

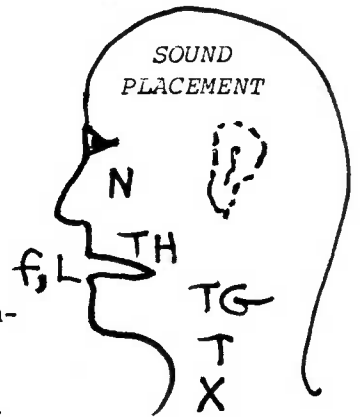
Both ends of our gastrointestinal track make sounds. Sounds from the lower end have little meaning, being merely "passing wind," and no spirit, though in many languages the word meaning spirit is the word meaning wind or breath. Now "breath," that something different, viz. sound coming out of the upper end of our g-i track, sound shaped to express "spirit," i.e. who we are, and "sense," i.e. what we mean and intend to communicate....The "fix" of this thinksheet is on *the human being in the act of making sounds with head-neck-chest using breath*, and the "project" of the thinksheet is the issue-possibility of engaging in this activity with "*integrity*" as *the integration of spirit [thus the whole person], sense [the most appropriate encoding], and sound [the most skilful sound-production the person is currently capable of]*. Finally, the "aim" of the thinksheet is to consciousness-raise toward sound-production improvement generally, and particularly in preaching.

1. The OCCASION of the thinksheet is a confluence of several facts. (1) In our culture, the best sound-production is to push various forms of shit, dramaturgic and commercial. So much so that the clergyperson who gives attention to what used to be called "voice cultivation" will be suspected of fraud! Thus a phony spirituality defends slovenly speech as bogus humility. [But I have known comen who "dumb it down" this way, and a university president who common-manned by not putting 'gs on his particples.] (2) My teacher Friz Perls would talk with a hotseat occupant till that person, that person's spirit, came public as sound: "Now that is you, whoever the hell else was talking before!" (3) Preaching, even with electronic crutches, has been getting harder to hear both because the quality of its sound-production has been declining and because the same thing has been happening to my sound-reception apparatus. Checking through a number of 1975-76 seminary catalogs, I found almost none offering opportunity to improve one's sound-production, and some without so much as a course in preaching. That's as stupid as putting \$1,000 into a stereo's guts and then driving that high-quality sound through a \$9.99 speaker! And as sad. A quality message deserves a quality message-sound, which can be had only through an equal-quality instrument. It saddens me to hear the gospel, the world's highest quality message, sounded out by a dull-toned mumbler, "a trumpet of uncertain sound."

2. In striving for greater integrity-integration, the preacher can work on his spirit [meditation, prayer, contemplation], his sense [study, reflection, interpretation], his sound, or his relationships and involvements. This thinksheet is about selecting, from this list, his sound-making. Its advice is that she take both singing lessons and speaking lessons. To improve communication, but also to lift "spirit"! Among clergy's enemies of "spirit," producers of disspiritedness and the sense of fragmentation, are the feeling that "nobody's listening" and "I'm not getting across." Improving one's sound production may not clear up this problem entirely, but it's certain to increase the flow of energy through the voice mechanism and the life and therefore increase both life-interest and job-respect. So it's certain to help in "integration," as narrowly and as broadly as one takes the meaning thereof. Seminaries granting continuing-education degrees should give credit for evidence of disciplined sound-improvement.

