

2008-10-19 Mindfulness of Speaking Part 2

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SPEAKERS

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Today I'm going to continue with a series of talks on mindfulness of speaking. I started last week, continue for another two or three weeks. And when people think about microphones of speaking, I think there's a fair number of people who will quickly think about the ethics of speaking. What's Right Speech, what's wrong speech. You know, the importance of speaking the truth, speaking kindly, things like that. But we'll get to that. That's kind of the advanced part. And the before before the ethics or morality of speech, speech, I think there's a lot to be learned about learning to track and be mindful of oneself, even before one begins to speak, or during what so that mindfulness of speaking is a very important part of what I want to talk about here. In this series, And, and there's a lot to be mindful of prior to speaking, in speaking, and after we speak. And part of mindfulness practice is to be not only attentive and present for what's actually happening, but also to be reflective in a useful way of what's about to happen, what our intentions are, what, what's, what we're looking at, what's what's going to happen, and also afterwards to reflect a little bit what happened. Look what happened just then, and think about it. Sometimes people do mindfulness practice, or teach it they can seem that the present moment is the God of mindfulness, which is supposed to be in the present moment, present moment, you know, and if you're too much in the present moment, that's all you do. I read once, many years ago, I pulled a book down from the shelves at Stanford library, just I don't know how it happened just kind of randomly one day, and never never did it before really or can't remember many times doing that just random Like polish, looked down and opened it randomly. And this book I was I don't know what it was about some strange topic, but in the page I opened it to it said something like being in the present moment is is a marketer's dream.

You know, just just shop, don't think about tomorrow, you know, do just shop shop shop. And so there needs to be some wider reflection. If you only in the present moment. Then maybe you miss some important pieces of information and how to take care of things. So reflecting afterwards and reflecting prior. And while we're doing it an important part of mindfulness practice or Buddhist practice. And then we reflect on ourselves in speaking before during, there's a lot to pay attention to And as a kind of, kind of overarching theme for today's talk, I'd like to tell a short story. Once upon a time story about that special monastery where they had a special monastery, they had two seats for the abbot are two avid seats to Lexus the main teacher seats and one was occupied by the actual Abbot. And the other on the other side of the altar was always empty. And when new monks would come to the monastery I thought they're kind of perplexed by why why was there one teacher seat there was always empty. was a teacher away for a long time or were they waiting for some wonderful person to show up and fill that seat and, and then if that are sometimes some of them would ask, you know, what's going on with that empty seat teacher seat has two avid seats and only one you know, we only have one and And then they were explained that, in fact, the second teacher of the monastery was a very important entity, very important thing that goes on here that's been here longer than any of the amongst current monks in the

monastery. And that is the relationship that exists between all the practitioners there. And there's you, there is me. And then there's the relationship that gets formed between us. There is my wishes for myself. My self concerns, perhaps there's your wishes for yourself and your self concerns. There's my wishes for how you treat me how you see me, there's your wishes, perhaps of how you want what you want from me. And then, but in addition to that, there's something which is invisible, which is why the seat is empty in the monastery, and that is the relationship I think it's formed. It's like a third party. It's like the marriage. There's one spouse, there's a second spouse. And then there's a third, the third spouse, which is the relationship that gets formed between them, which is like a third entity that needs to be cared for and attended to, and has its own requirements or needs or, or, or unfolding, that is a little bit different are quite different from what is needed, but in any individual, in the marriage or in the relationship. And so, it's the people don't don't as often don't often think about what goes on in relationship in a relationship gets formed. Sometimes people are very self preoccupied. And sometimes you really focus on the other person. Sometimes it can be both looking at a two individuals. But there's this third thing that happens and you see it very clearly. Sometimes When, you know when someone is having a hard time perhaps, and you can come along and want to give them advice, I have great advice, let me tell you or there can be be intimidated by the challenge of the person. And so, you know, I'm intimidated, so I'll just shut that shut down and walk away or something. Or a person can offer their, their listening, their presence, their care. And because there's that presence in silence and care, sometimes something new can unfold. There's like they can create a caring environment. And so in between the two people, there's a relationship and atmosphere and mood of caring that goes on there. So what is the relationship we have so in almost any situation we find ourselves in, whether it's interpersonal or in intrapersonal and ourselves are with objects outside of us, there is what's happening. And there's the relationship that exists between them. And so we tend to that relationship and what goes on that relationship. And part of that has a lot to do with the relationship we offer the situation, which is how do we how are we relating to it? So there's what's happening and how I'm relating to that situation.

