Overview:

Four Aspects of Right Speech (from DN 2, MN 41, and elsewhere)

1) Abstaining from Lying:
   - Honesty as a necessary quality in a student...
   - The Buddha’s advice to Rahula...

2) Abstaining from Divisive Speech:
   - When speaking about oneself and others...
   - An image to really drive it home...

3) Abstaining from Harsh Speech:
   - Being “Suvaca”, or easy to speak to...

“We will be easy to speak to (admonish) and make ourselves easy to speak to (admonish) purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, reverence for the Dhamma, devotion toward the Dhamma, honor for the Dhamma.’ Thus, bhikkhus, should you train yourselves.” (MN 21)

“Measuring Up” (MN 15)

“MA: The ancients called this sutta the “Bhikkhupātimokkha.” A bhikkhu should review himself three times daily in the way described in the sutta. If he cannot do so three times, then he should do so twice, or, at the minimum, once.”

“What, venerables, are the qualities which make one easy to speak to?
4) Abstaining from Idle Chatter:
- Words not worth treasuring…
- Better than a thousand useless words…

Better than a thousand useless words is one useful word, hearing which one attains peace.

Better than a thousand useless verses is one useful verse, hearing which one attains peace.

Better than reciting a hundred meaningless verses is the reciting of one verse of Dhamma, hearing which one attains peace. (Dhp 100-102)

Additional Readings & Resources:
- Conditions for Admonishment:
- Steering Compliments back to the Dhamma:
- Resources

Overview:

**Four Aspects of Right Speech (from DN 2, MN 41, and elsewhere)**

1) **Abstaining from Lying:**

“Here someone, abandoning false speech, abstains from false speech; when summoned to a court, or to a meeting, or to their relatives’ presence, or to their guild, or to the royal family’s presence, and questioned as a witness thus: ‘So, tell what you know,’ not knowing, one says, ‘I do not know,’ or knowing, one says, ‘I know’; not seeing, one says, ‘I do not see,’ or seeing, one says, ‘I see’; one does not in full awareness speak falsehood for their own ends, or for another’s ends, or for some trifling worldly end.”

“Having abandoned false speech, one abstains from falsehood. One speaks only the truth, one lives devoted to truth; trustworthy and reliable, one does not deceive anyone in the world.”
2) **Abstaining from Divisive Speech:**

“Having abandoned divisive speech, one abstains from divisive speech. One does not repeat elsewhere what they have heard here in order to divide others from the people here, nor does one repeat here what they have heard elsewhere in order to divide these from the people there. Thus one is a reconciler of those who are divided and a promoter of friendships. Rejoicing, delighting, and exulting in concord, one speaks only words that are conducive to concord.”

3) **Abstaining from Harsh Speech:**

“One (does not) speak harshly; one (does not) utter such words as are:

a) rough,
b) hard,
c) hurtful to others,
d) offensive to others,
e) bordering on anger,
f) unconducive to concentration.

“Having abandoned harsh speech, one abstains from harsh speech. One speaks only such words as are:

a) gentle,
b) pleasing to the ear,
c) endearing,
d) going to the heart,
e) polite,
f) amiable and agreeable to the manyfolk.”

4) **Abstaining from Idle Chatter:**

“Having abandoned idle chatter, one abstains from idle chatter. One:

a) speaks at the right time,
b) speaks what is factual and beneficial,
c) speaks on the Dhamma and the Discipline.
d) One’s words are worth treasuring;
e) timely,
f) backed by reasons,
h) measured, and
i) connected with the good.”
The purpose of Discussion:

“For that’s the purpose of discussion, that’s the purpose of counsel, that’s the purpose of drawing near, that’s the purpose of lending ear: that is,, the liberation of the heart through no clinging. (anupādā cittassa vimokkho)” (AN 3.67)

Results of wrong speech…

“Lying—when indulged in, developed, & pursued—is something that leads to hell, leads to rebirth as a common animal, leads to the realm of the hungry ghosts. The slightest of all the results coming from lying is that, when one becomes a human being, it leads to being falsely accused. Divisive speech…leads to the breaking of one’s friendships… Harsh speech…leads to unappealing sounds…Idle chatter… leads to words that aren’t worth taking to heart…” (AN 8.40)

1) Abstaining from Lying:

- **Honesty as a necessary quality in a student…**
  "Let an intelligent man come to me who is sincere, honest, and straightforward, and I will instruct him. I will teach him the Dhamma." (DN 25)

- **The Buddha’s advice to Rahula…**
  Then the Blessed One, having left a little bit of the remaining water in the water dipper, said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see this little bit of remaining water left in the water dipper?”

  “Yes sir.”

  “That’s how little of a contemplative2 there is in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie.”

  Having tossed away the little bit of remaining water, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this little bit of remaining water is tossed away?”

