

Mouth, be aware of !^[1]

By Ven. S. M. Sujano

Discussions always lead to different subjects. Further, any subject can be a matter of discussion. In England most common subject is weather. Weather most of the time is an opening speech and most obviously used to break a silence. Virtually any subject can be subject of interest and can drop into middle of crowd for discussion. There were two close friends, Dave, and Anna, were talking about varies of things about their lifestyle, world, and daily necessities. Surprisingly, one of them.

What a wonderful day today, isn't it? Anna broke a silent after few miles away from subject to find other interesting issue to discuss about.

'Indeed', short, and concise answer dragged into deeper silence.

"How many ears have we got?" suddenly, Dave asked breaking a silence.

"Well, don't you have any other opening speech, each one of us have two ears," says Anna.

Although, the answer was pulling discussion into clouds, Dave replied, "Yes! You're right, Anna. We have two ears each. These ears lay on different sides of the head, totally opposite sides. Even though they lay on other sides of the head, however, they both work together to listen to sound. So, although there are two parts, they work as one to listen."

"What do you think about eyes?" changed a topic.

"Everyone has two eyes too," Anna replies without any second thought.

Dave smiled and responded, "Yes! We have two eyes. Have you ever known that the eyes have a very important function within the working of the body? I suppose you do. Let me tell you little more, we have two eyes, which function observe objects, so that we recognise it. Similarly, we also have nose with two holes (nostrils) too. However, these nostrils function to observe smells. They can tell us whether a smell is good, or bad. Furthermore, the nose assists our breathing, which helps in keeping us alive."

So eventually, (no matter how eccentric the conversation might seem), these friends begin to realise a richer landscape of their own being.

"There are at least three important *open* parts of the body –ears, eyes, and nose. Although each of these parts have two *openings* –which lay in separate places- the parts nevertheless function together; in order to listen, observe, and smell respectively. These parts are like two in one," says this friend.

The mouth is another *opening* of the body that has more than one use; in that it can take in food or be a source of sound. On the whole, the mouth is mainly used for eating, and speaking. Despite the mouth having only one opening, it can be use for various different intentions. Although the mouth has many good qualities –you can't deny its dangerous abilities. I would imagine that most people have heard *sayings* such as: 'watch your mouth'; 'mind your language'; 'words are sharper than the sword'; 'keep your mouth shut'; etc.

There is one mouth, but it may function in two ways: positive, or negative. In other words, we can (again) say, 'two in one'. Even though the mouth is more commonly used to *describe* positive information, it can also be used for rumour, gossip, and innuendo. Our mouths can be used to cultivate goodness for ourselves, and others. Though, it can cause destruction, when the intention to use it, is negative. We can often hurt ourselves, and others, when we are careless with our words –it's as though we're born with a pair of scissors in our mouths. Therefore, the Buddha classifies speech into *wrong speech*, and *right speech*. Wrong speech can be defined as follows:

(1) **False speech** or **lying**; this can mean intentionally hiding the truth; misleading others; distorting issues, through speaking more, or less than one should.

(2) **Divisive speech**; this can mean speaking negatively about other people; slander; speech with the intention to divide, or alter relationships, and solidarity between (any number of) people.

(3) **Frivolous speech**; this can mean speech that is unnecessary; unmindful (unguarded/careless); idle chatter; gossip.

(4) **Abusive speech**; this can mean speaking with the intention to hurt and offend; unrefined/vulgar speech; sarcasm.

Now, as the discussion develops between the friends... their eyes turn to the mouth.

"Oh! I've never thought about these ideas before. I didn't reckon that the mouth had such characters. Actually, I always figured that most people, which way, use their mouth for their own benefit. So, if I'm thinking right, right speech is the opposite of wrong speech," says Anna.

Within the teaching of Buddhism, among the five precepts (*Musavada*), purifying verbal action, is one of the hardest precepts. It may not be easy to practise, but one could argue that it's better to try at least rather than practising nothing.

Dave changed a topic of discussion', "What about temples? What do you think about it? "

The temples on our heads –between the forehead, and ear!, Anna teasingly replied.

"No! The 'man-made building temples', Dave replied swiftly. Like the mouth, temples are not just for ceremonial place, but also gain advice or getting ideas for better and moral life. The temple, in fact, is a *quiet* place, where we learn avenues to purify our physical, verbal, and mental actions. You may try to learn to purify yourself inside such conducive environment; so that it may become easier to practise, outside of the temple, in daily life. Perhaps, don't let friends, or fellow members of the temple, loose trust in you. For the benefit of yourself and others be honest with your own words –as George Washington said, "Honesty is the best policy".

There are people, who use verbal skill for their own personal benefit, and dishonesty. These are many; undoubtedly, who aren't even afraid of the law of Kamma, what goes around comes back. They aren't aware of the landscape of their own being. If people tell lies, or create divisive stories about others, it always leads to destruction, and division.

The Buddha advises in three words; that we should be aware of whether speech is true, beneficial, and pleasurable. If our speech is positive –then speak. If our speech turns negative –then keep silent. Furthermore, Buddha suggests the following five factors to fulfilled, in order to achieve faultless speech:

- (1) Speaking at the proper time.
- (2) Speaking with the truth.
- (3) Speaking with gentle words.
- (4) Speaking that is beneficial.
- (5) Speaking with Metta, loving kindness.

It's worth noticing the Buddha's advise to monks, concerning mastering their own speech, or teaching others; that they will only be qualified, when five qualities, are established in the person teaching. These five qualities are: speak step by step, explaining cause and effect; speak out of compassion; speak not for the purpose of your own benefit; speak without disparaging others, or oneself. In this way, Buddhist monks can be ambassadors of truth and peace.

We shouldn't forget that the Buddha advises us to make our own judgements before we believe anything we may hear/see; even from the Buddha itself. We may judge things by using our own understanding; observing the whole story; finding truth by questioning the 'teller', (not a third person). Try in being impartial. If you listen to only one side of a story; then you only hear partially, and you may be even more of a fool, than the one who tells a story. Try to use your own observation, to decide what the truth is –no matter who says it to you. Buddhism emphasises righteousness, and truth, in what we see, hear, perceive, or verify for ourselves. Perhaps remember how it felt, or think how it would feel, when you found out the truth... only later on; in respect of this, be aware of your own speech. Here, it is apt to remember Friedrich Nietzsche, when he said, "What upsets me is not that you laid; but from now on, I can no longer believe in you".

Further guidance from Buddha: 'when worthy, praise them; when blameable, blame them'. This advice could be particularly applied by leaders, and parents; in order to manage, or show a right path, to fellow members, and children. Leaders, and parents, can appreciate that their expressions of praise, or blame, affects communities as a whole.

When speaking, if our intention is pure; then our speech will be true, beneficial, and may be pleasurable to those who listen. If when speaking, our intention is impure –no matter how, or what we say- the result will be negative, and harmful; for both ourselves, and the listener.

So in conclusion to the discussion let's conclude with a saying of great Chinese philosopher Confucius.

"It is better to keep silence, and to be thought a fool; than to open the mouth and confirm it".

[1] Puendham 44, year 12, June – October 2008, The Buddhavihara Temple Kings Bromley, UK