

[Controlling Our Words](#)

Category : [September 1994](#)

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Kaigu Ryokan, Japan's beloved 18th century eccentric monk/poet/calligrapher, took a post as a temple priest at age 17. At 33, he left the temple and wandered from village to village, shrine to shrine along the countless pilgrimage trails that interlace interior Japan, winding under waterfalls, teetering along cliffsides, penetrating dense pine forests—a spiritual nerve system of sorts. Ryokan's brightest pupil, a young nun, Teishin, compiled his writings after his death. One of his most enjoyable reflections—for Buddhist and non-Buddhist—is called Admonitory Words.

It seems the holy monk was forgetful and seldom able to curb his speech. This was his reminder to himself.

Take care not to: talk too much; talk too fast; talk without being asked; talk gratuitously; talk with your hands; talk about world affairs; talk back rudely; argue; smile condescendingly at others' words; use elegant Chinese expressions; boast; avoid speaking directly; speak with a knowing air; jump from topic to topic; use fancy words; speak of past events that cannot be changed; speak like a pedant; avoid direct questions; speak ill of others; speak grandly of enlightenment; carry on while drunk; speak in an obnoxious manner; yell at children; make up fantastic stories; speak while angry; drop names; ignore the people to whom you are speaking; speak sanctimoniously of Gods and Buddhas; use sugary speech; use flattering speech; speak of things of which you have no knowledge; monopolize the conversation; talk about others behind their backs; speak with conceit; bad-mouth others; chant prayers ostentatiously; complain about the amount of alms; give long-winded sermons; speak affectedly like an artist; speak affectedly like a tea master.