

Carrying Tales and Defaming Others

Backbiting is strongly forbidden, as it is universally known. God says in the Qur'an: "And do not spy on one another, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would loathe it." (Al-Hujurat: 49: 12).

This picture is drawn in the Qur'an for someone who is guilty of backbiting, which is defined in Islam as "saying about someone in his absence what he dislikes to be said about him." This applies even if what is being said is true.

The very fact that he is absent and people say about him things that he dislikes to be talked about is backbiting, and falls within what is described in the Qur'an as "eating the flesh of one's dead brother." A similar social evil is to spread defamatory tales about other people. This is what happens when someone tells another a tale about a third person who is known to both.

This is shown in the Qur'an as repugnant. "Do not pay any respect to the contemptible one swearing of oaths, the slanderer who goes about with defaming tales, the withholder of good, the sinful aggressor, cruel, possessed by greed." (Al-Qalam: 68: 10-13).

It is clear that the person concerned had a very abominable character. One of his qualities was to carry such tales.

In order to describe how repugnant this quality is, we may mention that the Prophet (peace be upon him), once passed by two graves, and he placed some green branches on them. He told his companions who were with him that the two people buried there were suffering torment. He said that the reason for punishing one of them was that he used to spread defamatory tales about his fellow men.

People often ask about the punishment that a certain sin incurs. We cannot specify unless there is some text to outline it. However, we can say that such a person commits a sin against society in addition to his slandering of particular people.

On the Day of Judgment, he will be brought face to face with them and they will be given some of his good deeds in lieu of the injury he caused them. If he does not have sufficient good deeds to compensate them, he is made to bear some of their bad deeds, which are then removed from them and added against him.

Therefore, people should guard against doing any such action by avoiding speaking ill about anyone in their absence.

If one knows some defect in a person's character, or of a bad deed that person has committed, he should keep it secret. He or she is rewarded for that.