  “Yes, sir.”

  “Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is tossed away just like that.”
Having turned the water dipper upside down, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how this water dipper is turned upside down?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is turned upside down just like that.”

Having turned the water dipper right-side up, the Blessed One said to Ven. Rāhula, “Rāhula, do you see how empty & hollow this water dipper is?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Rāhula, whatever there is of a contemplative in anyone who feels no shame at telling a deliberate lie is empty & hollow just like that.

“Rāhula, it’s like a royal elephant: immense, pedigreed, accustomed to battles, its tusks like chariot poles. Having gone into battle, it uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail, but will simply hold back its trunk. The elephant trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has not given up its life to the king.’ But when the royal elephant... having gone into battle, uses its forefeet & hindfeet, its forequarters & hindquarters, its head & ears & tusks & tail & his trunk, the trainer notices that and thinks, ‘This royal elephant has given up its life to the king. There is nothing it will not do.’

“In the same way, Rāhula, when anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie, there is no evil, I tell you, he will not do. Thus, Rāhula, you should train yourself, ‘I will not tell a deliberate lie even in jest.’

“What do you think, Rāhula? What is a mirror for?”

“For reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection. (MN 61)
2) Abstaining from Divisive Speech:

- **When speaking about oneself and others…**
  (Begins with parallel verses on a person of no integrity). "Now, a person endowed with these four qualities can be known as 'a person of integrity.' Which four?
  1. "There is the case where a person of integrity, when asked, does not reveal another person's bad points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person's bad points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back (...).
  2. "Then again, a person of integrity, when unasked, reveals another person's good points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of another person's good points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back (...).
  3. "Then again, a person of integrity, when unasked, reveals his own bad points, to say nothing of when asked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own bad points in full & in detail, without omissions, without holding back (...).
  4. "Then again, a person of integrity, when asked, does not reveal his own good points, to say nothing of when unasked. Furthermore, when asked, when pressed with questions, he is one who speaks of his own good points not in full, not in detail, with omissions, holding back (...). (<AN 4.73>)

- **An image to really drive it home…**
  *Narada Bhante:*
  You are wearing many garlands, a crown, and many other types of jewelry on your hands and legs. Your body is covered with sandalwood cream. Your facial expression is very pleasant and your body shines very brightly just like the sun.

  You are surrounded by ten thousand divine maidens who serve you whatever you want.

  They wear bracelets and have golden wreaths on their heads. You look very mighty and your appearance is very majestic. When people look at you they are stunned by your appearance and their body hairs stand on end.

  But you eat the flesh off your own back. What evil deed have you committed by body speech or mind to make you eat your own flesh?

  *Ghost:*
When I was living in the human world I lied, broke friendships using divisive words, cheated others, and did lots of cunning deeds. In the middle of large gatherings of people, when I was asked to tell the truth, I lied.

I insulted others behind their backs. As a result of speaking behind others backs, today I have to eat the flesh off my own back.

You have seen how I am suffering, Narada Bhante. Now I see the truth of the words of the wise and compassionate Buddhas. I can tell you now, do not break friendships, do not tell lies, and may you not have to eat the flesh off your own back like I do!

(Pv 3.9) Note: This is likely a later text, but still conveys a powerful image.

3) Abstaining from Harsh Speech:

- Being “Suvaca”, or easy to speak to…

  “We will be easy to speak to (admonish) and make ourselves easy to speak to (admonish) purely out of esteem for the Dhamma, respect for the Dhamma, reverence for the Dhamma, devotion toward the Dhamma, honor for the Dhamma.’ Thus, bhikkhus, should you train yourselves.” (MN 21)

“Measuring Up” (MN 15)

“MA: The ancients called this sutta the “Bhikkhupātimokkha.” A bhikkhu should review himself three times daily in the way described in the sutta. If he cannot do so three times, then he should do so twice, or, at the minimum, once.”

“What, venerables, are the qualities which make one easy to speak to?

(1) Herein, one does not come to be of evil desires nor in the thrall of evil desires.
(2) one does not come to exalt himself nor to disparage others.
(3) one does not come to be wrathful, overpowered by wrath.
(4) one does not come to be wrathful and a fault-finder because of his wrath.
(5) one does not come to be wrathful and because of his wrath takes offence.
(6) one does not come to be wrathful and because of his wrath utters words bordering on wrath.
(7) one, reproved, does not blurt out reproof against the reprover. (8) one, reproved, does not disparage the reprover for the reproof. (9) one, reproved, does not round on the reprover for the reproof.
(10) one, reproved, does not shelve the question by asking the reprover another, one does not answer off the point, one does not evince temper and ill-will and sulkiness.

(11) one, reproved, succeeds in explaining their movements to the reprover.

(12) one comes to be not harsh, not spiteful.

