

# 2006-11-05 Right Speech

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## SPEAKERS

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There's a Buddhist saying that says, when you're meditating, watch your mind. And when you're out in public, watch your speech. Watch your mouth. This year, we're doing a year long series on the Eightfold Path. And then periodically I'll give these talks over the course of the year focusing on each element of the Eightfold Path, and this month the element is right speech. So I thought I would talk a little bit about this notion of right speech as it fits into the Eightfold Path. So a little bit background for the full path. The Noble Eightfold Path is that path, which has a particular purpose as a particular direction. That is it has a purpose for liberation. And that's a whole topic about what liberation is. But in brief, it's, it's that release of the heart and the mind from the forces of contraction of clinging of compulsion of fear of egotism, that, that somehow keeps us in states of suffering. And so, the release of that is liberation. And that can be done in small ways, moment by moment. And some people find a lot of meaning in some momentary tuning into some possibility of freedom here now, where freedom is only, you know, a breath away, or even closer. And other people get a lot of meaning from the idea that, that the forces of, of clinging, of attachment of bondage of compulsion inside of us of the ego is very deeply rooted in the psyche, and they get a lot of meaning from the idea that it's a slow process of slowly working towards some degree of freedom of release. But the Eightfold Path has to do with this purpose of liberation. And that's very important to remember because you could have other purposes in your life. And you're welcome to have that when you look, but the question the Eightfold Path is asking is, how is it we can live our life? If what you want is liberation, how can you live your life so your life supports that movement towards liberation? If you're not interested in liberation, then you don't have to listen to this talk. And I say that a little bit. I said it carefully because it can sound the April pass sometimes can sound moralistic, like this is what you should do. This is how you should live your life. Especially when you get into speech, you know, right speech. And there certainly is. virtue and morality and ethics and integrity is very important in Buddhism and the area that Ethics in Buddhism is bigger than what's discussed in the full path. But the Eightfold Path focuses on that part of ethics that has to do with what supports you, you if what you want us to move towards liberation is

freedom. So for that purpose so the Eightfold Path begins with right view, which means the right understanding about what really is at stake when, when you're looking at liberation. And in order to do that, you have to understand something about the opposite of liberation. You have what's the opposite of liberation in the word languages. I don't like to use so much but if you can't get away from perhaps, is bondage and you find in the Buddhist language, he used the word bondage often enough, that somehow when when we operate when we function when we're motivated by force inside of us, that we feel like we have no control over and When we say things and do things, even think things and feel things that we rather not have happened. But we don't feel like we could stop it. And that momentum of compulsive or addictive or forceful kind of movements in US can cause us suffering causes pain. And you can wonder sometimes Why am I suffering so much? And sometimes it's a bit of a mystery. Sometimes it's very obvious. But even though it's obvious, sometimes very easy to say, Okay, I'll just let go of it. And that's happily ever after. So, the, so the beginning of it is to begin understanding something about what bondage is, or what is it that limits us or contracts us or what is the cause of suffering, and in particular, to begin orienting ourselves towards that part of our suffering that we contribute to. And that's a huge challenge. It's a huge challenge for all of us to begin appreciating our contribution towards our suffering. It's easy to blame other people. When the government's we can all go out tomorrow or Monday, Tuesday. We love to do it one day, a year. You know, but we you know, or we can blame our, you know, our relatives or family, we can upbringing we can blame all kinds of things out there. And there's some truth that the world contributes to our suffering. We can never forget that. However, that's not where the Buddhist path is found. The Buddha eightfold path is not found out there. It's found by figuring out what is my contribution to the suffering. So if you stick your hand into a fire, you don't blame the fire for getting burnt. You should be interested in your contribution to that. You know, well, you know, what was I doing? You know, one of the things and so the idea is to take responsibility for our contribution, and in a shorthand What Buddhists called our contribution is thirst or addiction or something compulsive inside of us. And then it is to find out how to let go of that compulsion. So that's the beginning of the path is understanding, suffering, the cause of suffering and the release of suffering. To appreciate that's where it's about. But if you want that release enough liberation, it's also helpful if you begin kind of orienting yourself or setting certain intention or certain attitude for how you're going to live your life, then how are you going to integrate her? It's one thing to be a weekend liberated. You know, I just didn't do it on Sunday morning. It's nice. But if we want to do it, you know, the whole the whole week, the whole life, then it takes more than just kind of showing up, you know, for Sunday morning, it takes, you know, what does it take in terms of, it takes more than just a ritual more than just kind of following certain rules. It takes some kind of interchange. And one of those interchanges is to take interest and respond to ability for our contribution to turn in here. I read recently, maybe it's an old, saying, someone said, that person of integrity would rather suffer injustice and cause it an interesting idea. So if you had to choose between the two, what would you do? So the first is a kind of upgrade integrity would rather suffer injustice than to actually be the cause of it to others. But is there some way of, of, you know, suffering injustice, that we were upright in the process? We mean, it maintains our dignity or nobility, or is it possible to receive an injustice and be crushed by it, you know, fall back to anger and hostility? Is there some inner way of responding to our world? Where are you Our attitude is not flowing around by the whims of the conditions of the world. So the