3. Willis can't do everything on a thinksheet [though he tries], but I can give basic instruction on how anyone, on fifteen minutes a day, can improve her/his sound-production in the course of a few months. The principle of "heightening," i.e. exaggerating a particular sound as in yoga a particular asana [posture] or in tai chi a particular gesture. Listen to a recording of your voice, turned up quite loud. Make a list of the sounds you make worst, and have some unfriendly person do the same and tell you "what even your best friend won't tell you." Then, in your daily workout, concentrate on those sounds. Be aware of both where and how the sound is made: you may be deficient either in its placement or in its shaping or both. Bore yourself with repetition: keep repeating a sound for at least a minute longer than you think you can without going crazy. Then notice sound-clusters: maybe you're in trouble with a particular cluster or particular clusters. For help here I've put the English sounds into these categories:

VOWELS [from Lat. "voice"] are the most basic, simplest sounds. They're made only by (1) continuous vibration of the "vocal" chords [at "X"--for larynx--on the diagram] + (2) the particular shaping of the mouth cavity. In singing lessons, they're practiced with initial "l" at various pitches and intensities, with variations of the latter. Effects: increase of head- and chest-resonances, and improvement of clarity-purity-beauty of sound-production. Work on it! Free of charge! NP: The sustaining of the tone improves speaking (1) by making it less choppy, since one learns to squeeze out the breath from the diaphragm rather than, squeekily and in gasps, from the throat, (2) by increasing pace-variety [legato/staccato, the latter from the Italian word for "detached" sound], (3) by improving mora-control [sound-length of syllable] and therefore meaning-sending, and (4) by enhancing vocal expressiveness in tessitura and thus, with greater flexibility, enlarging one's potential for oral communication. [SIDE NOTE: My think-sheets are meant for sounding orally or subvocally, and make little sense to folks who in reading use only their eyes, a deformity many of them acquired in speed-reading courses. You cannot read the Bible, or poetry, or any whole-person theology, only with your eyes and be reading with you heart--for your heart is connected to your ears and to the neural memory-tracks engraved through what has entered your brain through your ears. Ironically, no better witness to this than Helen Keller.]



LIQUIDS [lit., "flow-ers"] are like vowels in being flow-sounds but like consonants in involving certain parts of the speech apparatus in addition to the mouth cavity, viz. the nose and tongue. The grid shows horizontally which speech-organ is added, and vertically whether the sound "hits" or is placed in front or farther back in the mouth. Being aware of what's in action is important for (1) controlling the sound and (2) engraving a fresh neural path for improved sound-production, i.e. better speech-habits.

		MOUTH	
THE LIQUIDS		front	back
O	tongue	"L"	"R"
R	[linguals]	"L"	"R"
G	("TG" above)	"L"	"R"
A	nose	"N"	"M"
N	[nasals]	"N"	"M"
	("N" above)	"N"	"M"

CONSONANTS in the broad sense include everything but vowels, for only the latter involve no constriction or closure in sound-flow--the former therefore being (Lat., lit.) "fellow-sounds" or "like-sounds." The following chart, which I've adapted to English from Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin, displays all the remaining English sounds.....The "sibilants" [a word imitative of hissing and whistling] are placed in squares and the "fricatives" [cp. "friction"] in circles. As to letters from the top diagram, only "F" needs explanation: a sound seemingly placed in "front" of the mouth; all the letters indicate where the sound should be thought-placed. In addition, all the dimensions indicated how the sound is made--horizontally, the organs, the organ for "F" being the throat in constriction, or preferably the diaphragm; vertically, columns 2 and 5, an organ, the larynx, columns 1 and 2 being "plosives" [ex"plod"ing sounds] (as are the final two boxes of dentals), column 3 being "aspirates" [= "breathed"] (as are the final two boxes of gutterals), and columns 4 and 5 "sibilants" [= "breathed"].

THE CONSONANTS	PLOSIVES		ASPIRATES			*Semi-vowels
	1	2	3	4	5	
	EXPLODED		BREATHED	HISSED		"DIRTY SPEECH"
	unvoiced	voiced["X"] (laryngeals)	unvoiced	unvoiced	voiced["X"] (laryngeals)	
BREATH ONLY ["F"]	X		(H)			too light/heavy
LIPS (labials) ["L"]	P W*	B & (V) Y*	(PH) & (F)			flabby/tight
THROAT (gutterals) ["T"]	K & hard C	G	KH	(S) & (SH) breathed on throat	(Z) & (ZH)	weak/harsh
TEETH (dentals) ["TH"]	T	D & (TH)	(TH)	(CH) [=TSH] exploded on teeth	(J) [=DZH]	lisping/ whistling

MORE

P., i.e. believability-credibility, is proportionate to degree of quality of spirit, sense, and sound.