And, and how I'm relating how we're relating to any kind of situation how we relate to any person is often a very multi layered phenomena. Many things can be happening at once. And so we want to look at mindfulness of speaking what goes on in this phenomenally important interpersonal event of speech. We talked to each other so much gets communicated so much gets channeled some of the best, most important things that happens in people's lives, and worst things that can happen in people's life can happen through speech. I think it's useful to begin to kind of tuning into the layers of what's going on there. And one of the very useful things to look at is the relationship that we have towards the person we're talking to, but also the relationship we have to the relationship to the atmosphere, the mood situations being created by the two people, is there. Is there an environment that fosters intimacy or caring or honesty or, you know, something in that? Or are we somehow engaging in it? Like you're treating the person as an object or the event as an object or as the, you know, the subject of this conversation is the most important thing. And so let me just tell you the subject, but there's something else happening. So even when it's something as maybe it's unwise as gossip or slander. It's interesting to look at what's what's happening in the relationship between the two people who are gossiping. And occasionally we'll find that what's happening is sometimes there's energy and excitement and comrade greediness in that kind of feeling of kind of feel connected to someone and, and reinforced by someone and justified and, you know, feel kind of special, and we're kind of in it together, you know, you know, can you believe that person? And, and, you know, lovely expression, may the one who is whether it was to say that the one who hasn't seen cast the first stone Can you believe that person? what that person did. So, aside from the ethics of all that, it's interesting to look at what's happening in the relationship between the two people doing it. And sometimes I think the attraction to gossip and slander is the good feeling that can come from The energy and the comradery kind of warm feeling that comes from that.

And if we identify the good feeling that might be there, or the excitement or something, or the sense of feeling a little bit pumped up by it or something, if we can see that that's what's really we're tuning into. And then perhaps we can reflect, is there a more healthy way to do that? It's a healthier way to create that kind of that thing. But if we're unconscious of that part, that's part of that part of it, then we might kind of continue going for that so called benefit without noticing what the effect is. So when we, so there's so but also, our relationship and the relationship that gets formed is also related to something as simple as our breathing as we pay my pay attention to it in mindfulness. There's the breathing. There's me, paying attention to my breath. And then there's a relationship that exists between the breath and myself. And the breath is a wonderful place to see it because the breath is malleable and shake little bit goes back and forth. How we are shapes how we breathe, how we breathe in, and return affects us. And so what is it that's going on? In our you know, so I'm trying to follow my breath, I've been told to follow my breath, I'm going to do it, you know, keep my, but then what about the relationship to that? How are we what's the relationship that exists between myself and the breath? Is it harsh? Gotta do it, you know? Shake that mind, with the mind into shape and just keep it right there in the breath. You know, or is it kind you know, you know? let's let's let's be committed here to the being attention for the attended to breath. Let's do it in a kind, loving way. Is there a sense of judgments judgmental ism, to the breath, goodness, that worst breath I've ever I've Better do better next time the next breath come along, I'm gonna watch it really carefully and you know, and so we're judging, you know, or we're comparing. You know, the person next to me seems to have a really good breath. Wow, look at that. And the person that we keep our eyes closed, so we usually see we don't notice, but since then, I've said next is keep your eyes open and said next to people, and been very aware of the breathing while I'm sitting there because somehow it just so close and

