

GOSSIP

AND ITS ADVERSE EFFECTS ON THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY

By
Husayn al-Awayishah

Translated By
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DAR IBN HAZM

***IN THE NAME OF ALLAH
THE MERCIFUL THE COMPASSIONATE***

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Translator's Foreword

Ghibah is not an easy term to translate - there is no single equivalent word in English, although it may be loosely covered by the term "gossip". Ghibah also includes back-biting, slandering, scandal-mongering, etc.

Whichever word we choose, we cannot escape from the fact that *Ghibah* affects us all. We have all been victims and - we must be honest - we have all been guilty of this sin. But it is not a matter to be taken lightly - gossip can wreck lives and shatter communities. If we seek to unite as Muslims, we must combat *Ghibah*.

Islam is a practical faith which recognizes the human condition and offers achievable remedies to the problems that beset us. Every human society faces the problem of gossip, and Islam shows us how to tackle it in a sensible

and humane manner. (Interestingly enough, it is not assumed to be solely a female preserve, as popular notions would have us believe!) Husayn al-'Awayishah has researched the topic in depth, and has presented a concise guide to the evils of *Ghibah* and what can be done about it. This book may make for uncomfortable reading, but this topic is one which every one of us has to face up to.

Huda Khattab

Note on Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this book:

SWT - *Subhanahu wa Ta'ala* (May He be glorified and exalted).

SAAS - *Sall-Allahu 'alayhi wa Sallam* (May Allah bless him and grant him peace).

RA - *Radi Allahu 'anhu* (May Allah be pleased with him)/
Radi Allahu 'anha (May Allah be pleased with her)/ *Radi Allahu 'anhum* (May Allah be pleased with them).

AS - *Alayhis-salam* (Peace be upon him)/ *'Alayhim al-Salam* (Peace be upon them).

Note on Translation of Qur'anic Quotations

The translation of quotations from the Holy Qur'an are adapted from the Translation and Commentary by A. Yusuf 'Ali (1983 edition, published by Amana Corp., U.S.A.).

The adaptations are:

- 1 - The archaic style of English used by Yusuf 'Ali has been updated, i.e. the pronouns "thou", "ye" have been altered to "you". Verbs have been amended accordingly, so that "goeth" becomes "goes", etc.
- 2 - The word "God" has been replaced with the word "Allah".

Preface to the second edition

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with him from the evils of our own souls and deeds. Whomever Allah guides, no-one can lead astray, and whomever Allah leaves astray, no-one can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah Alone, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam." [Al 'Imran 3:102]

"O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; - fear Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you." [al-Nisa' 4:1].

"O you who believe! Fear Allah, and (always) say a word directed to the Right: that He may make your conduct whole and sound and forgive you your sins: he that obeys Allah and His Apostle, has already attained the highest Achievement." [al-Ahzab 33:70-71]

The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allah (SWT), and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad (SAAS). The worst of affairs are those which are fabricated. Everything which is fabricated is an innovation (*Bid'ah*); every innovation is a going-astray, and every going-astray leads to Hell-fire.

This is the first printing of the second edition of "*Gossip*." The text has been amended and corrected; unnecessary material has been omitted, difficult terminologies have been explained, and the sources and Isnads of the Ahadith quoted have been examined in more detail - with reference to the books, published and unpublished, of our Shaykh al-Albani, may Allah (SWT) preserve him.

I ask Allah (SWT) to benefit others through me, to accept (this work) from me, and to make me one of the sincere workers. Truly He is the One Who hears all prayers.

Introduction

Praise be to Allah; we praise Him and seek His help and forgiveness. We seek refuge with him from the evils of our own souls and deeds. Whomever Allah guides, no-one can lead astray, and whomever Allah leaves astray, no-one can guide. I bear witness that there is no god but Allah Alone, Who has no partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam." [Al 'Imran 3:102]

"O mankind! Reverence your Guardian-Lord, Who created you from a single Person, created, of like nature, his mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women; - fear Allah, through Whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you): for Allah ever watches over you." [al-Nisa' 4:1].

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The most truthful of speech is the Book of Allah, and the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammed (SAAS). The worst of affairs are those which are fabricated. Everything which is fabricated is an innovation (*Bid'ah*); every innovation is a going-astray, and every going-astray leads to Hell-fire.

When I thought about people's tongues, it was as if they were burning flames or poisonous snakes! How much sadness, grief and evil they cause!

So I determined to write a book on this matter, seeking to earn the pleasure of Allah SWT, and to protect and help the Muslims - firstly by explaining the dangers and evils of the tongue, and the grief, sorrow and regret that it can

cause in this world and the next; and then by showing how these problems may be avoided, in sha'Allah.

I wrote many chapters; indeed, years passed, and I still had not completed the project. I was weighed down with other work commitments, until Allah (SWT) made it easier for me to complete the research. I wrote about all the evil results which can come from people's tongues, under the title *Hasa'id al-Alsun* (The Harvest of the Tongues). However, I felt that it would be more useful to deal with the topic of *al-Ghibah* (gossip, backbiting) by focusing on it and writing a book solely on this topic, which is what I have done - *wa ma Tawfiqi illa Billah* (and in Allah Alone is my success).

I wish to offer my deepest thanks to everyone who has helped in the production of this book, above all to my Shaykh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani (May Allah preserve him), who let me use whatever I needed on this subject from his valuable MS *Sahih al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib*, and various other books and researches of his. May Allah (SWT) reward him with good on my behalf and on behalf of all the Muslims.

I ask Allah (SWT) to benefit me by this work, and that it may be a witness for me and not against me (on the Day of Judgement). Truly He is able to do all things.

Texts which indicate the prohibition of *Ghibah*.

"... Nor speak ill of each other behind their backs.¹ Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it... But fear Allah: for Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful." [al-Hujurat 49:12]

From al-Muttalib ibn 'Abdullah, who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "*Ghibah* (gossip, backbiting) means that a man mentions about a person something which is true, behind his back."²

From Abu Hurayrah (RA): The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "Do you know what *Ghibah* is?" They said: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "(It is) your mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes."³

From Abu Barzah al-Aslami and al-Bara' ibn 'Azib, who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "O you people who pay lip-service to Faith when it has not entered your hearts! Do not gossip about the Muslims and do not expose their faults. Whoever exposes the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will expose his faults, and if Allah exposes his faults it will be open for everyone to see, even if he hid in the innermost part of his house." ⁴

What is *al-Ghibah*?

It is clear from the above that *Ghibah* means saying something about a person which is true, but which he dislikes, behind his back.



Footnotes

1. Ibn Kathir said, in his Tafsir of this Surah: "There were narrated (concerning *Ghibah*) reports which strongly condemned it. Hence Allah (SWT) likened backbiting to the eating of a dead person's flesh" - i.e., as you would naturally abhor the one, so you should, according to Shari'ah, abhor the other, for it is even worse.
2. Quoted by al-Suyuti, *Zawa'id al-Jami'*, from the report of al-Khara'iti in *Masawi' al-Akhlaq*. Malik reported something similar, with a Mursal Isnad, as mentioned in al-Sahihah, No. 1992.
3. Muslim, *Kitab al-Birr wa'l-Silah wa'l-Adab, Bab Tahrim al-Ghibah*, No. 2589; Abu Dawud; al-Tirmidhi; Ahmad, et al.
4. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (1655); Abu Dawud, *Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud* (4083); Ibn Hibban. Classed as Hasan by al-Albani, *Ghaybah al-Muram*, 420.

Consensus of the scholars on the prohibition of *Ghibah* and on the fact that it is a major sin

Ibn Kathir, may Allah have mercy on him, said in his Tafsir of Surah al-Hujurat: "*Ghibah* is forbidden by consensus (Ijma'), and in general there is no exception to that, save in circumstances where it is necessary to speak about people, such as *al-Jarh wa'l-Ta'dil* (establishing the status and authenticity of Hadith narrators), and *al-Nasihah* (giving advice)."