so the second aspect of a full tank, is begin taking some beginning to take some responsibility for our inner attitude that we bring into whatever endeavor we're going to do. And in particular, the idea is to shift from an attitude and approach or an intention where the switch from switch from those intentions that have to do with causing harm and to those that do not cause harm. That's the primary one. And then there's two others that are often talked about, but the idea of not causing harm. Because if you want to be liberated, to cause harm, intentionally cause harm to yourself or to others, is not operating from a place of liberation. So just because it goes against the grain that moves so against, you know, to be kind of to come back and find out how can I maintain myself be mindful and clear. So I can be apprised in any situation and not cause because sometimes wish that intention to as a background what we're doing now in the Eightfold Path, they are eight steps, and they're called each of them is prefaced by the word right. And the Pali word Indian word is summer. And, and right here means right, the right tool for a particular job. And a job of course, here's the duration. So what's the right tool for that purpose? So in terms of our intentionality, the right tool is to have the intention not causing any harm, or maybe the opposite of that the actual cost benefit. Then we get to right speech. Right Speech is that speech which supports us moving towards liberation. Wrong speech is the wrong tool is the kind of speech that actually keeps us in bondage or keeps us suffering keeps us kind of, in some states we don't want to do. So, is it possible to look at our acts of speech and analyze them? By whether they move us towards states of health, or liberation or freedom, or happiness? Or they move us in the opposite direction? Is it possible to make that analysis and as part of the Eightfold Path, the Buddha suggesting there's actually very important to make that analysis not just to talk casually, you know, carelessly, whatever comes out your mouth is fine to say, but actually be concerned about what it is that you're saying what you're doing. So again, it's taking responsibility for ourselves, and not some magic thinking or not some kind of looking for spirit spiritual Some kind of comfort as your beautiful kind of spiritual kind of sense of comfort out there that we're all held nicely by the Dharma, but rather the Dharma practice, but looking in here, and how is it that I can be more upright how I can be more responsible? And so we begin with our speech. How can I speak in a more careful way? I'm really concerned by saying that it sounds heavy. You know, oh, no, you know, another one of these fire and brimstone sermons from Gil. That's not the spirit of it. The spirit is if you have this interest, you know, like, if you want to learn baseball, then you have certain things you got to learn how to be certain rules to follow. So do you want to play this liberation game? So, the Buddha, then he defines right speech, he lists four kinds of wrong speech, and then four kinds of rights speech and the kind of opposites of each other. So, the first one is the wrong speech is speech which is false lying and the right speech. the right tool is speech which is truthful, tell the truth. The second is malicious speech was wrong speech, speech that has intention to cause harm. And right speech is speech which has the intention of causing benefit bringing harmony being conquered malicious speech, speech speech is often said to be speech when wants to divide, like gossiping, or sometimes has a nature of dividing people. or so, the second is malicious speech is wrong speech and beneficial speech causing benefit. The third is a harsh speech. And this is speech which is not necessarily wanting to harm someone who's just spoken in such a harsh way that it feels painful to hear. And then the opposite of that, I suppose would be gentle speech, or comforting speech. And then the last one is usually translated to English as idle speech. And I learned the Friday that the idle speech, apparently the Pali word for it

