

The Banes of the Tongue and the Spiritual Core

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Note: Banes 7-19 may be more relevant for the curriculum.

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Ideas for Teacher Introduction to the Banes of the Tongue Project
and the Spiritual Core

I. Introduction

THE SPIRITUAL CORE AND THE ABUSE OF THE FACULTY OF SPEECH

- A) We all notice that what we *really* love about other people is the way they *ARE* - their state of being, not what they *have* or do. We are drawn to kind, generous, patient, easy-going, good people. And yet we think people will like us better for what we have so we boast about what we have and do, about our families, successes, and possessions though ever so subtly. Also to push ourselves up in the minds of others, we may put others down, casting doubts about others' reputations. We forget that *everyone* is on the same life (or spiritual) journey together and all of us encounter trials, loss, suffering, disappointment, setbacks, rejections, the illness and death of family and friends. We should all be gentle and protective of one another.

One of the ways we often unconsciously harm family and friends is our **misuse of the gift** of speech. Not only do we hurt other people terribly by what we say or write, but we do enormous damage to our own innate pure and good natures. The most important thing we have in this life is *who* we are, which is situated in our spiritual core. What we *have* in the material world can be taken away in a moment by an earthquake, a stock market crash, or a crippling accident. The quality and state of our Hearts can never be taken away. But we ourselves can cause it to darken and wither by putting ourselves ahead of everyone else, thinking of ourselves *first*. Our abuse of the miraculous faculty of speech damages the inner dignity of our True Selves.

We have understood that when a King or Queen says, "I give you my word," you can count on what has been promised or agreed upon. We each are only "as good as our words." What do you feel about someone who lies, even slightly, or jokes about someone with a physical disability? Their honor is compromised. And yet - because most of us are often fairly unconscious of what we are doing when we speak, we are unaware of the subtle ways we are harming our core state of being.

Hence - this treatise is being assembled to heighten our awareness and guide us to acting from our hearts rather than our tongues.

- B) The abuse of the faculty of speech has been a timeless and universal concern for people throughout human history. Our world's Wisdom Traditions have looked at the nature, causes and remedies of this detrimental desecration of language. The text we are using here was composed between 1095 and 1105 CE in Jerusalem and nearby Damascus. It is as relevant today as it was then and always will be.

This text is intended to be an invitation to people of all ages - teachers, parents, students and children. In order to go beyond merely making us all better and more clearly aware of the issues at hand, we are asking for thoughtful participation and collaboration in the creation of a kind of "support manual" for all ages.

Whenever we are given a list of 'do's and don'ts' - that's usually as far as it goes - it's a list that we know *about*. And yes, we acknowledge that lying and gossip are in fact wrong and hurtful. But in order to actually heighten the *very lens* through which we observe our lives or alter our speech, we need to have literally *experienced* these challenges and failures of speech as they occur moment to moment in our daily lives, in such a way that it becomes increasingly unpleasant to use harmful speech.

IDEA: A school group is invited to come up with activities (that will be included in the published Support Manual) that offer concrete ways for someone to "feel" and experience each Bane of the Tongue. For example, a few students could sit around making jokes about the appearance or disability of another classmate - in his or her presence. Then, they could all change places and each be the brunt of ridicule. A second phase would be a 're-play' where kindness and inclusion are played out. These short role-playing scenarios are ideally filmed with an iPhone (horizontal frame). In this way, the Support Manual will not just contain abstract dictums, shoulds and should nots - but work as a living module which can inspire others.

By 'acting out': spewing out harsh language, arguing, gossiping, and the like, the ugliness can be viscerally felt, just as kindness, patience and respect can be literally "felt" as though emanating from one's spiritual core. *Restraint* will be practiced, and understood from a fresh, non-generational perspective. Becoming aware and addressing the issues associated with daily speech can help a person better align with his or her core spiritual integrity.

II. Draft Teacher Overview

Language

- I. The Exalted of language; place of speech and the ability to communicate our thoughts.

The Tongue

- II.
 - A. The misuse of this faculty can cause great harm and suffering to both others and to ourselves, easily damaging our innate human dignity and Inner spiritual core nature. With a mere slip of the tongue:
 - i. **Gossip**
 - ii. **Slander**
 - iii. **Scandal mongering**
 - iv. **Lying**
 - v. **Showing off**
 - vi. **Obscenities**
 - vii. **Arguing**
 - viii. **Self-justification**
 - ix. **Making fun of others by exposing their faults etc.**
 - b. Though the tongue is small in size, it is tremendous in power; the damage it can cause is vast, unlike the reach of the eyes, ears or hand. Speaking out requires no energy or effort. We need to be on guard for a “slip of the tongue.”

How do we restrain ourselves once we become aware of how easy it is to insult someone even by joking or by sharing a secret entrusted to us?

- III. What are some ways to guard against the Banes of the Tongue - what are their causes and dangers? How can we restrain ourselves from gossip, lying, using low language, making fun of others by exposing their faults, bragging and justifying ourselves?
 - A. **PAUSING** and considering with our hearts what we are about to say.

The Merits of Silence

If you don't have something good to say about someone, don't say *anything* at all.

7 Helpful Practices to Discuss and 4 Kinds of Speech

A Selection of Banes

The FIRST SIX BANES are less serious and not as grievous as those that follow, which require vigilance and must be guarded against.

Bane #1 Speaking about what does not concern you

Time is our real wealth and is easily wasted. People crave to find out what they don't need to know. For the sake of sociable conversation and simply passing the time, hours are lost. We are responsible for every word we utter.

Bane #2 Superfluous Talk

Going on and on with tiresome and excessive speech can also lead to subtle boasting

Bane #3 Becoming Engrossed in Vain Talk

Topics which are best avoided include telling stories about people, making asides at the expense of one's own integrity, becoming engrossed by talking at length on low level subject matter. This is not as serious as slander, but there are more important matters and ideas that can be discussed, such as those regarding our spiritual and worldly lives.

Bane #4 Arguing and Polemics

In arguing, the undignified lower egoic self puts itself first and tries to win out over the other person by showing his or her shortcomings. A sense of self pride and superiority urges one to overpower someone else. By being the one who is 'right,' one is saying that the other person is wrong and ignorant. It is horrible to overhear people arguing and yet we do so ourselves. Arguments nearly always cause hurt and arouse anger. It is better to be silent, to recognize one's sense of responsibility and restrain the ego.

Bane #5 Legal Disputation

Most legal cases need to be settled and wrongs resolved. What is nearly always lost is beautiful speech and restraint. In such disputes, it is very hard to keep one's tongue under control. There is no harsher speech than verbal attack. When one accuses another in this way, one's dignity is lost, one's noble state of being is shattered.

Bane #6 Grandiloquence - Going on and on

Have you ever thought, "What a wind-bag!" when someone is embellishing a speech, never getting to the point? Usually the purpose of speech is to explain something as needed, but some speech can be a form of showing off.

BANES OF THE TONGUE WHICH REQUIRE UTTER VIGILANCE AND MUST BE GUARDED AGAINST

Bane #7 Obscenity, insults, vulgarity

- Imagine that anyone would use the miracle of speech to utter vulgarities. When we hear vile language, we are naturally repulsed. People use revolting words to insult and hurt others. Perhaps this includes referring to a person's physical defects or clothes.
- In former generations no one would have spoken badly to parents.
- Today's films are permeated with obscene language and examples of impolite speech.

Bane #8 Cursing

- Besides cursing people, it is wrong to curse animals or even things. Do you ever hear someone saying, "Go to Hell" to another?
- Never speak ill of the dead. What you say may hurt their surviving family. Perhaps the dead person repented of what you choose to expose. Best to say only beautiful things. In silence there is safety. Cursing harms your core essence.

Bane #9 Singing and Poetry

Beware of bad words in any form of speech. Be careful your life is not wholly taken up with entertainment.

Bane #10 Joking

Joking around with dear friends comes from a good place in the heart. Habitual and frequent joking can lead to frivolity. Being drowned in laughter can lead to a certain loss of dignity. Excessive joking can esser one's self respect, and one can become known for it. "He's a real jokester."

BANE #11

The Eleventh Bane: Ridicule and Mockery

We would never want to hurt anyone. Regarding mocking others, how do you know that a person or people you might make fun of aren't, in fact, better than you are?

The meaning of "ridicule" is to demean someone and point out his or her faults and deficiencies for the purpose of laughing at him or her. Ridicule includes imitating someone's speech and actions and mimicking gestures. If it is in the presence of the one being ridiculed, it is not called backbiting, but it amounts to the same thing.