Al-Qurtubi said: "The scholars agree that it is a major sin, and that committing this sin necessitates repentance (*Tawbah*) to Allah (SWT)."¹

This is apparent from the words of Allah (SWT):

"...Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would abhor it..." [al-Hujurat 49:12]

Indications that *Ghibah* is a major sin are also to be found in the following Ahadith:

"What is worse than usury (*Riba*) is a man's insulting the honour (*'ird*) of his brother."

And the words of the Prophet (SAAS) to 'A'ishah:

"You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been."² [i.e., the enormity of it is such that, even if it were mixed with the vast waters of the sea, it would not be concealed at all]



Footnotes

1. See al-Qurtubi, Tafsir of Surah al-Hujurat.
2. The sources of these two Ahadith will be given below, in sha Allah.

Common but invalid excuses for *Ghibah*

Shaytan comes to people in many ways, to tempt them to backbite or gossip:

(A) He says to some of them: What you are saying behind the person's back is true, so there is nothing wrong with it.

But this is prohibited by the words of the Prophet (SAAS), such as the following:

- (1) The two Ahadith mentioned above:
 - (a) *Ghibah* means that a man mentions something about a person which is true, behind his back."
 - (b) The Hadith of Abu Hurayrah (RA). The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "Do you know what *Ghibah* is?" They said: "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "(It is) your mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes." Someone

asked: "what if what I say about my brother is true?" He said: "If what you say is true, then this is gossip (*Ghibah*); and if it is not true, then it is a slander."

(2) The Ahadith quoted in al-Ahadith al-Mukhtarah, from the report of al-Diya' al-Maqdisi¹, from Anas ibn Malik, who said: The Arabs used to serve one another on their journeys. Abu Bakr and 'Umar had a man with them who used to serve them. (One day) they woke up and (found that) he had not prepared any food for them. One of them said to the other: "This one is sleeping as if he was at home!" [i.e. criticizing him for sleeping too long]. So they woke him up and said to him: "Go to the Messenger of Allah (SAAS) and tell him: 'Abu Bakr and 'Umar send you salaams and wish to request some food from you.'" He said: "They have eaten." They were astonished to hear this, so they came to the Prophet (SAAS) and said: "O Messenger of Allah! We sent word to you to request food, and you said that we had eaten. What have we eaten?" He said: "The flesh of your brother. By Him in Whose hand is my soul, I can see his flesh between your

teeth." They said: "Pray for forgiveness for us." He said: "Let him pray for forgiveness for you!"

When they said "This one is sleeping as if he were at home!", it was true, but the Prophet (SAAS) told them that they had eaten of his flesh.

People should beware of eating their brother's flesh! - such as saying: *How often so-and-so takes a bath! How much he eats! How mean he is! How much he sleeps!*

(B) Some people will say: We are saying this behind his back for his own benefit, even if he doesn't know what is good for him! They may even say: We are doing this in the interests of the community at large.

These claims may be dismissed on several counts:

(1) Any deed which is done must be done according to Shari'ah. Good intentions alone, with no regard to anything else, will not be sufficient to save a person from the wrath of Allah. Indeed, the *Mushrikun* (pagans)

claimed to have the best of intentions, but Allah (SWT) made their status very clear in the Qur'an, when He said:

"... But those who take for protectors other than Allah (say): 'We only serve them in order that they may bring us nearer to Allah.'..." [al-Zumar 39:3]

They may have had this lofty intention - namely, to be brought closer to Allah (SWT) - but that did not prevent the Prophet (SAAS) and his noble Companions (RA) from fighting them.

Doing good deeds in the interests of an individual or the community cannot be achieved by backbiting about people or spreading gossip about their private affairs!

(2) If the claims are true and said with the best of intentions, then the method of acting upon those intentions must also be sound.

This is best achieved by speaking directly to the person, and encouraging him, with gentle wisdom, to adhere to the teachings of Islam and to avoid following his own

whims. This advice and encouragement may need to be repeated, but if this brings no result, then look for someone else to give this advice, because your approach may not have worked. Ask the person you approach to keep secret whatever you tell him about the person concerned. He should choose the most appropriate way of approaching the person, directly or indirectly. If you find that the person will not give up his shameful deed or sin, even after repeatedly advising him, then all you can do is leave alone the one who is committing his sin in secret, and do not disclose it to anyone. If you do disclose it, you will have caused many problems in the Muslim community, including the following:

- (a) you will have transgressed the texts which command us to cover the faults of a fellow-Muslim.
- (b) you will have spread doubts, thus causing Muslims to be suspicious of even the best among them, and made it harder for them to trust one another.
- (c) you will have caused the Muslims to start gossiping about one another and spread hatred among them,

thus distracting them from the urgent matters which face them, and the community and Ummah as a whole.

- (d) you will have pushed the one who had committed his sin in secret into committing his sin openly.

3 - Every intelligent person will accept that there can be no benefit to the Muslim community in backbiting about a person who is trying to conceal his faults and sins. What possible benefit can there be in such talk?! What good can this do the Muslim Ummah - liberate Jerusalem?! Or destroy *Shirk* and the *Mushrikin*?!

4 - Not only does backbiting fail to achieve the purposes claimed - whether at an individual or community level - but the victim may begin to hate those who spoke about him in his absence, until the situation deteriorates as the poet described:

"There are no blood-ties or friendship (between us):
The gulf is too wide to be bridged."



Footnotes

1. Researched by al-Albani.

Some of the Motives for *Ghibah*¹ and the Islamic Response to them

1- Getting things off one's chest [especially in the case of hatred]:

One person may do something to upset another, and whenever the aggrieved party feels angry about it, he will get it off his chest by telling his friend about it. To avoid doing this, we should remember the words of Allah (SWT):

"Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord, and for a Garden whose width is that (of the whole) of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous, - those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; - For Allah loves those who do good." [Al 'Imran 3:133-134]

...and the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah (SAAS):

"Whoever controls his anger, even though he is in a position to act upon it, Allah will call him in front of all the people of the Day of Judgement and invite him to choose whoever he wishes of *al-Hur al-'Ayn*." ²

The one who gossips in order to "get something off his chest" is not considered to be one who has controlled his anger.

2 - Joining in with a group of friends.

When a group is indulging in the discussion of people's honour, a person may think that if he speaks out and tries to stop them, they will dislike him and exclude him. So he joins in with them, believing that this is how to be good company.

But we should remember the words of the Messenger of Allah (SAAS): "Whoever seeks to earn the approval of the people by angering Allah, Allah will abandon him to the people." ³

3 - Seeking to raise one's own status by putting others down.

In this case, a person may say, "So-and-so is ignorant, he is not clever..." etc. By doing this, he seeks to prove that he is better, and that he knows better.

We should remind ourselves that what is with Allah (SWT) is better and is eternal, and that this world is not even worth a gnat's wing in the sight of Allah. This person may be better than you in the sight of Allah (SWT), as in the Hadith:

"Maybe this scruffy man, who has doors shut in his face, if he swore an oath to Allah and asked him for something, Allah would do it for him!" [Muslim, Ahmad].

4 - Fooling around and joking.

A person may mention another in such a way as to make people laugh - some people even earn their living in this way.⁴

But we have to remember the words of the Prophet (SAAS): "Woe to him who tells lies in order to make the people laugh - woe to him, woe to him!"⁵

5 - Jealousy.

It could be the case that a person may be praised in a gathering, where he is liked by the people, and a jealous person may hear this. The jealous one then insults the other, so that the latter may lose the status which he previously enjoyed.

I have discussed the answer to this problem in *Amrad yu'ani minha al-Hasidun bi-Alsunatihim* (The diseases suffered by those who reap the harvest of their tongues).⁶

The jealous person should remember that, because of his jealousy and insults, the person who is the object of his envy will be above, not only in this world but on the Day of Resurrection.

6 - If a person has been accused of doing something, he will mention the name of the one who actually did do it, in order to clear his own name, thinking that this is the best way; or else he will mention someone else who took part in the deed, hoping thus to excuse himself by saying "so-and-so did it, and so-and-so did it too."

The person has the right to protest his innocence, but he does not have the right to mention the one who did the deed, or any others who took part in it.