4. While the third section of this thinksheet contains all the essentials of a course in do-it-yourself speech self-improvement, I think I should say more by way of motivation. First, one must face hurdles within oneself: (1) I speak well enough to get along, and prettying up my speech would open me to the accusation of putting on airs. My people are not very sophisticated, and I'd better not come on too polished of utterance. [This reasoning is as shabby as its user's speech probably is.] (2) Beecher said, "Preaching is the communication of truth through personality." He didn't say anything about voice- and speech-improvement. [Beecher! A natural singer and orator who yet labored hard on elocution, as was common in his time. No argumentum e silentio here, please; he simply assumed you'd tune your instrument before playing.] (3) I'm too old for that. Besides, I had a little long ago in school, and it didn't take. [This is the argument that what I'm talking about is kid stuff, and we can assume (contradictorily!) that seminarians don't need remedial speech and that it's too late to be worth their effort, their speech-habits being now irrefragably formed.] I respond that I seldom hear a theological student who doesn't need, and wouldn't soon profit from, remedial speech.] (4) I'm too busy, with all else I've got to do here at NYTS and as familyperson and in the church. [Too busy for fifteen minutes a day? Too undisciplined, sounds like. And a bonus of the discipline would be, as is true of personal daily devotion, putting iron in your constitution for the rest you have to do, which will take less time if you have more iron.]

5. Sound-making and METAPHYSICS: Philosophical Hinduism says sound=reality=sound, therefore the mantra [in TM and all meditational Vedanta]. Sound-making and HISTORY: Judaism, and therefore Christianity, holds that revelation is chiefly oral/aural. Our religion is EAR-religion, sound-religion not in the metaphysical but in the historical sense; and accordingly the normal medium of communication is the human voice, in witnessing and preaching, which accordingly is the first thing "the search [or pulpit] committee" wants to know whether you're good at. "Does he have a pleasant voice?" A fair question in a cacophonous world, isn't it? And "Can he preach?" That question irritates even the half-new breed, but it's got to be faced constructively, not by badmouthing preaching and setting the nonverbal above the verbal. "His sound has gone forth into all the world!"

6. Distinct from both philosophy and philosophy of [as well as psychology of and sociology of and history of] religion is theology, which is adjunctive to preaching: "theology" is thinking toward and during preaching. It of course has other relationships, but its one constituting relationship is to preaching, as the great theologians of the ages have affirmed. What then is "preaching"? The public use of oral speech to persuade to the gospel. How "persuade"? By increasing the relative plausibility of the Good News, so that folks ap"plaud" the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than that of any of his competitors. In our increasingly skeptical age, we struggle not for respectability as much as for credibility. Millions find the Christian faith frankly incredible no matter how hard they want to believe it. That sets the task for theology-preaching. You've doubtless anticipated my point: The quality of sound in preaching-witnessing-visiting-counseling is a plausibility factor. Does the way you speak make the gospel more, or less, credible? Is my "sound" up to my "spirit" and my "sense"? [In Beecher's bromide, the "truth" being "sense" and "personality" being "spirit."]

7. Physical factors and the struggle for plausibility in sound: (1) General health, sustained by good nutrition and regular exercise and off-time. (2) Head- and chest-resonance. (3) Energy invested in pitching, shaping ["enunciation"], spacing, and volume-controlling sound--the foundation being deep breathing (yoga breathing-exercises being the best training). I remember E. Stanley Jones in ashrams. When he said "It stands to reason," it did, not just because his logic was clear and powerful but also his voice, and through it his whole being.