(13) one comes to be not envious, not grudging.

(14) one comes to be not treacherous, not deceitful.

(15) one comes to be not stubborn, not proud.

(16) one does not adhere tightly to their own views, or hold on to them tenaciously, and they relinquish them easily.

These, venerables, are called the qualities that make one easy to speak to.

- **Blending like milk and water…**

  “I hope, Anuruddha, that you are all living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes.”

  “Surely, Venerable Sir, we live …”

  “But, Anuruddha, how do you live thus?”

  “Venerable sir, as to that, I think thus: ‘It is a gain for me, it is a great gain for me, that I am living with such companions in the holy life.’ I maintain bodily acts of loving-kindness towards those venerable ones both openly and privately; I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately; I maintain mental acts of loving-kindness towards them both openly and privately. I consider: ‘Why should I not set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do?’ Then I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body, venerable sir, but one in mind.” ([MN 31](#))

4) **Abstaining from Idle Chatter:**

- **Words not worth treasuring…**

  He engages in idle chatter. He speaks out of season, speaks what isn’t factual, what isn’t in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya, words that are not worth treasuring. ([AN 10:165](#))
- **Better than a thousand useless words…**

Better than a thousand useless words is one useful word, hearing which one attains peace.
Better than a thousand useless verses is one useful verse, hearing which one attains peace.
Better than reciting a hundred meaningless verses is the reciting of one verse of Dhamma, hearing which one attains peace. (Dhp 100-102)

**Additional Readings & Resources:**

- **Conditions for Admonishment:**

  The pattern here is this: Before admonishing the bhikkhu, one must first make sure that one is qualified to admonish him. According to Cv.IX.5.1-2, this means knowing that: 1) One is pure in bodily conduct. 2) One is pure in verbal conduct. 3) One is motivated by good will, not vindictiveness. 4) One is learned in the Dhamma. 5) One knows both Patimokkhas (the one for the bhikkhus and the one for the bhikkhunis) in detail.

  Furthermore, one determines that:

  1) I will speak at the right time and not at the wrong time.

  2) I will speak about what is factual and not what is unfactual.

  3) I will speak gently and not harshly.

  4) I will speak what is connected with the goal (attha) and not what is unconnected with the goal (this can also mean: what is connected with the case and not what is unconnected with the case).

  5) I will speak from a mind of good will and not from inner aversion.

  Cv.IX.5.7 and Pv.XV.5.3 add that one should keep five qualities in mind: compassion, solicitude for the other’s welfare, sympathy, a desire to see him rehabilitated, and esteem for the Vinaya.

  If one feels unqualified in terms of these standards yet believes that another bhikkhu has committed an offense for which he has not made amends, one should find another bhikkhu who is qualified to handle the charge and inform him. Not to inform anyone in cases like this is to incur a p›cittiya or a derived offense under Pc 64, except in the extenuating circumstances discussed under that rule.

  The next step, if one is qualified to make the charge, is to look for a proper time and place to talk with the other party—for example, when he is not likely to get embarrassed or upset—and then to ask his leave, i.e., to ask permission to speak with him: “Let the venerable one give me leave. I want to speak with you. To accuse him of an
offense without asking leave is to incur a dukkata. (Mv.II.16.1). (Buddhist Monastic Code, Pg. 136)

- **Steering Compliments back to the Dhamma:**
  “While you are training in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, there might arise mutual verbal friction, insolence in views, mental annoyance, bitterness, and dejection. Then whichever bhikkhu you think is the most reasonable of those who side together on the one part should be approached and addressed thus: ‘While we were training in concord, friend, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, there arose mutual verbal friction, insolence in views, mental annoyance, bitterness, and dejection. If the Recluse knew, would he censure that?’ Answering rightly, the bhikkhu would answer thus: ‘While we were training…If the Recluse knew, he would censure that.’ ‘‘But, friend, without abandoning that thing, can one realize Nibbāna?’ Answering rightly, the bhikkhu would answer thus: ‘Friend, without abandoning that thing, one cannot realize Nibbāna…’

  “If others should ask that bhikkhu thus: ‘Was it the venerable one who made those bhikkhus emerge from the unwholesome and established them in the wholesome?’

  **answering rightly, the bhikkhu would answer thus: ‘Here, friends, I went to the Blessed One. The Blessed One taught me the Dhamma. Having heard that Dhamma, I spoke to those bhikkhus. The bhikkhus heard that Dhamma, and they emerged from the unwholesome and became established in the wholesome.’ Answering thus, the bhikkhu neither exalts himself nor disparages others; he answers in accordance with the Dhamma in such a way that nothing which provides a ground for censure can be legitimately deduced from his assertion.” (MN 103)

- **Resources**
  [Thus Should You Train Yourselves](#) - A Compendium of Trainings from the Pāli Canon