

## BEYOND WORDS

Words, they are without a doubt, extremely powerful. People are easily moved and motivated by mere words.

Words also form a person's first impressions of someone else – what was spoken and how it was spoken usually provides us the basis to form a judgment on a person.

Words are so powerful that Prophet Muhammad's (ﷺ) miracle came in the form of words – the Quran, which suited the nature of the Arabs of his time who loved and appreciated poetry. Coming from Allah, the words in the Quran are so beautiful and divinely structured that no human can produce anything similar or comparable to it.

The words of the Quran had such an immediate and strong impact on the people of the Arabian Peninsula, and it affected the Arabs so much that they accused Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) of being a magician and a soothsayer.

Words from the Quran are so miraculous that they could even move and soften the hearts of even the strongest personalities such as Umar al Khattab. Before Umar al Khattab embraced Islam, he was one of the early opponents of Islam. He was known to be fearless and was well respected among the Quraish people of Makkah.

One day, Umar al Khattab visited Masjidil Haram and heard Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) reciting the verses of Quran. While he was listening to the Prophet (ﷺ), each time he thought of an accusation that the Quraish people had made against the Prophet (ﷺ), Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would recite a verse to counter it as if Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was reading his thoughts.

In actual fact, at this point, the verses had already made an impression on him and had slowly but surely entered his heart. But because he was influenced by the numerous accusations made by the Quraish, he ignored the positive effects the verses of Quran had on him.

Disturbed by the rise of Islam, Umar al Khattab, known for his determination made a sudden decision to kill Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). Driven by his hatred, he set aside the effect the Quranic verses was having on him and proceeded with his intention. On his way to see the Prophet (ﷺ), he bumped into Na'im ibn Abdullah and they started talking. When Na'im found out Umar was set to kill Prophet (ﷺ), he told Umar to deal with his own sister first, who had embraced Islam. Shocked by the news, he immediately rerouted his way to his sister's house instead.

There, he found his sister, Fatimah ibn al-Khattab and her husband, Said ibn Zaid reading the Quran written on a leaf together with Khabbab ibn al-Arrat. Umar got angry and immediately confronted the couple.

***Qais narrated: I heard Sa`id bin Zaid saying to the people, "If you but saw me and Umar's sister tied and forced by Umar to leave Islam while he was not yet a Muslim. And if the mountain of Uhud could move from its place for the evil which you people have done to Uthman, it would have the right to do that."***

Bukhari

Both Fatimah and Said confessed to converting to Islam but stood strong and proud despite the intimidation by Umar. They openly declared to him that they would rather die than waver in their faith.

Umar felt guilty for his outburst. Amazed and moved by his sister's determination, his own heart started to soften. He then requested to have a look at the leaf. At Fatimah's request, Umar cleaned himself first. The leaf was then handed over to him and he started reading it. Upon reaching verse 14 of Surah Taha, he stopped –

***Indeed, I am Allah. There is no deity except Me, so worship Me and establish prayer for My remembrance.***

Taha 20: 14

Umar al Khattab then exclaimed, "Surely this is the Word of Allah. Take me to Muhammad (ﷺ)."

***Ibn 'Umar narrated: that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "O Allah! Honor Islam through the most dear of these two men to you: Through Abu Jahl or through 'Umar bin Al-Khattab." He said: "And the most dear of them to Him was 'Umar."***

Graded Hasan Sahih by At-Tirmidhi

Umar al Khattab then proceeded to meet Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). At that time, Prophet (ﷺ) was in the company of some of his closest companions.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) asked him "Umar, what brings you here"?

He replied, "I am here to accept Islam".

Hearing this, the Muslims shouted with joy.

This incident holds a great importance in Islamic history, as Muslims were now empowered with great strength following the conversion of Umar al

Khattab. It was after he embraced Islam that Muslims were able to pray freely, and Islam started to spread easily.

***`Abdullah bin Mus'ud narrated: We have been powerful since `Umar embraced Islam.***

Bukhari

Umar al Khattab's conversion to Islam is a great example of how the beautiful words of the Quran can enter and pierce a person's heart and change them forever. From an enemy of Islam, Umar al Khattab became one of the most prominent leaders and upholders of Islam.

### **The Power of Words**

Words are so powerful that some even consider it as a lethal weapon – "words are sharper than swords" they say. Mean words can hurt so deeply that it can sometimes kill a person's self-esteem. In extreme cases, it can hurt to the point of killing, where one can suffer from a heart attack or even commit suicide.

