

## **Gossip** *A Letter from Miriam M'susah shel Abyown*

Dear Yoneq:

There is something stirring deeply in my heart. I want to share it with you because I know you love us, the Body. I earnestly believe I am seeing something that is out to destroy us as a people, unless we truly obey Mt 18:15,16, 17.

In the South, gossip is considered a part of having etiquette and is a big part of life for the Southerner. Typical questions that are asked at the post office, bank, beauty parlor when meeting up with one of their townfolk were always, "What's the latest, honey?" "Did you hear about Sadie Barber?" "What news do you have for me, today?"

Oh, how prestigious it seemed to see my mom setting up for the bridge club. There the debutante ladies of the South met, with their little dainty tableclothed tables with their little dainty bowl of mints and their little dainty cups of coffee, to play this little game of bridge. They began to talk about the mailman, the maid, the neighbors, the school teachers, etc. How innocent it seemed, but how dangerous it was.

I grew up this way and became a leader in my school as I too so severely gossiped about anyone and everyone. I now look back and can see how I devastated people's lives. As in return, gossip devastated my life as well.

Gossip is a destroyer. It destroys people's lives, leaving them deeply wounded, insecure and mistrustful.

When I moved to Burlington, I was greatly affected by one sister's example of standing against gossip. Not to tear any of the other responsible women in my life down, but I had never seen this kind of example before.

Sometimes, her boldness to stand against gossip offended me because of this spirit driving me to gossip. But deep within I loved how she was, desiring to be like her.

But I was all tangled up, hating gossip because of its effects on me and others, but loving it too because if people agreed, it gave me a sense of being right or better than others. It seemed I was always compelled to sit and chat with those of a kindred spirit over a cup of tea. With just the right words, the gossip began. "Oh, I am concerned about this person. Have you ever noticed how they react to their husband?"

The other party, "Oh yes, I've seen it many times. One even in front of their child."

The initiator, "Oh well...I've seen it more than once."

Then of course, the conversation continues with the other faults they see in that person. But...the question here is, did either party go to this woman? Well... not her, but instead to four or five other women. Now that several women are in agreement, at least one of them has the courage now to go to this poor woman who needs love and help.

Often, I've been, and I've experienced, that in the name of CONCERN is when the spirit of gossip makes its way into our lives.

Mt 18:15 says, "If your brother sins, go reprove him privately. If he listens to you, you have won your brother.

But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more witnesses with you."

Often I have seen it the complete opposite — that we often go to the witnesses first and then go to the brother. It really does take love to go privately. It's easier to go publicly and get the courage. But I deeply believe our Master wants us to love enough to reprove our friends privately without even having to mention to another what this person did, especially if they receive.

Fear causes us to not go to our brother or sister. So we often gain courage through gossip, as we repeat a matter to another and they give us the courage to confront someone. Whenever I thought I saw anything I always went to another. Even in the name of concern. I was literally filled with fear, the fear of death, the fear of conflict (a biggy), the fear of exposure, the fear of being wrong. I really wanted to make sure I was RIGHT before saying something.

I was trapped, entangled in a sticky web of gossip. I honestly wanted out. I hated being this way. As the years went on, I was becoming a leader of gossip and participating in undergrounds of different communities I lived in.

Our Father brought my sin to the light. I began to judge my leaders and sowed seeds of discord about one of our Father's most respected shepherds. My treacherous deeds sown in the dark were exposed. Our ABBA faithfully

brought my sin to the light. I was surrounded on all corners with no escape. Finally! Finally! I was so mercifully caught. And I welcomed the sword. With all my heart I wanted to be untangled. As each strike of the sword came down, I felt the cords of death being cut away from me. It HURT! Oh, how it hurt. But I desired freedom. After many days of meetings, I was granted full repentance. I was washed and cleansed from this deadly enemy. I felt so wonderfully clean and free. Free in my conscience, free to be bold, free to say, "NO, I will not listen to gossip!" Free to go STRAIGHT to the person in *private* and not tell a soul. I was fully determined to be honest and forthright.

I am convinced that if we do not obey Mt 18:15 we will not make it. Gossip is a *deadly* destroyer. It destroyed the first church. It comes in so many subtle ways. It can seem so compassionate and so concerned. But if one isn't obeying the word of our Master, what profit is there? We will never increase in love for one another. We will only cause that insecurity we mentioned earlier.

Gossip destroyed our brothers and sisters in the early church. Paul warned them. He hurt for them. He saw what was happening. They once had a fervent, hot, first-love for one another. They were devoted to the Apostles' teachings, they were devoted to fellowship. They loved each other so much! But after a time, they began to see each other's faults. They were not open and went to each other about one another. Undergrounds developed. They became estranged and the beautiful life of that deep fervent love was increasingly growing cold. Their once glorious life of love became NOTHING but a ritual as the speakers ruled and the rest grew silent.

I believe so much we must go way beyond our brothers and sister of old. I long for the day that we will love in this *deep, deep* way with a fervent love. With all my heart I do not believe it will happen if we do not obey Mt 18:15. Somehow, I believe this has to become a part of us, and we've just got to obey or we will never increase as a people.

A sister shared something with me just yesterday that also, among other recent incidents, started my zeal for writing this letter. She told me about an incident that a woman who grew up in the Body and is now married, shared with her. When she was 4 or 5, she heard two women speaking in front of her about another woman. What they said affected this young girl for years, as she suffered so deeply to respect this woman that these two women spoke about negatively. For close to 20 years, she struggled to have respect for her. The reason it affected her so much was that the two women speaking were considered responsible women.

We often go to others too because we want others to know what this person is really like. Usually we are this way because we've been offended. There is something to be said about winning a brother or a sister. If a sister knows you came to her because you loved her, and you want to cover her fault or sin it draws her heart to you more, increasing ever the more the bond of trust and peace between you. But if we go to brothers or sisters apart from obeying Mt 18:15 it only decreases love, making it harder to dispel the accuser who is there at all time looking for an opportunity to destroy our unity.

A gossip is not loyal. They *cannot be trusted*. Especially those of a kindred spirit are never secure with each other because they know the same ones who sip tea with you will also sip tea with others. A gossip is not a respecter of persons. Given the right circumstances, a gossip will gossip about anyone. One of the hardest things about being a kitchen covering is that many people go to them about So and So and what they see them doing. At an unguarded moment, a thought (seed) is planted. Kitchen coverings, as I've seen it happen, can become the household gossips. I see more clearly that kitchen coverings as in my case now have to stand up quickly and boldly, not giving an ear to gossip coming as concerns and say, "Go to So and So, not me. You saw it. Don't tell me, and I will not tell you. Go love your friend, help them (Mt 18:15).

Recently I have been tested, which I needed and I am now thankful. I was beginning to fall. But I MUST ALWAYS remember what I was delivered from and where the sin of gossip leads me. DEATH! I have to find the way, mark it well and always remain and never return to evil. I desire to stay clean and free, remaining a builder and not a destroyer.

The way is narrow... find the way, mark it well. Even if we have been bad examples, it's for the sake of others. Mark the way so the others following behind us will not go the wrong way.

I deeply desire to see gossip eradicated from the camp! And to obey Mt 18:15 with all my heart, so that our love, unity and peace will increase.

I love you so much,  
Miriam M'susah