look at that. I didn't notice my breath. And then or there can be hesitation or resistance. You know, I know it's supposed to be good for me to stay with a breath, but you know, I'm just rebellious. Whenever I'm told to do something. It's the last thing I'm going to do but I'm supposed to do it. So there's all this all this other stuff that goes on. that we exist there in the relationship and how we relate to it. And so it's very important to look at that. And notice that some of the practice is not a matter of just focusing on the breath. It's also taking in how we are in relationship to the breathing. In fact, how we are, is more important than being able to successfully stay one breath at a time. So how we are. So it might also be that way when we talk in conversation with people, that how we are might be more important than the object or the subject of the conversation. How are we in this situation? What do we bring to it? In order to become aware of ourselves more,

and kind of kind of begin understanding more what goes on in speech. I think it'd be very helpful to notice the self talk that goes on inside of your own mind. And so Part of mindfulness practice is to notice what goes on in your own thinking. What are you thinking regularly? What's the flavor and the quality and the mood and the emotion that comes with how you're thinking? I know there's some people and I think probably everyone some, some points can think without any reflection or mindfulness of what the act of thinking is, like, if we're thinking about is so important, that somehow we just think away and thinking is such a from some people is such a common integral part of who they are and what their life is about. That thinking is like, supposed to, maybe it's like supposed to be the fish doesn't see the water swims in. I don't know if that's true. But, but, you know, we, we don't see the, you know, we don't see the air we walk through, so we don't see the thinking because it's kind of invisible. They're just so involved so engaged in it, so caught up in it. But when people sit and meditate, meditate for a long time, day after day. There's much more than becoming calm that's important. And the long patient kind of ongoing work of meditating. Slowly, we begin noticing patterns in our thinking, sir, note becoming familiar with what goes on. And the way that we can think we just kind of barrel ahead with our life and think away freely we can often do. And it's a very, you know, and especially in the silence of meditation,

there's a way of kind of seeing it, or thinking in a very different way, because we're not actively engaging in our thinking. We're not, you know, thinking about thinking or thinking about what we're thinking about. We're kind of stepping back and holding our thinking and have kind of more broader expansive awareness. So then there's a lot of things to notice in the self talk the inner self talk and might be possible to notice what is the why Is the how energetic is. Is there a lot of energy in that self talk? Is it a really charged up and loud screaming? Or is it very, very calm? Quiet, soft? Or where is it in that range from being quiet and soft to being, you know, hyped up and loud and aggressive. And probably in the course of a day, you might you're thinking they're thinking might change the energy level. Certainly I can watch mine change. And the other day I was driving and here in Redwood City, and this police car pulled up behind me as I was driving fall with me. I mean, I didn't think about it much. You know, I was driving. Exactly speed limit. 25 miles an hour, no problem. He never went 27. I'm sure the police officer wouldn't have cared. That was in 2002 In 25, and everything was fine and I made an unusual turn down the unusual street officer followed me I'll just a coincidence. I made another unusual turn to another Street, right in my tail. But there's no sirens on but what's going on here? Well, the myself talk revved up and so you know in other times it gets really quiet. So the energy and so what do we learn from the energy level of the self talk? You know what we learn from that? Probably the police officer I think there was some kind of anxiety started to surface there was kind of Sooners. Oh, look at that. I'm getting anxious. What have I done wrong? What in the world am I doing wrong? And the story is the energy level, what's the energy level in there? The other interesting thing to do with self talk is to listen to the emotional tone of the self talk. And it's kind of like, if you listen to someone who speaks a foreign language, you don't understand. Sometimes, sometimes not always accurately, but sometimes you can, you can kind of tell there were the emotions they are, you know, even if you don't understand the words, and so Oh, that person's angry, or that person is, you know, gentle or that person is, is scared or something, somebody in a tone, you can hear it.