It is incorrect to smile or laugh aloud when you hear someone else being ridiculed. If you want to actually experience how horrific this ridicule is, play-act it out with a friend. Take turns being

the object receiving this mocking and then see what it feels like being the one to make fun of your companion.

BANE #12

The Twelfth Bane: Divulging Secrets

Conversation among people is actually a trust. Divulging a secret, what is said in confidence, is betraying a trust, even if no harm comes of it.

BANE #13

The Thirteenth Bane: Making False Promises

The tongue can be quick to make a promise: "Sure, I'll do it!" "Yes, I'll be there!" But we must be aware that breaking a promise is a sign of hypocrisy. It's like not paying back a debt.

Sometimes we might say something that resembles a promise and if the other person takes it as something promised, we are responsible.

Then, if a promise is understood to be firm, it must be kept unless there is some real excuse. And if someone makes a promise intending not to keep it, that is hypocrisy.

"A promise is a gift." Would you take back a gift you had given to someone?

However, if someone promises something to another and intends to fulfill it [but cannot], it is not breaking the promise.

BANE #14

The Fourteenth Bane: Lying in Speech or Oath

Lying is considered one of the most offensive and vilest of faults. Hypocrisy is a contradiction between what is private and what is public, between word and deed, and between what is within and what is without, and the foundation on which hypocrisy is built is lying.

If we lie about something to a friend who believes what we are saying to be true, we have betrayed that person. Often, salesmen and merchants lie by exaggerating the value of what is being sold, and by swearing a false oath.

Honesty is connected to goodness. We naturally love people who have the best character, those who are most honest in their speech and most trustworthy.

We have been talking about inner dignity and doing nothing that might injure or compromise our good hearts. If we lie, we should give it up out of self-respect. When we are dishonest we abase ourselves.

By clearly recognizing and acting from the place of our truest selves, we can lead correct and good lives. There is a saying that “Honesty and falsehood battle one another in the heart until one expels the other.”

It is clear how using our tongues and our gift of speech to speak untruths abases the dignity of who we truly are!

- When Lying is Permitted -

The problem with lying is also the harm it might contain for those who hear it. Perhaps by passing on inaccurate facts, others who don't know the full truth of a matter could become endangered.

Maybe, for example, you tell someone a bridge has been repaired but you have not verified this fact, you simply heard it. Perhaps this person tells another who unknowingly crosses this bridge and is badly injured.

Lying is essentially unacceptable except in a condition of absolute need. It can be used to reconcile two people at odds with one another whose hearts cannot be won over except by lying. It is not being a liar to try to reconcile two people by saying what is good. For example, you could go to one of the two people and say, “What is the matter between you and so-and-so? I heard him speaking so highly of you.’ Then you meet with the other person and say the same thing, which may help them to reconcile.

Three instances where lying is permissible are A) during war - for war is deception - two sides attempting to deceive the other, B) between two people at odds with one another in order to bring about reconciliation, and C) what a husband or wife might say to please each other.

Included in these three exceptions concerning lying is anything else with a sound purpose for the one who tells the lie or for someone he or she may be protecting. An example could be protecting someone's reputation by excessive praise.

But one must be very careful, not only being certain of one's motives for lying, but that the correct conditions actually exist to do so. One needs to determine whether one's reason for lying is more necessary than being truthful.

- There are ways to Avoid the Risk of Lying by Using Indirect Speech

Among lies that are not sinful are those which occur in certain forms of exaggeration, such as when you say, “I told you this already a hundred times!” In such a moment one is actually emphasizing *how much!* But you can easily see how unleashing the tongue in exaggeration could lead to the danger of lying. Sometimes, when one tells a story to amuse one's friends, exaggeration is what makes it funny. But this could easily be at the expense of that person's dignity.

A vigilant person is careful and aware when lying creeps in from the tongue. Sometimes one is unaware of it happening.

One might also be on guard when recounting a dream, claiming one was shown something in a dream when one was not.

BANE #15

The Fifteenth Bane: Backbiting

- a) The definition of backbiting is when you speak about another person in a way he would hate to hear if it were to reach him, whether it be about something lacking in his physical appearance, or his lineage, his character, his deeds, his speech, his spirituality, his worldly affairs --- even his clothes, his house, or his transportation.

Imagine if you spoke about someone's physical appearance in a way that this person would dislike - e.g. She's fat, he stutters, her clothes are out of style.

- b) There are many aspects we need to understand about backbiting, which deeply affect our honor as human beings. Someone who backbites won't be forgiven until the one who has been slandered forgives him or her. Imagine how difficult it would be to admit backbiting someone to his or her face!
- c) It has been said, "When you want to mention the faults of your companion, mention your own faults instead" and "One of you sees the speck of dust in your brother's eye and does not see the tree trunk in his own eye."

Even animals are to be respected. There is a story where Jesus and his disciples passed by the corpse of a dog. The disciples said, 'How foul the stench of this dog!' And he said, "How brilliantly white are its teeth!" It was as if he were prohibiting them from speaking ill of the dog, reminding them to mention only what is best of God's creation.

But in respect to your backbiting for the purpose of boasting and adding to your merit at the expense of someone else's reputation, you void any excellence you have acquired and risk losing what good people believe of you. Imagine how people would view you were they aware of your attacks on others.

Remedy:

In the case of backbiting in order to ridicule and make fun of someone, if your purpose was to disgrace another, it is really you who are disgracing yourself. Would you want your friends to be aware of your humiliating someone? If you could imagine how you would feel if others were aware of how you disgraced someone, you would be shocked out of doing this. Just as you mocked someone before a small group of people, imagine your being ridiculed and exposed before a large group of your community.

Our egos are drawn to backbiting. If we express amazement at the faults of others, we should instead be amazed at how we are debasing ourselves. Imagine our own shame if the veil which hides our own shortcomings were to be pulled back - the way we remove the veil that covers the faults of our companions when we express our amazement and draw attention to their faults.

It would be useful to look at our own faults instead of being busy concerned with the faults of others. Blessed is he the one who is too occupied with his own faults to be concerned with the faults of others.

We should recognize 'we are all in the same boat' when it comes to self restraint and that it is hard for anyone to overcome faults.

Another general remedy is simply to imagine the pain you would feel if you were to be the object of backbiting. If that is unbearable to imagine, how can you then do it to another? And yet, if you think about so much of the daily conversation and gossip we all hear, it is at the expense of others.

BANE # 16

The Sixteenth Bane: Scandal Mongering

- A) Scandal mongering involves disclosing what is secret, what would be disliked were it made known, whether it be done in words, writing, symbols, gestures or imitation, and whether or not what was disclosed is someone's speech or action. It is scandal mongering whether or not the fault being made known is even true or not. We should be silent about what we see unless making it known would have some benefit. The motives that could bring a person to scandalmonger could include not only wishing to harm someone, but wanting to entertain others. Often when we talk too much and want to show off, it is at the expense of others' weaknesses.
- B) Besides spreading rumors that divide the community, or carrying gossip between people, it is wrong to speak of what was learned in private conversation. Imagine: how safe would feel if you shared personal matters with a friend in private conversation and that person betrayed your confidence, did not guard your privacy and passed on what you confided?

An Explanation of Scandal Mongering - what is required to reject it or what are its remedies?

- C) 6 things to do if someone tells you that a person is speaking badly about you behind your back:
 - 1) Don't believe the person who comes to tell you this. A person who transmits rumors is untrustworthy to start with.

- 2) Let the person who is speaking, spreading scandal, know how bad it is to do this. Counsel him or her. Enjoin what is right.
 - 3) Upon hearing slander, show anger that this reprehensible act is taking place.
 - 4) Keep yourself from negative assumptions about the scandalmonger.
 - 5) Don't let what has been rumored lead you to spy on the person supposed to have made these remarks in order to be sure this has occurred.
 - 6) In order not to become a slanderer or backbite yourself, do not mention the slanderer saying, "So and so told me such and such."
 - 7) And it is said that one of the sages was visited by one of his brethren who conveyed to him news about a certain friend. The sage said, "You have not visited for a long time, and you now have come to me with three transgressions: you have made my brother hateful in my eyes, you have occupied my heart which had been empty [of gossip], and you have brought guilt upon the trustworthiness of your own soul."
- D) A person who slanders someone to you will slander *you* to someone else. You cannot believe the words of a backbiter or slanderer who continues to deceive, betray and cause bitterness, jealousy as well as hypocrisy. They destroy relations between people. A "cutter" has been explained to mean someone who severs what is between people by slander or someone who cuts family ties.

