you lost your status with Alla-h while jeopardizing your status among the public: People may think less of you if they come to know that you speak ill of others. You will then have sold what the

Creator has for sure in store with Him, trading it for what people have with them due to your own whim. If people think well of you, it will not help you win favor with the Almighty at all.

o Backbiting someone because of envy combines two types of penalties: You have envied him for a worldly blessing while your envy torments you. Yet you were not satisfied with all of this till you added to it a torment in the hereafter, thus losing in the short life as well as in the hereafter; hence, you combine two punishments. You targeted the one whom you envied while harming your own self. You have given him by way of a gift the rewards of your own good deeds; thus, you are his friend and the enemy of your own self! Your act of backbiting him does not harm him but harms you while benefiting him! It shifts your own good deeds to him or shifts to you his wrongdoings which do not benefit you at all. You thus combine the ugliness of envy with foolish ignorance. Your envy and speaking ill of him may become the reason for the individual whom you envy gaining more prestige. It has been said that if Alla-h wants a forgotten virtue to be disseminated, He permits an envious tongue to propagate it.

o You mean by ridiculing someone to demean him by actually demeaning your own self in the sight of Alla-h, His angels and prophets. Had you contemplated upon your shame, infamy, sigh and sorrow on the Day when you bear the sins of the person whom you ridiculed and when you are led to the fire, this would have shocked you and distracted you from shaming your fellow. Had you come to know your condition, you would have preferred to laugh at its account, for you ridiculed him before a small number of people while exposing yourself to your hands being taken on the Judgment Day and led away before a huge crowd of people. You will be led away under the burden of that person's own sins like a donkey led to the fire, while he ridicules you and is pleased at you being thus shamed, happy because Alla-h supports him against you and seeks revenge against you for his own benefit.

o As regarding pleading to Alla-h to have mercy on him on account of his own sin, it is something good, but Eblis envied you and made you articulate something because of which the rewards of your good deeds are shifted to someone else. And it is more so than the rewards which you gain for having pleaded to Alla-h to have mercy on him. Thus, the one for whom mercy is sought gets out of the category of one in need of mercy while you yourself become worthy of being stoned: Your [hypocritical] plea foiled your rewards and diminished your good deeds.

o Feeling angry for the sake of Alla-h does not necessitate backbiting. Satan made backbiting look good to you so the rewards for your anger are voided, and you become the target of the wrath of Alla-h Almighty because of being guilty of backbiting.

As a whole, the treatment for all of this comes through knowledge which is achieved by

considering these matters that are among the divisions of conviction (ima-n). One whose conviction is strong through combining all of the above prevents himself from committing the .sin of backbiting, that is for sure

Permissible Backbiting

Be informed that mentioning one's wrongdoing is a sound objective according to the Shari-`a in order to achieve one's objective for the removal of such wrongdoing. Thus, the sin of backbiting is voided, but this is limited to ten situations:

First: One seeks redress. If someone mentions the name of a judge as being unjust, treacherous and accepting bribes, he is one who backbites while being a transgressor. As far as a judge is concerned, one can complain about him to someone who he hopes can remove his injustice. He will be attributing injustice to such a judge who is the only person who can grant him what rightfully belongs to him.

has said, "One with a [usurped] right has the right to complain (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h about it" (Ihya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 144).

has also said, "A rich person commits injustice if he looks down at others" (Al-`Awa-li, (ص) H Vol. 4, p. 45).

Second: One seeks help to correct a wrongdoing. One has the right to seek help to correct a wrongdoing and bring an aggressor back to the path of righteousness. In the achievement of this sound objective, the matter is alright but is prohibitive otherwise.

Third: One seeks someone's opinion, such as you may say this to someone: "My father—or brother—has been unfair to me; so, what is the way out of it?" In this regard, it is safest if one refrains from identifying the oppressor. For example, one may say, "What would you say about a man whose father or brother has oppressed him?"

Abu- Sufya-n is a miser man; he does" ,(ص) It has been narrated that Hind said to the Prophet not give me money to meet my needs and those of my children. Should I take some of his money without his knowledge?" He said, "Take only what suffices you and your children fairly" (Ihya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 144). She complained about not having enough to spend on did not rebuke her since her objective (ص) herself and her children, so the Messenger of Alla-h was to seek his opinion.

Fourth: One warns another Muslim against falling in danger, in evil, and how one seeking counsel is to be advised. If you see someone pretending to be a faqi-h (jurist), pretending to be someone whom he is not, you have to attract people's attention to his shortcoming and inability to rightfully qualify himself. You must alert them about the danger that may fall upon

them if they obey him. Also, if you see a man making too frequent visits to the house of a debauchee who is covering up for him, and if you are concerned about this man falling down on account of such companionship in a way which violates the Shari-`a, you have the right to attract his attention to this person being a sinner no matter what motive you have, whether it may be concern about the dissemination of an innovation in the creed or the spread of corruption.

This may be prompted by conceit and Satan's foolhardiness, for your motive may be envy of that man because of the status which he enjoys. Satan will then confuse you when you pretend to have compassion for people. Also, if you see a man buying a slave, and if you know that this slave has defects, you can mention these defects to the buyer, for if you remain silent, you will be harming the buyer. Your stating these faults harms the slave, but the interest of the buyer ought first to be taken into consideration.