7 - Anger for the sake of Allah (SWT).

A person may become angry because of a sin committed by another person, so he talks about it⁷, demonstrating his anger and mentioning that person's name, when he should have concealed that person's name and not mentioned him in this way.

8 - A man may feel sorry for his rother because he is going through some hardship, so he mentions him by name, saying, "Poor so-and-so, he's really going through a bad time!" He may be sincere in what he says, but it is

wrong for him to mention the name of the person he is speaking about.

In this case, we should remember the words of Allah (SWT):

"Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it." [al-Zalzalah 99:7-8]

How much evil results from the gossip of the Muslims! A good intention does not justify an evil deed, as we have explained above. A person will be rewarded for his intention but he is deemed a sinner because of his deed.

9 - A person who has too much free time and feels bored, may find nothing better with which to occupy his time than talking about people and their faults, and mentioning things they dislike.

To combat this, we should fill our spare time with worthwhile activities and worship, and the pursuit of

knowledge; we should remind ourselves of the words of the Prophet (SAAS):

"The son of Adam will not be dismissed by his Lord on the Day of Resurrection until he has been asked about five things: his life, and how he spent it; his youth, and how he made use of it; his wealth and how he earned it; and on what he spent it; and what he did with the knowledge he acquired."⁸

10 - A man may seek to get closer to his bosses by criticizing his colleagues, in order to gain promotion or make them think well of him

The Muslim should remember the Ayat and Ahadith which speak of *Rizq* (sustenance), and that no harm or benefit can befall him except by the permission of Allah (SWT). Belief in *al-Qadr* (Predestination) is the basis for combating this problem.

Hence I would remind such people of the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah (SAAS): "Whoever seeks to earn the

approval of the people by angering Allah, Allah will abandon him to the people."

11 - Conceit, and a lack of awareness of one's faults.

The answer to this is its opposite: a person should think about his faults, try to put them right, and feel ashamed to criticize anyone else when he himself has faults.

The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) condemned conceit and said: "If you were not to sin, I would fear something even worse for you: conceit, conceit!"⁹

* * *

Footnotes

1. The title and points covered have been adapted from al-Ghazali, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, p 1-6, with the addition of some further points, relevant quotations and explanations, which were not mentioned by al-Ghazali.
2. *Sunan Abi Dawud*, 3997, et al.
3. Part of a Hadith narrated by al-Tirmidhi et al. See: *Takhrij al-Tahawiyyah* (278)
4. This was the case at the time of al-Ghazali, and it is even worse nowadays, with the many plays and productions which are put on by the various media. This is the way of life for people who cannot do without them.
5. Al-Tirmidhi, Abu Dawud, et al. See: *Ghayah al-Maram* (No. 376).
6. See my book: *Hasa'id al-Asun*.
7. It is not right to mention his name unless there is good cause for doing so. See: "Types of Ghibah which are permitted" (p.63).
8. Al-Tirmidhi, *Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, No. 1969, et al. See: *al-Sahihah* (No. 946)
9. Reported by al-'Aqili, Ibn 'Adiyy and al-Quda'i, in *Musnad al-Shihab*, with an Isnad whose narrators are trustworthy, apart from Salam ibn Abi al-Sahba', about whom there was some disagreement, but it is Hasan because of corroborating evidence. See: *al-Sahihah*, No. 658. Al-Mundhiri said: Al-Bazzar mentioned it with a good (*Jayyid*) Isnad, (*Al-Targhib wa'l Tarhib* 3/570).

Ahadith Aimed at Deterring People from Gossiping

From Abi Bakrah (RA): The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said, in his sermon during the Farewell Pilgrimage: "Your blood, your wealth and your honour are sacred, as this day of yours, in this month of yours, in this land of yours, are sacred. Have I not told you?"¹

Let us think deeply about this, and regard the orders of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SAAS) with the awe that they deserve.

In the sight of Allah, violating the rights of your brother by gossiping is equivalent to violating the sanctity of *Yawm al-Nahr* (the Day of Sacrifice), in the month of Dhu'l-Hijjah, in Mina. Do you not realize the enormity of this violation of a Muslim's honour, O you who backbite and gossip and eat the flesh of the Muslims?!

From al-Bara' ibn 'Azib (RA) who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "There are seventy-two degrees of

Riba (usury), the least of which is equivalent to committing adultery with one's own mother. The worst of them is a man's insulting his brother's honour."²

Allahu akbar! Where is our reason? *Allahu akbar!* Where is the Faith which should fill our hearts? Where is the Faith which should control the whims and desires of the self? Where is the Faith which will stop us insulting the honour of our fellow-Muslims?

How serious a sin is *Riba*! The matter is regarded as being of such enormity that Allah (SWT) declared war on whoever deals in it. The lowest degree of *Riba* is equivalent to a man's committing adultery with his own mother, but the *worst* type of *Riba* is a man's insulting his brother's honour.

Don't you understand?!

So - go ahead and insult your brother's honour to your heart's content; backbite, spread rumours, insult and criticize... but where will you run to on the Day of Judgement?!

From 'A'ishah (RA), who said: I said to the Prophet (SAAS): "It's bad enough that Safiyyah is..." (Some of narrators said: she meant that she was short). He said: "You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been."³ [i.e., the enormity of it is such that, even if it were mixed with the vast waters of the sea, it would not be concealed at all]

A word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been!! One word alone could do this, and have such a far-reaching impact! So what do you think of the gossips of today, whose tongues never cease to wag? What vast oceans could be tainted and corrupted by their words! How many quiet lives are disrupted by them!

From 'Amr ibn Shu'ayb from his father from his grandfather: (the people) mentioned a man to the Messenger of Allah (SAAS), saying: "He doesn't eat until he is fed and he doesn't visit anybody until they have visited him first." The Prophet (SAAS) said: "You have gossiped about him." They said: "O Messenger of Allah! We have mentioned about him something which is true."

He said: "It is bad enough that you have mentioned something about your brother which is true."⁴

We should all ask ourselves: who among us is infallible? Who has made his *Qarin*⁵ submit in Islam? Who among us is free from errors, faults and sins? Who among us would be content to have everything about him, good and bad, spoken of by others?

Any one of us becomes furious if he hears someone hinting something about him; so what would you do if it was said clearly and in detail, let alone behind your back?

From Anas (RA) who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "When I was taken up into heaven, I passed by people who had copper claws tearing at their faces and chests. I asked: 'Who are these, O Jibril?' He said: 'They are those who ate the flesh of the people, and insulted their honour.'"⁶

Have these gossips lost their minds? How can they continue to insult the honour of the Muslims and eat their flesh after hearing this Hadith? Let them have the glad

tidings of copper claws tearing at their faces and chests! These claws are far worse than the claws of savage wild beasts, so as to intensify the punishment for their evil deeds. So it is up to you to decide how much you wish to indulge in gossip after reading this!

From 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (RA) who said: We were with the Prophet (SAAS), when a man got up and left, whereupon another man immediately started backbiting about him. The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Clean the bits of meat from between your teeth!" He said: "What should I clean from between my teeth? I haven't eaten any meat!" He said: "You have eaten the flesh of your brother!"⁷

This is the state of our community nowadays: any one of us may commit the sin of gossip or backbiting, but then will say: I didn't gossip, I didn't eat flesh, I haven't done anything!

Why?!

Because we have allowed our tongues to become accustomed to speaking this way, without knowing what *Ghibah* is.

