

## Awareness of Gossip

- 1) Acquire a journal and carry it with you wherever you go. For one month, as often as possible after a conversation with someone, take a minute or two to reflect on the general topic of the conversation. Write it down.
- 2) Also note if any individuals were brought up in the conversation. Briefly describe, in general terms, what was said about them. Did you bring them in, or did someone else? Simply notice, without recording too much detail.
- 3) After one month, you will find that you are more sensitized to your conversations in general with regard to other people being discussed. You will notice the subtleties of how a person's name is brought up. Record your experiences on the mechanics: was there an association with the subject? How does the energy of the conversation change when someone's name is brought up? Are you completely at ease, or is a tension introduced? Whenever you have a few free minutes during each day, reflect on and record your insights on this subject in your journal.
- 4) After another period of three or four weeks of recording insights, begin to do some self-censoring. Whenever you feel the urge to bring up somebody's name during a conversation, try to hold back. This may feel uncomfortable at first. Experiment with it. Sometimes, you may bring a name up and notice the experience; at other times, hold back and notice what that feels like. Either way, you will be developing more and more sensitivity.
- 5) After you achieve success in self-censoring, try a more difficult experiment. Whenever you notice someone else has brought in a name for gossip, try to gently guide the conversation in a new direction without offending the participants. If you can, move quickly off the subject by ignoring it. If this does not work, you can be more direct by saying something like, "Let's not talk about this person; it makes me uncomfortable to gossip," or "I'm trying to avoid gossiping as a spiritual practice." This is not easy to do at first, but after a while you will gain more courage and strength.
- 6) Once you gain a level of mastery over yourself in personal conversations, you will find that you will be less comfortable with any kind of gossip - including in the material you read, see on television, or listen to on the radio. You will discover that gossip is unhealthy in many ways. It clutters our minds and our feelings. It is said that anyone who masters this path will attain a high degree of awareness, as the practice of refraining from gossip releases an enormous amount of unnecessary mental baggage.

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