7660 - Complaining to Husband About Relatives

the question

Is the following backbiting; mother talking about her son to another son or sister / wife talking to husband about her sister/brother and real brothers talking about other real brothers?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Backbiting (Ghibah) is a bad characteristic which Allah and His Messenger have forbidden. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And spy not, neither backbite one another. Would one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? You would hate it (so hate backbiting). And fear Allah. Verily, Allah is the One Who forgives and accepts repentance, Most Merciful.” [49:12]

It was reported from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

“The Muslim is the brother of another Muslim; he does not betray him, lie to him or forsake him. The whole of the Muslim is sacred to his fellow Muslim – his honour, his wealth and his blood. Taqwa (piety) is here (in the heart). It is sufficient evil for a man to despise his brother.” [Muslim, al-Tirmidhi].

It was reported that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “When I was taken up into the heavens (the M’iraj), I passed by some people who had nails of copper with which they were scratching their faces and chests. I said, ‘Who are these people, O Jibreel?’ He said, ‘These are the ones who used to eat the flesh of the people and slander their honour.’” [al-Bukhaari, Abu Dawood].

With regard to the meaning of Ghibah (backbiting), it was reported from Abu Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Do you know what Ghibah is?” They said: Allah and His Messenger know best. He said, “(It is) when you mention something about your brother that he does not like.” It was said, What do you think if what I say about my brother is true? He said, “If it is true then you are backbiting against him and if it is not true then you are slandering him.” [Muslim, al-Tirmidhi]. Ghibah means mentioning something about your brother in his absence and saying something that he does not like to have said about him, with the intention of mocking him or making fun of him.

But if you say something about him in his absence to someone who can offer him advice so that he will advise him, or you are asking for help from someone who you hope will have an influence on him so that he will stop doing some evil action or sin that he has fallen into, and thus bring him back to the straight path – this is not Ghibah. For example, if a wife talks to her husband or her son about another of her sons so that he can advise him, this is not Ghibah.

Similarly, if you speak about your brother or someone else to his guardian or to someone who is able to stop him from doing wrong – with the intention of voicing a grievance and asking for help, or because he has taken something from you unlawfully and you want to demand your rights from the guardian of the one who took what is rightfully yours, such as when a man complains about his brother to his father if he has mistreated him or taken something that belongs to him, in order to have his rights restored to him, or complaining to a ruler or judge of unfair treatment – this is not Ghibah.

Al-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his commentary on Saheeh Muslim:

“But Ghibah (speaking about a person in his absence) is permissible if it is for some legitimate (shar’i/prescribed) purpose, which includes six reasons:

The first is complaining about unjust treatment: it is permissible for a person who has been mistreated to complain to the ruler or judge, or other people who have the authority or power to deal with the person who has mistreated him. He can say, so and so mistreated me, or, he did

such and such to me.

The second is seeking help to change some evil action, and bring a sinner back to the right path: so he may say to the person who he hopes can help: so and so is doing such and such, so try to stop him, and so on.

The third is seeking a religious ruling or fatwa: whereby a person may say to the Mufti (scholar): so and so – or my father, or my brother, or my husband – has treated me unjustly by doing such and such; does he have the right to do that? How can I deal with this and protect myself from his mistreatment etc.? This is permissible in cases of need. It is preferable to say in the case of a man or a husband or a father or a son that someone did such and such [i.e., describe it indirectly], but naming names is permissible, because of the hadeeth (report) of Hind who said (to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): Abu Sufyan is a stingy man.

The fourth is warning the Muslims against some evil: this may take various forms, such as mentioning the faults of narrators, witnesses and authors. This is permissible by scholarly consensus. Indeed, it is obligatory, in order to protect the sharee'ah (Islamic law). It also includes describing faults when one is consulted [about a person, for a serious reason such as business, marriage, etc.], and speaking up if one sees someone buying faulty goods or a slave who steals or commits zina (adultery) or drinks wine etc. – he should mention that to the would-be purchaser if he does not know about it. This is by way of sincere advice, not to cause harm or offence or corruption. Also, if you see a seeker of knowledge frequently visiting a person who is immoral or who follows innovations, and taking knowledge from him, and you fear that he may be harmed, you must advise him by explaining the situation to him, with the aim of offering sincere advice. If you see a person in a position of authority which he cannot discharge properly because he is not qualified for it or because he is corrupt, you should tell whoever has authority over him and explain what he is really like so that he will not be deceived by him and so that he will discipline him – this is not Ghibah, and it is obligatory to put things right.

The fifth is if a person is openly committing immoral deeds or following bid'ah (innovation): such as drinking wine, confiscating people's property unlawfully, collecting extortionate taxes, being in

charge of illegal activities etc. It is permissible to speak of what he is doing openly, but it is not permissible to speak of other things except for another reason.

The sixth is for the purposes of identification: if a person is known by a nickname such as al-A’amash (rheumy-eyed), al-A’araj (lame), al-Azraq (blue), al-Qaseer (short), al-A’ama (blind), al-Aqta’a (missing a limb) etc., this is permissible for purposes of identification, but it is haram (impermissible) to use such names for the purpose of belittling a person, and if it is possible to identify them by using other words, this is better. And Allah knows best.”

But if there is no useful purpose to be served by speaking about a person, or if the aim is to make fun of him or expose him, this is Ghibah and is not permitted.

And Allah knows best.