And you have to mention only the defect which is relevant to the matter and not mention anything relevant to anything else that may undermine the partnership, the contract, or one's trip. Rather, you must mention in each situation what is relevant to it and not go beyond it aiming at advising rather than harming. If a man shies away from getting married when you advise him that marriage will not be good for him, you will be doing what you ought to be doing. But if one is not dissuaded except when explicitly told about something, let it be so. has said, "Do you hesitate to name a corrupt person before people find it out? (ص) The Prophet Say that against which people ought to guard themselves" (Ihuya- Ulu-m ad-Di-n, Vol. 3, p. 144).

has also said to Fa-tima daughter of Qays when she consulted him about men seeking (ص) He her for marriage, "As regarding Mu'a-wiyah, he is a penniless pauper. Regarding Abu- Jahm, he never lets the [whipping] baton descend from his shoulder" (Al-`Awa-li, Vol. 1, p. 155).

Fifth: Slandering and making amends for both an eyewitness and a narrator: Scholars have written about narrators of traditions, dividing them into "trustworthy" and "doubted", often mentioning the reasons behind their being doubted. A sincere advice is shared in this situation, as we have stated above, when it is meant to protect the Muslims' wealth, control over what they say and protect them all from telling lies.

And it is conditional upon one having neither animosity nor fanaticism nor stating anything that violates his testimony and narrative, and he does not stand hostile to others such as being a man of taunting or casting doubts except, perhaps, when he openly commits transgression as we will state later.

Sixth: The object of the statement must deserve it because he is a pretender on its account

such as a sinner who openly shows his sin, so much so that he does not hesitate to talk about the sin which he commits. He must be referred to with regard to what he admits and nothing more.

has said, "One who puts down the covering of modesty from his (ص) The Messenger of Alla-h face, to backbite him is not a sin at all" (Al-`Awa-li, Vol. 1, p. 105). From this, it is quite obvious that to backbite him is permissible even if the sin is not mentioned. Regarding the permission to absolutely backbite the debauchee, the possibility stems from this statement of the Prophet (ص): "A debauchee is not backbitten" (Al-`Awa-li, Vol. 1, p. 438, tradition No. 153).

It is stated that the tradition must be understood as applicable to a particular debauchee or to [backbite him in order to] force him to stop his committing sins. Such is better except when the matter is attached to a religious objective and a sound goal which goes back to the backbiter who hopes the individual will on its account stop committing his sin. It will then enter the category of preventing a wrongdoing.

Seventh: One must be widely known by a name whereby his defect is identified, such as "the lame" or "the blear-eyed", etc. There is no sin if one identifies him by it. Scholars have done so due to the need for identification and because it has become so common, the individual himself no longer hates it, having come to know that he has become famous on its account. In fact, what the reliable scholars have indicated can be relied upon with regard to their narrative.

As regarding identifying those who are still living, it is conditional on the acceptance of the individual to whom it is attributed as a general criterion for prohibition. In that case, it is not categorized as backbiting. How can it be since when one can be identified by some other way, it would have been better?

Eighth: If the number of individuals, according to whom a penalty is to be exacted for a sin, are eyewitnesses to the committing of that sin, it can be mentioned to the rulers as a testimony even in the presence of the doer or in his absence. It must not be mentioned in any other situation except if it meets other criteria.

Ninth: It has been said that if two persons witness a transgression committed, and one of them stated it in the absence of that transgressor, it is permissible because mentioning it has no impact on the listener although he ought to protect himself and his tongue from mentioning it for any other purpose especially with the possibility of forgetting the statement or out of concern it will be disseminated because of them.

Tenth: If someone listened to someone else backbiting another without knowing the rights of the person being backbitten or whether what is being said does not actually exist, the speaker

cannot be prevented from articulating it due to the possibility it could be true, and the speaker may be accepted as factual unless he is known to be otherwise.

Deterring him from such talk requires the violation of his own sanctity, being one of the individuals involved. It is better to draw attention to such a situation unless general evidences surface that have no room for rebuttal. It is evident that the general will is to be cautious about ignorant folks being tempted in its regard. If this is done to those whom you know, the general evidences would not have surfaced, and they would not have been taken into consideration with regard to the listener due to the speaker perhaps knowing how to make his statement plausible, and it undermines the principle of prohibiting backbiting.

This individual is held as exceptional with regard to hearing backbiting, and it has already been stated that he is one of those who take part in backbiting.

Generally speaking, a virtuous soul takes precaution against backbiting although sometimes it is preferred that one tells what he knows so others may take their own precaution against a particular individual or action.

The testimony for its absolute prohibition, as has already been stated, is this statement of the Do you know what backbiting is?" They said, "Alla-h and His Messenger know" :(ص) Prophet said, "It is saying something about your brother which he does not like" (Tanbi-h (ص) best." He al-Khawa-tir, Vol. 1, p. 118).

As regarding its permissibility, such as the response to innovations and the shaming of the debauchees from among them, getting people to stay away from them and taking precautions against following them, this is described as obligatory: It is possible and is preferable, and it is relied upon to achieve all these objectives. So, a vigilant person must not overlook the objective .and the reform it contains, and surely Alla-h is the One Who grants success