means something like the empty husk of sesame seed or something. The word so it kind of Empty speech maybe is a better translation speech, which is kind of vacuous? And it is the shell of speech and has no. And so then the opposite of idle speech, I guess would be, I forget what the part what it says in the text, but, you know, which is not idle, which is beneficial, useful, useful speech. So, this kind of list, but what's more interesting list, and certainly more interesting for people who are meditators, who are on this path of liberation is not following this like rules, you know, thinking about your speech or have to analyze it, you know, that can be useful you can, you can avoid causing a lot of harm. But what's interesting is not what you say, ultimately, what's interesting is what's behind your speech. What motivates it. That's what's really interesting for people interested in liberation, is what motivates is what's different. Inside the heart, which is interesting knots kind of the symptoms of what's expressed. So when you're going to tell a lie, when you're gonna lie, what is it that motivates that? When you're saying the truth, what motivates that? When you're going to speak maliciously? What motivates that? When you're going to speak in a way that's beneficial, what motivates that? idle speech? What motivates that? And one of the most powerful ways of practicing mindfulness is not on the cushion, not meditation, but rather his mindfulness of your speech. If you ask yourself the question, why did I say that? Why do I just say that? Why am I saying this? what's motivating me to say this? And so, you know, we know it's pretty embarrassing. Pretty Quickly, if you really ask that question, and if you come with a single answer while you're saying something, you probably haven't explored it as fully as you could. All because that person needs that information. Okay, so an example I made up for this Friday, which comes to my nose. If I go up north camino here and someone asks me, how do I get to the post office in Redwood City? I could say, well, you go south and El Camino. Take a left to Jefferson Jefferson going through the train tracks past the first stoplight. And on the right is the post office. Right. So why why did I say that? Well, they asked me, sorry, told them. Leave me alone. Don't bother me. But you know what other motivations were going on while you said that. Oh, I want it to Show them how clever I am in giving really clear directions that they foolproof, you know, just show you how to have a clever direction giver. Or I noticed that some other IMC people were kind of around camino. And, and you know, if I could show how compassionate and caring I am, they have things very good about me. So I'm really gonna make an effort to really kind of really be present for that person and give clear directions. And so then, you know, showing off, maybe as part of it, there could be other motivations going on, you know, besides just giving, giving, giving information. Sometimes we are trying to paint a picture of ourselves to others, but what we say like I've showed up here to teach sometimes until someone I'm not prepared today, before the talk, or after the talk, I wasn't prepared for that. And that's interesting information. I guess we could put it in the Chronicle. You know, filled with not prepared, newsworthy item. But you know, really what's motivating these and protecting myself. Don't judge me, you know, because it wasn't prepared doesn't shouldn't judge what I eat or what comes out of my mouth. That's, that's really, you know, I'm trying to say something protects me. I'm trying to create an image, I'm trying to represent myself a certain way hoping that you would then take that representation and use that to see who I am. For whatever lost cause. But I think we do that a lot, right? We say things hoping to get a certain response hoping to get a certain it create a certain image someone sees a certain way. We try to speak kindly to see this kind people or cleverly or whatever, you know, all kinds of ways. So there's a lot going on. There's a lot of motivation behind

