

June 11, 2009

Thursday

Title: [The Nobility of Silence](#)

DVD title: The Nobility of Silence and the Wisdom of Speech:  
Strive to Learn the Valuable Use of the Tongue

I will briefly try to talk about silence. In the world in which we live in, it would probably behoove most of us to contemplate promoting less talk, less speaking. Typical of a spiritual life one should sleep less, and in the world we live in today, one should probably speak less. If we want to truly be a *mujāhidīn*, to really strive, really work hard against the enemies of peace, the enemies of goodness and equity, kindness and mercy and love; if we would really would like to end bigotry, hypocrisy, anger and the prejudice that we are seeing displayed more and more around us—the killing of that doctor, and the killing [of the guard] at the Holocaust museum—I think we have to look at what incites such activity.

I cringe when I listen to news reports today and I hear it said that this man [who killed the security guard at the museum] acted alone. That is the most ridiculous thing in the world. He acted out and was encouraged because of people who talk. The Rush Limbaughs of this world who came out today and said this man was a “tool of the left,” of the Obama administration. People are going to have to learn how to shut up. Everything in the world that we live in today encourages just more and more talk. Twenty-four hour hungry media monster has to be fed all the time. If a person would really like to strive for the good in this world, [they must] frame what they say in the mantle of goodness and justice. And people have to watch what they say. Even today in the news, people said, “Well, [these crimes are] not really a political thing. This is not political.” Of course it is political. This kind of rhetoric is to incite, and the concept of silence is almost unheard

Author: Shaykh Ahmed Abdur Rashid

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of. In a way, we practice too much silence and too much tolerance and too much peace, we may wind up like the guy who wants to drink the well water, because you become so out of step with humanity.

There are some hopeful signs on the horizon. Sam came to visit me today and we had a very good talk. He was interested in my thoughts about him. I like him very much and feel that, I feel that I would feel safe and secure for my children if people like him were in control of things. This is a 29 year old young man. He grew up right. He knows how to listen. Inherently, he knows the value of silence. He knows when to speak and when not to speak. We talked about the dangers of losing that. The world we live in mixes up truth and lies and opinions, and it behooves us to contemplate what it means to speak less.

A lot of the assumptions that we all have is that everybody wants the same thing, that everybody has a common goal, that everyone wants peace and justice and tolerance and understanding. It is not true. It just is not true. There are people who do not see any further than what is in front of them and what they want out of their own selfishness. We have to remember that. So if we really want to be a true *mujāhid* and really strive hard against the enemies of what is good and what is right, not only do we have to learn how to hold our tongues, we have to find the right way to silence the people who don't do that. You can't do that by your hand and you can't do that out of force.

The only way that you can force people to be silent is through love and with the Truth, or to have the force of society silence them by accusing them of what they are guilty of, which is to incite people toward violence. I wrote today a couple of paragraphs which I would like to post on the site tomorrow. I think we need to make a statement about this. I am glad that some of the news agencies are calling it domestic terror because it is. I am glad that some people understand that no body acts alone in a situation. They may act

alone, but they are not really acting alone. They are acting as a hand or a voice for a whole group of people who want such things to happen. We can be very, very grateful and very happy and very honored by all the good that we do in the world and in our work, but compared to the evil that is happening in this world, we have barely scratched the surface. If we are really going to be humane human beings, let alone be Muslims, let alone be *mu'min*, then we have to commit ourselves, not just to learn how to hold our tongues, but also when to speak.

The Prophet (sal) in a *hadith* said, as well as in Qur'an, that it is not permissible to shun or avoid talking when it is necessary, because it will result in problems or cause inconvenience and difficulties that are greater than if one were to remain silent. Yet we know that in certain conversations, the result of talking can cause much worse situations as we see in the world today, as we see, sometimes in our own community and in our own life, in our own work. Yet at the same time we know that eventually that every conflict will end, at least in part, because there was some talking being done. It may be just to negotiate something, but some talking will happen. It may be at the end of years of conflict. It may be the end of years of pressures from the outside, but someone will have to speak to someone else.

