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Lesson 31: The Tongue, A Means of Guidance or Misdirection

This section of the sayings of the Noble Prophet (S) is related to the tongue and its control. Of course, in the previous lesson there was discussion regarding the need to control the tongue, but the present saying points out that man ought to take extra caution with regard to what he says. With regard to this point, it is important that we look in our books of *hadith* at sections especially dedicated to the manners of talking and the etiquettes of the effects of utterance.

Speech that is necessary and speech that is unadvisable and must be avoided have been mentioned. Before our presentation and examination of the advice of the Noble Prophet (S), it is appropriate to explain some issues in this regard. First, we will point out that the tongue is a blessing among the many blessings of Allah and then we will enumerate some of the weaknesses and blights of the tongue.

Deriving Benefit from the Tongue and Other Members of the Body for the Purpose of Spiritual Ascension and Growth

All the gifts which Allah, the Exalted, has granted to man—whether they are physical and outward members, like the ears, eyes, hands and legs, or internal parts and whether they are immaterial qualities such as psychological and spiritual faculties, like the power of thought and imagination, which are related to the brain or the feelings and sensations of the soul; in short, that which is related to the soul and body of man—are all ways and means of attaining perfection and not goals in and of themselves. Not even their results and effects are the ultimate goal of man.

We should use the eyes to look at things which draw us closer to ultimate perfection and to Allah. In the same way, we have to listen with our ears to things which bring about human perfection and, in addition, use the rest of the members of the body—one of which is the tongue—in the same way.

We have to say things which bring about our spiritual ascension and are pleasing to Allah. We should

use all the gifts of Allah with the purpose of gaining proximity to Him and to attain human perfection and we have to know that they are not just means of sporting and games such that we can use our faculties in whatever way we fancy.

Man should not conceive the results and desires of members of the body like the tongue as his ultimate goals because the original aim is something much higher than these and speech is by far not the principal goal in man's life. It is for this reason that the tongue has to be employed in the way of good and perfection. In a *hadith*, Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) states:

“The charity of the tongue is giving advice to the Muslims and awakening the negligent as well as glorifying and invoking Allah much.”^{[1](#)}

Talking is a means and because Allah's goal in creating man is that he ought to attain human perfection and proximity to Him, he has to use the tongue to derive the best benefit, not to use it as a means of procuring misfortune. He has to speak with wisdom and refrain from words which result in social and spiritual decline because a person's words are symbols of his personality and status. Therefore, if man speaks without deliberation and does not take the fruits of his words into consideration, he reveals the inner essence of his self. As Imam ‘Ali (‘a) states:

“Speak so that you may be known, since man is hidden under his tongue.”^{[2](#)}

Elsewhere, Imam ‘Ali (‘a) enumerates the ill effects of vain speech and the lack of thought in regard to the fruits of the words of the hypocrites:

“The hypocrite speaks whatever comes to his tongue, without knowing what is in his favor and what goes against him.”^{[3](#)}

In contrast to a believer who:

“When a believer intends to say something, he thinks it over in his mind. If it is good he discloses it, but if it is bad he lets it remain concealed.”^{[4](#)}

Although we may generally know that we have to gain proximity to Allah by means of the tongue, the subject of discussion revolves around the manner of gaining this proximity. In this regard, it has to be explained that words and speech sometimes fall in the category of worship of Allah, such as the words man utters at the time of supplication and ritual prayer where the words are considered to be either obligatory or recommended acts of worship.

However, in other uses of the tongue are means of making others know what he has concealed within his heart and make them know his desires and intentions. In making others know his desires, man should have divine intentions. He has to know what issues and what speech is pleasing to Allah and this can result in him becoming closer to Allah and can be a cause of gaining His reward in the hereafter. It is in this case that a person attains divine wishes by means of using his tongue and speaking.

In some instances, the advisability and desirability of words has to be distinguished by the help of the divine law of Islam, otherwise a person himself does not know the bounds and characteristics of desirable talk.

In a lot of instances one can discern the goodness of his speech by means of the intellect and comprehend whether what he says is desirable, incumbent or recommended. In case man has the intention of pleasing none but Allah, his words are considered to be worship. An example is when one wants to defend an oppressed man by means of his speech or exact justice on behalf of an oppressed person by taking an oppressor to task.

