



## MINDING THE TONGUE

SOCIAL ISLAM

LEVEL 5

### Objectives >>>

#### Students should:

- Understand that the tongue is a blessing that can take us to paradise or hell as most good and bad actions start from speech
- Understand that we can use good speech to convince others of the beauty of Islam
- Be reminded that most sins are from speech and the damage done cannot easily be corrected or taken back
- Understand techniques of minding the tongue
- Be reminded of the basic rules of speech

## Minding the Tongue

وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا

“Speak (and do) good to people” (2:83)

Speech is one of main distinguishing characteristics of human beings. It is one of the signs and products of the human being’s superior intelligence which Allah (SWT) has bestowed on us from His favours.

Imam ‘Ali (as) has said

“Your tongue is the interpreter of your intellect.”

Knowing that speech is one of the greatest blessings of human beings, it is important to understand as thoroughly as possible the ways to use this blessing in order to achieve the maximum benefit and realize its full potential for raising our status in this world and the hereafter.

## SPEECH – THE SOURCE OF MAN’S SUCCESS OR DESTRUCTION

Humans are social creatures who cannot live in isolation. They naturally incline towards living together and communicating with one another. The main form of communication between humans in their social life is speech. It is this ability to speak which sets humans apart from other creatures. While most other abilities that a human possesses can also be found in other creatures, speech is something unique to mankind.

One of the major challenges of living in a society and communicating with others is in fact is how we use our tongue. Our words can be very hurtful if they are not well considered, and words which are not considered properly, can cause many problems. Therefore, in order to live well in society, we need to mind our tongue.

Imam 'Ali (as) was asked: 'What is the best thing that Allah has created?' He (as) said, 'Speech'. Then he was asked, 'What is the worst thing Allah has created?'. He (as) replied, 'Speech'. Then he said, 'With speech faces are whitened (illuminated) and with speech faces are blackened'.

By this statement, Imam 'Ali (as) has shown us that the tongue is responsible for leading man to paradise or hell depending on how he uses this blessing.

On a closer look, we will note that a majority of the sins committed start or are caused by the wrongful use of the tongue (wrong speech). These sins have damaging effects both to the individual and to the society. This is because the tongue is used to express thoughts and feelings which result in action. For example, a man who gets angry can utter vulgar words or disrespect his family members and hurt their feelings, causing a rift in the relationship.

Some of the great sins that are caused by the tongue (through speech) are the following:

**a) Backbiting**

Imam al-Kāḍim (as) said: "Cursed is the one who backbites against one's brother (fellow Muslim)." <sup>i</sup>

**b) Slander**

The Holy Prophet (saw) said: "Slander acts quicker against the faith of a Muslim believer than leprosy does against his body." <sup>ii</sup>

**c) Lying**

Imam al-'Askari, the eleventh Imam, (as) said: "Wickedness was put inside a house, and the key (of its door) was rendered to be lies." <sup>iii</sup>

**d) Vain Talk**

Imam 'Ali (as) said: 'Any talk that does not have the remembrance e of Allah (SWT) therein is vain'. <sup>iv</sup>

**e) Obscene Language**

The Holy Prophet (saw) has said: 'Allah (SWT) has prohibited Heaven to those who use obscenity, vulgarity, lack shame, and are not concerned about what they say and what is said to them'. <sup>v</sup>

**f) Insulting**

The Holy Prophet (saw) has said, 'The one who insults a believer is as one who is on the verge of ruin'. <sup>vi</sup>

**Note:** Here it is important to understand the emphasis on the respect we should show towards our parents in particular. We should avoid rebuking, insulting or being rude and hurting their feelings in any way whatsoever.

## THE BLESSING OF THE TONGUE

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah (SWT) mentions that He has given us eyes and a tongue and lips, and showed us two paths, and left it up to us to choose whether we use these blessings in the right way or the wrong way:

"Have We not given him two eyes, And a tongue and two lips, And pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways?" (90: 8-10)

When considering the tongue, we obviously acknowledge that the physical tongue is a blessing which allows us to speak, eat, taste etc...However, here we are discussing the ability of speech. The ability of speech is what sets humans apart from animals. Historically, humans have been defined in philosophy as: 'speaking animals'. In fact,

Imam 'Ali (as): says: 'what is man without a tongue except either a drawn image or a mute animal'.

## A MAN IS CONCEALED UNDER HIS TONGUE

It is a person's speech which introduces that person and gives us the best insight into what kind of person he or she is. We know little about a person until we listen to them speak. Once they speak, we then either see the ugliness or the beauty of their personality through their speech. This is why Imam 'Ali (as) has said:

“The tongue is a human's scale”

Imam 'Ali (as) also says:

“Man is concealed under his tongue.”

The meaning behind these statements is that a man's worth can be known by his speech because the speech of every person is indicative of his mind and manners, and by virtue of it, his feelings and temperament can be very easily assessed. Therefore, so long as he is silent, his weaknesses as well as his attainments are concealed but when he speaks his real self, manifests itself.

