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GUARDING THE TONGUE

Importance of the Tongue

People are a combination of organs that if rectified and used properly, can rectify the person. The tongue is a very small organ among these organs that is often used very improperly. This is resonated in an Arabic proverb that says that the tongue may be physically small but leads to major sins.

One major sin that angers Allah ﷻ is hypocrisy; not practicing what one preaches. The words spoken by a believer are valued greatly by Allah ﷻ and hence, should be truthful.

O you who believe! Why say you that which you do not? [61:2]

The Holy Quran further states elsewhere:

Not a word does he utter but there is a sentinel by him, ready to note it [50:18]

The Affirmation of Faith (*Kalimah Shahadah*)

Allah ﷻ values the Affirmation of Faith (*shahadah*) so highly that He will absolve all who recite it with sincerity. Even the unbeliever who has spent his entire life reveling in

sin will be absolved of his sins if he recites this affirmation of faith with sincerity. The spiritual elders relate that whenever anyone recites these valuable words and enters Islam, an angel flies towards the heavens. During this angel's flight, he encounters another angel descending towards the earth. The latter asks his counterpart where he is going, and the ascending angel replies, "Someone has accepted Islam and I am going to present this deed to Allah ﷻ. Where are you going?" The descending angel replies, "I am taking good tidings of forgiveness from Allah ﷻ for the person who has accepted Islam." Indeed, words spoken by the tongue can be so powerful, that for their sake, Allah ﷻ forgives a whole life of sin.

There is no comparison between the rule of law of this life and that of Allah's ﷻ rules and mercy. If a person is ever falsely accused in this earthly existence but then fully exonerated upon investigation, society may declare that individual totally innocent of any charges, but the initial accusation and resulting investigation still become a matter of record for that person's life. However, Allah ﷻ is so merciful that He not only forgives a person on the face value of the beautiful words of the *shahadah* and repentance, but also wipes his entire record clean as if that person never sinned. Furthermore, a hadith records that Allah ﷻ even wipes clean the memory of the recording angels so that they cannot be witnesses on the Day of Judgment.

The Impact of Mockery

Today, people lie, spread rumors, mock, and hurt others merely for pleasure or to feel superior. People should note

that wounds inflicted by a sword can heal, but those inflicted by the tongue last forever. Allah ﷻ warns against mockery in the Holy Quran.

O you who believe! Let not some men among you laugh at others; it may be that (the latter) are better than (the former)
[49:11]

Such serious words and insults flow from the tongue very easily but will place their speaker in a very precarious position on the Day of Judgment, because Allah ﷻ detests this kind of behavior.

Speech Culminating in Disbelief (*Kufr*)

The scholars (*‘ulama*) have been gracious enough to give us examples of speech that would be labeled blasphemous and that would lead a person to disbelief (*kufr*). It is unfortunate that Muslims come to speak such words very easily.

For example, someone asks another person where he lives? And so the person asked replies that he lives in a remote area apparently very far away. May Allah ﷻ forgive us, because we are only stating an example, but then the first individual says, “So far that you are even out of Allah’s ﷻ reach?”

This individual may have said this in ignorance and jest, but the dangerous reality is that such a statement takes the person out of the fold of Islam and as one consequence, immediately divorces him from his wife.

Another incident occurs in the circumstance where someone points out an important ruling of the *shariah* to

another who becomes irate and says something to the effect of “Forget your *shariah!*” or “Keep your *shariah* to yourself!”

People may think they are saying such things in jest but the truth be told that the heavens and the earth tremble in fear at such sweeping statements that render a heart empty of faith.

Importance of Words

Words are extremely important and carry tremendous weight. This is exemplified by the fact that a woman who minutes ago was prohibited for a man to touch, can become his wife just by the short expressions of the marriage contract (*nikah*). Consequently, a wife who was a life companion a few minutes ago can become totally forbidden for the man due to the equally potent short words signifying divorce. One does not have to climb mountains or traverse pits of fire for circumstances to culminate in success or disaster, because a believer’s words carry so much weight and value with Allah ﷻ.

