

## IN DEFENSE OF WORDS

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1- Some say "Actions speak louder than words," others say "The pen is mightier than the sword." In a world of extremes, dichotomies rule supreme. We often have to remind ourselves that words lead to action and action leads to words. They seem eternally wedded. The teacher tells the first grader: "No hitting, use your words." Words are effective means to express anger and frustration. Mind you, words can hurt as much as hitting, or even more. My Iranian friend-an ER Doctor-teases me all the time by saying playfully: "You Arabs, all you do is talk...talk...talk, and you do nothing." Well, we can do both. It does not have to be the false either/or logic.

2- The power of words can be easily appreciated if one asks one's self the following question: "Other than the Iliad and the Odyssey what do I know of Homer's actions?" "Other than Plato's words what do I know of his actions?" It was not the actions of Mr. Siddhartha Gotama that made him the Buddha; it was his words-still influencing more than 2 billion men and women, if not all humans. The examples are as many as there are books worth reading on this earth. It is no surprise that a thinker's words are often called his "works." It is no coincidence that "word" and "work" differ only in their last letter.

3- The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Enuma Elish, Gilgamesh, the Code of Hammurabi, the Iliad and Odyssey, the Talmud, the Torah, the Bible, the Qur'aan, the Kitab-i-Aqdas, etc. were words; I doubt that many will call them "just words!" The scriptures-despite being "words"- have shaped and continue to shape the minds and behaviors of almost every human being on this planet past, present, and most likely future.

4- The dichotomy of "words" vs. "action" is a false dichotomy (just like most dichotomies). I don't believe that "words" and "action" are opposites. I submit to you that "words" and "action" almost always co-exist. Before we set out to do or achieve something, we, hopefully, will engage in some form of planning. Planning involves ideas yet to be realized-ideas that must be communicated to others if anything is to happen-unless one thinks that he or she will single handedly do everything in person to get something done. Collective effort is impossible without communication. Planning and execution are insoluble. Good execution requires good planning as much as planning without execution becomes useless.

5- Language is mostly words. "Nations" were born out of a common language. The terms "Arab" and "Arabic" are almost always used to refer to someone or something related to the Arabic Language .

6- Words and "just words" have started wars and ended them. This can't be truer than in the Arab world through the ages. A poem in the not so distant past could have triggered tribal feuds and resulted in many lives lost. Another poem would have resulted in many lives saved. The Imam on the podium can inflame youth to kill or can calm emotions to prevent bloodshed, just by using his words.

7- Education is our best defense against the universal enemy of ignorance. Education would be almost impossible

without books full of words.

8- Even if thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle have not lifted a finger, they would have influenced humanity as much as they did and still do .

9- The term "Talk Therapy" is used by many in reference to Psychotherapy, especially Psychoanalysis. Since it is true that psychotherapies involve quite a bit of talking (there are other important aspects not involving talking or words) but mostly it is true that exchanging words is the single most important aspect of psychotherapy. "Talk therapy" is a simple yet descriptive enough term to have some usefulness. The words exchanged are not "just words," they are ideas, concepts, emotions, etc. that hopefully result in behavioral change.

10- Out of all our modes of communication, language may be the most important. Whether spoken or written, language has marked the beginning of history as we know it. Everything about our humanity before language is considered "prehistory." "Written words" started in Mesopotamia, our present day beloved Iraq. Since we designed symbols to refer to "words" we started having access to other people's thoughts and minds through their words. I can feel the presence of a long ago deceased thinker when I am reading his or her "words".

My very own ideas are not truly mine, they are the amalgamation of all the words I have read and heard, the words of deceased masters and the words of living family, friends, my patients, my teachers, co-workers, and even the stranger that I had a few minutes 'conversation with without ever knowing his or her name.

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