This instance is a case of “intellectual independence” wherein the intellect is not dependent on the dictates of divine law. If no divine law had ever been inspired to mankind, man would still have comprehended that defending the weak and oppressed was incumbent and if one were able to defend the oppressed by means of speaking, then that would be pleasing and gratifying to Allah. Even if one were not able to fully comprehend the obligation of speaking out in defense of the weak and oppressed, he would at least conceive its goodness and desirability.

We all know that it is very good and desirable to stroke the head of an orphan and make him happy and that abating the sorrow and sadness of a believing brother is good. In such circumstances, man's deeds are considered to be worship if he makes the intention to please Allah. In contrast with these situations, in other instances we may not realize the limits and cannot distinguish the realm of the permissibility of certain actions and, like divine injunctions, the lawmaker has to explain them to us. Even though the intellect may conceive the generalities, the characteristics, conditions and limits of those instances are determined by divine law and they are placed at our disposal by means of inference from the sources of Islamic jurisprudence.

Therefore, in such instances we must follow divine injunctions. There are also instances which we know are not pleasing to Allah. Acting upon such deeds is not correct, man sins if he does these forbidden actions, he will be punished and because these deeds are not pleasing to Allah, they cannot be discharged with the intention of worship.

The wisdom of these instances is independently distinguished by the intellect and there is no need to receive the injunctions from the divine legislator. Examples are vexing other people by means of the tongue, lying, false accusation, and spoiling relationships between two believers by means of what one says all of which are detestable and hated by the intellect.

We conclude that we ourselves clearly conceive the goodness and badness of some of our words and in other instances divine law explains the limits and requirements of correct and proper speech.

Method of Deriving Benefit from the Tongue and Avoiding Troubles It Causes

We have to bear in mind that the tongue is one of the greatest gifts of Allah and one of His most delicate of creations. Even though its size is small, its devotion or evil can be great because disbelief and faith are made apparent by means of it and these two are the utmost limits of obedience and disobedience. It is for this reason that effort has to be made to control the tongue because leaving it free can result in a lot of harm.

A person remains safe from the calamities of the tongue once he controls it by means of divine injunctions and laws. He must never leave it free to utter whatever the heart desires but only that which is necessary for the worldly life and hereafter, and he must try to hold his tongue in instances where he senses worldly danger or danger in regard to the hereafter. The tongue is the biggest means of the devil for deceiving and misleading man; it is for this reason that silence has been praised in *hadiths*. As the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Every person who keeps silent attains redemption.”^{[5](#)}

In another *hadith*, he states:

“The faith of man does not become firm until his heart becomes resolute and his heart does not become resolute until his tongue becomes unwavering.”^{[6](#)}

The tongue has to be controlled against defects such as lies, false accusation, gossiping and other such things and made to utter decent and acceptable words so that harm does not arise from it. Words have to be spoken where befitting and problems resolved by means of speech, so that man might build a palace for himself in paradise. Still, if a person, who is able to amass invaluable treasures, amasses straw instead, he has made regrettable losses. This is the similitude of a person who quits invocation of Allah and embarks upon deeds that do not earn him any benefit. Even though his words do not constitute sin, because he has lost that which is procured by invocation of Allah, he has incurred losses. Imam al-Sadiq (‘a) quotes the Noble Prophet (S) in regard to the attributes of the saints [*awliya*] of Allah:

“The saints [*awliya*] of Allah enjoined silence upon themselves and their silence was invocation of Allah, they looked and their looking was taking lesson, they spoke and their words were wisdom, they associated with the people and their socialization was a blessing.”^{[7](#)}

It is in view of the role of the tongue in bringing about either prosperity or everlasting misfortune and even more important its function in edifying the community or ravaging the ethical foundations of a society that Allah and His saints [*awliya*] have made a great deal of recommendations that people must endeavor to control their tongues and, through awareness of correct social etiquettes and Islamic

conduct and by making the saints [*awliya*] of Allah and their speech and behavioral manners their role models, use their tongues to build themselves and the society. It is for this reason that the best way to control the tongue and use it is observing the speech etiquettes of the prophets and the saints [*awliya*] of Allah (‘a).