Some of the great virtues that man is greatly rewarded for are also caused by the tongue (through speech) are the following:

**a. Truthfulness:**

Imam AL-Ṣādiq (as) has said: ‘He whose tongue tells the truth is pure of action’

**b. Eloquence:**

Imam 'Ali (as) has said, ‘The best speech is that which is decorated by a pleasant structure and is understood by the elite as well as the laymen’. <sup>vii</sup>

**c. Supplication**

Imam 'Ali (as) has said: ‘The most beloved action on this earth with Allah – The Mighty and Exalted – is supplication’. <sup>viii</sup>

In the Holy Qur'an, Allah (SWT) commands mankind to use good speech to invite others to Islam. He says:

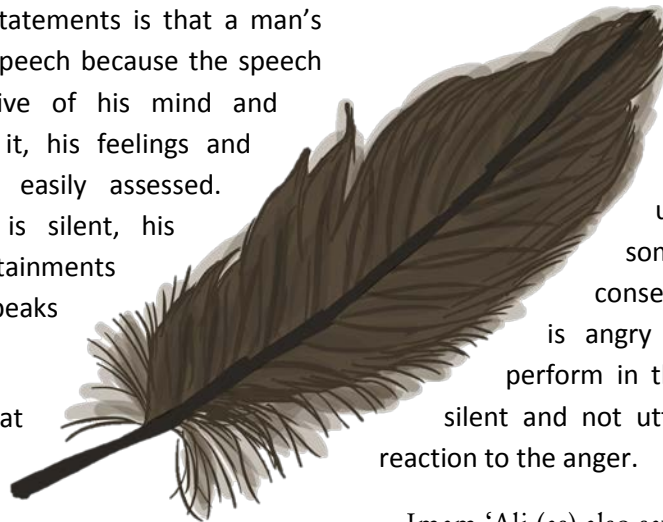
“Invite to the Way of your Lord with wisdom and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better. Truly, your Lord knows best

who has gone astray from His Path, and He is the Best Aware of those who are guided.” (16:125)

This means that our speech should be intelligent, polite, clear and appealing to the listener.

## WORD POWER

The quality of speech is such that whatever one says, he or she cannot take it back. This means that once something is said – the effect of the words has already taken place and cannot be cancelled. Just like a feather that is blown away and cannot be replaced, similarly our words cannot be taken back.



This is the reason why Islam recommends that we must carefully think and ponder upon the words we wish to utter, for once we have said something, we have to live with the consequences. As such, when a person is angry or upset, the best action to perform in this state is to remain calm and silent and not utter vulgar or obscene words in reaction to the anger.

Imam 'Ali (as) also says: ‘The heart of a fool is in his mouth while the tongue of the wise man is in his heart’

## MINDING OUR COMMUNICATION

Speech in this context is not only limited to uttering words using the mouth. Speech extends to all forms of communication which utilize the use of words, texts, sounds and also images to certain extents especially in the form of publication. As such, the different modes of communication that would be governed by the rules of speech in Islam include:

- Talking face to face
- Talking on the phone/video
- Texting
- Online communication including chats, email and comments etc. This includes all communication in social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Now that we know how important and also dangerous the tongue can be, we must know how to use it properly

to avoid harming ourselves (our reputation) and also others' (feelings).

Since many feelings and relationships are based on the communication of speech, it is vital to regulate who we speak to, when we speak and where and how we speak – to the four questions to ask before speaking are:



1. **Who** – are we speaking to someone we are allowed to speak to?
2. **When** – are we speaking when it is necessary to speak?
3. **What** – is what we are saying important, true, good and useful/relevant?
4. **How** – are we polite, rude, angry, or sarcastic?

### SOME RULES TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN SPEAKING

1. Avoid all the plagues of tongue – this includes lies, swearing or vulgar words, sarcasm and insults, rudeness and other ill words
2. Don't be the sole speaker, also listen to the other person
3. Don't prolong your stories. The more you speak the more you slip, the more you bore people, and above all the more you harden your heart.
4. Don't say but what you know, and also don't say all what you know.
5. Try to practice silence as much as possible (avoid speaking when it's not necessary to speak)

### RULES OF ONLINE COMMUNICATION

1. Avoid casual (unnecessary and unimportant) communication to people of the opposite gender
2. Use kind and proper words – not words that are rude, emotional or that arouse inappropriate feelings
3. Make sure what you speak or write is true, good and useful/relevant – avoid giving opinions on subjects you have little or no knowledge on.
4. Make sure you are not bullying someone online!

### Review Questions

**Q1. The rules of speech and minding the tongue in Islam only apply to:**

- a. Verbal communication
- b. Online communication
- c. Dressing
- d. Any form of communication which involves words in any format.

**Q2. Provide an example for 1 vice and 1 virtue of the actions of the tongue and explain briefly the effects of each action.**

**Q3. <sup>ix</sup>Provide one hadith from the Ahlul Bayt (as) on the importance of minding the tongue/speaking/speech, which is not provided in the lesson above.**

<sup>i</sup> Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 23

<sup>ii</sup> Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, p. 257

<sup>iii</sup> Bihar-ul-Anwar, vol. 72, p. 263

<sup>iv</sup> *Mizan ul Hikma*, p. 978

<sup>v</sup> *Mizan ul Hikma*, p. 862

<sup>vi</sup> *Mizan ul Hikma*, p. 508

<sup>vii</sup> *Mizan ul Hikma*, p. 151

<sup>viii</sup> *Mizan ul Hikma*, p. 369

#### <sup>ix</sup> REFERENCES

Mizan Ul Hikmah – book of Hadith

Holy Qur'an – Surah Baqara (Surah 2) and Surah Balad (Surah 90)

Social Rules in Islam Lecture Notes – Sheikh Mansour Leghaei on Minding the Tongue (as)