what we sometimes say. And so one of the ways I'm suggesting more very powerful way of doing mindfulness practice is to ask yourself, why am I saying this? Why am I going to say it? Why am I saying it? Why did I say it? And chances are a good percentage of you will find that that's actually very revealing. And sometimes very embarrassing. You might go find a friend, go for a walk with a friend. And so, you know, I never really spent a lot of time asking the question, exploring the question, why did I say things? Maybe, you know, I could tell you something I said recently to someone, and you can help me kind of explore on packet. What were some of the reasons what's going on behind that? What are the what was my emotions were my, my motivations or my beliefs was going on that kind of fed into saying the post office is done or you know, it could be something very seemingly very innocent, but it might it might attack it, or you might choose something as a much more, you know, interesting and directions. So then if you look at right at these these definitions of Right Speech and wrong speech, what are some of the motivations for lying for false speech so, while somebody make some suggestions we won't hold you to with a thought from firsthand experience. But you can imagine why some other people might lie. Yes. To not hurt someone. Uh huh. So that's one motivation to lie in order to protect someone. And then sometimes it backfires. Yes, the police cover up one's bad behavior. So one look looks good perhaps or Yes. self protection. Yes. personal gain. Yes. To avoid conflict. Oh, yes. Maybe just a couple of words. I'll just repeat it. And then if it's longer than we use the mic, thank you. Yes. To enhance one's ego or self image to get a laugh. So other people like us when I was when I was in a Zen monastery because it hurts so much for me. I became acutely aware of how much I was motivated by wanting to be liked. now heading in was very painful to have that account constant amazing social gymnastics I started to accomplish to avoid punishment so some so some of these motivations if you look back and ask what's the what's motivated you discover these kinds of things but if you step back one step further into into your heart What do you find the step behind those and that's a very question we'll see what comes up? Yes. Fear Okay. What else? Step back behind the motivation what motive what's what prompts the motivation? Yeah. Hurt a sense of self. Yes. loneliness, craving insecurity. So if we if we restart with our speech, look at what motivates it, and then looks at what's the behind that and bring our attention to that. Why is that useful? Why is it helpful to kind of go back and back and kind of sit there? be very mindful of that fear the insecurity of loneliness hurt? Why? Yes. So through the ownership attempt to stop the externalization great. We can see how we're touching our own pain with our words. Rexie how we're touching the pain through the Words. Yes. It's hard to speak the truth unless we're in touch with that internal truth. So even if the true if the inside is in pain in some way, it's actually sometimes more powerful to speak that than to hide it and lie about it. And let the truth come out. This is what mindfulness is mindfulness can be seen as an act of saying the truth to yourself, being honest to yourself, and then mindful speech involves practicing mindfulness out loud. So you can can speak what's there. So if we trace it back to these things, then the suggestion in Buddhism is that that tracing back, you've come to a point place where you can begin finding freedom. If you have this fear, insecurity and loneliness and craving and all these things deep down inside and you ignore it by only focusing on the rule of what's right and wrong speech, then you would stay with that, with those unfortunate kind of states. You see what I'm saying? So that's why it's very important not to take the teachings of the right speech, as being rules that you have to follow kind of kind of a surface or now after you speak the truth in some way, but actually kind of go deeper