The prophets (‘a) used to show the best way of socializing with the people, an example of which are the logical proofs and demonstrative arguments which they used to have with the unbelievers that are recorded in the Gracious Qur’an; likewise, discussions they had with the believers and the detailed ways of life narrated from them.

If we delve deeply in the discussions the prophets (‘a) had with the polytheists and the defiant, we cannot find anything insulting, offensive or humiliating that they said to the infidels. Indeed, in spite of all the opposition, insults, mockery, derision and ridicule that the unbelievers used to heap upon them, they always responded with the best and most well-intentioned counsels and advice and always took their leave with peace.

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ هَوْنًا وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الْجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا

“The servants of the All-beneficent are those who walk humbly on the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say, ‘Peace!’”⁸

In spite of all the hurtful words, false accusations and derisions which the polytheists would utter to the prophets (‘a), and the Qur’an has narrated them, it has not been recorded anywhere that the prophets (‘a) ever responded in kind. On the contrary, they used to respond with decent talk, articulate logic and good manners.

Truly, these great people conformed to the method of education that taught them the best manner of speech and behavior and of these teachings is the following, which Allah, the Exalted, ordered upon Moses and Aaron:

اٰذْهَبَا اِلٰى فِرْعَوْنَ اِنَّهُ طَغٰى * فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لَّيِّنًا لَّعَلَّهٗ يَتَذَكَّرُ اَوْ يَخْشٰى

“Let the two of you go to Pharaoh. Indeed he has rebelled. Speak to him in a soft manner; maybe he will take admonition or fear.”⁹

One of the manners of speech of the prophets (‘a) is that they always considered themselves as part and parcel of the people and used to talk with everyone according to their own level of understanding, and this truth can be deduced from the conversations which they had with different people as has been recorded in history. A *hadith* has been narrated by both the Shi’ahs and Sunnis that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“

The basis of our work as prophets is to talk to people according to their intellects

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”

[10](#)

Abstaining from Talkativeness and Excess in Humor and Joking

Our discussion concerns the defects and detriments of the tongue and there are numerous *hadiths* recorded in this regard. Religious jurists have assigned certain topics of Islamic jurisprudence [*fiqh*] to the inviolable things [*muharramat*] in regard to speech, including lies, gossiping, ridicule, tormenting a believer, as well as vain and extravagant talk which has become known as *lahw al-hadith*—talk which separates man from Allah and diminishes the spirituality and divine light of human nature (in books of ethics there are detailed discussions explaining this matter).

The thing is that in some instances, the condemnation and unlawfulness of certain deeds is clear to man; therefore, man harbors no doubts with regard to their religious decrees in speech and deeds. However, sometimes certain words appear to be permissible and man even imagines that they are advisable when they are in reality forbidden or unadvisable. In such circumstances, the devil deceives us and we fall into error, whether knowingly or unknowingly, and as a result say those dubious and erroneous words. Sometimes, also man himself lacks enough attention and deceives himself.

If man reflects upon doubtful things in regard to what is good, he usually perceives the truth of the matter, but he unfortunately does not often pay careful attention to these things because he acts out of whims and does not take care in his deeds. He even makes excuses for himself and even calls his deeds good and justifies them as well.

For example, a joking jester who wants to liven up a gathering and make other people laugh makes excuses for himself that tonight is a festival and he only intends to make people happy! On this pretext he embarks upon frivolous talk which has no spiritual or worldly benefits whatsoever, and does not have any other effects save wasting time and even hurting other people.

The word '*lahw*' (frivolousness) denotes everything which prevents man from important and necessary work and '*lahw al-hadith*' (vain and frivolous talk) is vain and extravagant talk which causes man to deviate from what is right and makes him preoccupied—like old superstitious tales and stories which tempt man to do indecent and obscene deeds—melodies and music can also be instances of *lahw al-hadith*.

The Qur'an states:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا تَبْتَغِي الْجَاهِلِينَ

“And when they hear vain talk, they avoid it and say, ‘Our deeds belong to us, and your deeds belong to you. Peace be upon you, we do not court the ignorant’.”¹¹

It has been recorded in “*Majma‘ al-Bayan*” that this verse was revealed in regard to Nasr ibn Harith. He was a businessman who used to travel to Iran where he would learn the old tales of the Iranians and later relate them to the Quraysh. He used to say, “Muhammad narrates to you stories about ‘Ad and Thamud and I narrate to you stories about Rostam, Esfandiyar and Kasra.” The people too would listen to his tales and not to the verses of the Qur’an.

