

## **CONTROL THE URGE TO TALK**

*Question before the story:* Have you ever heard someone tell you to be quiet when you are talking?

### THE TALKER

There was once a teacher with hundreds of students who were young monks. The students had a rooster which crowed every morning, waking them up at sunrise, just at the right time every day. One day the rooster died, and the students tried to find a new rooster. One student was looking for firewood near a cemetery, and he saw a rooster, so he brought it to the monastery hoping that it would crow in the morning to wake them up. But this rooster grew up in a cemetery, and didn't know about time. So he crowed at midnight. The students woke up and studied at midnight, but it was too early. When the sun rose, they were so tired that they could not concentrate. Then during the daytime, the rooster crowed again, repeatedly. This crowing distracted the students so that they could not concentrate during the daytime. One student got so upset that he killed the rooster and then, feeling guilty, went to tell his teacher about it. The teacher said that the rooster's parents did not teach him to crow at the right time, so he crowed repeatedly at the wrong times.

Now here is a story about what happened many, many years later.

When the Buddha was staying at the Jetavana monastery, there was a monk who loved to talk. He came from a nice family, and he could have been a wealthy young man with a successful career. But instead, he sacrificed that opportunity and decided to live a religious life as a monk. Young men who choose the disciplined life of a monk seek wisdom and a peaceful mind.

But the talkative monk was not very disciplined. He often forgot his duties, or he did them very quickly and not carefully. He did not pay attention to the proper time to do his duties. He did them when he chose to do them. He studied not at the proper time with all of the other monks, but when he chose to. He did not silently gather with all of the other monks at the proper time to listen to the teachers; he often came running, the last one to arrive. But his biggest problem was that he talked to other monks whenever he got a chance. He just loved to talk and laugh with others. He always liked to comment on things, too, even at times he was supposed to be quiet and listen to the teacher. He was often in the middle of a long conversation when it was time to study, to do some duty, to hear lessons from the teachers, or to go to bed. So, he was often running late, and distracting the other monks and making them late, too. When he talked late at night, he kept the other monks awake so they were sleepy the next day and could not concentrate and meditate well.

One evening when the monks were gathered together in the big hall, the other monks gently and patiently suggested to the talkative monk that talking too much is annoying to others.

The talkative monk did not like to hear this criticism, even though it was spoken with kindness and compassion. He then told them that he would try to talk less, but he did not really want to. He could not believe that the other monks thought he was annoying; they had listened to him and smiled at his funny stories. And he felt happy when they listened to him, paid attention to him, and laughed with him. He often got interesting ideas to talk about, and he looked forward to his conversations with the other monks who would listen. He wanted to enjoy these conversations as often as possible. He thought that he would feel bored and isolated if he was only allowed to talk for a few moments at lunchtime. Then there would be no more fun stories to share, no more long conversations about interesting things, no more laughter. He wanted to talk when he got the urge to talk and not have to wait until lunchtime. So he slowly and miserably walked back to his sleeping area.

Just then, the Buddha walked into the big hall and asked the monks what they were talking about. The monks told him about the monk who talked too much. The Buddha told them, just like in this life, that monk in a past life was a rooster who made too much noise all the time and was killed.

That evening, as the talkative monk laid down on his bed to sleep, he missed the fun conversations he usually had before he went to bed. He tossed and turned and could not sleep. He felt rejected and unappreciated by the other monks. He even felt that they had betrayed him, laughing at his stories and then criticizing him for talking too much. But then he remembered what the monks had told him that evening, and thought a little deeper about it. They said that they liked to listen to him because he was so entertaining, but that he was tempting them to listen to him instead of studying, doing their chores, and doing things on time. When they did not finish, and when they were late, then they would feel guilty, and would worry that they had disappointed their teachers. They would feel tired and irritable the next day after staying awake late at night hearing him talk. So although at the time he was talking they enjoyed it, they later felt much worse. He realized that he too felt guilty when he was late, and when he had not studied enough or finished his chores. And he felt hurt when the teachers pointed out what he had not done, or had not done properly – all because he had been talking too much. He also realized that when he felt guilty and hurt, he tried to talk and laugh with the other monks to forget about his bad feelings. He understood that the other monks were not rejecting him, but instead they were helping him to control his urge to talk so that everyone, including he, could be peaceful and happy.