And so the same thing when we talk to ourselves, some sometimes it's possible to be aware of the inner kind of mental attitude or tone or mood that's there. And some people find when they pay attention, that it's always harsh in there. It's always critical. They might be kind their speech externally, because we're so socialized Perhaps, but internally, it's really mean. There's a lot of meanness there a lot of critical illness. And until they start to pay attention, they realize, wow, I had no idea was so much of it. Or there might be everything is everything we think about is somehow couched or held in a flavor of anxiety, of worry. Everything's seen as being, you know, worried about it. Whether it might be that it's, there's a flavor of mood of kindness, that's there, and compassion. And so there's a kind of a wonderful feeling of caring thoughts of caring that are there. So what's the mood or the emotional kind of tone or voice that inner voice is speaking from? The reason why all this stuff is important is that the flavor, the texture or the mood of the inner voice and how we talk will have a direct impact on how we speak out loud, one way or the other. And as we begin tracking what goes on, inside with ourselves. It's a lot easier to track and be responsible for Be careful for what we say, out loud. So if we don't know what we're thinking, and we don't know how our thinking is being influenced by our mood, or our emotional state, then we're not going to be so conscious of what we say out loud. And people often make mistakes, which they didn't say that. So one of the great skills, or one of the great skills and consequences of mindfulness practice in that meditation is developing this familiarity with our inner life. So we can kind of track all these things, and then learn also how to negotiate that inner landscape. So that when we're really angry, we notice Oh, there's a lot of fury and heat in there. I think that this is not a good time to make decisions. This may be a good time to talk to you know, That person, let's wait, let's have that conversation later. Or if there's a lot of anxiety in there, then it might be useful to go and look at that anxiety and settle it and work with it, rather than letting it keep festering and kind of kind of limit your life. But as of its own, so another whole area to look at, around this inner inner talk, but then it translates very directly to the outer talk is the intention that's connected to the talking to the

conversation. What is it we want? What are we trying to accomplish? In the speech act, whether it's in our city, talking to ourselves or externally. And I'm not an expert in what I'm about to say. So maybe I shouldn't say with a lot of too much enthusiasm or confidence but

It's my strong sense that if you want to jumpstart your mindfulness practice, if you want to really go deep quickly in Buddhist practice, here's the direct path. There's a very direct way. And that is be aware of why you're saying what you're saying. Why are you saying what you're saying? What are you saying what you're about to say? So someone you so say you go out to a restaurant, for dinner, and the next day at work, you know, you go and you say, I just ate at the very best restaurant. Why are we saying that? Isn't in fact the best restaurant? And how would you know? Have you been to all of them? And what would you? Why are we saying that? And it might be that it's sharing our enthusiasm or delight, in which case we just hear the delight of the person. Or it might be a subtle way of saying, I am a really good restaurant chooser. And the one that I went to was really good. It reflects who I am. What is it when we speak? What are we trying to do? The story I like to tell apologize. Those of you heard before I was coming to teach one Monday night back in Palo Alto days, and an old friend hadn't seen for a long time happened to be there just as I walked in through the door. There wasn't really time to talk very long, much just a couple of words back and forth. And the last thing I said To the person and to anyone before I went meditated when I said to this old friend of mine, Oh, I didn't prepare my talk today. So because the last thing I said, when I sat down to meditate, it kind of echoed in my mind. And I said, Why do I say that? And I realized the reason I said it was was true. I wasn't particularly prepared. There was there was a true statement. But it was this important news. It's a broadcast to the world. Why did I have to sit? Why did I feel like this was necessary to tell the friend that might be useful for my friend to know it wasn't for my friends sake, that I said it. It was for my sake. And I was protecting myself. So that if I gave a lousy talk, I was covered. I wasn't prepared. So you know, what can you expect? So in, what are we trying to do? Why are we saying what we're saying? How many times is what we're saying? When we're saying it, because this is useful information that person needs to know. Like if someone asks, you know, where's the closest drugstore, pharmacy? You might say, Oh, just go down all camino for blocks, take a left. That's useful information. But how much of what the past is back and forth and conversation is just useful information needs to be exchanged. I suspect it's very little. There's a lot more going on in conversation. If you're just changing information, even when we seem to be the case. What are we trying to accomplish when we what we're trying to do when we speak? Some of it is we're trying to create a relationship we're trying to be in relationship to someone and what's the nature of that relationship that we're interested in having with a recreating in that acts aspects The act of speaking it's really easy to be unconscious or not conscious about this not aware of it. And sometimes we create very kind of even ugly kind of relationships by how we speak. What goes on sometimes we can get beautiful things. But what to ask yourself the question why am I saying what I'm going to say right now? And not to settle for one answer. Because there's often multiple agendas, multiple purposes behind saying something. Some of it might be to create have the other person have a favorable impression of us. Look how smart I am. Look how clever I am. Look, whatever it might be, because we want to share and some wonderful comradery feeling some good feeling together to nice and warm share our friendship and our work together. Might be part of it. It might be that We're subtly trying to make sure that that somehow

