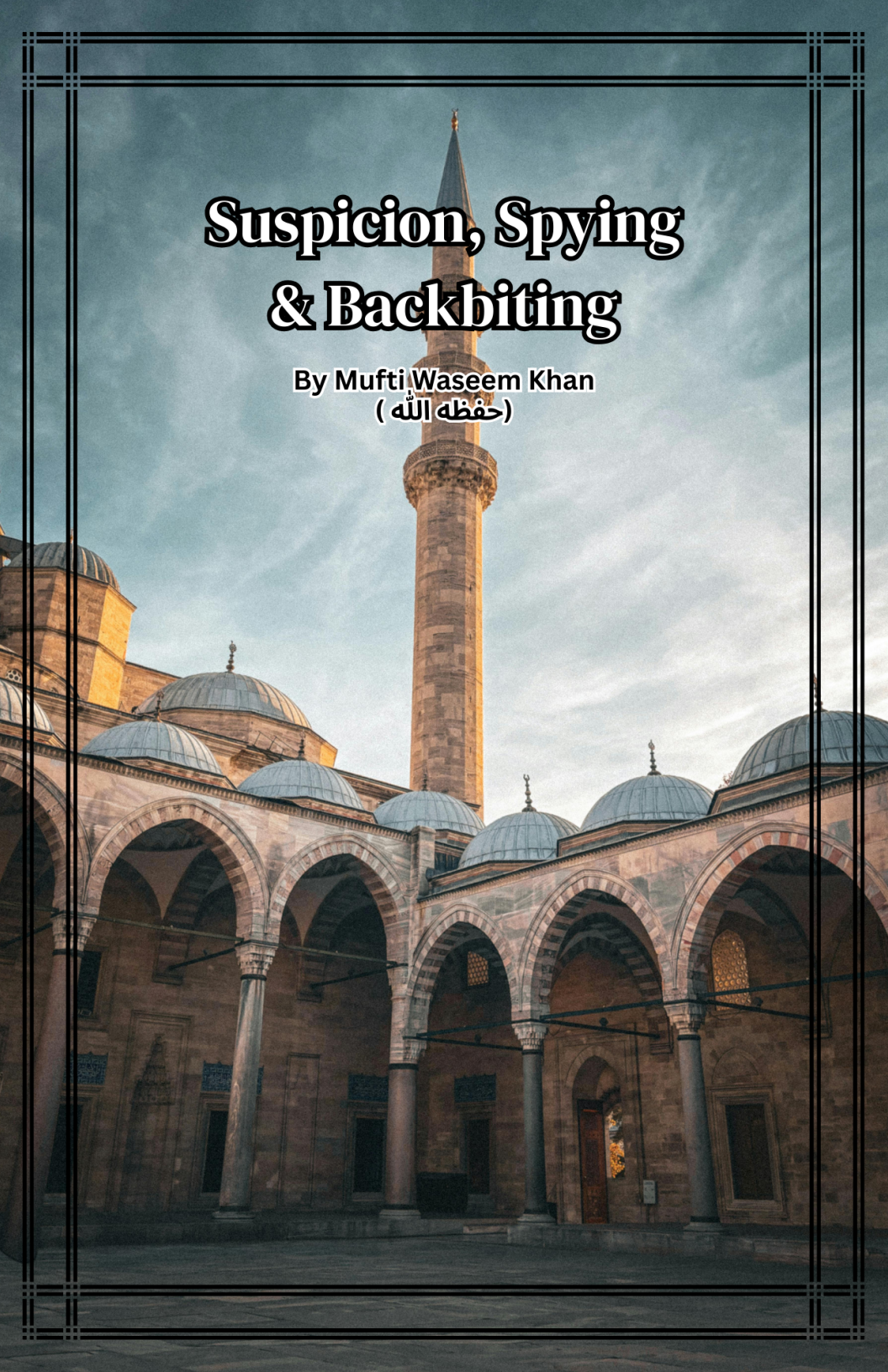


Suspicion, Spying & Backbiting

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(حفظه الله)



Allah states in verse 12 of Surah Al Hujuraat:

“O you who believe! Avoid much suspicions, indeed some suspicions are sins. And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it. And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One Who accepts repentance, Most Merciful.”

In this verse, Allah mentions certain injunctions regarding rights and etiquettes that are connected to one’s social life. Three prohibitions have been given in the verse, which are considered to be totally Haraam in Islam.