Each and every spoken word is recorded and presented in front of Allah ﷻ. This is why the *People of Allah* ﷻ choose their speech very carefully because they are well aware that they will be answerable for it. In fact, our righteous predecessors would write down everything they said in the course of a day and account for this speech at night, repenting for any wrong they may have said.

The Fear of Allah ﷻ

Hadrat Abdullah ibn Mubarak (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) was returning from Hajj when he noticed an

elderly lady approaching from the other direction. She replied to his greeting with a verse from the Holy Quran.

Peace! A word (of salutation) from a Lord Most Merciful
[36:58]

He asked her where she was coming from. Once again, she quoted the Quran in her answer:

And complete the Hajj or Umrah in the service of Allah [2:196]

Hadrat surmised that she had just completed the Hajj and asked her why she was coming towards him from the opposite direction. She replied with a quote as before:

To such as Allah rejects from His guidance there can be no guide [7:186]

Hadrat Abdullah ibn Mubarak understood that she was lost and asked where she was going. Her next quote told him that she was returning to the city and so he offered to guide her because he was going the same way. Having traveled for some time, Hadrat Abdullah started reciting some poetry in Arabic and so the lady recited a verse from the Holy Quran:

Read as much of the Quran as may be easy for you [73:20]

Hadrat Abdullah ibn Mubarak now kept silent, but asked himself who this lady might be. Along the way, he

tried to find out more about her, but she put an abrupt end to his questions with yet another verse.

Ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble [5:101]

Reaching the outskirts of the town, Hadrat asked her who she had to meet up with. From her reply, he ascertained that Allah ﷻ had blessed her with sons and wealth.

Wealth and sons are the allurements of the life of this world [18:46]

Entering the town, Hadrat noticed a caravan of pilgrims (*hujjaj*) that had obviously stopped for rest along the way and asked the lady the names of her sons. Just as she had done throughout, she replied with a Quranic verse and said:

Ibrahim, Isma'il and Isaac [2:133]

As soon as Hadrat Abdullah called out these names, three handsome youths came running toward him. As they had been extremely worried regarding their mother's whereabouts, they had been searching all the caravans. Now, they were overjoyed to see her. Her benefactor was about to leave when she again quoted a verse and indicated to her sons that they should host Hadrat Abdullah with food and drink.

And they feed for the love of Allah [76:8]

Her sons immediately ran and brought some fruit for Hadrat, but he politely excused himself. The mother who he had just reunited with her sons again quoted from the Holy Quran.

We feed you for the sake of Allah alone [76:9]

Hadrat Abdullah ibn Mubarak was amazed at what had been transpiring and asked the lady's sons why their mother replied to everything with a Quranic verse. One of the sons told him that their mother was a *hafizah*¹ of the Holy Quran and a scholar ('*alimah*) of hadith. Her heart was so filled with the fear of Allah ﷻ that she feared having to account for her speech on the Day of Judgment, and hence had spoken nothing but the Holy Quran for the last twenty years.

The Day of Judgment

People will be held accountable for every article of speech they uttered. No doubt, they will be completely ashamed when they stand before Allah with the likes of those who recited nothing but the Holy Quran all of their lives. Answering to Allah ﷻ will prove to be a monumental task when even prophets will tremble when asked about their lawful deeds.

Hadrat Abdul Qadir Jilani (May the mercy of Allah ﷻ be upon him) writes in his book *Ghaniyat ut-Talibeen* that Allah ﷻ will be in intense anger on the Day of Judgment, and will ask the Christians why they associated a created

¹ One who has memorized the Holy Quran (female).

being to Him in worship. The Christians will at once defer to Hadrat Isa عليه السلام saying that he taught and invited them to such worship. So Allah ﷻ will turn to Hadrat Isa عليه السلام and ask:

Did you say (this) unto men? [5:116]

When addressed by Allah ﷻ in such a manner, every pore of Hadrat Isa's عليه السلام body will bleed in absolute fear of Allah ﷻ. If this is what the Prophets' reaction will be, what will become of the common people whose tongues are ever so loose? Carelessness in speech and action is effortless in this world, but accounting for them will prove dangerous on the Day of Judgment.

