

2008-11-02 Mindfulness of Speaking Avoiding Unethical Speech...

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SPEAKERS

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So, in the last few weeks, I've got three to three weeks now I've been given talks on having to do with speech, mindfulness of speaking. And I've tried, to some degree, to avoid the ethical issues around speech. Often when Buddhists will talk about speech, they often start with the ethical issues, but it wasn't acts of right speech. And instead, I pointed out some of the various things we might be mindful of. If we look at the domain of speaking, it's commonly said that and I certainly feel that way, that one of the hardest places to stay mindful is in speech while we're speaking. And so it's a very important area to bring mindfulness to if we want to bring mindfulness to our whole life. It's a very consequential issue. That's why it's often treated ethically because of the great harm and benefit didn't come from speech. And the first week, I talked a lot about what you could notice in yourself physically, emotionally kind of your own if you bring mindfulness to yourself while you speak. The second week, I talked a lot about bringing mindfulness to what motivates us to speak. That suggests and this is a very powerful window into our inner life, probably unparalleled. If you simply ask the question, why? Why am I going to say what I'm about to say? You stop and pay attention to that you'll learn so much about yourself. And the last week I talked about being mindful, not so much of the ethical issues of which how you should speak, but rather, some of the dangers and benefits that can come with speaking, kind of getting sensitive to the area, the territory of what happens in, in social relationships, what happens with speech, and what are the dangers and harm that we can see that gets created, and what's the benefits that we can see that gets created? Today is a day to talk about it. And, and I think what I'll do is do divided up into two days today is the, the more than the the, what to avoid and next week more what to pick up what to act on in terms of speech and nobody number in terms of talking about looking at the ethics of speech from Buddhist point of view but just one thing that I've seen, I've heard said is that not from Buddhism, but from elsewhere that people give more many people give more attention more care to how they dress than how they speak. And you know, stated like that, you know, what's more important, how you dress or what you say. The so from So, people who study ethics like something like to say that there has to be a first principle, from which then the rest of the ethical system builds. So some some primary principle, like, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That's the first principle. So from there comes a lot of other things follows from there. And so certainly Buddhism has first principle or first principles that can be used. And I'll talk about that. But it's also there's another perspective on ethics in Buddhism. And that is not just first principle, but also if we use that language or first, first state, the first state of being, that how you are the state that you're in, can affect the choices you make about what is ethical or not ethical or what you how you want to act. So for example, if you meditate and you find yourself relatively peaceful, settled on agitated nothing conflict with things at the moment. And in that state of unconflicted peace, you probably feel how great it would be to say something really mean spirited. It just kind of would feel kind of really off. And so there. But if you're

really agitated and upset and angry, syncing and mean spirited can come out of your tongue with ease. Not only that, but there can be justification for it. Yes, that's right, and doesn't you know, feel the cost, the pain of it. So how we behave in the world has something to do also with a state that we're in.

And so it's not just a matter of first principles and logic and principles and how they build up and understand it. It has a lot to do with how we want to be we are and that's why meditation practice is important, both as a way of establishing a way of being how to be debt free. satisfying to us and deeply meaningful, but also so it provides us a reference point from which to choose more wisely how we want to engage in the world. How we want to speak what we want to do in the world. And this your state of being state of consciousness you have has a big impact on how you see the relationship to other people, how you understand yourself, and how you understand what's important for you. So we say it's very important as a preparation for wise speech, to do this inner work to establish some sense of deep inner well being. And then you have a very different reference point for the issue of ethics. From the point of view of first principle, Buddhist ethics has a variety of first principles that you could fall back on, so different people different times fall back on different ones. One very simple one. To avoid causing harm to yourself, just just that self serving, you know, don't cause harm. And it's pretty easy to see with speech, how a lie could come back and bite you later. Or mean spirited speech can come back and bite you when someone returns in kind. Or it builds up a certain kind of deep critical create a kind of reservoir of potential regret. I've sat down to meditate, meditate and quite happy and contented and sitting there very peacefully, and then boom, the memory banks fire up. How could I have done that? I forgot about that. It was 20 years ago. What did I do? Well, no. So it's really amazing. how the how the mind the heart, how it unfolds and moves in resolves things that sometimes are unresolved from decades before, it has a chance to do that when we sit down and become still quiet peaceful, can be a surprise. So the idea of just taking care of yourself would be a principal would be a motivation for, let's be careful here with what we do and say, so I don't cause a danger for myself here. The second principle that sometimes using Buddhism is compassion. What is it like for the other people, so the idea of minimizing harm for others. So rather than protecting yourself, you want to protect others. And that can be a good idea. It said that the more you protect others, the more you're protected yourself. So it's a wonderful mutuality that goes on. But, but also that's it desire, the motivation to protect To others to be compassionate arises also out of this first state, the more relaxed the person is more ease a person is, the more likely the inner functioning of empathy, compassion is going to work, the more stressed we are, the less likely it's going to work. So again, compassion can be something that that seems like a good idea can also be an issue of the heart. And so for people who are interested in compassion, it's also a matter of cultivating a greater capacity for empathy for the world around us. And so there are Buddhist practices for that. And coming from that compassion and a heightened, heightened understanding of compassion, heightened empathy, heightened understanding of how people are impacted, then comes different choices about how you want to speak. Now the third principle, first principle is could be seen as being kind of What's in it for oneself? But it's not about protecting oneself from danger, but rather about creating for oneself a maximum good. So you know, you know, some of you know about them.

