

Tongue and Teeth

The Tongue

The tongue: a mere piece of meat with no bones in it but like a work-horse, it carries you forward—it speeds you to Paradise, or dumps you into Hell. Take control of it, or it takes control of **you**.

So how do you steer this beast? Read on!

Pick your teeth!

Backbiting: one of the greatest sins, yet something we fall into, time after time, often without realizing. You chat away with your friends, you mention somebody else, and suddenly, the horse is out of control.

Our societies revolve around shows like "Friends" and "Sienfeld", shows based on lying, backbiting and cheating. But look to the best generation instead: when one of the companions spoke badly about someone who wasn't there, the Prophet, the Prophet said to him: "Pick your teeth!" The companion said "but I haven't eaten anything!" The Prophet said "You have eaten the flesh of your dead brother!"

As Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala tells us in the Qur'aan: "**Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother?**" [Hujuraat, verse 12]. The number three combo, a double McRotty, extra putrified, with a side order of squirmy white maggots? "No, you would hate it."

But they deserve it!

Ok, back up a second. Is it still backbiting if it's true? What if it's only half true? Or what if they deserved it? They're just mean, vicious little creatures who ruined your entire day with their attitude, their demands, or something else--and you just had to tell somebody!

Well, the Prophet sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam made it clear for us: "backbiting is to say something about someone they wouldn't like said about them. [...] If what bad you said about them is true, then you have backbitten them, and if it is false, then you have slandered them!" [Saheeh Muslim]

"So what," you might say, "it's not a big deal. Everybody does it!"

On the night of Miraaj (the Prophet sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam's ascension to heaven), he passed by some people with metal hooks in their hands who clawed at their faces and their necks with them. When he inquired about them, Jibreel said, "These are the people who eat the flesh of human beings and disgrace them." [Aboo Dawood].

So don't worry about "everybody" yet. Worry about yourself first!

Just teasing!

Maybe we think it's funny to trash-talk someone to their face. Maybe their clothes smell like curry, or maybe their beard needs a weed-whacker, or maybe niqaab actually makes them look better!

Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala warns us about this type of rudeness directly in the Qur'aan, when He says in soorah Hujuraat verse 11 (the interpretation of the meaning):

"O you who believe, let not some a party of you laugh at others, it may be the (latter) are better than you (former). Nor abuse each other, nor be sarcastic to each other by using offensive nicknames ... And whosoever does not repent (from these things), then such are the wrong-doers."

Besides, Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala made us the way we are. Humans have no control over their height, their flappy ears, or their pug-noses. What's more, one of the characteristics of munafiqun (hypocrites) is that they mocked the believers. So when your tongue insists on remembering other people's shortcomings, remember your own shortcomings to keep it in line.

You know, it's cool to swear ...

If you listen to some of your friends (or maybe yourself!) speak one day—you may notice, nearly every other sentence contains swear words. Maybe you think it's cool to swear, to copy the idols of TV and the cinema. Is it really "cool" to swear? The Hellfire is far from being cool--people will wish they were cool then, rather than being cool in this world! Remember: an angel writes down every single word you say, and one day, you will have to answer for all of it.

Sometimes you're so angry with someone, the only way to express yourself is to swear at them or hit them. The solution?

Be strong. Our Prophet sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam said: the strong man is not the one with the best Kung-Fu, but the one who controls himself in a fit of rage. [Muslim]

It's ok to feel angry. But learn to channel it properly. If someone angers you or swears at you, step back. Take deep breaths. Walk away, if you have to. Make woodhu with icy-cold water and go pray.

When you feel better, then respond in a better way, as Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala says: ***"Repel evil with what is better. Then he who was your worst enemy will become your best friend!"*** [Fussilat verse 34]

Moi? I never said that!

How often do we say "I was only kidding" or "just joking"? We treat the biggest lies like the smallest flies, gnats to be waved away until we get caught out. By then, it won't matter, right?