Inhabitants of Hell and Paradise

The Messenger ﷺ of Allah said that the leading cause of entry into Hellfire would be the lack of control over two bodily organs, that between the jaws and between the legs. The Messenger ﷺ warned the Companions, and thus the generations to come that many will descend into Hellfire because of their inability to control their tongue and sexual habits from the forbidden.

On the contrary, the Messenger ﷺ of Allah also said that he would be responsible for building a house in Paradise for those who utilize their tongue and engage in sexual intimacy within the boundaries prescribed by Allah ﷻ.

Weighing One's Speech

We should develop the habit of reflecting on our speech before subjecting it upon others. This way the speaker himself will be urged to act upon his own words first and can also weigh the appropriateness of the speech. Nowadays, people unfortunately think *after* they speak, whereas others do not even do that and keep on talking endlessly.

*One tongue Allah ﷻ has given to speak with,
But two ears with which to listen.*

Ideally, we should only speak after hearing, or weighing things twice. It is pitiful that people rarely want to listen, but rather interrupt others and start with their own vain talk and opinions. Hence, all parties try to talk over the other at the same time. Consequently, no one listens except the angels and maybe the walls surrounding them. One of the virtues that society is in need of more than ever, is for people to listen respectfully and let their counterparts finish speaking.

Hadrat Abu Bakr's ﷺ Fear of Allah ﷻ

Hadrat Abu Bakr ﷺ would often hold his tongue and say that it was the main bodily organ that would be the cause of man's descent into Hellfire. He would also say that the great person is the one whose silence and speech is punctuated with reflection and the remembrance of Allah ﷻ.

Slipping of the Tongue

The slipping of one's tongue is much worse than that of the feet. If the feet slip, then one can simply get back up, but

matters get dangerously out of hand if the tongue slips and says something wrong.

Hadrat Hasan al-Basri (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) would often remark in his gathering that a little girl had taught him an important lesson. When asked how, he would reply, “Once it was raining and people were walking cautiously through the mud. I saw a little girl approaching and cautioned her to be careful lest she slip in the mud. The girl looked at me and said, ‘If I slip I can always get up, but what will happen to the Muslim nation if you slip and fall? You have to be careful because you are our leader and guardian.’” Hence, Hadrat Hasan al-Basri would often say that a little girl taught him about steadfastness.

Hadrat Yahya bin Ma’adh (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) would often say that the heart is like a cauldron, whereas the tongue is like the spoon. Just as the spoon takes out whatever is in the cauldron, the true nature of whatever is in the heart comes out onto the tongue. Consequently if the heart is pure, the tongue will speak well of everything and if the heart is spoiled with sin, the tongue will only speak ill.

Correct Use of the Tongue

The *People of Allah* ﷺ can determine the spiritual health of a person by the tongue’s speech, just as medical doctors can determine a person’s physical health by the tongue’s color.

Hadrat Ali ؓ would often say, “People will assume you to be a scholar until you speak.” At other times he would say, “You will be recognized by your speech.” He would also

say that people remain hidden behind their speech, meaning their true character would be revealed if they were to speak.

People will rarely use inappropriate speech when at ease, but a true assessment of a person's character can be made by his speech when he is angered. Whether the person faces a tumultuous situation with control and patience or with uncontrolled anger and a flurry of insults will be the determinant factor in assessing his character. This is yet another reason why people must weigh the potential consequences of their speech very carefully.

Usually the case holds true that in anger, a man loses control over his hands and a woman over her tongue. A woman's tongue is the sword that never blunts with rust but always remains razor sharp. Moreover, it tears apart relationships that even swords of steel cannot separate.

Taking Care

Religious gatherings are places where respect and humility are extremely important. Therefore, attendees at such gatherings need to be extra careful in all aspects of behavior, because those who come later will follow the example of those before them. Usually, people sit humbly in such gatherings, as if to attract attention to themselves in an effort to show others their hollow piety.

Revered scholars have advised that people should keep their tongues in check when in the gatherings of the scholars, their eyes in check when in presence of their elders, and their hearts in check when in the gatherings of the auliya. Those who do not keep their tongues under control

do not live long lives, because their lives are shortened by the burdens their ill speech earns for them.

