

BACKBITING

That seeker should, also, regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.

(Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Page 265)

D. Miscellaneous Laws, Ordinances and Exhortations

(1) Miscellaneous Laws and Ordinances:

(y) Prohibitions:

xxii. Backbiting

(Synopsis and Codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Page: 46)

He must never seek to exalt himself above any one, must wash away from the tablet of his heart every trace of pride and vainglory, must cling unto patience and resignation, observe silence, and refrain from idle talk. For the tongue is a smouldering fire, and excess of speech a deadly poison. Material fire consumeth the body, whereas the fire of the tongue devoureth both heart and soul. The force of the former lasteth but for a time, whilst the effects of the latter endure a century.

That seeker should also regard backbiting as grievous error, and keep himself aloof from its dominion, inasmuch as backbiting quencheth the light of the heart, and extinguisheth the life of the soul.

(Bahá'u'lláh in "Kitáb-i-Íqán")

O beloved of the Lord! If any soul speak ill of an absent one, the only result will clearly be this: he will dampen the zeal of the friends and tend to make them indifferent. For backbiting is divisive, it is the leading cause among the friends of a disposition to withdraw. If any individual should speak ill of one who is absent, it is incumbent on his hearers, in a spiritual and friendly manner, to stop him, and say in effect: would this detraction serve any useful purpose? Would it please the Blessed Beauty, contribute to the lasting honour of the friends, promote the holy Faith, support the Covenant, or be of any possible benefit to any soul? No, never! On the contrary, it would make the dust to settle so thickly on the heart that the ears would hear no more, and the eyes would no longer behold the light of truth.

If, however, a person setteth about speaking well of another, opening his lips to praise another, he will touch an answering chord in his hearers and they will be stirred up by the breathings of God. Their hearts and souls will rejoice to know that, God be thanked, here is a soul in the Faith who is a focus of human perfections, a very embodiment of the bounties of the Lord, one whose tongue is eloquent, and whose face shineth, in whatever gathering he may be, one who hath victory upon his brow, and who is a being sustained by the sweet savours of God.

Now which is the better way? I swear this by the beauty of the Lord: whensoever I hear good of the friends, my heart filleth up with joy; but whensoever I find even a hint that they are on bad terms one with another, I am overwhelmed by grief. Such is the condition of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Page: 230)

In this Book He, moreover, prescribes the obligatory prayers; designates the time and period of fasting; prohibits congregational prayer except for the dead; fixes the Qiblih; institutes the Huqúqu'lláh (Right of God); formulates the law of inheritance; ordains the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár; establishes the Nineteen Day Feast, the Bahá'í festivals and the Intercalary Days; abolishes the institution of priesthood; prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy, monasticism, penance, the use of pulpits and the kissing of hands; prescribes monogamy; condemns cruelty to animals, idleness and sloth, backbiting and calumny; censures divorce; interdicts gambling, the use of opium, wine and other intoxicating drinks; specifies the punishments for murder, arson, adultery and theft; stresses the importance of marriage and lays down its essential conditions; imposes the obligation of engaging in some trade or profession, exalting such occupation to the rank of worship; emphasizes the necessity of providing the means for the education of children; and lays upon every person the duty of writing a testament and of strict obedience to one's government.

(God Passes By, Page: 214)

533. By God! In wealth fear is concealed and peril is hidden. Behold and then reflect upon that which the Merciful One hath revealed in the Koran: "Woe unto every maligner and backbiter who heapeth up riches and counteth them over." There is no continuance in the riches of this world. That which is subject to mortality and undergoeth a change hath never been and is not worth regarding. But as is well-known, the purpose of this Oppressed One in enduring these adversities and calamities, the revelation of the Verses and the manifestation of the Proofs, hath been to quench the fire of hatred and animosity, so that perchance the horizons of the minds of the people of this world may shine with the light of concord and attain the real tranquillity. The sun of this explanation is shining and arising from the horizon of the Divine Tablet; all must look toward it.

(Bahá'í Scriptures, Page: 262)

73. Praise be to God that through the gracious assistance of the Abhá Kingdom those devoted friends have been enabled to achieve that which befits the glory of the Cause of God and the protection of the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. This is none other than to foster unity and fellowship under all conditions, to strengthen the bonds of harmony and concord in all things, and to avoid political matters. It is particularly important to refrain from making unfavourable remarks or statements concerning the friends and the loved ones of God, inasmuch as any expression of grievance, of complaint or backbiting is incompatible with the requirements of unity and harmony and would dampen the spirit of love, fellowship and nobility. Therefore it is incumbent upon the members of the exalted Spiritual Assembly to exercise the utmost care with firm determination and not to allow the doors of complaint and grievance to be opened, or permit any of the friends to indulge in censure and backbiting. Whoever sets himself to do so, even though he be the very embodiment of the Holy Spirit, should realize that such behaviour would create disruption among the people of Bahá and would cause the standard of sedition to be raised.

In these days when the peoples of the world are thirsting for the teachings of the Abhá Beauty - teachings that provide the incomparable, life-giving waters of immortality - when we Bahá'ís have pledged ourselves to proffer these living waters to all mankind and are known to be prepared to endure every suffering and tribulation, how pitiful it would be if, despite all this, we were to neglect our binding obligations and responsibilities and to occupy ourselves with disagreeable discussions that provoke irritation and distress and to turn our attention to matters that lead to ill-feeling, to despondency and unhappiness and reduce the penetrating influence of the Word of God.