To discern when it is necessary to speak and when it is necessary to be silent is very, very crucial. Especially if one's livelihood depends on speaking (like mine does to some degree) it would not be permissible for me to not speak or for a person not to speak. But refraining from talk can cause a great deal of happiness and a great deal of relief, too. To discuss the truth, to discuss Qur'an, to discuss the body of the text that tell us the Truth, that speak to Truth to us, that's very important, very necessary. To keep our tongues busy with the recitation of the Truth of the Qur'an, this is very important—or *dhikr* or *salawat*. This in itself is a kind of *jihad* of speech. We know that the tongue can be a terrible

weapon, so why not let it be a weapon against the enemies of goodness? It can also cut away our egos and cut away our fears and doubts by reciting Qur'an and *salawat* and *du'ā*. But when we develop the habit of speaking good things about people and life, we get unlimited *thawab*.

We have to ask ourselves whether or not we think that what is being spoken by our mouths will be pleasing to Allah. I have no problem saying that people like Limbaugh or other folks like that never contemplate if what they say is pleasing to the ears of God. If we repeat falsehoods or scandalize other people, or even if we repeat Truth in a way that is painful and causes misery and upset, it is just the same as if we accused people of things that were false. The interesting thing is [that although] silence and speaking are two different things, [they are also the same] in a way, because [in silence] we can keep our tongue from speaking, but we are talking all the time to ourselves. If you could tape record your thoughts every day, it would probably freak you out, especially since they would be totally discontinuous and chaotic. Basically, one thing is to consider what comes out of your mouth, and the other thing is to consider what comes out of the mouth in your head.

Whatever is useless and self-destructive, accusatory and doubting has to be transformed. The way we do that is through *tawbah*/repentance, through actions that are repentant, through praising, through saying good words and encouraging things, and to articulate in words and in actions values that are undeniably good. In a sense, we need to create in our own minds an intercessor, a part of ourselves that intercedes when things are not going well and when things are negative. Allah (SwT) provided the prophets and the Prophet Mohammed (sal) and our *shuyukh* to help us in that way. What we all have to remember is to not only seek forgiveness, but to stop deceiving ourselves. [We need to] stop allowing ourselves to be deceived by others and their agendas, by their worldly desires or

their worldly fears, or by their anger, or by their need for personal attacks of defamation.

We have to remember that there are people who are not able to seek forgiveness. First of all they don't know that there is something to be forgiven, and even if they feel some guilt, their egos are not in a place where they can seek forgiveness of Allah. There are those who die before they seek forgiveness—maybe on the battlefield, like these young soldiers. Or people die to their values, like some of these young soldiers coming back from war. We have to pray for those people to forgive them and to forgive us. As Muslims and as Sufis, people who live and work in Tariqah, who practice Tasawwuf, we know there is no responsibility we have for ourselves that we don't have for other people. For every responsibility we have for ourselves, we have for others. There are people who take real issue with that. In fact it is a political ideology to say that I have no responsibility for other people. I just have responsibility for my own self. But how can we succeed if we don't pray for the success of others? How would you define that success? Hazrat Shaykh Farīddīn Attar (ra) said,

*My mind does not enter any topic nobler than silence. Silence contains so many benefits that it cannot be explained. Silence makes breasts the treasure house of pearls of wisdom. I learned this hidden secret from the oyster shell. A drop of water enclosed in the oyster shell is transformed into a pearl. Similarly, in one's breast it becomes a treasure house of pearls of wisdom by means of the closing of the lips.”* The opposite of which is as we say in English: “Let the person go on talking, because they are just making a fool of themselves.”

We have to ask ourselves on a daily, if not more than that, basis: “What is it that I really want?” “Where am I?” “What am I doing?” “Who am I?” If we are going to have conversations in our head, then they may as well be around these topics. “What do I

want?” And if the answer is something like, “I just want to be able to perceive the Truth,” or “to do good things” or “to encourage others” or “to be an inspiration” or “I really want to end poverty or hunger, illness, or Aids;” if it is a noble answer, a sincere noble answer: “I want to come nearer to knowledge, to Allah.” “I want to understand what peace really is.” “I want to understand what wisdom really is.” then you have to ask yourself, on what basis do I deserve these answers? What is the foundation? What do I already have that I can build upon? Do I have any of what I am seeking already? Or do I have something to build on, something to refer to. When I am in a situation of conflict, do I have something that I really know of peace? When I am in a situation of ignorance, do I have really something of wisdom that I can already build upon? When I am in a situation of anger, of overcoming anger, do I have something to build upon? When I am in a situation of serving others, what do I have in the form of compassion that I can build on?