The first is that of الظن (Adh Dhann - Suspicion). The second is regarding التجسس (At Tajasus – Spying), and the third is connected to الغيبة (Al Gheebah – Backbiting).

With respect to ‘Suspicion’ (Adh Dhann), Allah says, **‘O you who believe! Avoid many suspicions. Indeed, some suspicions are sins’**. Here, Allah prohibits the believers from having suspicions about others, and suspecting others of sins and wrongdoings without any proof.

Believers must not have bad thoughts and assumptions about other believers if their affairs are known to be good. They must also not lay blame or cast aspersion on one another when they have no concrete proof regarding what they say. Instead, they must always have good thoughts and assumptions of other sincere and truthful believers. (Tafseer Al Qurtubi vol. 16 pg. 280, 281 Maktaba Rasheediya Queta)

While encouraging believers to have good thoughts and assumptions of one another, Umar (R.A) once said, ‘Do not ever think of a word which comes from your Muslim brother except with goodness, and that you find a meaning of goodness for it’. (Tafseer Ibn Katheer vol.5 pg. 588 Dar Al Kitab Al Arabi, Beirut 2013)

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also warned the believers of suspicion and said, ‘Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the falsest of speech (a speech with the worst lies). Do not spy on one another. Do not look for other’s faults. Do not be jealous of one another. Do not envy one another. Do not hate one another. Do not desert one another; and become servants of Allah as brothers. (Bukhari Hadith No. 5143; Muslim Hadith No. 2563)

The scholars have mentioned that the statement, ‘**Avoid much suspicion**’, gives the message that one should refrain from frequently having suspicions about others, so that he can completely refrain from having any type of wrongful/sinful thoughts and assumptions about others. (Tafseer An Nasafi vol.3 pg. 355 Dar Ibn Katheer Beirut 2022)

The prohibition, ‘**Avoid much suspicion**’ also informs the believers that they must be very cautious and careful of all suspicions, and must not entertain everyone. Instead, they must ponder and investigate each one before entertaining it in their hearts lest they become sinful. (Safwah At Tafaseer vol.3 pg. 218 Dar As Sabooni 2009)

The verse says, ‘**Indeed some suspicions are sins**’. As mentioned by the commentators of the Holy Quran, this statement explains why Allah has prohibited the believers from having many suspicions. He explains that from among those that may enter in their hearts, there are some that are sinful. As such, in order to avoid the sinful ones, they must avoid entertaining too many (suspicions).

While explaining the above, the great companion (Sahabi) Abdullah bin Abbas (R.A) says, ‘Allah has prohibited a believer from having bad suspicions about another believer. As such, if a believer entertains bad thoughts/suspicions about another believer, then it is sinful because Allah has prohibited him from that’. (Tafseer At Tabari vol.26 pg. 155 Dar Ihya At Turath Al Arabi Beirut 2001)

While mentioning about the suspicion which is sinful, as mentioned in the verse, Az Zujaj, the great exegete states, ‘It is for one to have bad thoughts/suspicions about the people of goodness (righteous people). As for sinners and transgressors, then it is permissible for us to have thoughts/suspicions about them based on what is seen/evident from them’. (Tafseer An Nasafi– Madarik At Tanzeel vol.3 pg. 355 Dar Ibn Katheer Beirut 2022)

Imam Qurtubi has written that most of the Ulama (scholars) have stated that it is not permissible for one to have bad thoughts/suspicions about a person whose external/apparent conduct is of goodness. As for that person whose external/apparent conduct is bad, then there is no harm in having bad thoughts/suspicions about him’. (Tafseer Al Qurtubi vol. 16 pg. 284 Maktaba Rasheediya Queta)

Imam Al Baghwi, the great commentator of the Holy Quran, has also explained the suspicion which is sinful and stated, ‘Sufyan Thawri (A.R) said, ‘Suspicious are of two types. One is sinful while the other is not. The sinful one is when one has a suspicion and he speaks about it. The other which is not sinful is when one has a suspicion, but he does not speak about it’. (Tafseer Al Baghwi vol.4 pg. 215 Idara Taleefaat Ashrafiya Multan Pakistan).