inside. Now, if you go deeper inside and you look at honest speech, when honest speech comes out of being healthy, like for the best reasons, what are some of the deep step back and back? What are some deep kind of ways of being inside that would prompt Speech compassion pride historically pride is a negative thing, but nowadays it has a better so self dignity self worth. The Buddha came from a warrior caste and so the certain kind of pride or dignity or self respect that warriors traditionally in the old days often had so much so that some people I've seen wanted to translate the word rough summer which is the right Right Speech right action all that in April path as upright. Record upright upright speech, which they upright to self respecting sort of pride. Yeah. Courage because it takes courage to see so it takes courage, compassion, courage, pride or self respect. Yeah. transparency. And I say a little bit more to the harmony between the inner world and the outer world. Yes. skeptic skepticism about your own ego. Good. So, that comes together perhaps with a sense of inquiry of curiosity interest. So the so called session important points, maybe I'll get away with saying one more time. That is a very powerful way of practicing mindfulness is to bring your attention to what is it that prompts or motivates you to say what you do. And then don't get burdened by that in some moralistic way. But rather keeps focusing backward into yourself to see where you can clarify something really deep about yourself. And as you go deeper and deeper to find where's the freedom? Where's the liberation there? If you do that at chances are I think you'll find that become obvious. That line malicious speech, harsh speech and idle speech, entitled A little bit, maybe a little bit ambiguous, but especially the first three. They come from places of not being free The Explorer expressions of someplace inside of us, which is not free. We might feel it in the surface or I was free to lie, you know, it was great. But if you actually trace it back, you probably find that something's operating there. We actually somehow being constrained, constrained or bound or compulsive or something. And then and then you can ask the question, where's the freedom now? Can I kind of come from Can I kind of find the freedom? And if I find the freedom or Intuit the freedom, then how do I respond? How do I speak to others? How do I how do I talk them? And then conversely, if we see that truthful speech, kind speech, gentle speech maybe. And useful speech is much more and it can be much more expression of freedom, then it's possible to use our speech as a A mirror to help us understand when we might be entrapped and when we might be free now certainly possible to be in bondage while you spoke speak the truth while you're talking kindly while you're talking with usefully right I mean, some people tell the truth because they're really afraid in some some unhealthy way. Some people tell the truth is a weapon. Some people choose telling is a form of malicious speech. You know, it's really gonna Java to the person. And so the fact that just is just simply kind of say, I'm speaking these, you know, the Right Speech according to these criteria. That's not enough to make it the Noble Eightfold Path or the upright eightfold right speech. Again, have to look back back. So now, let me set all this. Maybe you can understand one of the reasons why meditation practice is so important for the Eightfold Path because As you do meditation practice, it allows you to settle on yourself, and see deeper into yourself and have access to depths within yourself. So you can begin answering these questions in a really deep and useful way. Someone who doesn't have a deep sense of themselves deeper understanding of themselves, and some deep ability to settle and relax and let go doesn't have the same reference point for understanding what's behind their speech. And if you understand yourself really deeply, then maybe the tendency is to take these as rules, surface rules, so it just kind of sits with you. But if you

have this position provides a really great resource, a sense of well being and sense of freedom, a sense of ease, a sense of calm, sense of peace, a sense of something, sense of insight, kind of seeing, that gives you a very, very different resource or understanding, to help you analyze and understand what is it that motivates our speakers. So the two are forming wonderfully together. So the more you kind of have some experience of meditation settling you, the more that helps you understand your speech, the more you kind of study your speech. understand what's behind that. The more material it gives you to settle in your meditation, to free your meditation to its wonderful spiral kind of deepens with it deepens together. Having said all this, I would also would like to say that mindfulness of speaking for most people, is one of the most difficult places to be mindful. And it's certainly difficult while we're speaking, but it's possible. And again, meditation helps a lot because one of the functions of meditate book of mindfulness meditation is to teach you how to be in your body more in your breath more and the body becomes a great supporter help for this. process of staying mindful while you speak, understanding what's going on. But it's also possible to be mindful just before you speak. And I would give a tremendous kind of cheerleading for the usefulness of pausing before you speak. It doesn't have to notice the notice that you're pausing. Except for you, or they could it could be a long pause, say, Well, let me think about that. You know, you find yourself wanting to sit, tell someone, you know, to say, You're wrong. You're terrible person. That's a great time to pause. Let me catch my breath here. I mean, think about this for a moment. Let me think about this for a moment. Most people will give you a moment if you say let me think about this for a moment. And then kind of check in and see what's On. So because it's so hard to speak, to be mindful while you speak, it can be very helpful to pause and be mindful before you speak. And then it can also be helpful to be mindful after you speak. The you know, we focus a lot to the language of kind of our Buddhist tradition on being in the present moment. Because it's really helpful to a powerful to be in the present moment. But it's, I think a wise life also is a reflective life. It spends a little bit of time reviewing what happened. You had a conversation that was difficult to see go for a walk and just review that conversation what was going on there was really happening. And the more we kind of do kind of healthy review. I think the easier it's going to be to it will be Be mindful while you're actually doing the speaking. So mindfulness speech involves being in your body involves being present while you speak involves maybe pausing and checking in before you speak. And it also involves reviewing a little bit after you've spoken. And one of the things we check into is what is it that motivated me to speak this? What went on? What's happening? So now you understand why Buddhists can say, if you meditate, watch your mind. When in public, watch your speech. It's a very useful, very powerful thing. So I hope my speech was was right this morning. If it wasn't, I apologize. I'll review it and think about it some. So thank you very much.