We have to bear in mind that it is not only vain and comical talk which makes an unhappy believer cheerful, but also relation of a suitable *hadith* with the temperament of the heavy-hearted believer about the graces of Allah can thus cheer him or her up and release them from sorrow and sadness. We do not necessarily have to make a person happy by means of vain or comical talk.

There is no person who denies the goodness of making other people happy and joyous, and this is a point which has repeatedly been recommended in Islamic sources. However, the point here is that a person’s words and speech should have positive value and spiritual worthiness so as not to waste other people’s time and not lose Allah’s graces, one of which is the tongue itself, in vain and unrewarding pursuits.

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) narrates that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“Every person who makes a believer happy and joyous has made me happy and joyous and verily every person who makes me happy has made Allah happy.”¹²

In another *hadith* Imam al-Sajjad (‘a) narrates that the Noble Prophet (S) stated:

“The best of deeds in the eyes of Allah, the Exalted and Honorable, is making the believers happy.”¹³

Sometimes, a believer becomes sad because of worldly affairs and sometimes on account of matters related to the hereafter. In any case, that sorrow and sadness inhibits man from activities and work and brings his faculties and powers to a halt. Therefore, he cannot make use of his capabilities and capacities because he has no peace of mind and lacks joy. If he studies, nothing is retained in his memory, and he lacks presence of heart during prayer.

In any case, he cannot concentrate on anything and he does not embark on doing anything. In this case, we have to try to redeem him from that sorrow and sadness and gladden him so that he may perform his acts of worship and other duties. Making him happy is both desirable and an act of worship if done with the intention to please Allah.

Sometimes, man deceives himself that the only way to make a believer happy and joyous is to narrate useless tales, speak vain and futile words and tell funny jokes to him forgetting that in that regard he can speak productive, logical and valuable words and he can bring the believer out of sorrow and sadness by means of reasonable talk. He can guide the believer and tell him that these sorrows and distresses do not remedy problems and only harm the brain and inhibit him from his work without benefiting him in any way.

A joker or jester starts telling funny jokes once he sees his friend sad, imagining that he will make his friend happy, negligent of the fact that only a bit of joking is advisable and excessive jesting is reproachable and blameworthy. Excessive jokes cause man not to take himself and other people seriously and to imagine that everything is for play and sport. Also, a lot of laughing gives rise to the spiritual death of the heart and blots out the seriousness and sombreness' of man. We notice that even the Noble Prophet (S) used to joke, as he himself stated:

“I too joke, but I joke about what is right.”[14](#)

And in regard to the need to refrain from excessive laughter, he states:

“I swear upon Allah, if you were aware of what I know, you would cry more and laugh less.”[15](#)

With regard to what has been mentioned, we have to try not to let joking and jesting go beyond advisable limits. Most often excessive jokes and funny stories made on the pretext of making people happy result in hurting, derision and, Allah forbid, false accusation and gossip about other human beings. Man is cheated and deceived by the devil that making a believer happy is a recommendable act and thereby perpetrates a sin like gossip. In addition to the fact that he himself becomes contaminated by sin by committing indecent deeds, he impels his friend to become tainted by sin by listening to gossip.

In any case, in a great number of situations the devil deceives man into committing sin as a result of vainly imagining that he is doing good and decent deeds. However, if man thinks well and uses caution, he conceives his mistake.

Sometimes though, a person does not perceive his mistakes no matter how carefully he thinks because a human being is not necessarily perspicacious and foresighted. In such circumstances, it is the duty of others to make him aware that his deeds are not appropriate and he can do better deeds to make believers happy in another form that is more appropriate and desirable.

The Diversity in Methods of Guidance

In order to make people aware of their displeasing acts, we cannot always derive benefit from the same methods. For people that do not have much knowledge about incumbent and forbidden things of religion and are not knowledgeable of religious sources such as the Qur'an and *hadith*, the worldly and heavenly ill-effects of sins such as gossip, lying and false accusation must be enumerated. They have to

understand that gossip is similar to eating the meat of a dead brother, and other facts.

