

Backbiting — the verse and the hadith

One verse forbids it, one hadith defines it, and the definition is far wider than most people assume: saying something true about an absent person that he would not like.



★ The verse

وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَبِ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُّبُ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ
لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ

“And do not spy, nor let some of you backbite others. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it.”

Qur'an 49:12

★ The hadith — what it is

“Do you know what backbiting is? Mentioning your brother in a way he dislikes.” It was said: and if what I say is really in him? “If it is in him you have backbitten him; if it is not, you have slandered him.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Birr wa's-Silah wa'l-Adab

★ No mockery, no nicknames

وَلَا تَلْبِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ

“And do not insult one another, and do not call each other by offensive nicknames.” The same passage, two verses earlier: the tongue against a person present as well as absent.

Qur'an 49:11

★ A surah opens with it

وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ

“Woe to every scorner and mocker.” Two words — one for the slanderer behind the back, one for the sneerer to the face.

Qur'an 104:1

★ The rule for the tongue

مَنْ كَانَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَلْيَقُلْ خَيْرًا، أَوْ لِيَصْمُتْ

“Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, let him say something good or keep silent.” In the same hadith: do not harm your neighbour, and honour your guest.

Sahih al-Bukhari 6475

★ Carrying tales

يُعَذِّبَانِ، وَمَا يُعَذِّبَانِ فِي كَبِيرَةٍ، وَإِنَّهُ لَكَبِيرٌ، كَانَ أَحَدُهُمَا لَا
يَسْتَرُ مِنَ الْبَوْلِ، وَكَانَ الْآخَرُ يَمْشِي بِالنَّمِيمَةِ

Passing two graves: “They are being punished, and not for something great — and it is great. One did not shield himself from urine, and the other used to go about carrying tales.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 6055

★ What is sealed off

“Do not envy one another, do not hate one another, do not turn away from one another; be servants of Allah, brothers. The whole of a Muslim is inviolable to another Muslim: his blood, his property, his honour.”

Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Birr wa's-Silah wa'l-Adab

★ Speaking for the absent

مَنْ رَدَّ عَنْ عَرَضِ أَخِيهِ رَدَّ اللَّهُ عَنْ وَجْهِهِ النَّارَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

“Whoever defends the honour of his brother, Allah will defend his face from the Fire on the Day of Resurrection.” The cure is not only silence — it is defence.

Sunan at-Tirmidhi 1931 • hasan (at-Tirmidhi)

★ Every word is written

مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

“He utters no word except that with him is an observer, ready.” The conversation with no witnesses has two.

Qur'an 50:18