There are three things which debase your goodly state of being. Beware of speaking too much, disclosing what is secret, accepting what anyone says as true. Always beware of an informant. Even if that person is honest, he or she is blameworthy. A truly honorable person protects the integrity of others and hides their faults.

Imagine that you are received into someone's home and after sitting with that person, you then convey what was said to you in confidence about another person. You have debased yourself by disrespecting someone who trusted you. Then if you also convey what was said about a person to *that person himself*, he then will feel dislike for the one who spoke badly about him. Speech creates in such ways distrust, hate, and disrespect.

The 17th Bane - Speaking with Two Tongues

A hypocrite has two faces in this world. He puts on a different "face" for those whose favor he seeks. He may go back and forth between adversaries, pretending to agree with each. How can a person of "two tongues" be trusted? He may greatly dislike someone but when they meet, he flatters and praises this person he secretly hates.

Hypocrisy has many signs. To meet different people with different faces is among them. Instead of being a steadfast and noble person, a hypocrite (has no character and) "turns with every wind," seeking opportunities for him or herself.

It is true that one can be friendly to two people who are themselves enemies but that friendship is weak. In a strong friendship one would completely take one's friend's side.

Scandal mongering includes conveying the speech from one adversary to the other. If you promise each side that you will be supporting them against the other, if you praise one of them to his face but speak ill of him in his absence, this is more of being two-tongued. You should either remain silent or else support only the one you believe is right in his presence, his absence and in the presence of the adversary. It is not permissible to praise, affirm, or even nod the head while listening to a false statement and one who does so is a hypocrite. Rather, if he is able, he should deny [in speech] what is being said, and if he is not able, he should keep his tongue silent but deny it with his heart.

The 18th Bane - Praise

Sometimes praise is used as a subtle way to either insult or backbite someone. There are four ways in which the one *giving* the praise can abuse it, and two ways for the one *receiving* the praise to be harmed.

- 1) Praising someone excessively can lead to lying.
- 2) Praise can involve showing off. Perhaps the one giving praise does not mean what he is saying so his praise becomes two tongued. Hypocrisy and ostentation.
- 3) There is also the risk of praising someone for something that is not entirely true and there is no way to be sure about it. However, you could instead say, "In my experience, so and so is completely honest." The difficulty lies in the praising of general human qualities." "So and so is humble, pious, and generous." But reporting a verifiable fact is more accurate: "I saw so and so giving charity to the needy."
You cannot truly know the hidden character of a person unless it has been tried and tested. It has been said you cannot know a person unless you have traveled with him, been involved in financial dealings with her and been his neighbor in daily life.
- 4) Although terrible leaders are pleased to be praised, they should instead be blamed in such a way as to make them sorry for their wicked deeds.

The person being praised can be harmed in two ways:

- 1) When you are praised, both conceit and pride are bound to arise inside of you.
- 2) Self-satisfaction hinders spiritual growth. If you are praised for your goodness, you might reduce your efforts to improve and slacken off. The reason why conceit, pride and self-satisfaction are so bad is that they are deadly for spiritual growth. You can see how greatly these might harm one's inner integrity.

When Praise is Commendable

If praise is free of these banes which harm both the one giving and receiving praise, there is nothing wrong with it. If someone praises something good you have done, and you are above

pride, conceit and slackening off, you wouldn't let it go to your head. You can be objective about it. After all, you didn't give yourself your skills, qualities, parents, place in time and space, or your connections for doing good. All of this is on loan to you. You have been entrusted with these qualities and cannot take or credit for them. So it should be easy to give back what is merely on loan to you and not take any credit, and to experience humility rather than pride.

Praise for people who have died is encouraged.

Concerning the One Who is Praised

One of the ways you can protect yourself from the harms that easily come from praise (the harms of pride, conceit and slackening) is to remind yourself of the ways you show off and the defects of your own doings. Say to yourself, "There are many things I know about myself and secrets that pass through my mind. If this person praising me knew what only I know about myself, he would be silent!"

19 Carelessness Concerning Errors in Speech

Sometimes errors in speech give the wrong impression of what is actually going on and suggest a wrong reality.

We all notice that what we *really* love about other people is the way they *ARE* - their state of being, not what they *have* or do. We are drawn to kind, generous, patient, easy-going, good people. And yet we think people will like us better for what we have so we boast about what we have and do, about our families, successes, and possessions though ever so subtly. Also to push ourselves up in the minds of others, we may put others down, casting doubts about others' reputations. We forget that *everyone* is on the same life (or spiritual) journey together and all of us encounter trials, loss, suffering, disappointment, setbacks, rejections, the illness and death of family and friends. We should all be gentle and protective of one another.

One of the ways we often unconsciously harm family and friends is our **misuse of the gift** of speech. Not only do we hurt other people terribly by what we say or write, but we do enormous damage to our own innate pure and good natures. The most important thing we have in this life is *who* we are, which is situated in our spiritual core. What we *have* in the material world can be taken away in a moment by an earthquake, a stock market crash, or a crippling accident. The quality and state of our Hearts can never be taken away. But we ourselves can cause it to darken and wither by putting ourselves ahead of everyone else, thinking of ourselves *first*. Our abuse of the miraculous faculty of speech damages the inner dignity of our True Selves.

We have understood that when a King or Queen says, "I give you my word," you can count on what has been promised or agreed upon. We each are only "as good as our words." What do you feel about someone who lies, even slightly, or jokes about someone with a physical disability? Their honor is compromised. And yet - because most of us are often fairly

unconscious of what we are doing when we speak, we are missing the subtle ways we are harming our core state of being.

III. Draft Support Manual (Edits welcome)

The Bane of the Tongue

What is a BANE? Definitions include: a ruinous effect; scourge; menace; plague; calamity

LANGUAGE

Think of the exalted place the faculty of speech holds. Imagine that we have the ability to communicate what is in the heart or mind to another by means of the *miracle* of language.

Clearly, the mis-use of this gift can cause great harm and suffering not only to others, but to our own spiritual cores and innate human dignity. Think of the ruinous effect of gossip, slandering and scandal-mongering, which is widespread in today's world of online social networks. Think of the effect on one's precious character that results from showing off, lying, obscenity, arguing, self-justification and making fun of others by exposing their faults.

Now, more than ever before, it is both critical and urgent that we truly are aware of the various and subtle damage that can be caused to both the lives of others and ourselves by speaking in certain modes of speech.

The Tongue

Truly the tongue is one of our greatest gifts. Though it is small in size, it is tremendous in its power. Moreover, there is nothing that the tongue cannot reach and express. Anything that knowledge can encompass or reach, the tongue can articulate.

What other organ in the body has this special quality? Our eyes see color and shape, our ears hear sound and our hands can touch solid forms. But the reach of our tongues is *vast*. What can resist it? The good that it can do can go on forever, while the damage it causes can be immense.

Speaking beautifully benefits us both inwardly and outwardly. We *all* need to learn when speaking is good and when it is blameworthy. It is difficult to rein in the tongue. Speaking out takes no effort. If we need to lift something heavy, it takes energy, but no energy is needed to move the tongue. We all need to be on guard because a 'slip of the tongue' can bring on a calamity and much hurt for others.

So, offered here are ways for you to guard against various banes of the tongue by understanding their meanings, causes and dangers. In order to restrain ourselves from slipping into abusing the precious gift of speech, we must be *aware* of how easily we might argue or

insult someone, even by joking. Sometimes people promise to keep a secret and then break that promise. Gossip, lying, spreading rumors, using low language and speaking about what does not concern us - all these come from our being careless and not observing or correcting ourselves before we wrongly use our tongues!

Before we speak, we ought to PAUSE and deeply weigh what we are about to say lest we abase the dignity of our True Selves. If we wish to speak, we should consider it with our hearts and then express it with the tongue. Do a drawing of your heart with your tongue in front of it, ready to speak before the heart advises. Best the tongue is waiting to speak *behind* your heart, reflecting.

The Merits of Silence

We have all been told by our parents, "If you don't have something good to say, don't say anything at all."

It has been said, "If speech is silver, silence is gold. When you see someone who is silent and dignified, draw near to that person, for he or she has been endowed with wisdom."