However, for people who are always preoccupied with the Book and the *sunnah* and sciences of the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a), there is no need to enumerate the ill-effects of these sins because they themselves are aware of them. However, they do have to be reminded about instances in regard to which they have become negligent. They have to be awakened and made aware that some talk, even if it is done with a good intention, is unadvisable and not pleasing to Allah and can result in harm.

Indeed, in some instances, deeds are two-sided or ambivalent and it is a person's intention and motive which grants them the essence of decency or indecency. Sometimes, a deed is considered to be good if it is done with a good intention although the same deed can be considered to be a bad deed if it is done with a bad intention because the value of every deed in the Islamic point of view is the intention.

Often a person, unknowingly or out of negligence, does a bad deed with good intentions and in this regard he receives a reward due to his good intention or at least if he is not rewarded he is exempt from punishment. On the other hand, if he carries out a good deed with a ignoble intention, he does not gain any reward and he has not performed any worship and would most probably be punished for that act because his deed was not done out of good intentions. Such instances can be found in a lot of sayings.

Sometimes, discussion arises in a group in regard to a certain person and someone from the group intends to talk about the good traits of that individual and, in order to please that individual, he embarks upon flattering and improperly complimenting that person. If the others ask why the person is flattering so and so, he responds that he intends to be endowed with humility as a result of praising other people.

Of course, one of the excellent qualities of man is that he should enumerate the good qualities of other human beings and try to mention the virtues of other people—this point has been recommended in the *hadiths*. By doing so, we increase the repute and prestige of a believer and we also encourage others to do good deeds and acquire good traits, but we have to observe the intention we employ when we praise other people. Is our praise for the sake of honoring a believer, pleasing Allah and bidding the good in the society or do we praise others in their presence and absence so as to earn their pleasure and subsequent favors?

If we compliment a person with the intention of earning his pleasure and favors, he may praise us in return and grant us favors in times of our need. In such circumstances, we have done nothing but become deceived by the devil—we have praised our friend in his absence so that he may praise us in our absence. It is in these circumstances that knowledgeable and informed people are deceived by the devil.

The devil impels ordinary and unlearned people who are not aware about divine injunctions and laws to tell lies and gossip openly and commit well-known and defined sins, but he deceives the scholars in another form. He makes them imagine that if they embark upon reciprocal praise of one another, they have done something good. This in reality is the result of the trickeries and deceptions of the carnal soul.

Therefore, man has to be cautious and examine his heart whenever he wants to do any deed in order to see what motive he has for doing that action. He has to reflect a bit before doing anything and again after doing it. He should not let his tongue loose and free to utter whatever he wishes without any reflection and thought, because this is a quality of fools who do not control their tongues and say whatever they desire.

In regard to the difference between a wise and foolish person, Imam 'Ali ('a) states:

“The tongue of the wise man is behind his heart, and the heart of the fool is behind his tongue.” [16](#)

In explanation of this prominent saying, the late Sayyid Radi states:

“This is one of the most prominent and honorable sayings, and the intention of Imam 'Ali ('a) is that the wise do not leave their tongues free to speak before they reflect and meditate in their hearts. In contrast, the ignorant gives precedence to saying whatever he wishes before thinking and contemplating.

Therefore, it is as though the tongue of a wise man is behind his heart and the heart of an ignorant man is behind his tongue.”

Therefore, it is befitting that when talking, we have to initially ponder about why we want to talk and what our motive is so that by the grace of Allah, we may remain safe from the defects of the tongue, the deceptions of the carnal soul and the devil. However, if we do not think or take precaution in our deeds and we talk without reflecting and calculating, we will gradually fall into the devil's traps and unwillingly fall prey to his deceptions and trickery.

Of course, these errors which result from negligence, haste, lack of thought and reflection and not having the correct intention in doing deeds are not confined to words and speech. Man also falls into these errors with regard to deriving benefit from the other parts and limbs of the body but at present our discussion concerns the defects and faults which arise from the tongue and are directed at man and surely the deviations and errors of the tongue are numerous and the dangers which arise from the tongue are more than those which result from the other parts of the body. We must remember to seek the pleasure of Allah when we speak, and not our own low and defiled motives.

