

THE THREE GATEKEEPERS

‘Speech is silver, but silence is golden’. Most people are only familiar with the ‘silence is golden’ bit of this ancient phrase and on hearing the first half are both surprised and a little bemused. What does it mean, ‘speech is silver’ and why should silence be compared to something as precious as gold? In fact, to break up this phrase is to diminish and devalue the power of its meaning. Let us take a closer look at its hidden depths. It is clear we are being told that however much importance we place on speech, its value does not compare with that of silence. There are several interpretations worthy of merit but the one we think demands the greatest attention and also proves the most useful in everyday life is the one we call the three gatekeepers. They are truth, kindness, and benevolence. Let’s explore each of them in greater detail...

Truth: If we are to apply the ‘silence is golden’ rule to everyday interaction, we need to ask three important questions, the first one being: ‘is my position one of truth?’ When you are in any interaction, situation or experiencing ‘something’, whatever that may be, before reacting you need to ask yourself if your reaction true, is it the right response to the individual, circumstance, or event? If the answer is yes, then you can proceed to the next gatekeeper, but if the answer is no, the silence is golden rule then applies, because at this point it is better to say nothing than to react. Far too many of our actions are merely reactions which are ill conceived and lack proper consideration. This is why we unconsciously and sometimes consciously hurt the hearts of others. A simple pause before reacting and asking yourself this question: ‘is my position one of truth?’, would make a world of difference. How many times have you paused and fully considered the ramifications of your words or actions? We would dare to suggest not enough. Next time you find yourself about to react, why not check in with the gate keeper of truth and see if your thoughts stand up to this first test...

Kindness: Once your thought processes have passed through the gate of truth, the next keeper of right action and good conduct that you need to persuade is kindness. The question you have to pose to yourself at this point is: ‘is what I’m about to do or say truly kind and compassionate?’ If it isn’t, you should swiftly retreat from speech into the sanctuary of silence. It is at this point that you should again choose gold over silver. It is better to say nothing than to cause harm. To be unkind to another is to be unkind to oneself. Ask yourself: ‘why should I treat another in a way that I would not wish to be treated myself? Kindness and compassion are now the subjects of many scientific studies. It seems that we have become so trapped by scientific endeavour that unless we can see the ‘evidence’ under the microscope or in a laboratory it somehow does not exist, even though it is glaringly obvious that kindness and compassion are intrinsically good and therefore should be applied in our lives wherever possible. Isn’t it time we also applied the principles of common sense? If what you are about to say or do can walk through the gate of kindness, then you can proceed to the third gate keeper...

Benevolence: The final gate through which our thoughts have to pass before coming into speech is benevolence. The question you need to ask yourself at this point is: ‘is what I’m about to say genuinely necessary and useful?’ You need to be sure before embarking on your chosen path that what you are about to do benefits others and yourself, because far too often we are busy pursuing our own needs and become trapped in our own opinions to such an extent that we do not consider the real value of what we are about to say or do. We are literally driven by impulse and outdated patterns, which compel us to speak and act. The wisdom of our words at this point is not truly being considered, discrimination has been overthrown as we pursue the

need to be right and to defend our position. Self-interest now reigns supreme because we are not concerned with the 'rightness' of what we are doing or saying. It is at this point that the greatest harm is often done as we say and do things that hurt others and even though we may not be aware of it, these actions hurt us as well. Our actions not only damage us psychologically; they damage our bodies too. The more we understand the mind-body interface, the more we realise that anything that is negative affects both mind and body equally (See: The Story of Health). It is folly to think that we are immune to what we do, either to others or ourselves. This is why we would encourage you to make the three gate keepers your friends and allies. The more you practise aligning yourself to these positions the more you are freed from negative consequences. This does not mean your life will be free from challenges because challenges are often where our most important lessons are learnt. It does mean, however, that you will always have the resources you need to rise and meet your challenges.

Hopefully, by now you can see the wisdom of this ancient mantra - silence truly is superior to speech - as it enables you to apply the appropriate discrimination to your thoughts and your actions. Silence teaches you the art of responding rather than reacting. Reaction tends to be immature and short-sighted and is far too concerned with winning, as it sees winning as being right. It does not understand that to truly win we simply have to do the right thing and how can we do that when we have not taken time to consider all the options? Responding, on the other hand, takes its time to deliver its message. It understands that 'patience is the mother of wisdom'. She who can wait, all things come to her door. Practise slowing yourself down and remember that other great adage: 'more haste, less speed'. The practice of the three gatekeepers will only add seconds and at most minutes to our decisions and responses. However, the time added is more than repaid in the many positive outcomes that follow. You will find that you begin to leave a positive trail and the fragrance of good feeling wherever you go. You will also add value to every situation and find that you can extract benefit from all your interactions. It is at this point that you really begin to understand that how you see the world does indeed shape your reality. The three gate keepers will free you from the slavery of being a victim as you move away from a culture of blame into the healthy mindset of personal responsibility. This is what good mental health looks like and feels like and it's yours for the taking. None of us are denied the gifts of truth, kindness, and benevolence; however, an attitude of determination and quiet resolve is required. These changes are unlikely to occur where the individual is not fiercely intent on transformation. It is important to note that there is no force in nature equal to the determined mind.

Before you do anything else, read this handout again, then make a pledge today to acquaint yourself with truth, kindness, and benevolence. Promise yourself you will at least try to make them your companions. The more you practise implementing them in your day-to-day life the more peace and contentment you will find. Your heart and mind will naturally move away from conflict, and you will seek out creative responses and solutions. Each moment will either offer joy or benefit, in some cases both. Remember the three questions are: 'Is my position one of truth or am I trapped in my own point of view?' 'Is what I am about to do or say kind or am I simply being driven by the force of habit and the need to be right? and, finally, 'Is there really any benefit in the position I'm taking, or would it be wiser to maintain silence?' By asking yourself these questions again and again, you will eventually acquire the habit of honouring the wisdom of the three gatekeepers. Hopefully, you will now see why speech is indeed silver and silence, in our view, is worth much more than gold.