Some Helpful Practices

A good exercise, from which anyone might benefit, would be to keep a pebble in one's mouth to prevent talking. Imagine if you had to remove a pebble from your mouth before speaking! You would have time to reflect and ask yourself, 'Is *this* even worth saying?'

Let us consider a traditional saying, "My tongue is a lion; if I let it loose, it will devour me." It might be a helpful reminder to do a drawing of one's tongue in the image of a ferocious lion!

Another suggested practice would be to put out a fresh sheet of paper each morning and then write down all the topics one has talked about during the day. In the evening, one can review and assess what the tongue has said. There is also the example of a lady who never spoke of worldly matters for twenty years. One could profit from such an effort. Try it for a day!

Silence can keep us safe from such speech in which we are subtly

- a) 'showing off',
- b) justifying ourselves,
- c) adding or leaving off facts,
- d) exposing others' faults,
- e) even distorting information

We are mostly unaware we are doing these things. What would be an example of ways in which you yourselves have done any of the above in conversation?

- a) _____
- b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

e) _____

- Silence helps a person to maintain dignity, and to have more time to reflect. One's conscience is always aware when our acts and thoughts aren't measuring up.

E P R O [Event - Pause -Respond- Outcome]

Think up an event and write what would happen if you paused. How would your response be different, as well as the outcome?

Pretend you like someone that you don't. Use speech in good ways when you speak to this person. Make excuses for them if others speak badly about them.

When people are talking, we think we know better and interrupt them. How rude! How often do you do this? Why?

The Four Kinds of Speech

To further demonstrate the merits of maintaining silence, consider this. There are four kinds of speech and only 1 of the 4 kinds is beneficial (and even *that* has risks).

1-2) It is clear that the kind of speech that is harmful, or the speech that contains both harm and good are to be avoided.

3) A third kind of talking -which produces neither benefit nor harm is all that extra talk- people simply talking for the sake of talking. This could just be seen as a loss or waste of time.

4) But EVEN the 4th kind of speech has risks. Let us picture ourselves speaking beautifully. Perhaps a small amount of showing-off or gossip can ease in without our realizing it. So you can see how easily wrong speech can come with even speaking at all!

- Activity: Give an example of speaking beautifully but with a small amount of wrong slipping in, almost unnoticeably.

WE WILL NOW LOOK AT A SELECTION OF THESE BANES OF THE TONGUE, STARTING WITH THE LEAST SERIOUS ONE. THESE FIRST SIX ARE NOT AS SERIOUS AS THOSE WHICH FOLLOW.

The First Bane: Speaking about what does not concern you

We are each accountable for the actions of our tongues. We certainly don't want to be the kind of people who waste our time talking about things which don't even concern us, and trade 'what is higher for what is lower.' Moses asked the children of Israel, "Would you exchange what is better for what is less?" Think of how often we do this. So many of us engage in daily useless conversations and discussion and thereby lose the benefit which comes from a higher use of our time. We have traded the greater for the lesser.

Time is our *real* wealth and it would be dreadful to squander our precious moments on what is of no concern to us (which we do so much of the time).

Conversation about subjects which would appear to have no possible problems associated with them, still might lead to harm. Pretend you are recounting the story of a trip most recently taken, describing the beautiful scenery, the wonderful meals, the fascinating people you met. Maybe you have been able to describe your journey without boasting or causing others to envy your wonderful trip. But from another perspective, you still have been wasting your time

Other problems could arise if you ask someone an unnecessary question that does not concern you. Besides wasting that person's time, you might be providing an opportunity for him or her to feel uncomfortable. They might want to remain silent but are afraid of being rude. There might be reasons why a person would not want to explain something he or she had said or done. That person might then lie.

Such questions aren't harmful in themselves. But people crave to know what they don't *need to know*, or to be sociable in conversation for the sake of friendship or simply to pass the time by talking about things which have no benefit. No *real* good can come from this.

Stop to think of how short life is, and that we are *responsible for every word we utter*, and that our breaths, our moments on earth are our true wealth. It is not hard to recognize that we must not waste the opportunity life affords us. Understanding this would be the *cure* for useless talk-from the standpoint of knowledge.

Keeping silent is exceedingly difficult except for someone living alone in seclusion.

But ideally, if we could be more silent - even about things that *do* concern us, it would help us to be silent about what does not concern us.

And there is always the practice of keeping a pebble in your mouth except when eating, drinking or sleeping. This suggestion is only an example for us of how important it is not to engage in useless talk. It was used by the great Tibetan sage Milarepa.

The Second Bane: Superfluous Talk

From useless subject matter to quantity of words

We have pointed out the dangers that accompany speaking on topics which don't concern us. There is also the matter of *speaking too much*, even if what we are saying contains no harm. Often we become engrossed in talk which is meaningless, or speak about things which are important but use too many words. Don't we cringe when we hear people going *on and on!*? If a single word is enough, more words are excessive.

It has been said that a truly wonderful person is someone "who holds back the **excess** of his tongue and spends in charity from the **excess** of his wealth." But look at how people have turned this upside down so that they hold back the excess of their wealth and spend freely from the excess of their tongues! You could do a simple drawing illustrating this idea.

A very careful person admitted, "What keeps me from too many words is the fear of boasting," and another observed, "People are destroyed by two things: excessive wealth and excessive speech."

The Third Bane - Becoming Engrossed in Vain Talk

Talking about what does not concern us, or talking excessively is best avoided. It can be a total waste of your time and dignity to discuss low matters, such as telling stories about people, debauched social gatherings, or the luxurious life of the rich and famous.

Such conversations have no worth. People sitting together, entertaining one another perhaps make jokes and asides at the expense of other folks' honor. Think of what we talk about to make other people laugh. There are so many forms of vain talk that the best way to avoid them is to limit our speech to important matters regarding our inner and outer, spiritual and worldly lives.

Certainly vain talk is less serious than spreading scandals and using bad language, but when we become engrossed in it, talking at length about low level topics, we are using our speech in a way that it has no *real* value.

The Fourth Bane: Arguing & Polemics

Who would have guessed that arguing is **completely** unacceptable? Why do you think arguing could be such a bad thing to do? Of course, when you hear people arguing, how does that make you feel? If it's so horrible to overhear, why would we *ever* argue ourselves? When we do, we can feel the lower part of us, the *ego*, trying to win out over the *other* person, putting ourselves first. Quite impolite.

A person who is always arguing with others, pleased with his or her own view, is *really* in trouble. Do you know anyone who is argumentative and has to be right *all* the time?

In a way, if you argue with a friend, you are somehow suggesting that he or she is not truthful because what they are saying is wrong. Would you want to do this to your friend, making him or her upset and angry?

Jesus said, "Dignity departs from the one who quarrels with others."

Let's look at what arguing actually is - it is when you point out to someone that he or she is wrong about something. It is best to remain silent or else ask a question that might gently open the topic up, instead of coming off as an attack. You could also say, "Let's talk about this later," which could give everyone some time to calm down and get some perspective.

Disputes and Debates

There are also disputes or debates which take place. These are not discussions, but involve strong verbal attacks on someone or something. One person attempts to overpower and demean another by objecting to his words and accusing him or her of being ignorant. Putting someone down, and showing his or her shortcomings, arises from the ego's desire to demonstrate its own superiority while diminishing and hurting another. These two destructive traits are strengthened by arguing and controversy.

Arguments nearly always cause hurt and arouse anger. Sometimes those arguing try to support their positions by falsehoods.

A cure for this would be: A) to recognize and overcome one's sense of pride and superiority B) as well as to diffuse the urge to overpower another.

In general, the cure for anything is to remove its cause. Controlling one's own ego is quite difficult; it is hard to be as humble as we should be.

When it comes to matters of religion, people often feel justified to insist on their point of view.

The Fifth Bane: Legal Disputation

- 1) It is nearly impossible to keep one's tongue under control in a legal dispute. The worst of what is lost however in such disputes is the use of beautiful speech and the reward for restraint. The *smallest* gain is reaching an agreement with the other person. Keep in mind that *there is no harsher speech than verbal attack*, accusing someone of lying or ignorance. This is what occurs when we argue or quarrel - when goodly words are lost.
- 2) Sometimes arguments arise over property and rights.

- 3) Here is an example of not involving oneself in arguing or a dispute for the sake of making one's inner dignity a priority. However, it is clear that some cases need to be settled and wrong doings resolved:

A man returned to the person he was arguing with and said, "I will not argue with you." That person replied, "So, you have realized that I am right?" He then answered, "No, but [I will abstain] in order to keep my dignity." Then the man he refused to argue with said, "[In that case], I seek nothing from you. It is all yours."