Words can also empower and motivate people, even to fight to the death. There are many charismatic leaders who had proven their ability to motivate people to stand up and fight for their rights such as Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi and not forgetting the greatest of all, our beloved Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ).

There is also the other side of the coin, of course – those leaders who used words to start aggressive and extremist movements, causing disharmony and violence such as Adolf Hitler, the person responsible for starting World War II.

## Realising Words

However, words will just remain words, if we just stop there and not take action. Words do not bring value if they are not acted upon.

Words may enable us to attract people's attention, and people may start listening to us but ultimately, we will be judged by our actions and the things we do (and also, our inactions and the things we do not do). This is how our credibility is built, through actions and not mere words.

This is the main reason why most people don't trust politicians. Most politicians have the tendency of promising the moon during election campaigns but when the time comes for them to deliver, their promises end up as empty ones.

***It is narrated on the authority of Abdullah b. 'Amr that the Prophet (ﷺ) observed: "There are four characteristics, whoever has them all is a pure hypocrite, and whoever has one of its characteristics, he has one of the characteristics of hypocrisy, until he gives it up: When he speaks he lies, when he makes a covenant he betrays it, when he makes a promise he breaks it, and when he disputes he resorts to obscene speech." In the narration of Sufyan (one of the narrators) it is: "And if he has one of them, he has one of the characteristics of hypocrisy."***

Muslim

Let us reflect on the holy Quran, the miracle in the form of words that was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). We cannot deny the fact that the words used in the Quran are exquisite and beautiful; it is truly a miracle in its mere form.

However, the real beauty lies in the messages it carries. It defines and guides us, and clearly setting out the righteous actions that we should take in life. Although reading the Quran is considered one of the most virtuous acts of worship, on the Day of Judgment, our performance will not be measured

primarily on how many times we have read it. Instead, we would be measured based on how much we had practise its contents. In the end, it is our actions that matters.

Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) may have great communication skills, and was well-equipped with the miracles of the Quran. However, the main reason people were attracted to him and his cause, and easily accepted the message of Islam was due to his actions – he practised what he preached.

***Aishah narrated: that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "The best of you is the best to his wives, and I am the best of you to my wives, and when your companion dies, leave him alone."***

At-Tirmidhi

Let's take example of the hadith above, what this means is that the best of Muslims are the ones who are best to their wives, and he himself was the best example. He allowed his wives to express their opinions, and he listened attentively to them. He helped out with the chores at home – he even sewed his own clothes.

***Hisham said, "I asked Aishah, 'What did the Prophet (ﷺ) do in his house?' She replied, 'He did what one of you would do in his house. He mended sandals and patched garments and sewed.'"***

Al-Adab Al-Mufrad. Graded Sahih by Al-Albani

Mind you, at this point in time, Prophet (ﷺ) was the number one political leader of the Islamic state based in Madinah. This is a position similar to the Prime Minister or the President of a country today. I am quite sure no Prime Minister or President in today's world does any chores at home, well at least not anymore.

In preparation for the Battle of *Khandaq*, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) was literally on the ground, digging up the trenches together with everyone else. It just shows how much he practised every single word that he preached – when he asked the Muslims to give their best in defending Islam, he himself displayed the exact actions that reflected his words.

***Al-Bara' narrated: I saw Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) on the day (of the battle) of the Trench carrying earth till the hair of his chest was covered with dust and he was a hairy man. He was reciting the following verses of `Abdullah (bin Rawaha): "O Allah, were it not for You, We would not have been guided, Nor would we have given in charity, nor prayed. So, bestow on us calmness, and when we meet the enemy. Then make our feet firm, for indeed, Yet if they want to put us in affliction, (i.e. want to fight against us) we would not (flee but withstand them)." The Prophet (ﷺ) used to raise his voice while reciting these verses.***

Bukhari

These are only some of the many examples of how Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) put his words into actions, making him the greatest human who ever lived.

## Talk and Walk

The only way to realise your words and make it a reality is to translate them into action. This is what people say as “walking the talk”. This basically means doing or practising what we preach or say.

Taking action is not as easy as we think. People often misunderstand the definition of taking action.

A lot of people mistakenly think that letting things flow naturally and hoping things would eventually turn out to be all right equals to taking action. In actual fact, that is just plain laziness.

***Never mistake motion for action.***

Ernest Hemingway, novelist, short story writer, and journalist.

Instead of walking the talk, many of us tend to do the opposite.