In the first place, our speech must be pleasing to Allah and, in the second place, we have to have the right incentive when speaking; that is to say, there has to be both virtue in the deed and virtue in the doer. Both the mould and the framework of our talk must be correct and the contents and the aim of that talk have to be correct. In other words, the form as well as the meaning and purport have to be right.

Many times over Imam Khomeini, may Allah be pleased with him, and other eminent scholars used to say: never does the devil tempt a religious scholar to liquor drinking or any ugly deed which is unsuitable to his status because in that case no reputation remains for that religious scholar and he is never prepared to tolerate such danger and loss for himself. However, the devil compels religious scholars and the people of knowledge to deviations and slips which in their inner essence are even worse than beer

drinking.

He obliges the scholar to do deeds which do not have an ugly outward appearance and no one reproaches him for doing that, but the damage and sin of that deed is great and most often man himself does not even conceive the greatness of the sin he has committed and to what level he has [spiritually] fallen!

For this reason, there is need to be cautious and embark upon controlling carnal desires and restraining our tongues so that we do not utter whatever word we desire and we must observe limits in our talk. We must not talk when there is no need to speak.

A Perspective on the Effects of Speech and Other Deeds

We have to bear in mind that once we get engrossed in talking, controlling the tongue becomes difficult. For this reason, we have to reflect about what we want to say before talking so as not to go beyond limits. If we do not control our tongues, when talk about a particular subject arises in a gathering and others laugh as a result and thus encourage more, it is very hard for a person to stop.

Therefore, he jokes and jests in his frivolous talk and tries in every way, even by means of gossip, to make the others laugh. In reality, an uncontrolled tongue is like an unruly horse which is very difficult to control once its reins have been released. For this reason, people have to try to first control their tongues and ponder upon every sentence that they want to say. They must reflect upon whether what they want to say is proper or improper and refrain from excessiveness and extremism.

The Noble Prophet (S) and the saints [*awliya*] of Allah (‘a), in order to edify and train people, used to warn them to be accountable for their deeds and not imagine that they would not have to answer for them. We must not imagine that nothing at all has taken place one hour after talking about whatever we fancy!

On the contrary, every word that is released from our mouths is recorded, and every person will be held accountable as to why he says what he says and why he had a particular intention. Paying heed to this issue helps a person control his tongue; otherwise, the carnal soul is strong and does not easily surrender.

One of the ways by which the soul of a believer can be controlled is by making it realize that Allah, the Exalted, is present everywhere, He listens to whatever we say and He will question every one of us in regard to what we have said. The Noble Prophet (S) has explained this in this way:

“O Abu Dharr! Allah, the Honored and Glorified, is next to the tongue of every speaker. Therefore, the speaker has to fear Allah and be cautious about what he says.”

If man pays heed to the fact that Allah is present whenever he talks and his words do not remain hidden

from Allah, he becomes cautious and does not utter anything he wishes. In addition to that, piety brings about fear of Allah, helps man control his conduct and does not allow his tongue to produce words without great caution.

Likewise, one of the ways the saints [*awliya*] of Allah (‘a) would employ to train their followers was to control their carnal desires through careful attentiveness to their surroundings and in this way encourage their followers to refrain from excessive or out of place talk so that they talk only according to need and necessity.

They used to encourage them to speak less and if they could let the listener know what they meant in two sentences, they should refrain from speaking a third sentence. Even if they wanted to explain an incumbent duty, such as ‘enjoining good and forbidding evil’ [*amr bi’l-ma‘ruf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar*], they should try to speak just enough to fulfill this aim and refrain from additional words; in this regard, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

‘O Abu Dharr! Refrain from speaking unnecessary words. It is sufficient that you speak only to fulfill your goal.”

Sometimes when a person is busy talking in a gathering, he utters superfluous or pointless words without attention—words which have no benefit either for this world or for the hereafter. He loses the irreplaceable capital of his life! Therefore, it is necessary for man to speak according to need and abstain from useless or superfluous words. In one *hadith* the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“Blessed is he whose morals are good, whose attributes are pure, whose inner self is decent, whose appearance is good, who spends his extra wealth in the way of Allah and who swallows his extra words.”^{[17](#)}

One eminent religious scholar says, “A believer is a person who first reflects before talking, and he speaks if he determines it to be advisable; otherwise, he keeps silent. However, the immoral and perverted one sets his tongue at complete liberty.”