The Sixth Bane: Grandiloquence (going on and on)

Sometimes you may have thought to yourself, when listening to someone going on and on, "What a wind-bag! Why doesn't he get to the point!" This can happen not just in conversations but when someone gives a speech or lecture. Before finally speaking about the actual topic itself, an excessively long introduction is given. Things need to be kept to their purpose. The purpose of speech is mostly to explain something as needed. One needs to avoid over-embellishment, pompous and pretentious overdoing of speech. It is showing-off.

However, to use beautiful expressions in an address or a spiritual lesson without excess can be good. If the intent is to move hearts or inspire people, then skillfulness in expression is appropriate.

BANES OF THE TONGUE WHICH REQUIRE UTTER VIGILANCE AND NEED TO BE GUARDED AGAINST

The Seventh Bane: Obscenity, Insult, Vulgarity

Imagine that anyone would use the miracle of speech to curse and utter vulgarities. When we hear vile language being used, we are naturally repulsed.

Besides using revolting words, some people openly insult and expose what another person would be ashamed to have known. This may include referring to a person's physical condition - that he or she, for example, has a skin disease, wears ugly clothes, limps or is bald. To point this out is indecent. It arrives from a wish to actually hurt someone else.

Unfortunately, these days, we often hear youth speaking badly to their own mothers or fathers. Going back a generation, no one would ever have imagined insulting or criticizing parents. But then, of course, today there are films and television shows which are permeated with this low language and endless examples of elders being demeaned. This then is copied, and seems to be the 'norm.' No one is objecting to this nor exposing this indecency.

The Eighth Bane: Cursing

It is completely wrong to curse animals or even things - never mind human beings! Have you ever heard someone say "Go to Hell!" to another? It is best important to keep from ever cursing.

Only speak well of someone who has died. If you speak ill of the dead, it might be hurtful to their families. And perhaps, before he/she died, this person repented for any wrongdoings.

The tongue should instead be busy saying beautiful things. In silence, there is safety. Best not to have any cursing harm your core essence!

The Ninth Bane: Singing and Poetry

Poetry is like speech. If it contains good words, it is good, but if it contains bad words, it is bad. And one should not be wholly taken up and absorbed by entertainment.

The Tenth Bane: Joking

We all joke around with dear friends and it comes from a good place in the heart. But habitual and frequent joking can overbusy the heart with lightweight frivolity. Play is fine but excessive joking can give rise to excessive laughter which harms the heart, by causing it to lose *dignity*. Some people want to make people laugh in any way they can!

'To be drowned in laughter can diminish dignity. One who jokes [too much] can lose self-respect. One who does anything to excess becomes known for it. One who speaks too much, easily makes many mistakes.

The Eleventh Bane: Ridicule and Mockery

We would never want to hurt anyone. Regarding mocking others, how do you know that a person or people you might make fun of aren't, in fact, better than you are?

The meaning of "ridicule" is to demean someone and point out his or her faults and deficiencies for the purpose of laughing at him or her. Ridicule includes imitating someone's speech and actions and mimicking gestures. If it is in the presence of the one being ridiculed, it is not called backbiting, but it amounts to the same thing.

It is incorrect to smile or laugh aloud when you hear someone else being ridiculed. If you want to actually experience how horrific this ridicule is, play-act it out with a friend. Take turns being the object receiving this mocking and then see what it feels like being the one to make fun of your companion.

So if and when you might laugh at others, or put them down, deride or demean them, never forget they might be a better person than you.

Sometimes a person might enjoy making him or herself the brunt, or object, of mockery and this is a kind of joking-around. The main thing to keep in mind is not to belittle someone in such a way he or she gets hurt. Imagine laughing at someone because of his or her way of speaking, or doing something.

The Twelfth Bane: Divulging Secrets

Conversation among people is actually a trust. Divulging a secret is betraying a trust, even if no harm comes of it.

The Thirteenth Bane: Making False Promises

The tongue can be quick to make a promise: “Sure, I’ll do it!” “Yes, I’ll be there!” But we must be aware that breaking a promise is a sign of hypocrisy. It’s like not paying back a debt.

Sometimes we might say something that resembles a promise and if the other person takes it as something promised, we are responsible.

Then, if a promise is understood to be firm, it must be kept unless there is some real excuse. And if someone makes a promise intending not to keep it, that is hypocrisy.

“A promise is a gift.” Would you take back a gift you had given to someone?

However, if someone promises something to another and intends to fulfill it [but cannot], it is not breaking the promise.

The Fourteenth Bane: Lying in Speech or Oath

Lying is considered one of the most offensive and vilest of faults. Hypocrisy is a contradiction between what is private and what is public, between word and deed, and between what is within and what is without, and the foundation on which hypocrisy is built is lying.

If we lie about something to a friend who believes what we are saying to be true, we have betrayed that person. Often, salesmen and merchants lie by exaggerating the value of what is being sold, and by swearing a false oath.

Honesty is connected to goodness. We naturally love people who have the best character, those who are most honest in their speech and most trustworthy.

We have been talking about inner dignity and doing nothing that might injure or compromise our good hearts. If we lie, we should give up doing it out of **self-respect**. When we are dishonest, we **abase** ourselves.

By clearly recognizing and acting from the place of our Truest Selves, we can lead correct and good lives. There is a saying that “Honesty and falsehood battle one another in the heart until one expels the other.”

It is clear how using our tongues, our gift of speech, to speak untruths abases the dignity of who we truly **are!**

- When Lying is Permitted -

The problem with lying is also the harm it might contain for those who hear it. Perhaps by passing on inaccurate facts, others who don't know the full truth of a matter could become endangered.

Maybe, for example, you tell someone a bridge has been repaired but you have not verified this fact, you simply heard it. Perhaps this person tells another who unknowingly crosses this bridge and is badly injured.

Lying is essentially unacceptable except in a condition of absolute need. It can be used to reconcile two people at odds with one another whose hearts cannot be won over except by lying. It is not being a liar to try to reconcile two people by saying what is good. For example, you could go to one of the two people and say, “What is the matter between you and so-and-so? I heard him speaking so highly of you.’ Then you meet with the other person and say the same thing, which may help them to reconcile.

Three instances where lying is permissible are A) during war - for war is deception - two sides attempting to deceive the other, B) between two people at odds with one another in order to bring about reconciliation, and C) what a husband or wife might say to please each other.

Included in these three exceptions concerning lying is anything else with a sound purpose for the one who tells the lie or for someone he or she may be protecting. An example could be protecting someone's reputation by excessive praise.

But one must be very careful, not only being certain of one's motives for lying, but that the correct conditions actually exist to do so. One needs to determine whether one's reason for lying is more necessary than being truthful.

- There are ways to Avoid the Risk of Lying by Using Indirect Speech

In Indirect speech, what you say may be understood in a different way by the person hearing it. An example of this would be: A person you don't want to see asks your housekeeper if you are at home but she, instead of lying and saying you are not home, re-directs that person, “Look for her in the park.”

Indirect speech could be allowed for certain small things like delighting the heart of another in a humorous way.

-Exaggeration and Dreams-

Among lies that are not sinful are those which occur in certain forms of exaggeration, such as when you say, "I told you this already a hundred times!" In such a moment one is actually emphasizing *how much*! But you can easily see how unleashing the tongue in exaggeration could lead to the danger of lying. Sometimes, when one tells a story to amuse one's friends, exaggeration is what makes it funny. But this could easily be at the expense of that person's dignity.

A vigilant person is careful and aware when lying creeps in from the tongue. Sometimes one is unaware of it happening.

One might also be on guard when recounting a dream, claiming one was shown something or given a directive in a dream when one was not.

The Fifteenth Bane: Backbiting

There are many aspects we need to understand about backbiting, which deeply affect our honor as human beings. Someone who backbites won't truly be forgiven until the one who has been slandered forgives him or her. Imagine how difficult it would be to admit backbiting someone to his or her face!

One of the most terrible things we can do with speech is to backbite for the purpose of attacking the reputation of others.

We should not look into what someone might be ashamed for others to know about. This will lead to our own disgrace. One of the greatest sins is to attack someone's honor and personal dignity.

It has been said, "When you want to mention the faults of your companion, mention your own faults instead" and "One of you sees the speck of dust in your brother's eye and does not see the tree trunk in his own eye."