We have to turn our attention to those goals; and through prayer and meditation, service and remembrance of Allah, we have to say, “*Main mutawajjah...* I turn my attention.....” “I turn my attention towards the Truth.” “I turn my attention towards compassion.” “I turn my attention towards patience.” I want this, but I don’t have it yet, Allah. I want only a small amount of it so I can grow. What is the cost of this? What do I have to pay for this? If we are telling our self all these things, then we have to ask ourselves: Where am I standing in the way of my goal? How am I keeping myself from attaining what it is that I know that I want? Have I silenced the chatter of the inner tongue so that I can hear inwardly what reason and what skills and what knowledge I really have? Am I thinking only about what is standing in my way, or am I thinking about building on what I have in order to rise above whatever is blocking the way? What have I learned in the 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, 60, 65, 70, 75 years of my life? Even the young people can say, “What have I learned in the 15, 20 years of life?” What do I know about life? What do I know about

death? How am I applying what I know?

These are all good questions. In a way, if we ask those questions, they quiet our mind. They give us pause from speaking. “What have I learned from my experiences? How prepared am I to shed this frame, to change this suit of clothing? What will I leave behind? And what will happen when this seat is empty?” Will we have the humility and the honesty to say that we have not been very good teachers of ourselves? *Alhamdulillah*, we have the Qur’an. *Alhamdulillah* we have the *Sīra* and the *Sunnah* of Nebi Mohammed (sal). We have the examples of the Ahl al-Kitab. We have the *sayīds* and *sayīdas*. We have the example of the *shuyukh*. We might be able to answer some of these questions. But we also need a framework. And there is a traditional framework. There is a traditional framework and for us a great framework in the Naqshbandi teachings, of the teachings of the Khwaja Khwajagan. There is a framework of learning. “Have I studied it? Am I tired of saying, ‘Tomorrow I will begin again.’? Or am I anxious to begin again?”

Mevlana said, “*Come, come. Join my caravan.*” Remember? “*Even if you have failed 1,000 times, join my caravan.*” The caravan comes by every morning, every day. So if we are not prepared tomorrow, if we are not prepared for the journey, then we cannot join it. One thing we can say about tomorrow with absolute certainty is that tomorrow is too late to take care of what we didn’t do today. It is too late. Today is gone. If we want to start thinking, truly, thinking about tomorrow, then we have to make a *niyyat* tonight about that. Because before you know it, it is going to be here. How many times we started to exercise. We started to diet. We tried to speak in a better way. We tried to change our work habit. How many failures have we had that we see as stepping stones to success? How many successes have we had that we should be building on?

Tomorrow never comes, does it, really? It is always now. So we have to ask ourselves another question. With all that sincerity we have, with all the promises that we make to ourselves, and with all the inner dialogue that we have with our inner tongue, how sincere really am I in my intention to awaken myself, to understand? How sincere, how truthful am I or have I been about my commitment to realizing the true potential within my own self? Do I believe in the power of meditation? Do I believe in reflection/*fikr*? Do I believe in prayer? Do I believe that it is better to be positive than it is to be negative, to reward than to punish, to have loved than to have hate and criticism, to speak kindly instead of critically?

If I do believe those things, even mostly believe those things, then I have to ask myself yet another question: “Why do I punish myself by not doing them?” Because there is definitely a causal relationship between a person’s actions and attitudes and the amount of time they spend in remembrance of Allah (Swt), their service to other human beings, and their meditation. There is definitely a causal relationship between the people who hate, who promote division and deride others, and the actions that follow those intentions—like the killing of that innocent guard.

Finally we have to ask ourselves: “How much time am I spending with ‘I’?” “How can I be humble, grateful, patient, and skillful?”

A lot of questions. *Salām aleikum.*