Let us learn about our religion. Let us learn about Halal and Haram - as much as we can - and distinguish between the speech which is Halal and the speech which is Haram.⁸



Footnotes

1. Al-Bukhari (1/26, 2/215, 5/224); Muslim (1218), et al.
2. Narrated by al-Tabarani, *al-Awsat*, from the report of 'Umar ibn Rashid, who is weak (*Da'if*). Our Shaykh al-Albani mentioned that other similar reports were narrated via other Isnads (al-Sahihah, No. 1871). The Hadith is Sahih because of the various corroborating Isnads.
3. Abu Dawud (4875), *Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud* (No. 4080); al-Tirmidhi, who said it is a Sahih Hasan Hadith; al-Bayhaqi. See *Ghaybah al-Maram* (427).
4. Al-Isbahani, with a Hasan Isnad, as in al-Mundhiri, *al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib (Al-Tarhib min al-Ghibah...*, No. 13). Al-Albani classed it as Hasan in *Sahih al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib*.
5. *Qarin*: a Jinn or Shaytan whose task it is to accompany a person constantly and try to mislead him. [Translator]
6. Ahmad; Abu Dawud (*Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud*, No. 4082), et al. See: *al-Sahihah* (No. 533).
7. Al-Tabarani, *al-Kabir* (10092), et al. Al-Haythami, in *al-Majma'*, said: Its men are Sahih. Al-Albani classed it as Sahih (*Ghayah al-Maram*, No. 428). Also found in *al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib*, 3/506.
8. In order to make it easier to fulfil this *Shar'i* requirement of learning about Halal and Haram, Allah enabled me to write *Hasa'id al-Asun* ("The Harvest of the Tongues"); praise be to Allah for His blessings.

The prohibition of listening to gossip

Allah (SWT) said:

"...Every act of hearing, or of seeing, or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning)."
[al-Isra' 17:36]

"... If Satan ever makes you forget, then after recollection, do not sit in the company of those who do wrong." [al-An'am 6:68]

"And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom..." [al-Qasas 28:55]

From Ka'b ibn Malik, in the long Hadith concerning his repentance; he said: The Prophet (SAAS) said, when he was sitting among the people at Tabuk: "What happened to Ka'b ibn Malik?" A man from Banu Salamah said: "O Messenger of Allah, the beauty of his cloak and the appreciation of his sides (have detained him)!" Mu'adh ibn Jabal said: "Woe be upon that which you have said.

By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, we know nothing about him but good." The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) kept quiet.¹

What do we learn from these texts?

1 - That listening and paying attention to gossip is something for which the individual will have to answer to Allah (SWT).

2 - That it is prohibited to sit with people who are gossiping and backbiting.

3 - That refusing to listen to *Ghibah* and bad speech is one of the qualities of the believer.

The Hadith which related the story of Ka'b (RA) goes beyond the rejection of *Ghibah*: the Muslim's honour should be defended by criticizing what the gossip says, and by saying something good about the person which is true. Thus Mu'adh (RA) said to the gossip: "Woe be upon that which you have said. By Allah, O Messenger of Allah, we know nothing about him but good."

The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Whoever defends the honour of his brother, Allah will protect his face from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection." ²

The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Whoever defends his brother in his absence, Allah will defend him in this world and the next." ³

These are matters which are well-understood; there is no excuse for any nonsense talk or backbiting.

But anyone looking at the people nowadays will see them behaving in the opposite manner.

You will see them:

- 1- Paying attention to the gossip who criticizes a fellow-Muslim;
- 2- Listening to it with enjoyment,⁴ hoping to hear more bad news about the person;
- 3- Adding some news or descriptions of their own,

mentioning about their brother something which he dislikes, and thus co-operating with Shaytan;

- 4- Agreeing with the gossip and supporting him in his criticism of the Muslim who is absent.

"Do they not think that they will be called to account? - on a Mighty Day, a Day when (all) mankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?" [al-Mutaffifin 83:4-6]

The poet described them correctly when he said:

"You would have been heard if you had called people with life in them,
but there is no life in those whom you call.
If you had blown into a fire it would have blazed up,
but what you are blowing into is dead ashes."

A better description is given in the Qur'an, where Allah (SWT) says:

"The same is it to them whether you admonish them or you do not admonish them: they will not believe." [Ya-Sin 36:10]

One of the verses of poetry on the prohibition of listening to gossip says:

"Protect your ears from listening to evil talk,
as you would protect your tongue from speaking it.
For when you listen to evil talk,
You are an accomplice of the one who is speaking -
so beware!"



Footnotes

1. Part of the Hadith narrated by al-Bukhari (6/3), *al-Fath* (8/113 and No. 4418), Muslim (2769), et al. See also my book, *Min Mawaqif al-Sahabah* (Part 5).
2. Narrated and classed as Hasan by al-Tirmidhi. Classed as Hasan by al-Albani, *Ghayah al-Maram* (below Hadith 431).
3. Al-Diya': *al-Mukhtasarah*, et al. See also: *al-Sahihah*, No. 1217.
4. The fact that they enjoy it is obvious from their lack of regret and repentance, and from their persistence in committing this sin. Indeed their enjoyment is obvious every time the victim is mentioned.

The one who listens to Gossip and the one who Gossips are the same

Remember the Hadith of Anas (RA) which was quoted above¹, in which it was said:

"One of them said to his companion: "This one is sleeping as if he were at home!"

Only one of them said this, but the other one listened and agreed with him, so the Prophet (SAAS) said to both the speaker and the listener: "You have already eaten!", then he said, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, I can see his flesh between your teeth."



Footnotes

1. See "Common but invalid excuses for *Ghibah*," p 20 of this book.

How to stop gossip

If any of us hear gossip about one of our brothers, we are enjoined to oppose it, and correct the speaker - gently, politely, and with wisdom. This is in accordance with the various ways of changing a bad deed which were described by the Messenger of Allah (SAAS)¹, which we should try to do to the best of our ability. The least of these is opposing the wrong deed in our hearts, which in this case should make us leave the gathering where the gossip is taking place.

Let us think about the words of Allah (SWT):

"When you see men engaged in vain discourse about Our Signs, turn away from them unless they turn to a different theme. If Satan ever makes you forget, then after recollection, do not sit in the company of those who do wrong." [al-An'am 6:68]

Let those who relish gossip beware! The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) ordered those who hear gossip to reject it, but they are accepting it with pleasure!

Woe to you! Are you not thinking about where you will end up? It is as if you think you were created only for fooling about and committing sins! For your Lord's sake tell me: are you Muslims?!



Footnotes

1. The Hadith reads: "Whoever of you sees an evil deed should change it with his hand [by acting], or if he cannot do that, then with his tongue [by speaking out], or if he cannot do that, then with his heart - and that is the weakest of faith." Reported by Muslim (*Kitab al-Iman*, No. 49).

The Virtue of speaking up for a Muslim in his absence, and opposing *Ghibah*

From Abu'l-Darda' (RA): The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "Whoever defends the honour of his brother, this will be a protection for him from the Fire."¹

From Asma' bint Yazid (RA), who said: The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Whoever defends his brother's honour in his absence, will be entitled to Allah's protection from the Fire."²

The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Whoever defends his brother's honour, Allah will protect his face from the Fire of the Day of Resurrection."³

From Mu'adh ibn Anas al-Juhani: The Prophet (SAAS) said: "Whoever protects a Muslim from a hypocrite, (probably he said:) Allah will send an angel to protect his flesh from the Fire of Hell; and whoever accuses a Muslim of something, seeking to disgrace him, Allah will

detain him on the bridge of Hell until he has been fully punished for what he said." 4



Footnotes:

1. Al-Khara'iti, *Makarim al-Akhlaq*; Ibn 'Asakir. There is nothing wrong with its Isnad as there is corroborating evidence. See *Ghayah al-Maram* (below Hadith No. 431).
2. Ahmad et al. It is Sahih because of corroborating and similar reports. See *Ghayah al-Maram* (431).
3. "The prohibition of listening to gossip.", P. 43 of this Book.
4. Abu Dawud: *Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud* (4086); Ibn Abi Dunya. See also al-Albani, *Sahih al-Targhib wa'l-Tarhib*.

The stench of those who gossip about the believers

From Jabir (RA) who said: "We were with the Prophet (SAAS), when there came a foul smell. The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "Do you know what this smell is? This is the stench of those who gossip about the believers." ¹



Footnotes:

- 1 Ahmad: al-Bukhari, *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, et al. This Hadith is Hasan; see *Ghayah al-Maram* (No. 429).

