

“The majority of a person’s sins emanate from their tongue.”

succeeded ...they who turn away from ill speech.” (23: 1-3). By asking ourselves, with honesty, sincerity & self-responsibility: Why do I gossip? Why, really, do I gossip? Why, really, really, do I gossip? ...we can begin to explore the root causes of why we gossip & why we choose to allow the violence of gossip to permeate much of our behaviour.

It is quite typical for normal conversations to contain some “gossip”. For instance, co-worker Mary during the course of a conversation says to co-worker John, “I heard Jane went to Florida on her vacation”. Gossip? Yes. Malicious? No. It is quite unlikely that this information will cause hard feelings or disturb Jane if she becomes aware of it. However, if coworker Mary said, “I heard Jane went to Fl on her vacation & did you know that Smith took his vacation at the same time? I bet the two of them went to Fl together. I’ve seen the way they look at each other”. The malicious gossip seed is sown and as it is spread, it changes from speculation to “fact.” Jane & Smith’s reputations are tarnished & hard feelings & friction among co-workers emerges. Think & speak of the absent as you think & speak of the dead – tenderly & sacredly.

Malicious gossip should never be tolerated – the consequences are too high. The backbiter scandals; having no conception of good, evil offers itself to such persons. How come then that mosques, churches, temples & other religious centres can rival The Enquirer for the spreading of gossip; in places of worship gossip reaches its luxuriant flowering. Such an ill deed in sacred places make the heavens weep.

God mentions the case concerning a chaste lady, about whom someone started a rumour. (24:12) Why do not the believing men & women, whenever such a rumour was heard, think the best of one another & say, “This is an obvious slander”? God continues with His universal & eternal teaching: (24:15-16) “When you welcome slander & REPEAT something of which you have no knowledge, and you deemed it a trifle, while with God it was serious. Why did you not, when you heard it, say: We should not repeat this. Glory be to God! This is a monstrous slander.” God comes down hard on defamation by oral utterance.

Prophet Luqman said: “If a tongue is truthful & honest, then it is the best part of the body. But when a tongue tells lies & utters dishonest words, then it is the worst part of the body.” Hollow & ineffectual, for the

“No servant of God’s belief will be correct until his heart is corrected, & his heart will never be corrected until his tongue is.”

most part, is our ordinary conversation. When our life ceases to be inward & private, conversation degenerates into mere gossip.

Avoid exaggerations. The Truth is sufficient. Speak only words which are truthful & do not deceive either by word, look, or gesture. Avoid slander as you would a deadly snake, lest you be caught in its toils. The one who speaks evil of another cannot find the way of peace. Put away all dissipations of idle gossip. Do not talk about the private affairs of others. Do not recriminate, or accuse others of offences, but meet all offences with blameless conduct. Do not condemn those who are not walking in the righteous path, but protect them with compassion, walking the path yourself. Quench the flame of anger with the pure water of Truth. Be modest in your words & do not utter coarse, or unseemly jests.

You should shudder at the danger, and a terrible danger it is, to admit into your mind the details of some trivial affair,—the news of the street. It’s astonishing to observe how willing people are to lumber their minds with such rubbish,—to permit idle rumors & incidents of the most insignificant kind to intrude on ground which should be sacred to thought. Shall the mind be a public arena, where the affairs of the street & gossip chiefly are discussed? Or shall it be a quarter of heaven itself,—sacred territory, consecrated to the service of God? Gossip is against the very concept of faith.

The higher, the more exalted the society, the greater is its culture & refinement & the less does gossip prevail. People in such circles find too much of interest in the world of art, literature, science & religion to discuss, without gloating over the shortcomings of their neighbours.

My name is gossip.
I have no respect for justice.
I maim without killing.
I break hearts & ruin lives.
I am cunning & malicious
& gather strength with age.

The more I am quoted the more I am believed.

I flourish at every level of society.

My victims are helpless.

They cannot protect themselves against me

“Is there anything which topples people on their faces into Hell other than the harvests of their tongues.”

because I have no face.

To track me down is impossible for you.
The harder you try, the more elusive I become.

I am nobody’s friend.

Once I tarnish a reputation, it is never the same.

I topple governments & wreck marriages.

I ruin careers & cause sleepless nights,
heartache & indigestion.

I spawn suspicion & generate grief.

I make innocent people cry in their pillows.

Even my name hisses. I am called Gossip.

Office gossip. Shop gossip. Party gossip.

Phone gossip. Facebook gossip.

I make headlines & headaches.

Before you repeat a story ask yourself,

Is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary?

If not— KEEP IT TO YOURSELF!

If you spend as much time praying

as you do talking about others

behind their backs,

you would be further ahead Spiritually.