Eye Opening Advice

Hadrat Baqibillah (May the mercy of Allah ﷺ be upon him) rarely spoke at all and once someone asked him to render some advice for the benefit of people who had gathered. Hadrat Baqibillah said, “Those who have not benefited from my silence will not benefit from my speech.”

The deepest ones remain the most silent.

Outside of teaching or clarifying a ruling, the *People of Allah* ﷺ and other respected elders do not have a love for excess talk and remain silent. Thus, they remain in fear of burdening themselves needlessly through futile talk, for the only difference between the wise and the foolish is that the wise think before they speak, but the foolish speak before they think. It is said that there is no need to put a bell around the neck of the foolish because their speech will soon enough expose them. Such people should be avoided because they have nothing beneficial to say.

Protecting Oneself from Foul Language

The Messenger ﷺ of Allah forbade swearing at or the use of foul language with one’s parents or elders. The Companions were surprised and asked, “Who would do such a thing?” and the Messenger ﷺ of Allah replied, “If you swear at anyone’s parents, he will in turn swear against yours which is the same as you swearing against your own parents.”

Victory in Truth

A piece of land in India was once disputed between Hindus and Muslims with each side claiming it as theirs. The Hindus wanted to build a temple on the land and of course the Muslims in turn wanted to build a mosque. The matter was so delicate and escalated to such a degree that the whole area threatened to be engulfed in war over the dispute, and the ruling British at the time worriedly sought a solution.

The British convened a court to try to resolve the issue and before its convening, the presiding judge asked both sides for a potential settlement to the land dispute. The Hindu delegation said that they had a possible resolution, and suggested that the judge call forth a specific Muslim *'alim* of their choosing and the question of rightful ownership should be posed to him. The Hindu side further claimed they would be satisfied with whatever that particular *'alim* decided. However, they insisted against naming him in public, but would only name him in secret to the judge. The judge agreed to this proposal and set a future date for the case.

The Hindu public was very irate at their spokesmen who had suggested this idea, because now the dispute seemed guaranteed to be settled in favor of the Muslims. In turn, the Muslims were ecstatic that the decision would almost certainly be in their favor. An *'alim* would certainly want a mosque to be built on the land instead of a Hindu temple.

People crowded the court on the date the case was to be heard and a venerable Muslim *shaykh* whose word even the Hindus greatly respected was presented in front of the judge. The judge asked this Muslim *'alim* who the rightful

owner of the land was and without hesitation the *alim* said that the land belonged to the Hindus. The judge further asked if the Hindus could then build their temple there or not, and the *alim* answered, “When the land belongs to them, it is their right to build whatever they like, either a temple or a house.”

According to the prior agreement, the judge ruled in favor of the Hindus, but recorded his decision in historical words. He wrote that whereas Muslims lost the ruling, Islam proved victorious.

Hearing this landmark decision, the Hindu party present at the court was so touched by this ‘*alim*’s character that they publicly declared their acceptance of Islam and further announced that they would build a mosque on the land. Through the blessing of truthfulness Allah ﷻ not only opened the door for the Hindus to accept Islam, but also gave them the blessed opportunity to build a mosque. Truth always guarantees victory.

*Faced with a thousand fears the tongue is still witness for the heart,
Thus has been the way of the conquerors of the past.*

A Formula for Repentance

Seekers are quick to complain that their progress has stagnated and consequently their lessons are proving difficult. However upon analysis, this is all due to disobedience in one way or another to Allah’s ﷻ commands.

Effective treatment always involves medication and avoidance of certain foods and activities. Seekers may be performing the remembrance of Allah ﷻ (*dhikr*) according

to the shaykh's instructions, but they will not progress if they continue to sin by using their limbs and organs contrary to Allah's ﷻ wishes. If there is sin in the heart, it will direct the entire body toward sin. So unless the heart is purified, prayer and remembrance is only lip service through which one cannot progress.

May Allah ﷻ grant us the wisdom through which we may use our tongue properly and forgive any sins we have committed. Ameen.

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