The author of Al Bahr, Abu Hayyan (AR) has also alluded to this in his Tafseer and said, ‘The sin is attached/connected to the speech (words) of the person who entertains suspicions. If he does not say anything, then the suspicion is futile (in empty space) since he has no power of removing thoughts (from his heart). (Tafseer Al Bahr Al Muheet vol.9 pg. 519 Dar Al Fikr Beirut 1992)

The other prohibition which Allah has given in the above verse is that of spying on one another. In this regard, the verse says, ‘**Wa Laa Tajassasu - And do not spy**’. That is, ‘**do not spy on one another**’.

The word used in the above verse is ‘**At Tajassus**’, which means ‘to spy’, and as such, the prohibition established in it is that Muslims are prohibited from spying on one another. The act of ‘Tajassus’ (spying) in Arabic means to seek/search for matters which are hidden from a person, and here (in the verse), it means that a believer must not search for the faults and defects of other believers, and must not go after them in order to find out and look for their faults/deficiencies.

Therefore, one must accept/take what is apparent/manifest and must not go about searching for the faults/shortcomings/defects of the believers. One must not look for a fault/defect of his brother to gain awareness of it when Allah has already concealed it from others. (Tafseer Al Qurtubi vol. 16 pg. 284 Maktaba Rasheediya Queta)

The great scholar, Mujahid (A.R) has stated, ‘Take that which is apparent/manifest and leave what Allah has concealed’. Sahl (A.R) also said, ‘Do not go about searching/looking for the faults which Allah has

concealed of His servants’. (Tafseer An Nasafi vol. 3 pg. 355 Dar Ibn Katheer Beirut 2022)

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) has also prohibited the believers from seeking (out) the faults of other believers and has warned them about it. Regarding this,

the companion Abu Barzah Al Aslami (R.A) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, **‘O you who have believed with their tongues but Imaan (faith) has not entered their hearts! Do not backbite the Muslims and do not seek their faults. For verily, he who seeks their faults, Allah will seek his faults. And if Allah seeks his faults, He will humiliate him even in the privacy of his own house’**. (Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4880)

In another tradition, it is narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, **‘Do not spy on one another and do not look for other’s faults’**. (Bukhari, Muslim)

Muawiyah (R.A) also narrated that the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, **‘If you seek out (and search for) the faults of the Muslims, then you will corrupt them’**. (Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4888)

It means that when a person goes about searching and looking for the faults of others (which are private and hidden) and then makes it public (or known among others), this will lead to shamelessness on the part of those who do wrong and they would eventually become bold in doing wrong actions.

From the above teachings of the verse and Ahadith, it becomes clear that it is not permissible for a Muslim to reveal what another person does privately or in secret and must not search for the faults of others. He must also not investigate the faults or sins of others, since all of these are known as ‘spying on others’ which is totally prohibited in Islam.

As a Muslim, one must conceal the faults and sins of other Muslims when he has knowledge of these.

While speaking about this, Abu Hurairah (R.A) reported that the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, **‘A servant does not cover the faults of another servant in the world except that Allah will cover his faults on the Day of Judgement’**. (Sahih Muslim Hadith No. 2590)

In another Hadith, Uqba bin Amir (R.A) narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, **‘Whoever conceals the fault of a Muslim, it is as if he has revived an infant girl (buried alive) from her grave’**. (Al Bukhari in Adabul Mufrad; Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4891)

Verse 12 of Surah Al Hujuraat further states, ‘Neither backbite one another’, that is, ‘and some of you must not backbite some’. Here, the prohibition of backbiting is given, and the believers have been informed by Allah that they must not backbite one another.

In order to teach his companions and followers what backbiting is, Abu Hurairah (R.A) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) once asked the Sahabahs (companions), ‘Do you know what backbiting is?’

They replied, ‘Allah and His Messenger know best’. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, ‘It is that you mention about your brother with that which he dislikes’. One of the companions said, ‘What if the thing mentioned is in my brother?’ The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, ‘If what you have mentioned about him is found in him, then you have backbitten him, and if it is not found in him, then you have slandered him’. (Sahih Muslim Hadith No. 2589; Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4873)

While explaining the above, Imam Qurtubi (A.R) mentioned the statement of the great Tab’iee scholar, Hasan Al Basri (A.R) in which he said, ‘Backbiting has three angles which are all mentioned in the Book of Allah. They are:

- (1) Al Gheebah (Backbiting)
- (2) Al Ifk (Falsehood)
- (3) Al Buhtaan (Slander)

Al Gheebah (Backbiting) is that you say something about your brother which is in him.