Wrong! The angel on your left shoulder is scribbling, scribbling, writing everything you say and do against yourself. Even if you're the only person on the Earth who knows, Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala the All-Seeing and All-Knowing is watching you.

One of the companions of the Prophet sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam asked, straight-up: "Can a Muslim be a liar?" He said "No! A Muslim can never be a liar!" [Malik's Muwatta]

He also said: "Truth leads to virtue and virtue leads to Paradise [...] lying leads to wickedness and wickedness leads to the Hellfire. And a person may keep telling lies until he is recorded as a liar." [Saheeh Bukhaari]

One lie leads to ten. Ten lead to 100. More and more and more lies, until you're caught in a web that not even you can remember the truth about. Save yourself now! Don't be recorded a liar in your eternal biography!

But it's only words!

You're just flapping your gums, right? What -- you don't mean any of it! What does it matter?

Remember: people enter into Islam through words (the shahadah), and leave Islam through words (of disbelief). The power of words seals marriage between two unrelated people, or shatters their relationship forever in. All through words.

So if you think you won't be held accountable for your words, think again: the Messenger of Allaah sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam told us that people will be flung face-down into the Hellfire, only on account to what they said! [Tirmidhi]

I must be doomed!

"I lie, backbite, and swear all the time. I must be going to Hell!" A one-way ticket to a place where they serve you boiling water and devils-heads for sustenance. You're doomed, right?

No! Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala tells us in the Qur'aan: **"O my servants who have wronged themselves, never despair of the mercy of Allaah, for truly He forgives all sins. He is the Forgiving, the Merciful."** [Az-Zumar, verse 53]

If you repent and turn back to Allaah, and promise not to commit the sin again, never ever, for as long as you live, and mean it, then He will forgive you. And whose mercy is greater than Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala's?

Make amends! If you've backbitten someone, go and tell the person, apologize sincerely, and ask them to forgive you. (If they say "no", don't worry about it—you've done what you can.)

But, if you think that might worsen the situation, then turn sincerely to Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala and beg for His forgiveness. Then to make up for what you said--go and speak good of the person behind their back.

Key to Paradise

If you control your tongue and speak good, Paradise can be yours, there to abide forever.

The Prophet sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam said: "Whoever can guarantee me two things I can guarantee them Paradise: what lies between his two jaw-bones (his tongue) and what lies between his two legs." [Bukhaari]

Even more amazing, he sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam said: whoever prevents sending gossip against his brother, Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala puts down a right upon Himself to relieve that person from the Hellfire.

So remember next time you feel like spouting at or about someone: if you remain patient, Paradise can be yours. All it takes is willpower and practice!

A Shovelful of Good Deeds

Your tongue can be a shovel. You now know all the ways to shovel the bad stuff, and get yourself in deep, deep doo. But how can you use it shovel up piles and mountains of good deeds for yourself?

1. **Dhikr:** Keep your tongue soaked in the remembrance of Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala. Whether a five-minute walk down the street or an hour-long drive, remember Allaah, and glorify Him (tasbeeh—SubhaanAllaah, Alhamdulillah, and Allaahu Akbar). Remember His Names and Attributes—the Most Merciful, the Just, the All-Knowing.
2. **Defend and Explain Islam:** When Allaah Subhaanahu wa Ta`aala tests us, as He promised He will, be ready to step up to the challenge. Often, you can unlock people's misconceptions with just a five-minute explanation on what Islam is really about.
3. **Naseehah:** Give people you know sincere, heart-felt advice. (Make sure you do so in a gentle way--"yes, I really think your clothes smell like curry" won't work too well.) Think it through before you say it, and make sure it sounds soft, not harsh. That makes it easier for them to accept.

One Tongue to Rule them All

Finally, if you remember anything, remember this one statement. It will ensure the protection of your tongue, bi idhnillah!

Are you ready for it?

Here it is: the Messenger of Allaah sall Allaahu`alayhi wa sallam said: "Whoever believes in Allaah and the Last day, let him either **speak good or keep silent!**" [agreed upon]