(Bahiyih Khanum - The Greatest Holy Leaf, Page: 194)

To an American friend He writes:

"The worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting, more especially when it emanates from the tongues of the believers of God. If some means were devised so that the doors of backbiting could be shut eternally, and each one of the believers of God unsealed his lips in praise of others, then the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh would be spread, the hearts illumined, the spirits glorified, and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity."

('Abdu'l-Bahá ,Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, Page: 83)

304. The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh

"Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness."

(Lights of Guidance, [The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Page: 10, Arabic no. 27])

306. Abstain from Fault-Finding and Backbiting

"On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding and back-biting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.

"If we profess loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they demand, and no amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings."

(From letter dated 12 May 1925 written on behalf of the Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, [Living the Life, Page: 3])

312. Backbiting - The Most Great Sin

"...Thou hast written regarding aims. How blessed are these aims, especially the prevention of backbiting! I hope that you may become confirmed therein, because the worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting; more especially when it emanates from the tongues of the believers of God. If some means were devised so that the doors of backbiting could be shut eternally and each one of the believers of God unsealed his tongue in the praise of the other, then the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh (Bahá'o'lláh) would be spread, the hearts illuminated, the spirits glorified and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity.

"I hope that the believers of God will shun completely backbiting, each one praising the other cordially and believer that backbiting is the cause of Divine wrath, to such an extent that if a person backbites to the extent of one word, he may become dishonored among all the people, because the most hateful characteristic of man is fault-finding. One must expose the praiseworthy qualities of the souls and not their evil attributes. The friends must overlook their shortcomings and faults and speak only of their virtues and not their defects.

"It is related that His Holiness Christ - May my life be a sacrifice to Him - one day, accompanied by His apostles, passed by the corpse of a dead animal. One of them said: 'How putrid has this animal become!' The other exclaimed: 'How it is deformed!' A third cried out: 'What a stench! How cadaverous looking!' But His Holiness Christ said: 'Look at its teeth! How white they are!' Consider, that He did not look at all the defects of that animal; nay, rather, He searched well until He found the beautiful white teeth. He observed only the whiteness of the teeth and overlooked entirely the deformity of the body, the dissolution of its organs and the bad odor.

"This is the attribute of the children of the Kingdom. This is the conduct and the manner of the real Bahais (Bahá'ís). I hope that all the believers will attain to this lofty station." ('Abdu'l-Bahá: Tablet to Dr. M. G. Skinner from 12 August 1913; Star of the West, Vol. IV, No. 11, Page: 192, [Lights of Guidance, Page: 73])

323. Backbiting is Divisive

"...If any soul speak ill of an absent one, the only result will clearly be this: he will dampen the zeal of the friends and tend to make them indifferent. For backbiting is divisive, it is the leading cause among the friends of a disposition to withdraw. If any individual should speak ill of one who is absent, it is incumbent on his hearers, in a spiritual and friendly manner, to stop him, and say in effect: would this detraction serve any useful purpose? Would it please the Blessed Beauty, contribute to the lasting honour of the friend,s promote the holy Faith, support the Covenant, or be of any possible benefit to any soul? No, never! On the contrary, it would make the dust to settle so thickly on the heart that the ears would hear no more, and the eyes would no longer behold the light of truth."

(Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Page: 230-231, [Lights of Guidance, Page: 77])

The handling of this case was not unusual; the Guardian well knew that the world, the believers and the Assemblies were still very immature; the administration of "justice" - in itself a highly involved subject - presupposes some degree of maturity, of experience, of deep knowledge of the teachings on the part of those concerned with it. It also takes a great deal of time. Over and over, during his entire ministry, the Guardian refused to arbitrate cases eferred to him and urged those concerned to rise above the situation, to forget the past and forgive, to concentrate on the urgent, the paramount needs of the Faith, which were to fulfil the goals of its current Plans and spread its healing message to all mankind. Of course in cases of divorce or disputes on financial matters and other tangible issues the believers were advised to refer to their Assemblies and he urged those bodies to investigate and come to a decision; indeed, as the administrative bodies

gradually matured over the years, he encouraged the Bahá'ís to refer to them their problems for solution, so that both the Bahá'ís and the Assemblies could gain in experience and learn to implement the marvellous Order of Bahá'u'lláh in their personal and community life; but nevertheless, in instances where plain inharmony, backbiting and mutual distrust had created the situation, he always called upon the friends to rise above it for the good of the Cause. His admonitions and appeals on such occasions were like a cool hand placed on a fevered brow, calming and comforting the angry and distressed contestants, soothing them until they were ready to let their essential love for their Faith flood back into their hearts and heal their wounds.

(The Priceless Pearl, Page: 301)

He should consider backbiting as error, and never step into that court, for backbiting extinguishes the brilliant light of the heart and numbs the life of the soul.

(Bahá'í Scriptures, Page: 53)

"If we Bahá'ís cannot attain to cordial unity among ourselves, then we fail to realise the main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Beloved Master lived and suffered. "In order to achieve this cordial unity one of the first essentials insisted on by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that we resist the natural tendency to let our attention dwell on the faults and failings of others rather than on our own. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is, immeasurably far from being 'perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect' and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticise their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked.

"On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from fault-finding and backbiting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.

"If we profess loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they demand, and no amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings."

(From letter dated 12 May 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, [Living the Life, Page: 2])