

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ
بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ
أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

Al-Hujurat (The Dwellings) 49:12

O You Who Believe!

- Avoid suspicion as much (as possible).
- For suspicion in some cases is a sin.
- And spy not on each other behind their backs.
- Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?
- No! You would abhor it.
- But fear Allah.
- For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Commentary

Allamah Tabai (AR)

God says, " O you who believe! Avoid much suspicions, indeed some suspicions are sins."

The sin being asked to be avoided is false attribution and good form of suspicion is being asked to be adopted. Surah Al Nur 12 says in this regards " Why then, did not the believers, men and women, when you heard it think good of their own people" refers to avoid guessing or speculation and accuse a fellow believer of something evil and then relate it to others. Suspicion is something natural and comes immediately to mind but this style of thinking is not being banned though (may God keep us distant from it too) because some of its results are impulsive.

Some apprehensions are deemed to be a sin in the sense that they are easily affected by sins and evil deeds like when insulting a person or defaming him because we have apprehensions about him of things that are sinful. But the excessive suspicions especially about things that are sinful is something that is disallowed. Simple suspicions are of course a part of one's nature. We should also avoid suspicions about things that we are not certain about whether they are sins or not. Hence we should not accuse, suspect or insult a person lest that deed of ours wastes our good deed. We are asked to be cautious because we fear God and that is why we should avoid doing things that may have the slightest suspicion of being a sin.

The Arabic word "Tajisu" means to keep oneself informed about the secret doings of people. The word "Tajusus" is used for things that are evil and the word "Tahasus" is used for things that are good. Now the meaning of the verse will be "Do not spy on the weakness of others for you will expose and insult the deeds that the doers may want to secret.

God says, "*And none among you should backbite against one another. Does any one among you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You will think him to be evil.*"

Backbiting is talking ill of a person behind his back in a manner that is detrimental to wisdom. Many commentaries have dealt with this issue and in Fiqh the explanation about it is that backbiting means talking ill of a person behind his back who may not like it, but discussing the evil deeds of a person who flaunts his sins is not considered backbiting.

Backbiting creates continuous mischief in society and erases its good attributes and qualifications. Everyone in society wants to live a life without mischief and in peace and this is the correct introduction of mankind. When we make friends with someone we should not abhor him nor should we think badly about him. Yet if we introduce him in a manner that gives a bad impression or in a way he does not desire, to accuse him of sins and evil, then it cuts him off from society. It is like cancer because it completely destroys the limb that it effects and then moves on to another part of the body until it effects the whole body and the man dies.

Man joins society to create a social identity for him to be able to live his life free of mischief and peacefully. He merges himself into the society so that he may help it and in return gain from it. Backbiting against someone demotes him in status and he loses his identity and a peaceful society loses one member. The society keeps decaying with backbiting and reformation is replaced by mischief. There is no love, peace and reliability left and the medicine itself turns into a disease.

Actually the society loses its identity when its members are ignored and man's status too is diminished. Had he known about this then he would have avoided it and never exposed others' secrets and this is the screen that God has put between the deeds of men and the society so that he can go about his work naturally as he desires. He unites people, gathers them, helps and cooperates with them just to cleanse mankind from all weaknesses.

God has given examples about this when he says, "Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it, (so hate backbiting)." God here has used the style of negative approach by asking one among many. He did not say "some among you" only to make the self strong for He said, "You would not" but did not say "he would think it wrong". Hating a sin is the positive result through a negative approach.

The backbiting by a believer is like eating the flesh of his dead brother and they are brothers because it is the social and religious affinity that creates bonds between believing people and they are brothers. They are being called "scavengers" because the person being talked about is unaware of all that the backbiter is saying. "So hate it (backbiting)" because it is not normal for a person to eat his dead brother's flesh and he abhors it . When you feel abhorrence for it then you should also abhor backbiting because when you backbite you are like the one who eats his dead brother's flesh.

" Would you like to eat?" has the same features that will be taken as common for those who spy on other's secrets; the difference is that backbiting is relating the weaknesses of someone in front of others or by quoting others in this regard. Through curiosity spying on other's secret is something else. It may so be that both of these are included in this verse.

"neither backbite one another" means that this backbiting is being referred to the believers and "brother's flesh" proves this because every believer is the brother of another believer.

God says, *" And Fear God. God is the one who accepts repentance. The most merciful."*

- If "Taqwa" means the avoidance of those sins that are pleaded for forgiveness then the words " (God is) The most merciful" will mean certainly, God is the one who accepts repentance the most. He is very merciful on those who repent and those who seek shelter in Him.
- If piety means the abstinence from sin and the distancing from everything evil, things that they have not done, then the words "most merciful" will mean surely God is the most attentive on his pious servants through guidance and inclinations. He protects them from evil death and has mercy on them.

