

# 2008-10-12 Mindfulness of Speaking Part 1

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## SPEAKERS

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So, today I'd like to start a series of talks on mindful speech, the practice of speech, bringing practice to speech. And I use that expression carefully mindful speech to include something broader than ethical speech. There's a lot of discussion in Buddhism on right speech, what kind of speeches, ethical things like that. But that's in some ways, the icing on the cake. It's very important how we speak and what we say. But when we think about Buddhist spirituality, or spiritual practice, how we speak is important part of that. But it's often useful to see how it fits into a larger context. And not just the context, but fits into a something more deeper in ourselves than what comes out of our mouths. Now It can be quite consequential if we say, it's often pointed out that the primary way that people are connected to each other is through speech, through our friends or neighbors or work through all kinds of situations. It's how we speak that we make our connections. And doesn't take a lot of reflection to realize how much suffering could come from speech, and also how much healing and joy and delight and come from how we speak as well. its stance stands out and highlights for me. The discussion in the public arena these days, the news, so much of it has to do with speech with the election and with the presidential candidates are saying and what other people are saying and it's very consequential when people say elections are lost in one on what people say, and what and also the impact That our speech has struck also by the state of our current economy. And how number of people are saying that our economy is built a lot on confidence, not so much on finances. And, and so having a president or presidential candidates say things that express confidence in the system trends translates into a whole nation or whole globe of people, hopefully, who get the message and then change their habits. They change their action. And there's a loss of confidence to what people say that has a detrimental impact as well. So these things play out also in our daily lives. What we say can have a big impact on the morale confidence. It can have a big impact on how divisive as our relationships are, how healing are connected there. They also have a big impact on how well we're connected to ourselves and, and how we feel about ourselves. I've said things that I've later regretted not just regretted for the moment, but regretted To this day, I regret some things I've said that has the lingering effect. And things that people have said to me, has had lingering effect on me. What comes to mind right now is when I was about 13, or 14, and I suppose I was just getting interested in girls. And so I came home to dinner one day, and said something about some girl that I had some contact with. The first time I've ever met said something like that at home to my parents. And, and what I got, what I got in return was being teased. And it was kind of, I think, I'm sure it was good hearted, you know, good nature, whatever. But in my fragile 13 year old ego It was really difficult. And so as a result, I never talked to my parents about my relationships with girls throughout my teenage years is like going there again. And so you know, some small little thing. Maybe it was innocent, innocent enough in their in their eyes had a big influence over me in a long time. In talking about speech, and trying to broaden it into kind of mindfulness of speech, it might be useful to distinguish between morality and ethics. morality, one way of defining morality is that it's a code of conduct of the rules and codes by which people live their lives by and ethics is the theory

behind those codes behind those rules. It's the principles, the ideas, the values that are behind it. And if we got to rush into the code of conduct, no, you should always speak truthfully should always speak