## **1. Talk the Talk**

A lot of us only "talk the talk" – instead of taking action, we go on and on talking and lecturing as though we are an expert but in reality, we do not practise what we had lectured on. This is a situation that most of us get trapped in, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

***Great is hatred in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not do.***

As-Saff 61: 3

We shouldn't take this behaviour lightly as we have been reminded of the harsh punishment that would be put upon people who does not do what they had said to do.

***Anas Ibn Malik narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said: On the night of the ascension, I saw some men whose lips were severed with scissors of the Fire. I asked, who they were and Jibril said: The sermonizers of your ummah who enjoined piety on the people but forgot their own selves though they recited the Quran. Do they not understand?***

Narrated by Abu Dawud. Graded Sahih by Al-Albani

As you can see, this is a strong reminder, particularly for religious teachers and leaders. The worst are the ones who gain popularity by telling other people what to do but they themselves don't do it.

We also tend to be defensive about things that are said about us. In such situation, responding and reacting by giving defensive justifications



might not be the best response as they usually come out sounding like a bunch of excuses. Such response would only result in people forming a perception that the allegations thrown to us are true even though we are innocent.

The right way to respond to such situations is to take action instead of complaining about it. People can claim that we are lying, but actions don't lie. We need to stop this bad habit of justifying ourselves and let our actions do the talking.

***The trouble with us is we feel the need to respond to everything that is said about us. At times, silence is best. Let your actions speak!***

Mufti Ismail Menk

Another bad habit we often have is claiming to be able to do something but failing to deliver and in the end, ruining our credibility. People hold on to our words, building expectations and hope. It breaks their hearts when we break our promises to deliver.

Trust is not easily built yet credibility is easily shattered. So, if we say we are going to do something, we better make sure that we do it. There is no point claiming we can do numerous things when in actual fact we don't have the skillsets and resources to do it. Actions (or in this case, inaction) speak louder than words.

## **2. Talk the Walk**

There are people who prefer to "talk the walk", bragging about everything they do, even the smallest and insignificant ones. Their main motivation in life is attention, always having this burning need for others to acknowledge how good they are. But at the same time, they look down on others.

***'Iyad bin Himar narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "Allah, the Most High has revealed to me that you (people) should be humble, so that no one transgresses another, or boasts to the other."***

Muslim

*Riya*, showing off performance of worships or good deeds for people to notice is considered a minor and hidden type of *shirk*. *Shirk* is a serious and major sin in Islam. *Shirk* basically means ascribing a partner or rival to Allah in Lordship, worship or in His names and attributes. In an indirect way, showing off does this because of the underlying intention – a person performs an act of worship or good deed not sincerely for Allah but instead to obtain recognition from others. Although minor *shirk* does not constitute to *kufr*, (i.e. turning away from Islam), it does eventually lead to major *shirk*.

***Mahmud bin Labid narrated that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: "The thing I fear most for you is the lesser shirk (polytheism), showing-off (of good deeds)."***

Ahmad

Allah has reminded us numerous times that He will humiliate people who likes to boast by disclosing their true intentions.

***Jundub narrated: The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "He who lets the people hear of his good deeds intentionally, to win their praise, Allah will let the people know his real intention (on the Day of Resurrection), and he who does good things in public to show off and win the praise of the people, Allah will disclose his real intention (and humiliate him)."***

Bukhari

In another authentic hadith, a similar reminder is given to us. The only difference in this hadith is that it is mentioned that the humiliation will also be displayed in this world as well – it is not only limited to the hereafter.

***Ibn Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) as saying: If anyone wants to have his deeds widely publicised, Allah will publicise (his humiliation). And if anyone makes a hypocritical display (of his deeds) Allah will make a display of him.***

Muslim

Let's ponder about this a bit further, taking our own real life experiences as a case study.

There will always be people around us who loves to brag in our lives and after a while, we can easily identify this type of people. Sooner or later, their true intentions will be revealed.

What happens to them after being exposed?

Two main core values would be impaired – sincerity and honesty. People will start to doubt them, avoiding from being close to them and not wanting to be associated with them. They end up alone.

Talking without doing anything does not get us anywhere – this is nature's law. A lot of us gets trapped in the cycle of whining and complaining, always blaming it on being too busy or having too much on our plates.

***Actions are the easiest way to prove why words mean little.  
Nobody is too busy; it's just a matter of priorities.***

Unknown

To a certain extent, these excuses may be true and carry weight. But then, even from the start, we are the ones who allowed it to become excuses.

No one else is to be blamed but us.

If we take time to plan and prioritise, busyness should not come in the way.

Anyway, if it is really important to talk about, why are we not making time to talk about it?

