

Silence is Best

Moral

I have found nothing better for the body than silence. Not study, but practice is the main thing. And one who talks excessively brings on sin.

- Ethics of the Fathers. Ch. 1, par. 17

Analysis

The head is the first part of the body that grows inside the womb. This fact states something about the importance of the brain and acquiring knowledge. For a similar reason, your head has two ears, and two eyes, yet one mouth. Perhaps this is to indicate that listening and seeing should each be at least twice as important as talking. Clearly, you cannot talk and listen simultaneously. Your brain was not created to function that way. Little, if anything can be learned by what you say, yet much can be learned by what you see and hear.

This moral places a stern warning against excessive talk. The phrase “brings on sin” can be equally applied to the talker as well as his audience. If you talk too much then you spend less time learning from others and improving your knowledge. Even if you are required to speak such as when delivering a lecture or when teaching others, you should attempt to convey your message in as few words as possible. In most cases, during a speech or lecture, the more you say about a topic or issue, the more confusing it becomes. The message becomes diluted and misunderstood. If your message conveys moral or behavioral actions from your user, they are more likely to perform wrong and perhaps, sinful, actions as a result.

If you think about how your body was formed and view the above moral, you can understand why you have two hands and feet, yet one head. Your head is on top of your body and it is certainly important in terms of acquiring knowledge. Yet, ultimately, your hands and feet will cause your knowledge to be placed into action. Few people will appreciate you by what you know, but rather, how you place your knowledge into daily action.

Refer to Lesson 1. In the premise of Moral Learning, I stated that you can learn about two ways of using your hand. You can use it to form a fist to harm someone, or you can stretch out your hand to pull someone out of the rushing stream of some of life’s hardships. You possess the knowledge of both methods. You will gain minimal self esteem by what you know, yet much by

what doing the correct actions. Instead of thinking and saying that you will do something drastic, noble, and notable, it is far more important to actually do it.

Parable

The CEO of a prominent company was annoyed that too many projects took too long to be completed. He planned a meeting with ten of the company's top executives. A week before the meeting, he emailed all the attendants stating that the meeting would begin at 2 P.M. and would end promptly at 3:30 PM.

The meeting began promptly. The CEO asked all the executives for the strategies on how to work more efficiently. Each person gave his opinion citing surveys, and touting their past experiences on how they successfully implemented similar efficiency strategies in the past. Benson sat quietly near the end of the table, and listened to all his colleagues. Finally, the CEO asked Benson to speak. All Benson said was, "I agree, so far, with everything I have heard."

The meeting continued, and it was running past the 3:30 P.M. deadline. The executives argued about the different efficiency strategies, discussing their merits and caveats. Benson sat and listened, silently, the entire time. Finally, the CEO said, "Benson, you've been quiet the whole time. What would you suggest we do to improve work efficiency in our company?" Benson replied, "End this meeting, now."

Thought Questions

1. Think of a famous speaker, either from history, or currently living. What did you learn from this person? Has what this person said affected how you act? Do you think this speaker acted according to what he or she said?
2. Who was your favorite school teacher? Why? What made this person more prominent, different, or more "famous" than your other teachers?

Moral Exercises

1. If you're the type of person who likes to make yourself known when you attend a party, then next time, try stepping "backwards." Keep your introduction short and listen more to what others have to say about themselves. You may learn a few things.
2. Send a short voice note to yourself. It could be a reminder or just a short quote or expression. (Cell phones and your microphone on the computer are two good ways to do this.) Play back the voice note and write (or type it.) See if this message has the same or a different affect when you read it as opposed to hearing it. Which method makes you learn more? Why?