you know that the that we get what we want out of the situation that we're leading up to, you know, maybe you'll invite me to that restaurant. But you can't ask directly. So you ask, you know, tell me more about that restaurant. So there's all these different things. So what is it? Why is it that we're saying we're about to say, in order to be able to study that? Well, I think the very important part of mindfulness practice is to be able to look back at ourselves, and to look at the intentions by which we live. What is the intention, so we live our life by and those are the intentions that exists on the broad scale. They're

kind of global intentions, you maybe you need to kind of spend some time reflecting and thinking about in some big way. But also, there's a small intentions that occur moment by moment. What is it? What does I'm wanting here? What am I trying to do here? what's what's the motivation in this situation? And before speaking, the impulse to speak, what's the flavor of it? Is it kind, caring, friendly? relaxed? Is that impulse, consistent? impatient? Is that impulse to speak? frightened? Self protective? Is the impulse to speak, held back. Checked, kept in check. I can't say that no, no. What's the impulse like and then behind that impulse to speak? Is there an intention? Is there a wish? Is there a hope? Is there an attempt to try to accomplish something in that even saying hello to someone Seems like a normal ritual thing to do, hello. But there's so much that can go into the Hello. Someone yesterday tell the story the other day tell the story of doing an exercise where two people had to be, I don't know, 50 feet away from each other, and then had to walk towards each other one of them had to wants to steal and the other one walked towards the one standing still. And the one standing still, at some point would say that's close enough. So, you know, when it's close enough, and, and, and what this person said was when the person got about 10 feet from his house close enough and someone else in the group said, Oh, you know, I, you know, I want contact. I'm, you know, two very different approaches one person wants to contact. And so, just coming together and say hello, there might be a nurse persons who want to contact us so you know, When she came over and said hello to me, she put her hand on my elbow. The other person can't remember ever being touched by that person. The so even something saying hello, what do we what are we accomplishing? What are we trying to do there? Are we trying to establish some close contact? Are we trying to establish distance I see you but don't get too close. You know, so, you know, there's gonna be a lot in that very simple communication. So what are we? What are we? Why are we about to say? What we're going to say is a very, very insightful practice. That will take a while to get the hang of it. But one of the ways to get a hang of it is develop a practice of looking what is in your own intentions inside. So the inner voice if you pay attention to that, what is what is it what is your what's the intention behind your inner voice? What's your inner voice trying to accomplish? When it tells you what it tells you? And there's layers and layers of this? Well, my inner voice is trying to judge me. Tell me about how rotten I am. Why is that voice what's behind that? And that not a few people I know, have found when they've kind of scratched below the surface of their judgmental, critical kind of mind. And thinking and even talking that behind that was an attempt to try to protect themselves kind of protect themselves from being harmed to protect themselves being criticized or if I criticize other people so well, then I can be be safe somehow. There's a variety of things so to look at this. So I hope it's in saying this today. I haven't made too much stayed away. From the ethical side, as much as I could

have speeches, kind of the importance of looking into how much there is to look and notice in the act of speaking, and so that's why one of the reasons why it's often encouraged that you should useful to pause before you speak. Because in the pause is a chance to take all this in some of the sin and what goes on and then we might be able to handle the ethical stuff more carefully. So

then enough so I hope that during the week if you do take this up as a practice and exploration looking at yourself talk looking at what why you say what you say that you do it with a lot of kindness and friendliness to yourself. And it's also really good to do it with a sense of humor. It helps to look likely and enjoy it. And it's easier to enjoy it if you see that it's in the long term. It's really benefits you and others do do this exploration. And as you explore it over the week, I would also strongly encourage you go find someone you can talk to about what you're discovering, have some conversations about this whole area, so that you're sharing with someone else. And so thank you so much.