***When something is important enough,  
you do it even if the odds are not in your favor.***

Elon Musk, business magnate, engineer, inventor and investor

### **Right Things vs. Things Right**

Actions do not come without assessment; we need to weigh the pros and cons for each of the action we take. At a more fundamental level, we should first assess whether as a matter of principle, we are doing the right thing.

***The successful person place more attention on doing the right thing  
rather than doing things right.***

Peter Drucker, consultant, educator, and author

Among the common mistakes we do in life is focusing too much on the processes rather than the fundamental issue at hand. We live in a world full of man-made processes that are structured with red tapes and bureaucracies.

Most of the time, these processes are designed to address the interest of the process owners and not the users, it tends to make the processes bias and one-sided. Because of this, there will be times when a process becomes disadvantageous and troublesome to other people – it might turn out to be the wrong way of doing things. Examples of such processes can be as simple as

returning a defect item for a replacement or a financial transaction involving money in the bank.

I had experienced such ridiculous processes many times in life. Among my classic experience was when I wanted to cancel one of my credit cards. The basic process was simple, I just need to call in and request for the cancellation. As long as there was no outstanding amount due, the cancellation process should be straightforward, fast and smooth. At least that was what I was told.

However, my experience turned out to be the total opposite, in fact, it was downright horrible. The officer who first answered my call told me that there was a particular person in charge who is handling my account but unfortunately he was on leave. I would need to wait for him to return before I could proceed with my cancellation request.

It surely did not make much sense but I went on with it anyway. I continued to follow up via the call-centre but after a while, I realised that the situation was becoming more and more ridiculous; the guy seems to be out of the office all the time. Out of sheer disappointment and frustration, I requested to speak to the manager. It was only after that that they proceeded to cancel my credit card. Even if it is true that the person in charge was on leave, the right thing to do would have been to proactively refer me to the manager or to another officer who could attend to my case. Instead, they left me hanging and frustrated for a long period of time. This was customer service experience at its worst.

This is why it is very important for us to be conscious of our actions, and to assess the potential impacts it may have and also whether, as a matter of principle, it is right thing to do. The key to ensuring that we do the right thing lies in our heart – if our heart is pure and filled with the right intentions, we should be able to differentiate between what is right and wrong.

***An-Nu'man bin Bashir narrated: I heard Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) saying, 'Both legal and illegal things are evident but in between them there are doubtful (suspicious) things and most of the people have no knowledge about them. So whoever saves himself from these suspicious things saves his religion and his honor. And whoever indulges in these suspicious things is like a shepherd who grazes (his animals) near the Hima (private pasture) of someone else and at any moment he is liable to get in it. (O people!) Beware! Every king has a Hima and the Hima of Allah on the earth is His illegal (forbidden) things. Beware! There is a piece of flesh in the body if it becomes good (reformed) the whole body becomes good but if it gets spoilt the whole body gets spoilt and that is the heart.'***

Bukhari

The right actions are not necessarily our preferred actions. Many times, for us to do the right things, we would have to do the total opposite of what we like. This can be things that we find tedious or difficult, or things that we are not entirely comfortable with. But for the right reasons, we got to do what we got to do.

***Greatness comes from living outside of your comfort zone.***

Lewis Howes, author, entrepreneur, and former professional football player.

## **Stay True**

Taking actions comes with its set of distractions and challenges, especially if we are pursuing a righteous path. These distractions and challenges will come from all directions, both external and internal, intended to sway us from doing the right things and stopping us from achieving greater heights.

Knowing our enemies provides us with the ability to manage these challenges well so that we continue to stay true to our purpose and take the necessary actions.

## 1. External Enemy

Our external enemies are the people who look down on us and don't have the confidence in our abilities. These are the people who don't believe in our dreams and ambitions. They discourage us at every chance they get – our failure is an achievement to them.

These are the people who we need to religiously avoid. If ever they get in our way, we need to consciously brush them off so that they don't become a stumbling block for us to do what we are supposed to do.

***Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions.  
Small people always do that,  
but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great.***  
Mark Twain, famous American author and humorist

On the other hand, there will always be amazing people around us who continue to be by our side, supporting us through life's ups and downs. These are the people who will never give up on us, and will continuously encourage us to move forward. These are the type of people we need to always keep close.

## 2. Internal Enemy

Our internal enemy is obviously ourselves. Firstly, if there is anyone who puts the cap to our limits, it would be our own self – the side of us that is naturally pessimistic.

The second enemy is even more dangerous than our pessimistic nature. Pride, arrogance and irresponsibility – these are negative traits that can potentially grow inside us once we achieve many successes. It is normal for a person to feel proud when he or she is able to achieve a significant milestone in life.