kindly should always speak what's beneficial, right? If things if you rush into the conduct without understanding the values and principles behind it, then I think it's kind of can be kind of shallow and also a little bit fragile in the whole thing. If we understand something about the values behind it, it isn't just a matter of understanding the values in Buddhism, but also understanding the body, the physical body or the heart, that from which those values come out of. And so it's a matter of touching into something deeper in us. That's an intellectual understanding. So I'll give you a I think is a wonderful example. Some years ago, there was a doctoral study done at see St. Saybrook university or college here at San Francisco and it's studied the ethical IQ of high school graduates and it gave us kind of a test, ethical test to see how ethical they were. And different high schools around the country. And one of the results that was very consistent was high school to graduates from what the Waldorf school system in particular private school kind of system, pedigree, particular pedagogy. They scored exceptionally high in ethical IQs comparable correlate to graduate students in philosophy. I don't know what makes them so ethical, but at least to me, they've been wrestling with these issues in a way and, but there was one exception and the exception was a High School in Honolulu. So, the adviser to the doctoral students said, you have to go to Honolulu and find out why that's the exception. And so, the researcher went there and looked into it, and found out that it, indeed was apparently a public high school, I think, or it wasn't at least it was not a Waldorf High School, but turned out a good percentage of those high school students had gone to a Waldorf grade school earlier. So then, the question is, so then the theory the question was, well, if it had something to do with a Walder system, and something happened before, like sixth grade, what was it about the first six years of the Waldorf education that led these kids to later be so you know, how much higher ethical capacity and other people so no one knows for sure. But the Waldorf systems theory But why this is the case is because in the early grades, the Waldorf system teaches mindfulness of the body. Isn't that something as opposed to saying, well, Thou shalt not, but rather developed a heightened sensitivity awareness of their own body and their own body in relationship to other people. And they do it a variety of different ways. My son goes to all their schooling some that seems a little bit odd to me to say it's to my speech day. But maybe they do the kind of dance that a lot of the kids kind of don't like so much. But it's, it puts them in their bodies, and it puts it and they dance together in the correct coordinated way. And they have to be tuned into each other from starting first grade. Tune into each other as a group, doing his different moves and dances and kind of things Tai Chi kind of things and And I think is one of the ways they're teaching, you know, to be present in your body be aware of your body. They teach math, partly through the body, they haven't actually had the kid standing in the classroom and moving as they do the multiplication tables, to get them in their body. So the idea of being in your body, this is I'm not here to champion Wilder, I'm here to champion, a champion, the importance of being in our body. And how is it being connected and being sensitive through our body leads to becoming more ethical?

I think a simple answer is that there's much more sensitivity to the world around us and to how the world affects us and to what's going on inside ourselves when we're connected to our body. And our body will reveal a lot to us about the impact of our speech, in fact, of the source of the motivation for a speech and the relationship our speech has to how we feel in here. If we speak in unkind ways and harsh ways, and you're connected to your body while you speak that way, you'll feel how lousy it feels in your own body. If you speak in kind ways, and you connect it to your body, you'll feel how that feels feels like in your own body. If you're connected to your body and you're with someone who's suffering, chances are you have greater capacity for empathy. Because of picking up other people's emotions, is not just a cognitive things, you know, you sit there and you look at them and say, oh, their mouth is turned down, and there's drops of water coming out of the air or their eyes. And this must mean that,

you know, it's not like that. It's you kind of pick it up, you know, viscerally. And so the more we're connected here, the more we can pick up and be aware of. Also, mindfulness of the body only occurs in the present moment. You're, you're connected to the present moment, if you're in your body. So the greater the greater the attentiveness is said. through your body, the more you're tuning into what's happening here and now the more we're tuning into things through our thinking, the less more likely it is that we're fall into the past to politics fall into the future, we fall into all kinds of things. I've had conversations with people occasionally almost. I thought where I'm having a nice conversation and then something they say makes me think about something and start thinking about it. And they keep talking. And I'm thinking about it. What did they say? You know, if you please repeat that, where were you? You know, I can lose touch completely. Not none of you, I'm sure has that problem and he And sometimes even more very embarrassing. The thing I have thing I'm thinking about is what I know they need to be told. And then a couple of times I've wondered, you know, I think I paid to tell them something. But I wonder if they just tell that to me. It's a little bit dangerous to say something that people you know, you're not paying attention to what they're saying. So, anyway, the body is much more in the present moment. When we look at the place where Right Speech occurs in the Eightfold Path, a full path being the classic description to the path of practice. Right, Right Speech happens after orienting oneself on the path having a sense of where the path is and After establishing the right attitude for being on the path. So after those two things are established, and then we actually start walking the path, according to the Eightfold Path, the first step is right speech, the first section in a walking attack, living it, practicing it is offered through right speech. I think it's a great thing because it's the foundation for so much that follows. And it's establishing a foundation for our path of practice, in a relationship to other people and our relationship to ourselves in relationship. It's very easy to practice meditation. Many people get interested in Buddhism first because of meditation. And they don't realize that that's actually that's actually the advanced step of the path. You're supposed to kind of prepare yourself. And the first way of very self is establishing good relationships. You don't know when to get them perfect. But you know, somewhat good relationships with the world around you people around You. And so focusing on your speech is one way. But it comes after getting oriented and having the right attitude. So there's preparation involved. And one of the best preparations happens to be meditation. So it's all circular. And so we don't get too strict about the this have followed these steps that step like way.