*Questions:*

1. Why was the rooster killed?
2. Why did the monk like to talk so much?
3. What problems did the talkative monk have when he talked too much?
4. Why did the other monks listen to him?
5. Why were the other monks annoyed by his talking?

6. With what type of attitude did the other monks speak to him about talking too much?
7. How did he feel about it at first?
8. What did he realize later after they talked to him?

*What the Buddha said:*

“One is not wise because one speaks much. He who is peaceful, friendly and fearless is called wise.”

Dhammapada 258

*Discussion about controlling the urge to talk:*

Do you know anyone who has the same problem as the talkative monk? Do you have that problem sometimes? We might think, “well, I don’t talk TOO much.” Or maybe we think “I USUALLY don’t talk too much” or “my talking doesn’t really bother anyone.” But we should think more carefully. Has a teacher ever asked you to stop talking? Has a parent ever told you to be more quiet? Has anyone ever said “Sh-sh” to you, or looked at you with an irritated face, because you were talking? Have you and a friend ever gotten scolded for talking to each other at the wrong time? Do you ever whisper during class when you are supposed to be silent and listen? Have you ever been late for anything because you were talking? Have you ever been the last one talking when the teacher is trying to start the class? Even if we have a rather quiet personality, we usually find that we have talked too much, or at the wrong time or place, at some times in our lives.

We often blurt out what we want to say without thinking first. Sometimes it is OK to do that – at the right time and the right place. What are some examples of the right time and place to talk? On the playground? During free time? During lunch? But even then, we should not blurt out things that are hurtful to another person, or that are annoying.

What are some examples of wrong times or places to talk? In class when you are expected to listen? When someone is talking to you? When someone around you needs to concentrate? There are many other examples.

What can we do to avoid talking too much? First, we should understand that others are easily annoyed by our talking. Some people who don’t fully understand that have a habit of enjoying the attention from being a “class clown” or “loudmouth.” If we have that habit, it is important to know that at some point later on, others will not think we are amusing anymore – they will think that we are a nuisance and will complain about us, talk badly about us to others, or maybe even insult us.

Maybe you are not a class clown, but like the monk in the story, you don't believe that others are annoyed by your talking. How do you feel when you are listening to something interesting but someone is talking so you cannot hear it? How do you feel when someone interrupts your concentration by talking? How do you feel when someone keeps talking to you but you are not really interested in what they have to say? How do you feel when someone makes you late because they were talking to you? Remember how that feels, and make an intention not to do that to others – treat others how you like to be treated. Others will appreciate you being considerate of them!

Next, we should be more aware of what is going on around us. We should carefully notice when others are being quiet – that is often a signal that we should be quiet too. Waiting until people stare at us – or glare at us – before we stop talking is inconsiderate. We should be aware of the time – whether it is time for class, time for bed, or time to be doing something we need to do. We should carefully notice whether the person we are talking to, and the people around us, are busy, or distracted or annoyed by our talking. We can pay attention to the other person's body language and facial expressions to see if he or she is bored or uncomfortable. Is he or she looking around a lot? Frowning? Sighing? Fidgeting? Moving around while you are talking? Interrupting you? If you make an effort to notice what other people's feelings are, you are being considerate and kind to them, and then they will respect you and like you more. They also like it when you listen to them a lot rather than just talk a lot

Once we are aware that our talking is no longer appreciated, or that it is not the right time or place to talk, then it is easy to be quiet so that we do not make a fool of ourselves.

Even if you don't have any problem controlling your urge to talk, you probably know others who have that problem. You can help them, like the other monks helped the talkative monk in the story. Like those monks, you must use kind and compassionate words. Talk to the person as you would like others to talk to you when you make a mistake.

*Activity to reinforce the lesson:*

Make a poster of words that remind you to control your urge to talk. Decorate it and hang it in your room as a daily reminder. You can decorate it with funny cartoon character talking too much. You could also make a cartoon character holding his ears as if trying to block out too much noise. Some suggested words for your poster are:

“Before you speak think – will it hurt someone in any way? Will it help someone? Is the right time and place to speak?”