However, we have to remember that we did not achieve these successes on our own – we received a lot of help from the people around us and most importantly, from Allah. Taking all the credit for the successes we achieve does not make us a better person, but eventually, it can make us a failure.

***Beware the pride and arrogance in you that credit yourself for all your successes but point a finger others for your failures.***

Mufti Ismail Menk

Also, no one wants to be blamed when something goes wrong. Usually, when something bad happens, our head would automatically turn around to find the person responsible. The last person we would think of would be ourselves – this is if we can be honest enough to consider ourselves as a contributing party, which most people can't. This is how in the end, an innocent person turns out to be a scapegoat.

For us to be battle these two enemies and start taking action, the most important thing for us to do is to stay true to our purpose and focus our energy on putting the right things in place. But more importantly, to love what we do.

It is not always the case that a person is lucky enough to be doing something that he or she really loves. However, for us to be able to do great things in life, we need to love what we do. If we are not loving what we're doing yet, we better find ways to make us do.

***The only way to do great work is to love what you do.***

Steve Jobs

How do we do this?



Firstly, we need to be honest with ourselves and identify the parts that we dislike about the things that we are currently doing.

Secondly, we might not be able to change what we're doing, but we can surely make the experience a more enjoyable one – our surroundings, the culture, the intimacy with the people around us.

These are factors that are within our control, of which we can change and influence to produce positive energies around us, and therefore create a fun working environment. We'll make it if we're enjoying it – Steve Job managed to prove this to us.

***People rarely succeed unless they have fun in what they are doing.***  
 Andrew Carnegie, Scottish-American industrialist who led the enormous expansion of the American steel industry in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century

This is the main reason we need to stay true to ourselves, as it enables us to address and take the appropriate actions to overcome these weaknesses. With the stumbling blocks out of our way, there is nothing to stop us from making our words a reality.

### **Keep It Real**

Words and actions are part and parcel of life, they exist seamlessly in our lives. It does however represent who we are and how people see us.

If our words and actions are pretentious, we will appear as pretentious.

If our words and actions are real, we will be seen as “genuine” – what you see is what you get, be it good or bad.

I sincerely believe that everyone prefers a person who is genuine rather than a pretentious one, anytime. At least, we know the true colours of a person. It is then up to us whether to accept their imperfections or avoid them entirely.

Words lead to actions, and actions lead to outcomes; this is the first chain of reaction. Outcomes do not necessarily equal success or excellence – success can only be attained through dedication, hard work and practice, not just by simply taking action for the sake of it.

***We are what we repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit***  
Aristotle

Keeping it real is about facing our fears and failures. It is impossible for us to continuously achieve success all the time, they will surely be rainy days. We have discussed the stories of the Prophets, who faced many failures in inviting people to the right path.

If the Prophets, who are the chosen ones, had to go through such upheavals, what more us mere mortals?

By knowing and accepting this fact i.e. that failure is a sure thing that we will have to face in life. The only way for us to overcome failure is to face it head on, embrace it and grow out of it, at the end, come out a stronger person. Giving up should never be in our vocabulary.

***I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.***  
Michael Jordan, former professional basketball player

Life offers us a range of choices and it is up to us to make the right ones, at least the ones that are best for us. We are the ones who need to make the best out of what life can offer. Life provides us the platform but we are the ones who needs to make it work.

***Life will give you what you settle for.***

Unknown

We can take the example of farming – the more activities and actions we put in, the more it produce. If we were to plant more seeds covering a wider piece of land, followed by regular intervals of nourishing them with adequate water and fertilizers, continuously attending to them with love and care, it is highly likely that we will end up with an abundance of crops at the of the season. However, if we are lazy and only put in mediocre efforts to grow the crops, we would even be lucky if we end up having anything worth harvesting.

Life behaves in a similar manner, if we decide to settle for less, we can put in mediocre efforts and be satisfied with minimal results. But if we've decided to chase the sky, we need to strive hard and put in maximum efforts to achieve our dreams, no matter what.

That choice – to be extraordinary or to just be an *average Joe*, resides with us, so choose wisely.

Life is beyond mere words. In the end, it is our actions that matters.

So embrace what we have learned, take the right actions and more importantly, act now before it is too late.

Live, love, learn and leave a legacy. Stay true and keep it real, *insha Allah*, things would eventually fall into place.

I'll wrap this compilation with my simple motto in life –

Live life to the fullest and have lots of fun along the way!