

3.6 Think Before You Speak!

Man was meant to listen more and talk less. That is why as the great British statesman Benjamin Disraeli said: “Nature has endowed man with two ears and one mouth. If man was meant to talk more and listen less, he would have two mouths and only one ear.” Imagine how we would have looked, how strange with two mouths on the two sides and one ear at the centre.

And mind you, the ears are like funnels, open all the time. There is no door with which you can close them. Whereas if you have to speak even one single word, that word must pass through two walls – two fences. There is firstly the fence of these two rows of teeth. There is secondly the fence of the two lips. Before a word can be spoken, it has to pass, it has to pierce through these two walls, through these two fences. Therefore we must think at least twice before we utter a word.

A very wise man once remarked that of the unspoken word you are a master, of the spoken word, you are a slave. Once you have spoken a word you cannot get it back, do what you will. Therefore you must be very careful about the words that you speak. Once the word has left your lips, you will not be able to get it back.

What are unspoken words? They are things you want to say, but remain unsaid, as thoughts in your mind. Once you have put the thoughts into words, once the words have left your lips, you cannot change them or control them.

A young man went to his spiritual teacher and said, “I have spoken very harsh and unkind words to my friend, and he is deeply hurt. I am afraid I have lost my friendship with him. How can I make amends?”

The wise teacher gave him a fresh sheet of blank paper and a pen; he said to the young man,



⌘ Was Disraeli trying to give a scientific reason?

⌘ Was he only trying to give a message in a lighthearted but effective way?

You have learnt about ‘adaptation’ in your science textbook. Find the biological reasons why man’s ears and mouth have developed the way they are now?

⌘ Draw a diagram to show the coming in and going out, of words in a human body.

Think about it :

- ⌘ Do you remember someone else speaking to you angrily, without thinking?
- ⌘ What did you do on that occasion? Did you also speak angrily?
- ⌘ Discuss what you can do to control your anger.

“Write down on this paper all the harsh things you said to him.”

The young man did as he was told, and showed the paper to the teacher.

“Now tear up this sheet of paper into as many small bits as you can,” the wise teacher said.

Soon, the single sheet was torn into a hundred tiny bits of paper.

“Throw the bits out of this window,” the teacher told him.



That was easily done! It was a windy day and the tiny bits were scattered far and wide even as the young man watched.

“Now, go out into the street and collect as many bits of the paper as you can,” the teacher ordered him.

The young man was taken aback. “But...but, that will be difficult ...” he stammered.

“It will be difficult indeed, but do give it a try,” the teacher suggested.

The young man went out. He returned half an hour later, exhausted. He had not been able to get hold of a single torn bit from the paper he had torn up just a while earlier!

“This is what happens with the spoken word,” the teacher said to him. “Once you have spoken the words aloud, it is very difficult to take them back. Therefore, learn to think before you speak in anger.”

Socrates was one of the wisest men of the ancient world. Many were the youths whose lives he influenced for the better.

Socrates counselled his disciples to keep their mouths shut – and speak only when absolutely necessary.

“O wise one, how may we know when it is right to speak?” they asked him.

“Open your mouths to speak only after you have asked yourself three questions, and received an affirmative answer to each of the three,” replied Socrates.

What were the three questions?

The first question we must ask ourselves before we speak is – **is it true?** If we are not sure about the veracity of what we are saying, it is better that we do not utter a word. When we utter words carelessly, we ourselves become transmitters of untruth.

The second question to ask is – **is it pleasant?** Many are the empty remarks and vain statements that people make in idleness to hurt others. It is better that these unpleasant words remain unspoken.

The third question according to Socrates is – **is it useful?** Is our statement going to benefit the listener? Will our words bring comfort to someone? Are we likely to help someone with what we say? Only in that case should we go ahead and speak.

- counselled : advised, guided
- affirmative : An affirmative answer is the answer, ‘Yes’.
- veracity : truth
- transmitters : Here, it means persons who spread something; in this case, untruth.

Reflect : Have you ever passed on an empty remark or vain statement that might hurt someone else? What can you do to avoid doing it again?



1. The same word can be used as a noun in some sentences and as a verb in others. For example,

(1) Many are the empty remarks. Noun.

(2) A wise man once remarked, Verb.

Make two sentences of your own with each of the words given below, using the same word as a noun in one and as a verb in another.

- change • show • throw • return • benefit

2. Complete the following.

- Our ears are like funnels because
- The two rows of teeth are like a fence because
- The two lips are like a fence because
- Harsh words are like scattered bits of paper carried away by the wind because

3. **Write a brief summary** of the story of the young man and his spiritual teacher, making the young man the narrator.

You may begin as given below.

‘I went quickly to my spiritual teacher for advice because I had
(Now continue)

4. Language study : **Adverbial** : An adverbial is something that is used as an adverb. An **adverbial** is often one word, an adverb, as in the following example –

1. You have run fast.

But, it can also be a phrase or a clause.

2. We played on the playground.

3. I will go home when the bell rings.

In sentence 2, the phrase ‘on the playground’ is used as an adverb. In sentence 3, the clause ‘when the bell rings’ is used as an adverb.