So if you do something like mindfulness and mindfulness meditation or any kind of meditation and develop a deeper connection to yourself, deeper capacity for calm, the deeper capacity to pause and a deeper capacity to listen. Then you have a greater sensitivity, empathy, to suffering and yourself and suffering outside. You have greater understanding, sensitivity to happiness and peace within and happiness and peace in others as well. And that greater sensitivity then gives you a very important information About how we want to relate to people, how we want to relate to ourselves. So we start with developing this greater sensitivity. And what's beautiful about cultivating mindfulness is it's not just a matter of creating greater sensitivity. But chances are fairly high. As you become more sensitive, more present, more mindful. You start feeling better. Calm, mindful presence, over time, produces a much better internal sense of well being. If we're always busy, running around thinking, anxious about this and that projecting forward and backward in time with our thoughts. It's hard for us to settle into our bodies and into our hearts. If we're present, and learn how to let go or thoughts, we have a chance of settling, relaxing, unwinding, and hopefully discovering some deeper sense of well being. That deeper sense of loss Being in turn, provides a wonderful foundation to look at how do we want to be? How do we want to relate to other people? I think most of you understand or seen that how you speak to others. And perhaps also to yourself, has a lot to do with the state of this your mood, your mental state, how you are. If you are really angry and upset and late and frustrated, the chances of saying something really fast, that you'll regret for years is a lot easier to say than if you're relaxed and quiet and happy. I've seen it in myself frustration, where I just and the places where place I've seen it in the last years

that has been the most challenge actually is in family life. with kids, and there's a way in which they kind of lead me to become to be frustrated. And it's so hard because you know, it's hard to know when you're supposed to do things and say things, you know. And so then I err on the side of waiting too long or something. And then there's been a couple of times where one of my sons has said something or done something. And the words came out of my mouth before I chose to even come out where they come from, you know, how could that be? But the condition for that was, it didn't just come out of the blue. I was in a particular mood. I was in a particular state of being a frustrated, upset, hurried, impatient. And so that led to kind of, you know, the conditions for speaking quite quickly. In the mean, other times where I've been very calm, feel good center and I've walked into situation which in other times be very, very frustrating. And you know, I can I can take it you know, all kinds of things yelling and screaming. Sometimes they go home and they call it the witching hour Sunday and some of you have had kids know this expression I didn't know about it until I had kids the witching hour it's usually around five o'clock before dinner boy. And I've had situations at home where I've tried every possible parenting trick every possible way I could think of to try to get decent behavior from a kid that decent behavior meaning alternative to hangry frustrating, demanding, yelling,