The punishment of the gossip in the grave

From Abu Bakrah (RA), who said: Whilst the Prophet (SAAS) was walking between me and another man, we came upon two graves. He said: "The occupants of these graves are being punished, bring me a palm-leaf stalk." Abu Bakrah said: So my companion and I rushed to bring him the palm-leaf stalk. He split it in two, and placed one half on each grave, then said: "May their punishment be lessened until this dries up, for they are being punished for no major sin: they are being punished for gossip and for urination."¹



Footnotes:

1. Ahmad; al-Tabarani; al-Awsat, et al. See also: Sahih al-Targhib: al-Tarhib min Isabah al-Bawl al-Thawbah wa ghayrihi, No. 152). Also narrated in al-Targhib wa'l-Tarhib, in Bab ma ja'a fi 'Aqubah al-Nammam.

The person who gossips is a coward with a weak personality

The person who gossips is a coward with a weak personality because he cannot confront the person concerned. If he were brave, he would tell him to his face, and gently point out his faults and wrong deeds, such as breaking a promise, failing to honour guests properly, or going along with his wife in ways that displease Allah (SWT).

Why can we not be brave enough to confront a person with his mistakes, so that we will earn the reward for enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and fulfilling the words of Allah (SWT):

"Who is better in speech than one who calls (men) to Allah, works righteousness, and says; 'I am of those who bow in Islam'?" [Fussilat 41:33]

Furthermore, if you confront the person directly, he may become aware of his sins and shortcomings. But if you

say the same words behind his back, you yourself will become blameworthy in the sight of Allah (SWT) for eating the flesh of your brother. If your words reach the person concerned, you will not have a leg to stand on, and you may even resort to lying ("I didn't say that!").

So choose which way you want to go: everyone will go in the direction which will fulfil the purpose he was created for.

* * *

The one who Gossips is lacking in Faith

O backbiter, pay heed! Do you not know that you are lacking in Faith? Have you not heard the words of the Messenger of Allah (SAAS): "None of you truly believe until he wishes for his brother what which he wishes for himself"?¹

Do you truly wish for your brother what you wish for yourself when you gossip about him? Would you like it if someone else were to say something you dislike behind your back? How can you do something which you would hate to have done to you?

Do you not realize that there is connection between faith and giving up gossip? Think about the words of the Hadith: "None of you truly believe until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself" The one who wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself has a heart which has been guided; the path of faith has been made easy for him. The one who does not do that should think

deeply about the Prophet's words: "he does not truly believe."

Think on: what price are you paying for your enjoyment of gossip?

Faith is the dearest thing a man can possess.



Footnotes:

1. Al-Bukhari (1/10), No. 13; Muslim; et al.

***Ghibah* disrupts the enjoining of what is Good and the forbidding of what is Evil**

If we were truly sincere in our Islam and in our deeds, then if we saw someone doing something wrong, we would confront him with his mistake or sin. We would mention it openly, and enjoin him to do what is right and to give up evil.

Every time (we see someone) doing something wrong and the Shaytan comes to tempt us to gossip about it, we should remind ourselves that the deed which he makes so attractive is in fact a sin, and that the human soul is prone to do evil deeds¹ which earn the wrath of Allah (SWT).

One may ask: but what outlet is there for the heart which is overwhelmed with frustration because of man's continual shortcomings and sins? But we know that the religion (*Din*) of Allah is one of ease and mercy: this frustration may therefore be channelled into making a person better and more obedient to Allah (SWT).

So go to the one who is committing the sin or who has the shortcoming, and get it all of your chest - as long as you do this purely for the sake of Allah (SWT). Speak gently and with wisdom, and explain to him that you are doing this because you wish for him what you would wish for yourself; do not leave unsaid anything that is in your heart.

Go back to him every time you see the sin or shortcoming repeated. Keep on enjoining what is right and forbidding evil. By doing this you will be one of the best of peoples evolved for mankind.

Have you not read the words of Allah (SWT)?

"You are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah..." [Al 'Imran 3:110]

But we can see that most of the people nowadays, unfortunately, prefer sin to obedience; they want to vent the anger which they feel in their hearts towards their

brothers, but they can find no other way to do so, except through gossiping. Shame on them for what they do!



Footnotes:

1. Cf. Yusuf 12:33 [Translator].

Types of *Ghibah* which are permitted

Having discussed *Ghibah* in general, we will now explain the types of *Ghibah* which are permitted, according to Shari'ah.

BUT: beware of the fact that Shaytan can mislead a person to abuse these exceptions and take them as an excuse to do things which are forbidden, so that he may find himself constantly gossiping if he is not careful.

The types of *Ghibah* which are permitted are clearly defined and strictly limited, and such things must only be said when the intention is correct. There must be no motive of venting one's own anger or of defaming the person. Allah (SWT) "knows of (the tricks) that deceive with the eyes, and all that the hearts (of men) conceal." ¹

The types of *Ghibah* which are permitted are as follows:²

1 - Complaint - such as complaining to a ruler or judge.

The evidence for this is the report of 'A'ishah (RA) in which she said: Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, told the Prophet (SAAS): "Abu Sufyan is a miserly man and does not give me enough for myself and my child, but I take from him without his knowing." He said: "Take what is sufficient for yourself and your child, and no more."³

Further evidence is to be found in the Hadith of Abu Hurayrah (RA), who said: A man said: "O Messenger of Allah! I have a neighbour who is harassing me." He said: "Go and put your belongings out on the street." So the man went and put his belongings out on the street. People gathered and asked: "What's wrong with you?" He said: "I have a neighbour who is harassing me; I told the Prophet (SAAS) about it and he told me to go and put my belongings out on the street." They began to say: "O Allah, curse him! O Allah, humiliate him!" (The neighbour) heard about this, so he came to the man and told him: "Go back into your house; by Allah, I will not disturb you again."⁴

2 - Seeking a Fatwa, such as telling the Mufti, "My brother - or so-and-so - has done me wrong: how do I get out of this situation?"

This is what happened in the Hadith narrated above.

3 - Seeking help to change a wrong deed (*Munkar*), or to prevent some disaster befalling a Muslim.

This too may be referred to the Hadith quoted above.

This includes the critical appraisal of the reporters and witnesses in the transmission of Ahadith - this is in order to protect the authenticity of the Hadith of the Prophet (SAAS).

From Zayd ibn Arqam (RA) who said: We set out on a journey with the Messenger of Allah (SAAS), in which we faced many hardships. 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy said to his friends: "Do not give what you have in your possession to those who are with the Messenger of Allah (SAAS) until they desert him. And in this case, when we return to Madinah, the honourable will dive out the

meaner therefrom." I came to the Messenger of Allah (SAAS) and told him about this. He sent someone to 'Abdullah ibn Ubayy and he asked him whether he had said that or not. He swore an oath to the effect that he had not done that, and said that it was Zayd who had lied to the Messenger of Allah (SAAS). Zayd said: I was very disturbed on account of this until this Ayah was revealed attesting that I had spoken the truth: "*When the Hypocrites come to you...*" [al-Munafiqun 63:1]. The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) then called them in order to seek forgiveness for them, but they turned their heads away..."⁵

With regard to this, Imam al-Shawkani (may Allah have mercy on him) said⁶: The clear evidence concerning that is the Hadith which was reported concerning *al-Nasihah* (sincerity) to Allah, to His Book, to His Messenger, to the leaders of the Muslims, to their common folk and to their elites. Exposing lies and liars is one of the greatest forms of *Nasihah* which is obligatory towards Allah (SWT), His Messengers and all the Muslims.

He also said: Likewise, exposing a person who has given false witness with regard to property, blood or honour, is also a form of the *Nasihah* which Allah (SWT) has made obligatory on us.

From al-Sharid (RA) who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "If someone is in a position to pay off his debts but does not do so, it is permitted to rebuke him harshly and to punish him." ⁷

Ibn Mubarak defined the punishment as imprisonment on the request of the one who is owed money.