A look at the Biblical rules that guide speech:

Proverbs 16:28 we read: “A perverse man stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends.”

Proverbs 11:13, “A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”

(Matt. 12:36-37): “But I tell you that men will have to give an account for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted & by your words you will be condemned.”

Proverbs 15:4, “The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.”

“Go for the Gold” in all areas of your life.

Manifest integrity & be regarded as a trustworthy person. The first step in obtaining this “higher ground” is to speak well of others when they are not present. The second step is not to listen, for this also defiles the spirit. For those women who can’t stop babbling then Aisha’s words would do good:

“Will you not allow the recording angel to rest?”

Oh, and if you want to eat meat, try mutton. Delicious on the tongue!

THE OPIATE OF THE ONE
LACKING TRUE SPIRITUALITY

Gossip

A GLOBAL VULGARITY

Gossip harms the spiritual well-being of all who participate in it. Its motives are to create disharmony & inflict pain. Idle speech consists in talking about the private affairs of others, in talking merely to pass away the time, and in engaging in aimless & irrelevant conversation. Such an ungoverned condition of speech is the outcome of an ill-regulated mind. Gossip constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Why our seemingly insatiable appetite for gossip...which turn vicious & get perpetuated fast – within moments – through texting, Twitter, email & social networks. Worse yet, they live forever, archived in our cyberworld.

No other religious scripture describes this sin in stunning metaphorical language as the Quran:

“Do not spy nor allow some of you to backbite others. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of the dead? You would abhor it!” (49:12) Such guidance is an excellent compass for managing

our tongue. From behind your back, face-to-

face & on Facebook lots of cannibalizing is taking place. Such horrible speech has become a heavily practiced form of conversation. So

where are you heading with your day-to-day gorging... “The one who spreads gossip which

they have overheard will not enter the Garden.” The Prophet (p). The one who listens

surreptitiously to peoples’ conversations against their wishes will have molten lead

poured into their ears on the Day of Resurrection. The secretive tenor of gossip

suggests that it contains information that the gossipee would prefer to keep private. Thus,

while gossip need not be malicious or potentially harmful, it usually is **Warning:**

Gossip undermines life & vitality at all levels.

“O you who believe!
If a mischief-maker
comes with any news,
ascertain the truth,
lest you should harm
people unknowingly,
& then have to feel ashamed
for what you have done.”

No, ‘tis slander, whose edge is sharper than the sword, whose tongue out venoms all the worms of the Nile, whose breath rides on the posting winds & doth belie all corners of the world. Kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave this viperous slander enters, wrote an inspired Shakespeare. The slandering tongue is set on fire by hell itself. The universe seems bankrupt as soon as we begin to discuss the character of individuals. Our discourse all runs to vilifications, and our limits grow narrower as we advance. It is not conceivable that our community— or for that matter, any society – will someday entirely rid itself of rumor-mongering & back-biting; but certainly societies, like individuals, can always improve themselves with regard to these socially destructive vices.

Extraordinary people talk about ideas, average people talk about events & little people talk about other people. Which of these best describe you? Our fallen human nature has perfected the art of subtle seduction in conversation. There is perverse pleasure in exposing someone’s faults & failures. That is what makes gossip appealing.

An old proverb relates the story of a person who repeated gossip – some rumor about a neighbor. Soon, the whole community had heard the rumor. Later, the person who spread the gossip learned that the rumor was untrue. The person was very sorry and went to an elder in the community who had a reputation for great wisdom to seek advice. The elder told the person, “Go to your home and take a feather pillow outside. Rip it open and scatter the feathers, then return to me tomorrow.” The person did as the

elder had instructed. The next day, the person visited the elder. The elder said, “Go and collect the feathers you scattered yesterday and bring them back to me.” The person went home and searched for the feathers, but the wind had carried them all away. The person returned to the elder and said, “I could find none of the feathers I scattered yesterday.” “You see,” said the elder, “it’s easy to scatter the feathers but impossible to get them back.” So it is with gossip; it doesn’t take much to spread hurtful words, but once you do, you can never completely undo the damage.

It is first & foremost up to each believer to suppress these malicious impulses. The ability to control the tongue is a sign of spiritual maturity. Since the Quran & the Prophet (p) rank rumor-mongering & backbiting among the greatest of sins, it is a wonder that this behavior is so prevalent among Muslims.

Gossip is an emotional cancer that eats away at the sense of well-being of the individual. Whether to feel self-righteous by exposing another’s sin or to enjoy that sin vicariously, we all are tempted to take a certain kind of pleasure in the sins of others. Love has no part in that. Love does not expose or exploit, gloat or condemn. Love bears; love does not bare.