snarling

you know, just and nothing helped nothing until we coaxed him into eating. And, you know, we could coaxed him into tricked him into eating some food. Finally, he settled down. It was a food issue. It wasn't an ethical issue or, you know, wasn't a parenting issue. And so I tell you that story, just that, you know that how frustrating it can be when nothing works. And so there have been times when I've gone back, come home, and I've been in a very spacious, calm, kind of I feel good and nothing, that kid will say, will faze me and there's nothing comes out of my mouth spontaneously. So that our mood, the way we feel has a big impact on how we are and what we say. So before looking at the ethics, or the morality of speech, I think it's much more important to look at how we can become mindful, attentive, more sensitive to ourselves, and develop an image of ourselves to a greater sense of well being. So meditation hopefully is one of that one of those ways. Another way that we have in Buddhism is cultivating loving kindness. Learning about the practice of loving kindness, or friendliness, and then not just leaving it to chance, but actually spending some time cultivating some friendliness, some kindness. So when we come into situations, we're more predisposed to, to tune into situation from a client perspective. Sometimes before I go into new situations with socialists situations, I'll spend some time sitting in the car, doing something before I go in reflecting on loving kindness, thinking about it, doing practicing loving kindness little bit. And I don't have to bring the practice with me into the social situations normally, but I find I've kind of tried to predispose myself. It's not a matter of talking myself into something I'm not. It's mostly a matter of reminding myself. It's really great friendliness, such a nice thing. So there are these practices. So thinking about practices. And then while we speak, while we're in in in conversation, there are things to do in conversations that come prior to reflecting on what we should say in the situation. And one of the great things to do is to be mindful of what's happening in the conversation. I try spend a lot of time being mindful of my body. When I'm coming conversation, what's happening to me here? Because I get all these cues about my state of mind, my reactions, my motivations, from my own body. So as my stomach getting tense, am I starting to kind of tighten up in some way, and I started to get tired. Getting tired is a wonderful cue and conversation. You never get bored getting bored. It's a wonderful cue. If you knew how wonderful it was, you start getting bored right away. So often indication on that something something interesting is happening right now. And this is going to look more carefully what's happening, what's going on here. So the so and so one of the ways of being mindful in conversation is to be more interested in listening than in talking I love the expression. God gave us two ears and one mouth. So we can listen twice as much as we speak. I get to speak so much as a Dharma teacher, because I did all my listening before.

Do you find it very strange to be sitting in front of all these people just talking away? It seems very odd to me, but anyway, you guys need to be listening to me back some of you.

So,

I called on the subconscious Of course, saying that you know, listen twice as much as speak and then monopolizing the conversation.

So

So listening is a great thing. Then we will listen to is not not Only the other person but also to ourselves. Now one of the great things to listen to, and to explore in mindful speech is listen to your own self talk. How do you talk to yourself? And when we get to the ethical aspects of the world kind of things around speaking, in a few weeks How will you evaluate the ethics of your own self talk? Chances are there are people who would never say out loud, the things that they say to themselves, about other people, but even even more amazing about themselves. Sometimes people are more cruel to themselves and your self talk than they are to other people. So to listen to that as well. What are we saying? What are we thinking? We're telling ourselves in different situations. And then again before looking at the, you know, the morality of it, become sensitive to how that self talk is affecting our body, heart and mind. It's not just disembodied words. If it's very harsh and critical, it hurts. And to feel the pain of that is actually a very important information. And one of the things we do in mindfulness practice is we stop for hurt. We stopped for suffering, the Buddhist bumper sticker. I stopped for suffering. And it's an important bumper sticker because most people it's bumper sticker is I avoid suffering. I run from suffering. I blame for suffering. You know anything but be present. for it. And there are people who get angry when they get them hear that you're supposed to stop and pay attention to suffering. But in the Buddhist context for spirituality, there's a tremendous amount of learning. That can happen when we stop and pay attention to suffering. We can learn what the causes of it what triggers it with the impulses are behind it with beliefs are. And also by by stopping and feeling sensing, where the hurt is, there's a half a chance for that hurt place inside of us to relax. That hurts place inside of us to soften. But if we don't give it a fair chance to don't give presents to that place of hurt, it doesn't have a chance to teach us and doesn't have a chance to soften. And so if we recoil from the hurt chances are that the mind the thinking mind, will can perpetuate the kind of patterns of thinking the only causes more pain puts more salt And so the idea of listening and paying attention, stopping and noticing what's here. There are people who teach the practice of mindful speaking number of Buddhist teachers who really specialize it, specialize in it. And one of the first things they always say around what to do in mindful speaking, is to pause. Whereas pausing, have to do with it. pausing gives you a chance to relax, pausing gives you a chance to tune in to what's going on. pausing gives you a chance to reflect more deeply, what is it you actually want to say? So hit pause, pause long enough that we can reflect consider what is actually happening. In this whole event of communication, what is being communicated? What are we speaking from? What's the container, out of which the speaking is coming from? So what's the container here? Who are you? What container Have you made for yourself? container meaning what kind of body mind heart kind of mood or state? Have you created here? What kind of body state mind Do you want to have? When you speak? Can you take some responsibility for the container from which you speak? So pause tuned into that. And one of the great little statements in conversation is let me think about that a little bit.