Even animals are to be respected. There is a story where Jesus and his disciples passed by the corpse of a dog. The disciples said, 'How foul the stench of this dog!' And he said, "How brilliantly white are its teeth!" It was as if he were prohibiting them from speaking ill of the dog, reminding them to mention only what is best of God's creation.

But what exactly *is* backbiting?

- 1) The definition of backbiting is when you speak about another person in a way he would hate to hear if it were to reach him, whether it be about something lacking in her physical appearance, or his lineage, her character, his deeds, her speech, his spirituality, his worldly affairs --- even her clothes, his house, or his transportation.
- 2) Imagine if you spoke about someone's physical appearance in a way that this person would be ashamed and embarrassed - e.g. She's fat, he stutters, her clothes are out of style.

Or of someone's family, his father is a garbage collector.

Or in respect to character - he is a miser, she hoards, he is severe in anger, he is weird, she's a show off, she's lame.

And as for others' actions - he is an alcoholic, she is a thief, he cheats in games, she's unkind to her grandparents, he backbites.

And as to actions connected to worldly life - He talks too much, she over-eats and sleeps much of the day, she is ill-mannered and neglects the rights of others –

As to clothes - His shirt is always dirty, her dress is out of style and ugly, he clearly can't afford to wear the "in" shoes!

Backbiting is when you mention something about another person that he or she would dislike being made known. If what you say is true, it is backbiting, but if it's false, it's slander.

- 3) There is also fabrication, or hearsay, when we pass along something we have heard. There are three ways of speaking ill of someone else --- backbiting, slander, and fabrication.
 - a) Backbiting is saying something about another that is true,
 - b) slander is saying something about another that is false, and
 - c) fabrication is saying whatever has been told to you. So much of what we pass on is gossip.
- 4) Backbiting is not limited to speech, but includes hand gestures, imitating someone (like a limp or other disability), facial expressions like raised eyebrows, symbols, writing or spreading gossip on social media. The pen is one of our two tongues.

Ways of criticizing that are not considered backbiting (because they do not attack the dignity of a specific person - living or dead) include saying general phrases such as: "Some people say..."

"What is the matter with people who say or do [such and such]? But if someone hearing you is able to recognize which specific person you are referring to, then it is backbiting.

- 5) Sometimes, people or scholars both show off and backbite at the same time. For example, they might see someone struggling to make a living who has become a beggar

and comment, “We are so blessed that we have not been reduced to begging. May God help him.” He hides his slander of the person begging in the form of being righteous and asking God to help him.

Another subtle approach is to begin by praising the one you wish to backbite. “What a wonderful person is so and so. He used not to be so lazy and has been tried the way we all have been tried - by having little patience.” What has happened here is though he mentions **himself**, his hidden intention is to blame another while praising himself by appearing to be one of the righteous who blame themselves. So here backbiting, showing off and self justification are combined.

This is similar to a person who says, “I am so saddened by the horrible indignity that has befallen our neighbors. We ask God to give them relief.” The one speaking is lying about being sad and then openly asks God to help them. If his intention were really to pray for them, he should have done so himself in private. If he were truly saddened, he should also be saddened to disclose in public what their neighbors would prefer not to have known. So much depends, however, on one’s *intention*.

6) “The Listener is One of Two Backbiters.”

If you listen to someone backbiting, or keep quiet, you are also a backbiter because you are complicit by taking part. If you show amazement at what you hear, you **encourage** the backbiter. “That is amazing! I did not know he was like that! I had thought she was a good person! Who would have known?”

However, if you listen to backbiting and object to it outloud (or if you are afraid to speak out but do so in your heart), then you are *not* a backbiter. If possible, stand up and leave or change the conversation topic, otherwise you have joined in. It is not enough to raise your hand to ask the speaker for silence, or to make an expression with raised eyebrows because that suggests that the backbiting underway is not sufficiently grave.

If someone speaks badly about someone who is not present, the highest response is to defend that person’s reputation and honor.

It is truly important to defend someone who is being talked about, whether he or she is absent or present.

Explanation of the 11 Causes which lead to backbiting and their remedies

The 8 causes found among most people are:

1) Venting anger

When you are angry with another person, the tongue rushes to mention his or her faults. When anger builds up inside of you it can even turn into a deep hatred. Anger and hatred are major causes for backbiting and the mentioning of faults.

- 2) People want to be liked and so they seek approval from their peers. This may include flattering friends and supporting their views whether you agree with them or not. This would seem to be part of the manners of friendship. If your friend is angry about something, you need to get angry as well, to show that through thick and thin you support him or her. But you can see how this then draws you into talking about people's faults or shortcomings. So beware!

Remedy:

The back-biting we do for the approval of others, seeking to please our companions, comes at the expense of demeaning ourselves. How can we be satisfied or at peace with ourselves if we do this? We can join our friends in righteous anger over some issue but we must never speak ill against another person.

- 3) If a person senses someone is about to accuse her of something and might speak at length against her and disgrace her, she may try to ruin this person's credibility beforehand.

You may be saving your reputation at such a moment but in reality, you are doing immeasurable damage to your personal dignity and state of being.

- 4) If we are accused of something we didn't do, it is our right to show our innocence but not to accuse someone else by name. It is also wrong to claim you were merely copying someone else: 'But I saw so and so saying such and such.'
- 5) When we **boast**, we try to push ourselves up in other people's opinion, often by putting others down. By slandering others, a person tries to appear superior.

Remedy:

But in respect to your backbiting for the purpose of boasting and adding to your merit at the expense of someone else's reputation, you void any excellence you have acquired and risk losing what good people do believe of you. Imagine how people would view you were they aware of *your* attacks on others.

Even if they believe in your merit, that would not benefit your sense of inner integrity if you dishonored others.

- 6) If you **envy** someone who is being praised, you might start saying negative things about that person's reputation.

Remedy:

Envy brings on two punishments. First, because someone else was given some worldly boon you suffered from being envious, but then by backbiting, you harm your higher self. Your object was to harm the one you envied but you damaged yourself instead.

Sometimes envy or slander can even become the means of spreading the virtues of the one envied. An Egyptian poet said: When God wants to spread someone's virtue that was hidden, He does it by way of an envier's tongue.

- 7) When friends are joking around as a way of passing time, someone might mimic or mention the faults of another in order to make people laugh.
- 8) Sometimes a prideful person may want to put someone else down who is present or absent. This is done through ridicule and mockery, making fun or belittling.

Remedy:

In the case of backbiting in order to ridicule and make fun of someone, if your purpose was to disgrace another, it is really you who are disgracing yourself. Would you want your friends to be aware of your humiliating someone? If you could imagine how you would feel if others were aware of how you disgraced someone, you would be shocked out of doing this. Just as you mocked someone before a small group of people, imagine your being ridiculed and exposed before a large group of your community.

Our egos are drawn to backbiting. If we express amazement at the faults of others, we should instead be amazed at how we are debasing ourselves. Imagine our own shame if the veil which hides our own shortcomings were to be pulled back - the way we remove the veil that covers the faults of our companions when we express our amazement and draw attention to their faults.

There are 3 other causes which are more subtle and harder to detect because they appear in the guise of goodness.

- 1) Someone might say, "How amazing. I saw so and so in the company of such and such a group of people." A person can be amazed but has no right to mention someone's name. He is backbiting without knowing it.
- 2) Another subtle way of backbiting arises when you express compassion for someone going through a difficulty. "Poor so and so. I am so sorry about what she is facing." It is possible to be sincerely concerned without mentioning the person's name.
- 3) Righteous Indignation
You might be angered over some wrong that another person has committed, the name of that person should be concealed and not mentioned in a bad context, except in certain cases. Names are revealed only in limited cases (see ahead).

~How to Restrain the Tongue from Backbiting~

Defects are remedied by a combination/mixture of deeper knowledge and action. The cure for any illness is the opposite of its causes. So what are the causes here? There's a general remedy and a particular one. The general is the understanding and knowledge that backbiting greatly harms one's inner core dignity and state of being.

The Prophet Mohammed said that "Backbiting consumes a person's good deeds faster than fire consumes dry wood."

It would be useful to look at our own faults instead of being busy concerned with the faults of others. Blessed is he the one who is too occupied with his own faults to be concerned with the faults of others.

We should recognize that 'we are all in the same boat' when it comes to self restraint and that it is hard for anyone to overcome faults.