Al Ifk (Falsehood/Untruth) is that you say about your brother such things which have been conveyed to you by others.

Al Buhtaan (Slander) is that you say about your brother that which is not in him'.
(Tafseer Al Qurtubi vol. 16 pg. 286 Maktaba Rasheediyah Queta)

The above hadith clearly establishes that speaking of a sin/fault which is in a person is ‘Al Gheebah’ (backbiting), while speaking of a sin/fault which is not in a person is ‘Al Buhtaan’ (Slander). Based on the words of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) in which he defined backbiting as ‘speaking of your brother with that

which he dislikes', many scholars have stated that backbiting does not only occur when it is done behind someone's back (in his absence), but it will also be considered backbiting if it is done in front of the person himself. Once something is said about a person which he dislikes, it will be considered backbiting, whether it is said in front of the person or behind the person's back.

While speaking of the grave nature of backbiting, the companion, Abu Saeed Al Khudri (R.A) and Jabir bin Abdullah (R.A) narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'Beware of backbiting, for certainly backbiting is worse than Zina (fornication/adultery). For indeed, when a man commits 'Zina' and then repents, Allah will accept his repentance (and forgive him). But the one who engages in backbiting, he will not be forgiven until the person whom he had backbitten forgives him'. (Tafseer Al Bahrul Muheet vol.9 pg. 520 Dar Al Fikr Beirut 1992).

The above tradition shows that backbiting is a violation of Allah's rights and also a violation of the rights of the servant. As such, the backbiter must seek forgiveness from the person whom he had backbitten along with seeking Allah's forgiveness.

Some scholars have mentioned that as long as the information of backbiting has not reached the person who was backbitten, then the one who has done the backbiting will not be required to seek his forgiveness. In this case however, he must continue to seek Allah's forgiveness for what he has done.

Scholars have further mentioned that the backbiter must also confess in front of whom he did the backbiting, that he committed a sin and that he was not truthful in what he said about the person whom he had backbitten. In addition, he must also seek forgiveness on behalf of the backbitten person.

Regarding this, Anas (R.A) narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'Certainly, from the expiation of backbiting is that a person seeks Allah's forgiveness for the one he has backbitten and say اللهم اغفر لنا و

له (Allahummagh Firlana Wa Lahu – O Allah! Forgive us and him) (Baihaqi – Bayan Al Quran vol.2 pg. 563 Maktaba Al Haq Bombay)

Regarding the severe consequences of backbiting, it is narrated that when the Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) was taken for the Isra/Miraj, he saw some people whose nails were made of copper, and they were constantly digging into

their faces and chests (with their nails). When the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) asked Jibra'eel (A.S) about these people, he was informed that they were people who ate the flesh of others (through backbiting) and they plundered their honour'. (Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4878 - Tafseer Ibn Katheer vol.5 pg. 592 Dar Al Kitab Al Arabi Beirut 2013)

Besides condemning the act of backbiting, Islam has also condemned listening to backbiting. Therefore, just as it is Haram (unlawful) to backbite, it is also Haram to listen to backbiting.

While speaking about the believers, Allah says, '***And when they (the believers) hear Al Laghw (dirty,false,evil vain talk), they turn away from it and say : 'To us our deeds, and to you your deeds. Peace be to you. We seek not (the way) of the ignorant'.*** (Sura Al Qasas Verse 55).

In another verse, Allah says :-

1. Successful indeed are the believers.

2. Those who offer their Salat (prayers) with all solemnity and full submissiveness.

3. And those who turn away from Al-Laghw (dirty, false, evil vain talk, falsehood, etc). (Surah Muminoon Verses 1-3)

These verses (along with others) show that it is the duty of a believer to shun vain talk and every other type of speech which is sinful, like that of lying, slandering, backbiting and the likes. As such, when a believer hears a person backbiting another, he should advise him/her to desist from it and should also protect the honour of the one being backbitten.