Al-Munawi, in *Qayd al-Qadir*, also commented on this Hadith, saying that the harsh rebuke could take the form of the one who is owed money telling his debtor: "You are a wrong-doer (*Zalim*), you do not pay your debts on time," etc., but such rebukes should not include foul language or insults to his honour (*Ird*).. The punishment could be decreed by the *Qadi* in order to make him pay his debts, and could take the form of lashing or imprisonment.

5 - Consultation in the matters of marriage, business partnerships or asking about a particular neighbourhood (i.e. with a view to moving there), etc.

When both Mu'awiyah and Abu'l-Jaham asked for the hand of Fatimah bint Qays in marriage, she consulted the Prophet (SAAS) about them. He told her: "As for Abu'l-Jaham, he does not drop his stick from his shoulder⁸, and as for Mu'awiyah, he is poor, and has no money."⁹

In another Hadith, the Prophet (SAAS) said: "Each Muslim has six rights over another." It was asked: "What are they, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: "When you meet him, you should greet him with salaam; when he invites you, you should accept; if he asks for your advice, then you should advise him..."¹⁰

6 - Mentioning the sin of one who commits his sin openly, or the *Bid'ah* of the innovator.

No other faults of such people should be mentioned, unless there is good reason for doing so, as outlined above.

From 'A'ishah (RA): A man asked permission to see the Prophet (SAAS) who said: "Let him enter! What a bad member of the tribe he is!" ¹¹

Al-Bukhari concluded from this Hadith that it is permissible to speak about wrongdoers and those about whom one has misgivings in their absence.

From 'A'ishah who said: The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "I don't think so-and-so and so-and-so know anything about our religion." ¹²

Al-Layth said: They were two men of the *Munafiqin* (Hypocrites).

7 - Description of someone who is known by a certain physical characteristic, such as *al-A'raj* (the one who walks with a limp), *al-Asamm* (deaf), *al-A'ma* (blind), etc.

It is not permitted to use these names for the purposes of insulting: if it is possible to identify a person by another name, then this is better.

From Usayyir ibn Jabir: The people of Kufah sent a delegation to Umar (RA), among whom was a man who was making fun of Uways. Umar said: "Is there anyone from the tribe of Qaran here?" That man (who had mocked Uways) came forward, and Umar said: "The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: A man will come to you from Yemen, and he will leave only his mother behind there. He will suffer from leprosy; he will pray to Allah, and Allah will cure him of it, except for a patch the size of a Dinar or Dirham. Whoever of you meets him, let him ask for forgiveness for you." ¹³

Imam al-Shawkani¹⁴ (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If you ask me, "What if a person who had a nickname (*Laqab*) was not known by any other name?" I would say, "If such was the case, then that nickname would not really be a nickname at all; it would be a proper name (*Ism*) by which the person is known, and he would not be known by any other name at all."

The specific *Shar'i* cases outlined above have also been referred to in verse:

"Criticism is not *Ghibah* in six cases:

Complaint, Identification, warning,

Criticizing someone who openly commits sin, seeking a
Fatwa, and asking for help to correct wrongdoing."



Footnotes:

1. The phrase is taken from the Qur'an (Ghafir 40:19) [Translator].
2. Adapted from al-Nawawi, *Riyadh al-Salihin*, with explanations and references as necessary.
3. Al-Bukhari (7180), Muslim (1714).
4. Al-Bukhari, *Adab al-Mufrad* (124). Al-Hafiz al-Mundhiri classed its Isnad as Hasan in *al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib*; and it was reported elsewhere. See also: Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Ihtijaj bi'l-Qudr* (57 and 58) (ed. al-Albani).
5. Al-Bukhari (4903) and Muslim (2772). Their turning their faces away meant that they did not want to the Prophet (SAAS) to ask for forgiveness for them.
6. *Raf' al-Ribah*, ed. Muhammad Ibrahim al-Shaybai, p27 (published by Maktabah Ibn Taymiyah, Kuwait). The word *Nasihah*, translated here as "sincerity", also carries the meanings of "good advice", "doing justice to a person or situation", "integrity", etc. See al-Nawawi's *Forty Hadith* (Hadith 7). [Translator].
7. Abu Dawud (3628), Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud/3086; al-Nisa'i; Ibn Majah, et al. Classed as Sahih by al-Albani, *al-Irwa'*, No. 1434.
8. This phrase may mean either that he travels a great deal, or that he is accustomed to beating his wives frequently.
9. Muslim (1480) et al.
10. Muslim (2162) et al.
11. Al-Bukhari (6054), Muslim (2591).
12. Al-Bukhari (6067).
13. Muslim (2542).
14. *Raf' al-Ribah*, p33.

Matters which must be taken care of in the case of that *Ghibah* which is permitted

1 - You must have pure sincerity of intention towards Allah (SWT). Whoever mentions something true about a person, not in order to correct some wrongdoing, but to discredit him, is a sinner. An example of such would be if a man asked another for advice regarding marriage, and the latter told him something true, not for the purposes of exposing the facts, but because of some jealousy (*Hasad*) which he himself felt, so that the person would not marry that particular girl.

This is Haram; and there are many such instances.

2 - You should only mention something which is true about your brother, if by doing so you will achieve one of the purposes outlined above, and as long as you do not mention any other of his faults unnecessarily.

3 - You must be sure that any evil which may result from this *Ghibah* will not outweigh its benefits, and that it will not cause any *Fitnah* which may harm the Muslims.



Repentance from *Ghibah*

It is necessary (*Wajib*) to repent after committing *Ghibah*, and you must hasten to turn to Allah (SWT) and repent to Him, for none can forgive sins except Him.

There are four conditions to be met when repenting from *Ghibah*¹:

- 1- You must stop gossiping (or backbiting).
- 2 - You must regret what you have done.
- 3 - You must be determined never to do it again.
- 4 - You must ask your brother to forgive you for gossiping, and to pray to Allah (SWT) to forgive you.

If you fear that some evil may result from your telling him, then there is no need to do so, and it will be sufficient for you to pray for him.

Ibn Kathir, in his Tafsir of Surah al-Hujurat, said:... Others say that asking him for forgiveness is not a condition (of repentance for *Ghibah*), because if you told him about it, this may hurt him more than if he did not know about it."

Al-Nawawi (may Allah (SWT) have mercy on him) said: "The 'Ulama' said: If you have committed *Ghibah*, then ask your brother for forgiveness." Commenting on this, our Shaykh al-Albani (may Allah preserve him) said: "This is if you do not fear any worse evil as a result of asking for his forgiveness; otherwise it is enough to pray for him."



Footnotes:

1. The first three conditions apply to repentance in general, for any sin against Allah (SWT) (i.e. any sin in which no other person is involved or affected). See *Riyadh al-Salihin, Bab al-Tawbah*.

***Ghibah* which is not recognized as such**

1 - A man may mention about his brother something which he dislikes, and when challenged he says: "I'm prepared to say it to his face!"

This attitude may be rejected on the following grounds:

- i) You mentioned about him something which he dislikes, behind his back - and this is *Ghibah*.
- ii) Your being prepared to say it to his face is a completely separate matter. It does not justify your having said about your brother something which he dislikes, behind his back.
- iii) There was absolutely no need to say it behind his back if you were able to say it to his face.
- iv) You have no guarantee that he will forgive you for what you said behind his back.

v) It is obvious from real life that being prepared to say something a person dislikes to his face, is not a valid claim. It is Shaytan's way of deceiving you into committing *Ghibah*.

2 - In a gathering of people, when some person is mentioned, a man may say, "*Alhamdulillah*, that we don't creep to the authorities!" or "I seek refuge with Allah from shamelessness!", or some such. By saying this, he both criticizes the other person and praises himself.¹

3 - A person may say: "Some people - or some of the Fuqaha', or some people we met - did such-and-such" - if the person to whom he is speaking will understand exactly what he means by that.¹

4 - A person may be asked about his brother and may say: "May Allah guide us, may Allah forgive us, may Allah guide him, we ask Allah for forgiveness, we seek refuge with Allah from evil," etc., so that it will be easily understood that he is criticizing him.

Likewise, a man may say: "So-and-so is only doing what any of us would do in the same situation."³

5 - A person may sarcastically refer to another by using high-sounding titles, thus intending to insult him.