Another general remedy is simply to imagine the pain you would feel if you were to be the object of backbiting. If that is unbearable to imagine, how can you then do it to another? And yet, if you think about so much of the daily conversation and gossip we all hear, it is most often at the expense of others.

- Backbiting with the Heart -

Making a bad assumption about someone is just as bad as speaking badly about that person. And then, imagine that **it is just as wrong of us to speak to others about another's faults as it is for us to talk to ourselves about these, by making bad assumptions.** A passing thought, doubt or critical comment by the ego, however, can be excused.

And these Judgements can settle in the heart. We shouldn't think badly of another unless we have been shown something that can't be interpreted in *any* other way. But if a matter we have not *personally* seen or heard about comes to us, we shouldn't automatically accept and believe it.

And if you were to ask, "How can one recognize what is a belief based on assumption, or a deceptive doubt, or a comment from the ego?", it could be said: the sign that it is a negative assumption is that your heart has changed towards the person from how it had been and so that now you have a certain aversion [to him], you find her unbearable, you have stopped caring about him, or visiting her, or showing generosity towards him, or being worried about her. Such are the signs of having reached a negative assumption.

If a fair and just person relates something to you and your assumption tends to affirm and agree with what he says [and so you believe it], in such a case you are excused. For if you had denied what this person told you, you would have been wronging *him* by

assuming that what *he* said was a lie, and that, in itself, is also a form of negative assumption. Indeed, you should not improve your assumptions about one person at the expense of worsening them about another.

So - the last course of action to take is the ***pause***, neither affirming or denying what you are told but rather say to yourself, **“Personally, I don't know anything about this situation and as it has been hidden from me, it will remain hidden. It could even be possible that the person who gossiped to me is in the habit of getting involved in other people's affairs and mentioning their ill deeds. We all know people like this!”**

What is sad is that folks take this *serious* issue of backbiting lightly and in today's world, hardly notice how they are harming people's reputations while debasing their own integrity and honor.

One solution to help strengthen your core innate goodness, your *Real Self*, would be to take account of those whom you have negative assumptions about and instead be kind and more caring to them. If you keep doing this, bad thoughts should stop coming into your mind and heart.

And if you see someone doing weak or bad things, rather than backbiting, counsel him or her in private. Just as you are sad for your *own* shortcomings, be sad for those of your friend.

Having negative assumptions about people leads you to spy on them to confirm your suspicions. Having negative suspicions, spying and backbiting are not acceptable.

When you spy, you do not leave a person, whose deeds were previously unknown, protected. This harms your own True Self, which feels terrible inside when you are engaged in suspicion, spying, disclosure, or backbiting.

When it is Alright to Speak Ill of Someone in his Absence

There are 6 situations:

- 1) If a person has been wronged by a judge, and there is no other way to prove his innocence, the judge needs to be accused and charged with injustice. Also, if a rich person delays paying what he owes, it is lawful to dishonor and punish him.
- 2) If a person commits a wrong and you wish to see him return to honorable living, you may mention what he has done to someone whose opinion that person respects, and whose advice he *would* take. This is not backbiting, but concern.
- 3) If you are seeking legal advice, rather than refer to names of those who have wronged you, you could say, “What would you say in the case of a brother who mistreats his sister in such a way...?” However, if it is important to identify the

person you are accusing because you are seeking a legal ruling and your intention is not to backbite, then it is acceptable to provide names.

- 4) It is important to caution others about someone who could cause harm, such as a person who is untrustworthy. It is also not backbiting to mention the faults of an oppressive ruler. But if a woman, for example, asks advice about someone she intends to marry, one could simply say, "I don't think this would be suitable for you." But if it takes giving her the details for not marrying a problematic person, this must be done.
- 5) If a person has been known by a nickname which refers to some disability such as "the lame one," "old one-eye" or "the stutterer," and does not object to its use after becoming well-known by it, this name can be used if there is no other name he or she is known by.
- 6) There are people who do indecent things out in public and may even be proud of and flaunt what they do. Such a person doesn't deserve respect. It is not backbiting to speak about what a person displays in the open.

Six Amends That Can Be Made If We Have Engaged in Backbiting

- 1) We must *truly* regret and feel genuinely sorry for what we have said.
- 2) The best thing to do is ask for pardon from the person who was the object of our backbiting, and do this with sadness (not just to be seen by others to apologize and appear to be pious with no inward regret). Imagine how hard it would be to say, "I lied in what I said about you. I have committed an injustice against you and I was wrong. If you wish, pardon me."
- 3) Another suggestion is: The amends for backbiting against your brother is to say something in praise of him and to pray for his welfare.[If this person is absent or dead, you could be abundant in asking forgiveness of him, praying for him, and doing good deeds.]
- 4) But asking a person's forgiveness *is* voluntary and obligatory.
- 5) One way to approach a person and be forgiven is to praise and compliment him or her effusively until this person's heart is pleased. But even making that effort, even if her heart is not pleased, the extent to which you sought her pardon and complimented her will be reckoned as a good deed in your favor and will stand in for you.
- 6) It is best to pardon whoever has wronged us, and to stay in contact with those who cut you off, as well as to be generous to whomever is stingy with us. Surely, if you think about someone you assume to be bad, your mind goes over and over this continually and you occasionally speak ill of them and are unkind to them. If you let all things go, your heart would be lightened greatly and eased. We all have a few people in our lives who weigh us down with our thoughts about them.

The Sixteenth Bane: Scandal Mongering

- E) Scandal mongering involves disclosing what is secret, what would be disliked were it made known, whether it be done in words, writing, symbols, gestures or imitation, and whether or not what was disclosed is someone's speech or action. It is scandal mongering whether or not the fault being made known is even true or not. We should be silent about what we see unless making it known would have some benefit. The motives that could bring a person to scandalmonger could include not only wishing to harm someone, but wanting to entertain others. Often when we talk too much and want to show off, it is at the expense of others' weaknesses.
- F) Besides spreading rumors that divide the community, or carrying gossip between people, it is wrong to speak of what was learned in private conversation. Imagine: how safe would feel if you shared personal matters with a friend in private conversation and that person betrayed your confidence, did not guard your privacy and passed on what you confided?

An Explanation of Scandal Mongering - what is required to reject it or what are its remedies?

- G) 6 things to do if someone tells you that a person is speaking badly about you behind your back:
- 1) Don't believe the person who comes to tell you this. A person who transmits rumors is untrustworthy to start with.
 - 2) Let the person who is speaking, spreading scandal, know how bad it is to do this. Counsel him or her. Enjoin what is right.
 - 3) Upon hearing slander, show anger that this reprehensible act is taking place.
 - 4) Keep yourself from negative assumptions about the scandalmonger.
 - 5) Don't let what has been rumored lead you to spy on the person supposed to have made these remarks in order to be sure this has occurred.
 - 6) In order not to become a slanderer or backbite yourself, do not mention the slanderer saying, "So and so told me such and such."
 - 7) And it is said that one of the sages was visited by one of his brethren who conveyed to him news about a certain friend. The sage said, "You have not visited for a long time, and you now have come to me with three transgressions: you have made my brother hateful in my eyes, you have occupied my heart which had been empty [of gossip], and you have brought guilt upon the trustworthiness of your own soul."
- H) A person who slanders someone to you will slander *you* to someone else. You cannot believe the words of a backbiter or slanderer who continues to deceive, betray and cause bitterness, jealousy as well as hypocrisy. They destroy relations between people. A "cutter" has been explained to mean someone who severs what is between people by slander or someone who cuts family ties.

There are three things which debase your goodly state of being. Beware of speaking too much, disclosing what is secret, accepting what anyone says as true. Always beware of an informant. Even if that person is honest, he or she is blameworthy. A truly honorable person protects the integrity of others and hides their faults.

Imagine that you are received into someone's home and after sitting with that person, you then convey what was said to you in confidence about another person. You have debased yourself by disrespecting someone who trusted you. Then if you also convey what was said about a person to *that person himself*, he then will feel dislike for the one who spoke badly about him. Speech creates in such ways distrust, hate, and disrespect.

The 17th Bane: Speaking with Two Tongues

A hypocrite has two faces in this world. He puts on a different "face" for those whose favor he seeks. He may go back and forth between adversaries, pretending to agree with each. How can a person of "two tongues" be trusted? He may greatly dislike someone but when they meet, he flatters and praises this person he secretly hates.