In this regard, it is narrated from Asma bint Yazeed that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'When a person defends someone whose flesh is being consumed by backbiting, it will be binding on Allah to save him from the fire of Hell'. (Baihaqi in Shu'ab Al Imaan – Mishkaat pg. 424 Qadeemi Kutub Karachi)

In another hadith, Abu Darda (R.A) narrated that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'There is no Muslim who defends the honour of his Muslim brother, except that it is a right upon Allah to move away from him the fire of Hell on the Day of Judgement'. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) then recited the verse of the Holy

Quran in which Allah said, **‘And it is a duty upon Us to help the believers’**.
(Narrated in Sharh As Sunnah of Imam Al Baghwi)

Another hadith narrated by Muadh bin Anas (R.A) states that the Prophet (ﺻﻠﻰ ﺍﻟﻠﻪ ﻋﻠﻴﻪ ﻭﺳﻠﻢ) said, ‘Whoever protects/defends a believer from a hypocrite (Munafiq) who speaks ill of him, Allah will appoint an angel who will protect his flesh on the Day of Judgement from the fire of Hell. Whoever blames/accuses a believer of something, through which he intends to dishonor/disgrace him, Allah will detain him on the bridge of Hell (Jahannam) until he comes out from what he said (i.e. until he seeks pardon from the person). (Sunan Abu Dawud Hadith No. 4883).

Verse 12 further states, **‘Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it’**.

Here, Allah gives a depiction and a portrayal of backbiting to show how repulsive, disgraceful and abhorrent it is. He questions the backbiter and says, ‘Would anyone from among you like to eat the flesh of his Muslim brother who is dead?’ He (Allah) answers this and states, ‘You would detest it’. It means, ‘You would certainly abhor this and show extreme hate to it’. (Tafseer Al Bahrul Muheet). Therefore, when one of you show extreme detestation to this, then in the same manner you must show hate and disgust for backbiting since the consequences of it are more severe.

While explaining this verse, Abdullah bin Abbas (R.A) has stated, Certainly, Allah has placed this similitude for backbiting because eating the flesh of the dead is Haram (unlawful) and filthy, and so, in a like manner, backbiting is Haram (unlawful) in the religion (Deen) and it is also impure/filthy in the hearts'. (Tafseer Al Qurtubi vol. 16 pg. 286 Maktaba Rasheediya Queta)

Hafiz Ibn Katheer explains the above and states that it means, ‘Just as you hate eating the flesh of a dead person on account of your nature; so too, you must hate backbiting on account of your religion. The latter carries a punishment that is worse than the former’. (Tafseer Ibn Katheer vol.5 pg. 591 Dar Al Kitab Al Arabi Beirut 2013)

It is narrated in a tradition that a cousin of Abu Hurairah said, ‘Ma’iz came to the The Messenger of Allah (ﺻﻠﻰ ﺍﻟﻠﻪ ﻋﻠﻴﻪ ﻭﺳﻠﻢ) and said, ‘O Allah’s Messenger, I have

committed adultery'. The Messenger of Allah (صلى الله عليه وسلم) turned away from him until he repeated his statement four times. The fifth time, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) asked him, 'Have you committed adultery'. Ma'iz said, 'Yes'. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) asked, 'Do you know what adultery is?' He said, 'I have done in an unlawful manner with this woman, what a man may do lawfully with his wife'. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'What do you seek to accomplish by this statement (of confession)?' He (Ma'iz) said, 'I intend that you purify me (i.e. of this sin)'. After Ma'iz explained what he did, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) commanded that he must be stoned to death (in accordance with the laws of the Shariah) and so, Ma'iz received this punishment.

When this was done, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) heard two men saying to one another, 'Have you not seen the man who had Allah cover his secret, but his heart could not let him rest until he was stoned to death just as the dog is stoned'. Although he heard their statement, the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) continued on and when he passed by the corpse of a donkey, he asked, 'Where are so and so, and so and so? Dismount and eat from this donkey'. They said, 'May Allah forgive you O Allah's Messenger, would anyone eat this?' The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, 'The backbiting you committed against your brother is worse as a meal than this meal. By Him in whose hand is my soul, he (Ma'iz) is now swimming in the rivers of Paradise'. (Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith No. 4429 - Tafseer Ibn Katheer Dar Al Kitab Al Arabi Beirut)

At the end, the verse states, **'And fear Allah, verily Allah is the One who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful'**.

It means, fear Allah regarding what He has ordered you to do and what He has prohibited you from. Be obedient to Him, fear Him and beware of His punishment.

He is 'Tawwaab', the One who constantly accepts the repentance of those who turn to Him (in repentance). He is 'Raheem', the Merciful One, who is full of mercy to those who turn to Him and rely upon Him. In this statement, Allah encourages the believers to repent to Him for the sins which they have committed so that He may forgive them.