You know, just a moment to make it you can be with that little bit. Most people Give you a few seconds, then you say it that way. And then you check in and tune in and feel. And the more charged that conversation is, the more useful it is to say. Let me think about that for a moment. And it really even



even a better practice and a better but even more, more effective practices way and really charge conversations. Just to say, you know, we'll continue this a moment but I really need to go to the bathroom.

necessarily say why you need to go to the doctor. I need to go to the bathroom so I can breathe.

You guys went to the bathroom. You know something that's coming and you know, it's coming. So any kind of tricks or the tricks of the trade to pause to slow down the conversation can be very helpful. So what are some of the areas in your body that are useful to notice? When you're about to speak, or when you're in conversation? So it's in your life what you've noticed, but then you'd like to share some of your body parts. What parts of your body do you find particularly informative? to pay attention to? Yes, please.

Certainly my voice

tends to tighten up you get a little bit higher. And I can feel a tightness in my chest for

sure. It's it's a highly charged situation. Great, thank you.

I noticed sometimes when I'm speaking, that my arms have crossed and they're kind of tense and to me That's a reminder that

I need to be more mindful about what's needed in the conversation from my part. Right. So crossing

your arms, communicate so much. cross your arms and tuck your chin down. Are you really listening? Thank you.

I noticed sometimes a lot of sensation in my solar plexus. And that seems to be when I'm in touch with that area when it feels sort of alive, is when there's more authenticity and when I say

so when you're aware there is more alive, more, more, more sensations there, then you feel more authentic.

Yeah, like it's coming from. Yeah, it just feels more aligned with what

I sort of truly mean,

in a way that I'm not warping my speech when I'm in touch with that area. And what

happened your solar plexus where you're not being authentic.

I'm either it's numb, or there's more of a constricted

Yeah, like a more constricted feeling. Thank you.

One of the things that

it's important for me is noticing where my eyes are,

whether I'm looking at the person whether I'm looking down whether I'm looking in a corner and also whether my since I have a tendency to frown whether I'm tightening up my brow muscles. Thank you.

My examples before I start speaking, if I'm just thinking bad thoughts, I get really tight in my neck and my shoulders. And then I'm just I just try to breathe and calm down before I

speak. Great, thank you. neck and shoulders behind you.

As I'm in a highly charged situation, my stomach just goes

and then my jaw will tighten. Thank you.

I know we don't teach Kindle. Hear, but

when I can really notice what's happening in one of those highly charged or emotional situations, I feel like I can

notice energy coming from my stomach and then to my heart and then shooting up into my head and there's some kind of

energetic pressure in my head that just makes me want to send the energy outward to the world, perhaps in the form of hasty speech, informing what in the form of hasty speech.

Thank you. energy changes here in the front.

Genie. If I am receiving communication from somebody and I have feelings, my body starts tensing up or I'm feeling something coming from them, and I check my intentions and I know my intentions are neutral. I then wonder what their intention is. And very often their intention is to something to get me to react some way or to maybe cause angry or some kind of other reaction, especially with children. And so then when I know that though, when I know what they're doing, it helps me to step back and take a different perspective rather than just react. But it does take that stepping back kind of not saying anything immediately until I kind of figure out what's really going on. And so

one of the one of the reference points is for you is your your own intention. And if your own intention is you said neutral, then you're easier for to see what's coming from the other person. Exactly. Yeah. Thank you. Hence in the back there.

I noticed that lots of times if I'm Nervous or carries in a conversation that

my hands are clenched and that is like a signal for me to take a breath and relax. Again.

If I find myself leaning forward too much, I know I need to relax,

to leaning forward as an indication. I've noticed that when I sometimes give Dharma talks, if I'm getting nervous about whether I'm getting something across or not connecting the audience, sometimes I started leaning forward. Not always.

Ah, I have to pay attention to what I'm thinking.