Now repentance to God will have two meanings,

- One, to plead to God before repentance as the book says, " Their repentance was accepted so that they could repent" (Tauba 118).
- The second is to plead to God for forgiveness after repenting.

And the acceptance of repentance is well defined in Al Maidah-39 " But whosoever repents after his sins and does righteous and good deeds, (by obeying God) then He will pardon him"

A Discussion on Hadith

Ibn Hatim has quoted Sani saying, that,

Salman once traveled with two persons with the duty to serve them and arrange their food. One day while he was sleeping those persons did not find him when they wanted him. They came to his tent and said, " Salman does nothing but pitches the tents and brings food."

When Salman met them they sent him to the Messenger to bring some cooked dishes . Salman told the Messenger, " O Messenger of God my friends have sent me to you so that you could give them something to eat if you have something." The Messenger said, " Your friends have already eaten so what will they need cooked food for?" Salman returned and told this to his companions . Both of them then came to the Messenger and said, " By the entity who has sent you with the divine truth we have not got food since the time we have come here." The Messenger said, " In your talks you have already eaten Salman's flesh." And this was when this verse was revealed (Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?"

Ziaul Muqadisi has quoted the hadith from Anas on the same issue that says, that the Arab had a tradition of helping each other while traveling together. Abu Bakar and Umar had a servant traveling with them. Once when they got up from sleep they found that the servant had cooked no food. They asked him to go to the Messenger and ask for some cooked food and say, " O Messenger of God Abubakar and Umar have requested you to give them some cooked food. The Messenger said, " They have already eaten." The servant returned and told the same to both of them so they came to the Messenger and asked, " O Messenger of God what did we eat?" The Messenger answered,

Both of you have eaten your brother's flesh. By the God who has the control of my life I see bits of his flesh between your teeth.

They both said, " O Messenger of God please pray for our forgiveness." The Messenger said,

You ask your brother to pray for you to be forgiven.

Compiler's words

It is the same incident in both the hadith. The characters in the first are Salman and his companions and the in the second are Abubakr and Umar. This is confirmed by the records of Jam'a Al Jawama' who says that Abubakr and Umar sent Salman to the Messenger to ask for food and he in turn sent him to his man Usama bin Zayd and he said, " I have nothing" so Salman returned to them.

They called Usama a miser; " Had we sent Salman to the well called Samih its water would have welled up. They both then came to the Messenger and he said, " I smell meat in your mouths." The answered, " We have not eaten meat today O Messenger of God." The Messenger said,

You have eaten the flesh of Salman and Usama and have been unjust.

And this verse was revealed.

Muhammad bin Yahya bin Abi I'bad quotes his uncle in the book A'yoon who said,

One day I heard Imam Ridha reciting poetry and he did this very seldom. The précis of the poetry is something like this,

- We hope till before death, and
- it is a scourge for all hopes,
- let not the false hopes mislead and misguide you,
- give importance to your intention and determination,
- take preventions against illness,
- this world is like a passing shadow,
- a traveler enters it and then leaves.

The narrator says, I asked him who the poet of these verses was? And he answered, " It belongs to your fellow Iraqi." I said, " Abu A'tahiya says they are his." The Imam said,

Mention his name but omit the pseudonym because God says, *Do not give nicknames*. He may feel it bad.

Hunayn bin Mukhtar is recorded as the narrator of a hadith of Imam Jafar Sadiq. The Imam said, Amirul Mominin has said,

- Always think well of your brother in all matters until you get something that perturbs you.
- Do not be suspicious of any words attributed to your brother when you see that there is goodness in it.

Hazrat Ali is recorded to have said, (in *Nahjul Balagha*),

If there is period of goodwill at time in society but even then some one is suspicious about someone from whom there is no sign of evil, the former has done an injustice. When the people of the times are overwhelmed by chaos and mischief but someone even then thinks good of some one else then he has been misguided.

The Compiler's word

Both these are not opposite to one another; the second one is concerned with suspicion and is dependent upon the deed.

A hadith of the messenger is recorded through Isbat bin Muhammad in the book Al Khisal that the Messenger said,

Backbiting is worse than adultery.

He was asked how so he said,

When the adulterous person repents God accepts his repentance but when the backbiter repents he is not forgiven until the aggrieved person forgives him.

Compiler's word

Similar hadith has been recorded in Durre Manthur through Ibn Marduia, Bahiqi, Abi Sa'id and Jabir in which the Messenger has said, " Backbiting is worse than adultery." When the people asked how it was so he said, " When man commits adultery he repents and God accepts his repentance but a backbiter is not forgiven till the person he has spoken against forgives him."

Sukuni is the narrator of a hadith of Imam Jafar Sadiq in Kafi. He has said,

Backbiting spreads faster inside a man than the cancer he has in his body.