Hypocrisy has many signs. To meet different people with different faces is among them. Instead of being a steadfast and noble person, a hypocrite (has no character and) "turns with every wind," seeking opportunities for him or herself.

It is true that one can be friendly to two people who are themselves enemies but that friendship is weak. In a strong friendship one would completely take one's friend's side.

Scandal mongering includes conveying the speech from one adversary to the other. If you promise each side that you will be supporting them against the other, if you praise one of them to his face but speak ill of him in his absence, this is more of being two-tongued. You should either remain silent or else support only the one you believe is right in his presence, his absence and in the presence of the adversary. It is not permissible to praise, affirm, or even nod the head while listening to a false statement and one who does so is a hypocrite. Rather, if he is able, he should deny [in speech] what is being said, and if he is not able, he should keep his tongue silent but deny it with his heart.

The 18th Bane: Praise

Sometimes praise is used as a subtle way to either insult or backbite someone. There are four ways in which the one *giving* the praise can abuse it, and two ways for the one *receiving* the praise to be harmed.

- 5) Praising someone excessively can lead to lying.
- 6) Praise can involve showing off. Perhaps the one giving praise does not mean what he is saying so his praise becomes two tongued. Hypocrisy and ostentation.

- 7) There is also the risk of praising someone for something that is not entirely true and there is no way to be sure about it. However, you could instead say, "In my experience, so and so is completely honest." The difficulty lies in the praising of general human qualities." "So and so is humble, pious, and generous." But reporting a verifiable fact is more accurate: "I saw so and so giving charity to the needy."
You cannot truly know the hidden character of a person unless it has been tried and tested. It has been said you cannot know a person unless you have traveled with him, been involved in financial dealings with her and been his neighbor in daily life.
- 8) Although terrible leaders are pleased to be praised, they should instead be blamed in such a way as to make them sorry for their wicked deeds.

The person being praised can be harmed in two ways:

- 3) When you are praised, both conceit and pride are bound to arise inside of you.
- 4) Self-satisfaction hinders spiritual growth. If you are praised for your goodness, you might reduce your efforts to improve and slacken off. The reason why conceit, pride and self-satisfaction are so bad is that they are deadly for spiritual growth. You can see how greatly these might harm one's inner integrity.

When Praise is Commendable

If praise is free of these banes which harm both the one giving and receiving praise, there is nothing wrong with it. If someone praises something good you have done, and you are above pride, conceit and slackening off, you wouldn't let it go to your head. You can be objective about it. After all, you didn't give yourself your skills, qualities, parents, place in time and space, or your connections for doing good. All of this is on loan to you. You have been entrusted with these qualities and cannot take or credit for them. So it should be easy to give back what is merely on loan to you and not take any credit, and to experience humility rather than pride.

Praise for people who have died is encouraged.

Concerning the One Who is Praised

One of the ways you can protect yourself from the harms that easily come from praise (the harms of pride, conceit and slackening) is to remind yourself of the ways you show off and the defects of your own doings. Say to yourself, "There are many things I know about myself and secrets that pass through my mind. If this person praising me knew what only I know about myself, he would be silent!"

The 19th Bane: Carelessness Concerning Errors in Speech

Sometimes errors in speech give the wrong impression of what is actually going on and suggest a wrong reality.

We all notice that what we *really* love about other people is the way they *ARE* - their state of being, not what they *have* or do. We are drawn to kind, generous, patient, easy-going, good people. And yet we think people will like us better for what we have so we boast about what we have and do, about our families, successes, and possessions though ever so subtly. Also to push ourselves up in the minds of others, we may put others down, casting doubts about others' reputations. We forget that *everyone* is on the same life (or spiritual) journey together and all of us encounter trials, loss, suffering, disappointment, setbacks, rejections, the illness and death of family and friends. We should all be gentle and protective of one another.

One of the ways we often unconsciously harm family and friends is our **misuse of the gift** of speech. Not only do we hurt other people terribly by what we say or write, but we do enormous damage to our own innate pure and good natures. The most important thing we have in this life is *who* we are, which is situated in our spiritual core. What we *have* in the material world can be taken away in a moment by an earthquake, a stock market crash, or a crippling accident. The quality and state of our Hearts can never be taken away. But we ourselves can cause it to darken and wither by putting ourselves ahead of everyone else, thinking of ourselves *first*. Our abuse of the miraculous faculty of speech damages the inner dignity of our True Selves.

We have understood that when a King or Queen says, "I give you my word," you can count on what has been promised or agreed upon. We each are only "as good as our words." What do you feel about someone who lies, even slightly, or jokes about someone with a physical disability? Their honor is compromised. And yet - because most of us are often fairly unconscious of what we are doing when we speak, we are missing the subtle ways we are harming our core state of being.

IV. Addendum: Background/Justification

The Spiritual Core Discussed

An increasing trend among today's youth is a loss of both self-worth and self-respect. Validation is often sought in the wrong places, and from sources which may encourage further self-deterioration such as social media and substance abuse. Activities and practices are needed which help the young (and old) identify with their innate core goodness and the dignity of this spiritual core. Youth need to feel they have joined the timeless universal journey of the Hero toward wholeness, achieved through a wide variety of life's trials and challenges.

1. WHO ARE WE REALLY? THE NATURE OF THE SELF AS IT HAS BEEN UNDERSTOOD BY HUMANKIND.

People travel to wonder at the height of the mountains, at the huge waves of the seas, at the long course of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and yet they pass by themselves without wondering.

– St. Augustine

2. AN EXAMPLE OF AN EXPLANATORY OPENING TEXT THAT COULD BE USED BY A TEACHER TO PRESENT THE SPIRITUAL CORE CONCEPT

"I would like to remind you that your true State of Being is one of innate goodness. One hears a lot about the True Self and the False Self. I am sure you can think of some of the characteristics of each. Your True Self is upset by injustice, meanness, greed, anger, and so on. This Higher Self of innate goodness has been recognized as such by people in all of human history.

This acknowledged innate goodness has been called by such terms as: the Christ Nature, the Buddha Nature, adama, the fitrah, and the Self. Teachers, and Heroic Leaders, who have changed the world were able to do so because everyone recognized and were deeply moved by their exemplary qualities— humility, selfless service, kindness, and so on.

On the basis of these teachers' examples, the world religions and their civilizations were established. When you travel and see examples of great architecture and art in museums, all of this – and the great literature you are taught, such as Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Tolstoy – all of this heritage is based on the character and qualities found in these exemplary role models. So, it is worth having a look at some of these character qualities, which have been universally revered.

People all want to be loved and respected. All we truly have is our state of being. It moves with us, even when stuff falls away, and life circumstances are in flux. What can never be taken away from us by a stock market crash or a grave

illness is our ability to *be* our true selves at any moment and use the blessings and trials of our lives to practice and strengthen what is honorable in ourselves.

Your state of being immediately affects others who in turn may copy what you do and then go on to affect others in time. Have you noticed how somebody's state of being can either make you happy or really upset? An uptight person can ruin your day. Practicing our good character helps us to grow in confidence and integrity, and to contribute meaningfully to those around us. When we notice some low tendency arise, like wanting to gossip, we must think to ourselves, "That's beneath my dignity." A high school student mentioned that once he watched himself not rush to help his mother bring in the groceries. He felt guilty, but didn't know how to make himself overcome his not rising up to give her a hand. He said he now has a phrase he says to himself when he catches his lower self winning out. He says, "Push on through," i.e. step over it and do it anyway.

Part of what the great wisdom traditions teach is that we should not identify with our lower false selves. Most of us tend to identify with our outer packaging – the envelopes that surround our True Selves. This suffering outer self is always worried about the future, because the brain is constantly scanning for problems to solve. This outer self also regrets things that happened in the past. It suffers nearly continuously just by the things it thinks about. But the great Wisdom Traditions teach us about these character qualities and have passed on practices which can show us how to identify with who we really are – that true, innate, eternal, beautiful core of goodness. **So, let's have a look at one key and foundational aspect - that of the way we *speak* to one another.**

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We need to change the story/narrative about ourselves. We will never be able to compete with Hollywood's narrative for us: fall in love, marry the right person, etc. We need to regenerate the imagination - spiritualize it with a new narrative, in concordance with an integrated spiritual/sacred worldview. We need to offer an alternative to the prevailing story we are being told. This has to be introduced not in a pious manner. We need to give the youth a place to go when they run up against the walls of their lower selves. An alternative about BEING, NOT BELIEVING. We must ask ourselves what would work for a 14 year old.