Because what I'm thinking, it's so fast. And then

my body, my body will sometimes I don't even get a chance to even feel what my body's selling because my thoughts come so fast. And actually, an incident happened. Just a few days ago where I was, somebody showed up at work, and I didn't expect them and they didn't expect me. And I was thinking of thought that Why are they here when I'm here? And when, when are they supposed to be working? Why are they coming on in on the weekend? And

the guy when he came in, he said that exact same thing to me.

And I thought, that is so cool. I talked to me like that.

And I thought it and I attracted it.

Thank you and the other body parts.

One of the things that I've,

I guess learned in the last few years is not so much the body sensation but realizing that many times when people are engaging mean conversation, they, I should really remain in a listening mode much longer instead of defaulting into, oh, they have a problem, and I already know how to solve it. And so one of the most effective things that I found is simply to wait and listen, and then see if they actually asked me for, do you have any suggestions and align with what you said, that tends to slow the conversation down and allow them to try to articulate it. And the only thing that I've noticed is sometimes I'm sort of feeling okay, you know, kind of get on with it. But then I realized that they're struggling with how to express it or there's this feeling that they're trying to get out and I just have to be patient. So basically not going into a immediate problem solving mode that interrupts their attempt to complete at their level. What they're trying to say, beautiful, I found that that's extremely helpful. A lot of times people actually aren't interested in what I would have to solve the problem. But then actually, that really wasn't what they were after they were just looking for someone to articulate what was inside them. And whether or not I could help or not, that wasn't really part of the equation for them. It's

beautiful. So in addition to that, in addition to the interest, understanding the wisdom you have about, you know, the importance of listening, what else in addition to understanding, understanding you expressed, what whether things help you be a better listener?

Well, just realizing that

if I'm listening to somebody, and I'm thinking of ways to solve their problem, then I'm not really listening anymore. I'm often and I may, it may look to them like I'm listening, but my mind is actually in the problem solving mode. And so as soon as I sense that happening, sometimes it's It's difficult, because you may actually have a strong feeling like, Oh, I know how to solve this problem. Like, it's obvious what to do, when in fact that may not be so you have to sort of force yourself to drop out of that. So I guess that's the sort of key but it's not really a feeling it's more of a kind of like a daydreaming thing. You catch yourself solving their problem while they're talking in try to decouple those two events in time. So one comes after the other if they want it.



Great. So that requires mindfulness to be able to decouple beautiful. So Cheryl,

when I feel like it's just not going anyplace, or I don't know what to say, might be that too, but it's very common.

There, they you know,

thank you. Maybe one one more. Laurie Laurie here.

I think for me, I really

try to sense the space around my heart.

If I

am in a

position where I may speak unwise

contraction.

And when I'm open, I feel that openness around the heart.

I know that I'm actually paying attention and being present, and I'm

more likely to be

kind and careful about what I'm saying. Beautiful. So thank you everyone. That was great. All those things people said. All you said and, and so I'm sure we left out important body parts. The buttocks some people tighten up their arms, the legs, sometimes the thighs. You know, the muscles along the spine sometimes can operate all kinds of places and What I'd like to encourage you to do, as we go through these next few weeks, we're going to explore the speaker speaking the whole domain of speaking. Is this next week in particular? Why don't you get more attention to the relationship between your speaking and being in conversation? And what happens in your body? What? So, you know, maybe before you go into, see meet someone, have a conversation, maybe tune into your body and feel what it's like when you're relaxed, whatever. And then notice how what shifts in your body what gets tense opens up? What happens to your body? What kind of information can you learn can you get from your body that relates to the conversation you're having. So, and you might actually know what happens in your belly, your chest, your heart, your solar plexus, your neck, your shoulders, your jaws, your eyes, your forehead, your hands, your arms. You know, there's a lot going on. Another one that's pay attention to which, which is related to all this is your posture, posture, maybe the whole body, you know, what posture Do you have when you're speaking? And so hopefully you do this without any judgment. Just notice. And I think this whole exploration of speech will be much, much richer for you more useful for you. If you've grounded the whole exploration in your body, and maybe one day, you will score higher ethical IQ. Thank you so much.