In Kafi again, Imam Sadiq is quoted to have said (through Hasas bin Umar) " The Messenger was asked for the appropriate penalty for backbiting and he said,

You should repent to God as much as you have backbitten and hurt the person.

In Tafsir Qummi, God's words " We have arranged you among groups and tribes. " The group mentioned here refers to the non-Arabs and the "tribe" refers to the Arabs, the book explains.

The Compiler's word

These words have been attributed to Imam Jafar Sadiq in Majmaul Bayan.

In Durre Manthur Jabir bin Abdullah Ansari has been quoted by Marduia and Bahiqi that the Messenger in his Sermon after the last Hajj said,

O people! Your Lord is one and be aware that your father is one also. Be warned that no Arab has any prominence over a non-Arab, no black is above any red and no red is above any black person excepting piety. The most respectable among you in the eyes of God is the person who is the most pious. You should know that I have delivered God's message to you.

The people chanted, " Yes you have O Messenger of God." He then continued, "*Then let the one's present here carry this message to those who are not here.*"

Abibakr Hazarmi is the narrator of a hadith in Al Kafi in which Imam Jafar Sadiq has said,

The Messenger arranged the marriage of Miqdad bin Aswad with Zabagha binte Zubair bin Abdul Muttalib to eradicate color prejudice and establish equality among the people. He told the people that a person is as respectable in the eyes of God as he is pious.

Jamil bin Daraj quotes a hadith in Rozatal Kafi, " I asked Imam Jafar Sadiq what is "Grace"?" He said, " It is piety."

A hadith is recorded in AlKafi in which the narrator Yunus bin Yaqub has said, " One Day Imam Jafar Sadiq said,

In Islam belief comes first. You get the legacy through Islam, and you marry, while through belief you gain the rewards from God.

Khisal A'mish has quoted that Imam Jafar Sadiq has said,

Islam is something other than belief. Every believer is a Muslim but every Muslim does not believe.

Durre Manthur explains the words of God, " The Bedouin Arabs says " We now believe". Ibn Jarir has explains that this verse is about Bani Asad.

The compiler's word

Mujahid and others have also narrated this.

Ibn Maja, Ibn Marduia, Tibrani and Bahiqi narrate in Sha'ab Al Iman quoting Hazrat Ali that he said, " The messenger has said, " Belief is realization in the heart and the concurrence to it is on the tongue and the deeds are expressed through the limbs. Nisai, Bazaz and Ibn Marduia have quoted Ibn Abbas to say, " The Bani Asad came to the Messenger and said,

" O Messenger of God! We have accepted Islam. The Arabs have fought against you but we did not fight against you. It was then that this verse was revealed "
They come to put you under obligation for having accepted Islam."

The compiler's word

There are hadith having the same meaning.

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Most kinds of suspicion are baseless, and some are crimes in themselves, therefore conjecture (qiyas) has been "outlawed" in Islam. Spying into other people's affairs means either idle curiosity or suspicion carried a stage further. Backbiting, being futile, is mischievous, and if poisoned with malice, it is a sin added to sin. It is like eating flesh of a dead brother, abomination plus abomination.

The Holy Prophet said:

Backbiting is worse than adultery, because Allah may forgive an adulterer or adulteress if he or she turns repentant to Him, but pardon for backbiting is not available until the aggrieved person agrees to forgive.

Imam Ali said:

Have a good opinion about your brother in faith unless proved otherwise.

Once a few companions sent Salman to bring food from the kitchen of the Holy Prophet. After obtaining the Holy Prophet's permission he went to Usama bin Zayd who was in charge of the Holy Prophet's kitchen, but as there was nothing in the kitchen, he returned to the companions with empty hands. They laughed at Salman and Usama and branded them closefisted misers. Then they came to the Holy Prophet. He told them: "*I see particles of flesh in your teeth. It is the flesh of Salman and Usama.*" Then this verse was revealed.

Imam Musa bin Jafar al Kazim said:

Anything evil said about anyone, when he is not present, to the people who do not know it, is backbiting.

It is mentioned in Tafsir Thalabi that some people reported to Umar that Abu Mahjan was drinking wine in his house. Umar at once raided his house but found no wine. Mahjan said: "*O Umar, you have spied on me, although Allah says: 'Spy not on each other.'*" Zayd bin Thabit and Abdullah bin Arqam were the witnesses to this event.

Abdur Rahman bin Awf, a very close friend of Umar, is reported to have said:

While crossing a street in the night, we saw light in the house of Umayya bin Rabi-ah. We jumped over the outer wall and entered into his chamber. Along with his friends he was drinking wine. Umar admonished him for breaking the law of Allah.

Umayya said: O Umar, I have broken only one law, but you have done four forbidden acts - spying, not entering through the front door, not obtaining my permission to come into my house, and not greeting me with assalamu alaykum.