Indeed, excess in speech is one of the defects of the tongue which lowers the personality and social status of man and can become a cause of regret for him in the hereafter because once a person speaks without any control, whether he likes it or not, in addition to wasting time in talkativeness and vanity, he also commits sins of the tongue; therefore, he has wasted both the great capital of time and invited the wrath and anger of Allah.

The Need to Relate True Speech and Abstain from Spreading Rumors and Hearsay

In continuation, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! In order to lie, it is sufficient for a person to narrate whatever he hears.”

One of the flaws of the tongue is that it should instantly narrate whatever it hears without investigation and research in regard to its correctness. Even if a person has no intention of telling a lie and only narrates what he hears without any additions or subtractions, his speech is nonetheless considered to be a lie because he has no certainty that what he says is correct or incorrect. For this reason, we have to refrain from outright intentional lies, because they are offensive, and also abstain from saying things we do not have certainty about.

We have to first of all inquire about what we hear and then only relate it once we are sure about its truthfulness.

The Noble Prophet (S) states that if a person narrates everything he hears, he will be considered a liar. In addition, sometimes we are not cautious in relating what we hear and often add or subtract to what we have heard when relating it to other people. We must be cautious not to recount everything we have heard when we talk because everything should not be repeated, and even worse is that we exaggerate and embellish what we hear when recounting it to the others!

With regard to the purport of falsehood which the Noble Prophet (S) has presented, spreading rumors and gossip is beyond the shadow of doubt a clear manifestation of lying. Gossip has been one of the weapons of the devil's forces against the leaders of religion.

Whenever they rose up to guide mankind and to establish a sound and divine society, the enemies of Allah's religion would stand up against them with all the satanic means including lies, gossip and false accusation in order to disperse the people from the reformers and the divine leaders and consequently attain their evil objectives and gains.

By carefully studying history, we realize that in the early days of Islam too the enemies, in order to restrain the Muslims from supporting the Noble Prophet (S) and frustrate their endurance in the way of religion, used to make use of false rumors and gossip with the intention of creating fear and anxiety in their hearts. In this regard Allah, the Exalted, states:

وَإِذَا جَاءَهُمْ أَمْرٌ مِّنَ الْأَمْنِ أَوْ الْخَوْفِ أَذَاعُوا بِهِ وَلَوْ رَدُّوهُ إِلَى الرَّسُولِ وَإِلَى أُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْهُمْ لَعَلِمَهُ الَّذِينَ يَسْتَنبِطُونَهُ مِنْهُمْ...

“When a report of safety or alarm comes to them, they immediately broadcast it, but had they referred it to the Apostle or to those vested with authority among them, those of them who investigate would have ascertained it...”¹⁸

This blessed verse narrates the story of the minor [*sughra*] battle of Badr in which, after the war of Uhud and the insubordination of the Muslims to the Prophet's (S) orders, the Muslims were losing the battle

and consequently Allah aided the Noble Prophet (S) so much so that he triumphed over the polytheists in spite of having very few forces. Islam was saved from definite extermination.

The hypocrites, by enumerating the capacities of the enemy and recounting their victory at the battle of Uhud, wanted to incite doubts and uncertainty in the hearts of the Muslims and the companions of the Noble Prophet (S) and mislead the believers by means of their rumor mongering. Their aim was nothing but opposition with the Noble Prophet (S).

It can be understood from this verse that when a report of safety or alarm comes to them, they immediately broadcast it that the hypocrites used to propagate fear and the Muslims would spread their rumors. It was nothing but nonsense which was being created by the infidels and their accomplices in order to create division and hypocrisy among the believers, but the people of weak faith used to spread those false rumors and did not understand that spreading such rumors would result in weakness and vulnerability among the Muslims.