There’s an ever-increasing emphasis on gossip, played out in Reality TV shows, in celebrity gossip shows & in the print media (The National Enquirer sells millions of copies each week). It is that depraved pleasure that sells magazines & newspapers that cater to exposés, “true confessions,” and the like.

The term “malicious gossips” translates diabolos, which, even to the person unacquainted with Greek, suggests the severity of this evil, with our English derivative “diabolical.” Diabolos means “accuser” and is used as a title for Satan. Engulfed and blinded by self-love, malicious gossips do the very work of Satan.

In the Wizard of Oz, it was “Lions & tigers & bears, oh my!” Organizations today are singing a different tune: “Gossip & rumors & hearsay, oh why?”

Who doesn’t love a little office gossip? With all those workplace romantics walking the halls & shutting their doors for a little privacy, we rely on the gossips at work to keep us ‘informed’ & keep ‘work’ interesting. Known for having the latest buzz on everything from promotions & demotions to office romances, the gossip is always on the prowl for the latest piece of dirt.

In company offices, in meetings, on the phone, in emails, in social settings & around the water cooler, people are spending more time talking about someone else – in language that is most often harmful, hurtful, critical, demeaning & judgmental — and outside the presence of the one who is the subject of the conversation.

Whereas, in the past, we might have viewed gossip in the workplace as playful, “idle” & “just kidding,” gossip today has taken on a tone of abuse, a tone of violence. Gossip is a form of personal attack. We engage in gossip as a way of avoiding personal responsibility for our feelings of frustration, irritation & anger by acting out through gossip & focusing our personal discontent on another.

Organizations are implementing strategies at combatting this scourge: “Do not participate in spreading gossip & rumors. Do not tolerate it from others. It sabotages our team’s ability to work together effectively. It is disrespectful, nonproductive & a selfishly motivated act that keeps us all from performing our jobs. If you hear about an issue that pertains directly to you, verify the accuracy of the information by asking the person, rather than simply passing on the information.” It is estimated that gossip within a company can cut productivity by as much as 50%. Of course this translates to lower profits & can negatively impact the company in the long-term.

Contrary to popular opinion, gossip is not benign; it’s not idle; it’s not tame; it’s not “for the fun of it.” It’s certainly not entertainment. Gossip is a symptom — indicating a lack of well-being in one’s own mind-body-spirit integration.

Gossip is a very real pernicious & insidious form of violence. While we may wish to consider the way we talk as not being violent, in fact, our words in the context of gossip often lead to hurt, pain and suffering.

To discover root causes, it’s well to begin with a powerful question: “Why do I choose to gossip?” One approach to answering this question is to be curious about our history around gossip. If gossiping is part of our character and personality now, there’s a good chance that we have been conditioned to gossip, that gossiping has become part of our wiring.

On a scale of 1-10, to what degree does gossiping take up a greater part of time & energy? An honest & responsible response can give some insights

“When you get up in the morning
all the limbs humble themselves
before the tongue & say:
Have fear of God for our sake,
for we are dependent on you.
If you are upright, we are straight.
If you are crooked, we are crooked.”

into our personal relationship with gossip & about any habits & instincts we may have to gossip.

Another approach to exploring the “Why do I gossip?” question is to look at what gossip gets us — in other words, what our motivations for gossiping are. “Why am I willingly (consciously or unconsciously) choosing to cause another person harm, hurt, upset, or pain?” The old WIIFM (What’s in it for me?) question.

Since no one of us is born gossiping, how is it that some of us develop into individuals who have a desire, need or obsession to engage in a such a violent or toxic behavior like gossip? The short answer is that each of us grows up with three basic psycho-social needs: the need for control, the need for security & the need for recognition.

The reality is that because many of us feel we’re not in control of our lives, or feel we’re not receiving adequate attention, acknowledgment and recognition, or feel insecure within ourselves, we look outside our self for ways to “feel good” and to “feel better” about life & about our world. While there are many ways to meet these three needs, one of the most blatant & egregious ways we meet these three needs is through gossiping.

By preoccupying ourselves with the life, or activities of another person, by being critical of them, by being judgmental of them, by being dishonest about them, by betraying them, and by putting them down, through the act of gossip, we feel we are lifting ourselves up. When we are experiencing feelings of inferiority, insecurity, deficiency & lack, or feeling like a “nobody” & have a need to feel like a “somebody,” we often believe we can gain some sense of control, recognition, approval or security by engaging in discussions about others.

“Certainly will the believers have

Who protects their tongue from

UNLAWFUL UTTERANCES

I shall guarantee them entrance into Paradise.

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