6 - A man may say: "He is young, we are allowed to talk about him."

This is a strange thing to say! There is no evidence that such a thing is allowed. There are no exceptions to the comprehensive prohibition of Ghibah; it is forbidden to gossip about anyone, old or young, male or female, rich or poor.

Why do they not say: "When the young person gossips about the old person, he is not sinning"?⁴

Why do they not recall the Hadith: "The pens are lifted from three [i.e. are not recording their deeds]: the sleeper until he awakes, the one who is afflicted [by insanity] until he recovers, and the young boy until he grows up."⁵

The Prophet (SAAS) said: "The pens have been lifted from three: from the insane person who has no control over his mind, until he recovers; from the sleeper until he awakes; and from the young boy until he reaches puberty." ⁶

7 - It may happen that Allah (SWT) makes it easy for someone to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong in a difficult situation, which no-one else could handle, and the person spoken to may respond by sincerely seeking to repent. But thereafter Shaytan may mislead the one who gave the advice, so that he begins to tell the story to others: "So-and-so did such-and-such, but I advised him in such a way...".

What motive can there be for telling this to others, apart from one's own whims and love of gossip? Isn't the aim of "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil" to spread good among the people and stop evil? So why talk about it once this aim has been achieved? Or is it the case that the one who seeks to enjoin good becomes led by Shaytan and the one who seeks to stop evil falls into its trap?

8 - Being careless with regard to gossip about a sinner.

This is not a clear-cut case: It is not generally permissible. It is not permitted to gossip about everyone who falls into sin, otherwise it would be permitted to gossip about all the Muslims! Every believer commits sins - this is confirmed by the Hadith of the Prophet (SAAS):

"Every believing slave has a sin which he will commit time after time, or which he habitually commits and which he will not give up until he leaves this world. The believer was created to be tested, to repent, and to forget; if he were to be reminded and encouraged, he would repent and remember." ⁷

In another Hadith, He (SAAS) said: "Every son of Adam constantly errs, and the best of those who err are those who repent." ⁸

How can they be so sure that gossiping about the sinner is allowed? How do they explain the words "Your brother" in the Hadith: "Ghibah means your saying about your

brother something which he dislikes"? Does this phrase not cover both the righteous and the sinner?

How can it be otherwise when the Messenger of Allah (SAAS) said: "The Muslim is the brother of the Muslim; he does not do him wrong, he does not let him down, and he does not belittle him. Taqwa is right here - and he pointed to his chest three times. It is evil enough if a man belittles his Muslim brother. Every Muslim is sacred to another Muslim: his blood, his wealth and his honour."⁹

We ask those who take this matter lightly: is the blood of a Muslim sinner Halal? - Obviously not! So why is his honour not likewise Haram, when honour has been described, along with wealth and blood, as being sacred?

9 - A person may describe another as an Indian, or a Palestinian, or a Persian, or an Arab, or a Bedouin, or a peasant, or a cobbler, or a carpenter, or a blacksmith¹⁰ - using such terms for fun, when he himself would hate to be described in such ways.

All of this may be controlled by avoiding "mentioning about your brother something which he dislikes."



Footnotes:

1. Adapted from Mukhtasar Minhaj al-Qasidin.
2. Al-Nawawi: al-Adhkar (Bab Bayan Muhammad tata'allaq bi-Hadd al-Ghibah).
3. Ibid.
4. This does not mean that young people are encouraged to commit Ghibah; we should teach them to give up this and every other Haram act.
5. Abu Dawud (4398), Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud (3698), et al. See also al-Irwa' (No. 297).
6. Abu Dawud, Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud (3701), et al. See also al-Irwa' (under No. 297).
7. Al-Tabarani, with a Sahih Isnad; see al-Sahihah (No. 2276).
8. Al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, et al. See also al-Mishkat, No. 2341.
9. Part of a Hadith narrated by Muslim (2564), et al. Part of it is also in al-Bukhari (2442, 6951).
10. Adapted from al-Nawawi, al-Adhkar, Bab Tahrim al-Ghibah wa'l-Namimah.

Adverse results which may come from a careless attitude towards Gossiping about the Sinner

1 - Rejection of guidance, refusal to accept good advice, and hatred of those who call people to Allah (SWT).

Unfortunately, this kind of *Ghibah* is most often committed by those who frequent the mosques and seek to call others to Allah (SWT). When they see a sinner, they begin to gossip about him, whether he neglects to pray, or to pay Zakat, or to fast, etc. When these sinners hear of the gossip about them, they let it be known that they hate the ones who gossiped about them, and that they can have no trust in them.

Those who seek to call people to Allah (SWT) and who frequent the mosques would do well to look at these sinners with compassion and concern, so that they might work harder to call them to Allah, with gentle wisdom, in order that they may be guided. How many *Mushrikin*, atheists and sinners used to spread corruption throughout

the world, but Allah (SWT) guided them, and they become the best of peoples with the highest morals... history bears ample witness to this.

2 - Hindrance of reconciliation between conflicting parties.

It may be the case that a man gossiped about his brother, and when the latter heard about it, he gossiped about him in revenge. When the first man heard about what the second had said about him, he took the matter further, and spread gossip about everything which the second man would hate to have said about him. The second man, in turn, would do likewise. When people come forward to try and reconcile them, each of them will say: "But he said such-and-such about me, I can never face him!"

All this back-stabbing which sours the relationship between them is caused by ignorance and carelessness.

How often are these disasters and tragedies repeated in our communities! How many good relations have been

destroyed by this kind of thing! How many close friendships have been destroyed by this *Ghibah*!

Is it not time for these people to fear Allah (SWT), for their eyes to weep and for their *Ghibah* to stop?



Beware of Gossiping about one who is inadequate¹

It is strange indeed that we fail to help a person who is inadequate in some way, and even stranger that we harass him by gossiping about him.

From Abu Dharr (RA) who said: I said: "O Messenger of Allah, which deeds are the best?" He said: "Belief in Allah and Jihad for His sake." I asked: "Which slaves are the best (to release)?" He said: "Those who are most liked by their owners and who are the most valuable." I asked: "What if I don't do that [i.e. release such a slave]?" He said: "Help someone who is trying to do something, or do something for someone who is unable to do it." I asked: "O Messenger of Allah, what if I am not capable of doing something?" He said: "Stop yourself from harming people, for this will be a *Sadaqah* (act of charity) from you for your own sake."²

The Messenger of Allah (SAAS) explained to Abu Dharr who the best slaves to release were, and he explained how

those who were not in a position to release slaves may also do good: that is, by helping someone who is inadequate.

But unfortunately, the inadequate person is not safe from the evil of our tongues - all of us criticize him, gossip about him and make fun of what he does.



Footnotes:

1. *Al-Ahraq* - the one who is incapable of successfully completing any task he undertakes.
2. Al-Bukhari (2518), Muslim (84), et al.

What is worse than *Ghibah*

One of the problems which our community is currently facing is that we may see a man gossiping about his brother, not because of some sin or fault of his, but because of customs and traditions.

One of the unique attributes of Allah (SWT) is that He alone is the Lawgiver, Who decrees what is allowed and what is prohibited; this has nothing to do with traditions and customs.

An example of this is the case where a man may invite two or three people to a meal; one of his brothers (who was not invited on this occasion) may feel upset, so he begins to gossip about him, just because he was not invited. All this is the result of ignorance and a lack of religious knowledge. Where does it say that the man has to invite you every time he thinks of inviting guests for a meal?!

If you want proof that such an attitude is in fact Haram, there is plenty of evidence. But there is nothing except your own whims to support you.

Or a man may do something good which is encouraged by the Shari'ah, but because of ignorance about the rules of Islam, people will eat his flesh, and his name will be constantly on the tongues of the ignorant and stupid.

For example, a man may be very modest in his dress, although he could afford to dress well. Every time the ignorant people see him, they may say: "Look at this miser!"¹ Look at this man who has deprived himself of the enjoyment of this world! Look at this one who has made our religion dull and lifeless!"