After the Muslims sustained losses during the battle of Uhud, the Noble Prophet (S) constantly used to invite the people to take part in *jihad* against the infidels but some people were working to prevent the believers from *jihad* and from helping the Noble Prophet (S) and so they were spreading false rumors that the infidels had gathered very large forces and great armies; Allah warned them that all the false rumors and frightening of the Muslims were the work of the devil and the talk of Satan which was being produced on the tongues of his friends. After that Allah made it incumbent upon the believers not to fear such machinations and only to fear Allah, the Exalted, if they had faith in Him. [19](#)

In today's world and especially in revolutionary countries and particularly in our country which has stood alone against all the hegemonic powers and is trying to protect its independence and guard Islamic and revolutionary values with all its being, there is a lot of rumor mongering and word-of-mouth relation of false stories. In order to create a split in the unity of the people and to make them pessimistic in regard to the goals and advances of the revolution, the hypocrites and counterrevolutionaries create and spread false rumors.

Unfortunately, once ignorant people hear these false rumors, they recount them with various motives. Perhaps they may not even have bad intentions in recounting those rumors, but when they sit next to their friends after long conversations, they have in any case narrated a number of false rumors.

Even if a person does not have any bad motives in narrating rumors, he has to observe whether recounting them has any benefit or not; in addition, he has to reflect as to whether that rumor has any basis or not. One should accept that it is likely that the person that has narrated that story is mistaken or that someone else has fed him with lies and false stories.

Therefore, before narrating any news, we have to carefully inquire whether it is right or not and speak with such caution and thought that once someone else hears our words, he becomes certain of its truth and says that there is no doubt in the words of so and so and whatever he says is true and he never

speaks without deliberation.

A person should speak correctly and with deliberation so as to win the confidence of others and attain a high and prominent reputation in the society as a result of telling the truth. If a person aims at attaining a good reputation, he has to try to earn the people's trust and confidence such that the people are impelled to say that so and so does not talk without contemplation and his words are correct and truthful.

Such a position grants him both worldly and heavenly reward. In the worldly point of view, the benefits of honesty and telling the truth are clear and in the heavenly point of view it results in the pleasure of Allah and man being granted lofty positions in heaven.

Therefore, we should not relate whatever we hear on the slightest pretext. If we disregard narrations that people often make about what they hear, in which they add or subtract something from it making uncalled-for changes, it is not even acceptable to explain every correct and true topic. Often it is not in a person's best interests to narrate what is right, because we might put the reputations of believers in danger and this is forbidden [*haram*] and a cause of Allah's wrath. In addition to that, some rumors cause people of weak faith to lose hope and become pessimistic about the Islamic system or the authorities.

Therefore, we have to bear in mind some of the expediencies when narrating some stories. We have to observe whether recounting some news has benefits or not. One must ask whether the listener has the capacity to bear and take in the news or not. Furthermore, one must ask whether he will take caution when narrating news to other people. Does he recount news without additions and subtractions or does he add to it much more than that which is true and narrate it to every person and as a result of spreading that news the system weakens and the people's confidence and trust in the system and the leaders lessens?

In continuation of the *hadith*, the Noble Prophet (S) states:

“O Abu Dharr! There is nothing more worthy of being imprisoned than the tongue.”

This is another instructional explanation from the Noble Prophet (S) which compels man to be more cautious of his words and to try to imprison the tongue in order not to utter words without deliberation. Some of the scholars of ethics used to state that Allah, the Exalted, has placed teeth in front of the tongue and he has placed lips in front of the teeth in order to imprison the tongue behind them.

[1.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 96, p. 7.

[2.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 432, pithy aphorisms 392, trans. Shahidi.

[3.](#) Ibid., p. 184, sermon [khutbah] 176.

[4.](#) Ibid.

[5.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 77, p. 90, hadith 2.

[6.](#) Ibid., vol. 71, p. 286.

[7.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 333, hadith 25.

[8.](#) Surat al-Furqan 25:63.

[9.](#) Surat Ta Ha 20:43-44.

- [10.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 1, p. 85, hadith 7.
- [11.](#) Surat Qasas 28:55.
- [12.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 3, p. 271.
- [13.](#) Ibid., p. 272.
- [14.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 16, p. 298.
- [15.](#) Ibid., vol. 58, p. 107.
- [16.](#) Nahj al-Balaghah, p. 367, pithy aphorisms 40, trans. Shahidi.
- [17.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 69, p. 400.
- [18.](#) Surat al-Nisa' 4:83.
- [19.](#) Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 5, p. 18, third ed., Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah Publications.

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