Where are those whom the Prophet (SAAS) described: "Whoever dresses modestly out of humility towards Allah, although he could afford to dress well, Allah will call him before all of creation on the Day of Resurrection and let him choose whatever garments of Faith² he wishes to wear."³

It is our duty to love this person for the sake of Allah (SWT), as long as he continues to be humble and have this good attitude, and as long as we know that he is practising Islam, to the best of his ability.

First of all we should find out why he is doing this, and we should think: is it Halal or Haram for us to speak badly of him, or to make an example of him and tell people, "He has made our religion dull and lifeless."

Allah (SWT) will call him on the Day of Resurrection, before all of creation, and let him choose whatever garments of Faith he wants to wear. But what will your position be on that Day, you who eat flesh and gossip about the believers? You will be in debt, full of regret and fear.



Footnotes:

1. Commenting on such people by saying things which are not true is very dangerous. People who say such things need to be reminded of the words of the Prophet (SAAS): "... Whoever says something about a believer which is not true will be detained in *Radghah al-Khabal* (a kind of muddy swamp) until he can find a way to justify what he said."

(Reported by Ahmad, Abu Dawud and al-Hakim, who said: Its Isnad is Sahih. Al-Dhahabi and al-Albani (al-Sahihah 438) agreed with him, and mentioned another Isnad).

In Muslim (2002): "They said: 'O Messenger of Allah, what is *Tinah al-Khabal*?' He said: 'It is the sweat or the juice of the people of Hell.'"

2. Garments of Faith: the clothes of Paradise which the people of Faith will be given; and Allah (SWT) knows best.

3. Al-Tirmidhi, who classed it as Hasan; al-Hakim, who said: Its Isnad is Sahih - and al-Dhahabi agreed with him; Ahmad; Abu Na'im, *al-Hilyah*.

Our Shaykh al-Albani said, after quoting some *Mutabi'at* (similar reports): Generally, the Hadith is Sahih because of these *Mutabi'at*. *Al-Sahihah* (718).

Unspoken *Ghibah*

We are all-too-familiar with the *Ghibah* of the tongue, i.e. that which is spoken, but *Ghibah* can take many forms.

Allah (SWT) said:

"Woe to every (kind of) scandal-monger and backbiter."
[al-Humazah 104:1]¹

From 'A'ishah (RA) who said: I said to the Prophet (SAAS): "It's bad enough that Safiyyah is..." (Some of narrators said: she meant that she was short). He said: "You have said a word which, if it could be mixed with the waters of the sea, it would have been." She said: "I imitated someone in front of him, and he said: "I would not like to imitate anybody even if were given such-and-such."²

Al-Nawawi said: "...Likewise, all means which may be used to get the message across, such as imitating a person's walk, are *Ghibah*. Indeed, they are worse than

Ghibah, as al-Ghazali said: because they are more obviously understood and the meaning is much clearer."³

The people who mock others by imitating their walk, or manner of eating or talking, should fear Allah (SWT).

The worst culprits nowadays are the so-called "comedy films", in which the actors devote all their efforts to imitating some person, in order to entertain people - regardless of the fate to which these sins will lead them. These sins include the failure to bring up children properly, and upbringing generations whose careless and sarcastic attitude has no concern for or interest in the affairs of the community or Ummah.

These films, unfortunately, are widespread, in cinemas and on TV and video.

May Allah guide us to His path.



Footnotes:

1. In the Tafsir of Ibn Kathir: "...*Al-Hummaz* ("scandal-mongering") is by speech, and *al-Lammaz* ("backbiting") is by deed. Ibn 'Abbas said: *Humazah wa Lumazah* means those who criticize people. Al-Rabi' ibn Anas said: the *Humazah* criticizes to a person's face and the *Lumazah* criticizes behind his back. Al-Mujahid said: *al-Humazah* is by hand and eye, and *al-Lumazah* by tongue."
2. Abu Dawud: *Sahih Sunan Abi Dawud* (4080), et al. Some of it is reported in Chapter 5, "Ahadith aimed at deterring people from Ghibah".
3. Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, *al-Zawajir*, 2/17.

Opposing *Ghibah* is the Best of Jihad

Many people are surprised when they hear that opposing *Ghibah* is one of the best forms of Jihad, but their astonishment vanishes when they hear the words of the Messenger of Allah (SAAS):

"The Mujahid is the one who strives to control his ego (*Nafs*) in obedience to Allah." ¹

and:

"The best of Jihad is that you strive to control your ego and your desires for the sake of Allah (SWT)" ²

Keeping oneself busy trying to prevent *Ghibah* is Jihad; indeed it is one of the best forms of Jihad.

Jihad against the enemies of Allah (SWT) can only ever occupy a limited period in a man's life, but the struggle to control the ego (*Jihad al-Nafs*) only ends when the man's life ends. And the Jihad against the enemies can only be

accepted from the Muslim as long as he is also striving to free his ego from hypocrisy, tribalism and self-interest.

Every Muslim is obliged to strive to control his ego, and prevent it committing *Ghibah*; he must establish an Islamic state in his heart before it can be established on earth...

"... On that Day shall the Believers rejoice - with the help of Allah. He helps whom He will, and He is Exalted in Might, Most Merciful." [al-Rum 30:4-5]



Footnotes:

1. Part of a Hadith narrated by Imam Ahmad; see also *al-Sahihah*, No. 549.
2. Abu Na'im, *al-Hilyah*; al-Daylami; et al. See also *al-Sahihah* (No. 1496).

Anecdotes on the condemnation of *al-Ghibah*

1- It is reported from al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) that a man said to him: "You have gossiped about me." He (al-Hasan) said: "You have not reached such a position that you can control my *Hasanat!*"¹

2 - Someone was told: "So-and-so has gossiped about you" - so he sent him a dish of dates, with the message: "I heard that you had given me your *Hasanat* as a gift, and I want to return the favour; please excuse me for not being able to pay back in full."

3 - It was reported from Ibn Mubarak (may Allah have mercy on him) that he said: "If I were to gossip about anyone, I would gossip about my parents, for they have more right to my *Hasanat*."

4 - *Ghibah* is the hospitality of the wrongdoer.

5 - From 'Amr ibn al-'As (RA): he passed by a dead mule, and said to some of his companions: "It would be better for a man to eat his fill from the meat of this than from the flesh of his fellow-Muslims." ²

6 - A man mentioned something bad about another to his friend. His friend said to him: "Do you go out and fight against the Romans?" He said, "No." His friend asked: "Do you go out and fight against the Turks?" He said, "No." The friend said: "The Romans are safe from you, and the Turks are safe from you, but your Muslim brothers are not safe from you!"

7 - If you are unable to do three things, then you must do three (other) things: if you cannot do good, then stop doing evil; if you cannot benefit people, then do not harm them; if you cannot fast, then do not eat the flesh of the people.

8 - The poet said:

"If a man is wise and fears Allah,
This will keep him too busy to concern himself with
the faults of others,

Just as the weak and sick person is too concerned
with his own pain
To think of the pain of others."



Footnotes:

1. The Islamic teaching is that the *Hasanat* (rewards) of the one who gossips will be awarded to his victim. [Translator]
2. This report from 'Amr ibn al-'As is proven: *Sahih al-Tarhib wa'l-Tarhib*.

Revision completed in 'Amman, just before noon on
Monday 5 Muharram 1413 AH.

Abu 'Abdurrahman Husayn ibn 'Awdah al-'Awayishah.



جميع حقوق النص المترجم محفوظة

لدار ابن حزم

بيروت - لبنان

الطبعة الأولى

١٤١٨ هـ - ١٩٩٧ م

جميع حقوق النص العربي محفوظة

للمكتبة الإسلامية

عمّان - الأردن

الغيبة

وأثرها السيء في المجتمع المسلم

حسين العوايشة

الْغِيَابَاتُ وَأَثَرُهَا السَّيِّئُ فِي الْمَجْتَمَعِ الْإِسْلَامِيِّ

حَسَنُ الْعَوَايِشَةِ

دَارُ ابْنِ حَزْمٍ