You know, there was for a long time in psychotic psychotherapy, there was a idea of helping people who were psychologically troubled, and helping them become normal, whatever that is. And so they can function and cope with society normally. And then there became a movement in psychology. It's not just about becoming not just we don't have to have the potential becoming normal. It's all become normal. But rather, it's possible to become, to take it to develop oneself and look at oneself, beyond normal normality into higher states of well being. So even people who don't have psychologic have difficulties or struggles, psycho psychology might be helpful for these transpersonal realms, for example. So Buddhism also goes beyond becoming normal become the ordinariness kind of coping in life in an

ordinary good way, but also points to some possibility of maximum good, which it defines us awakening. It's often said that this awakening is not meant to be something selfish or self serving only. But it's something that's also very, very helpful for the world around us. That the level of peace and happiness that can be attained through deep practice is something that by osmosis by inspiration, by example, is very, very helpful for the world around us as well. So from the first principle, the idea of cause not causing any harm to yourself. Buddhism offers the five precepts as being realistic Five legged precepts, and one of those has to do with speech. And that's when simply says, avoid lying. It's all it says, just shouldn't lie. It said, I've heard that it's it's said that even who is who was said it's but in the society of the devil, I guess the devil has a big court the devil leans I don't know. The one precept that they follow, there's no lying. Because even that society wouldn't be able to function if people lied. Society depends on certain degree of truth telling for it to function. Well, the and for people practicing mindfulness not lying should be is the motivation not to lie should be second nature. Because what mindfulness practice is His truth telling. It's being honest. Another word for mindfulness is to be honest Sit down, close your eyes. And just honestly notice what's actually going on here. And human beings are amazingly effective at self deception, or self delusion or self misunderstanding of what's going on, or having blinders on. And so part of the function of mindfulness is to, is to become heightened degree of truth telling, for ourselves. So this is what's really going on this, what's really motivating me, this is what really is, you know, sort of feel here what's happening. So, July goes directly counter to the very thing we're trying to cultivate through mindfulness meditation. So it's not something we want to do. Lying also can create tremendous amount of problems for ourselves and for others, it can seem in the short term, that line can be beneficial. It gets us out of trouble, but then it can come back and bite us when someone finds out or they sign up people that you know, you can't be trusted because Maybe your word is not good. Or people find out that you've lied and they feel deeply disappointed, deeply hurt. And so then we have to deal with those broken relationships that are there. Maybe it's better to say nothing than to lie. And then there's a whole exploration, exploration of lying, you know, are there are white lies, okay? are modified lies, okay? You know, is it okay to lie When, when, you know, in certain kind of very, very extreme situations, people love to have extreme situations. What about when

then, you know, that just proves that it's okay to lie. You know, with the Nazis come running in here, then it's okay to lie. I feel a little bit mistrustful of people who want to quickly go talk about when it's okay to lie because I think it's a useful as ethical exploration, and somebody should certainly has its place in life to consider, you know, the outer edges of when maybe it's appropriate to lie. But to ordinary people like us to quickly to go to that kind of discussion in order to justify lying, it's too fast. It's too easy then to kind of imply Well, guess there's all kinds of situations then where it's okay. I would suggest that for most of us, we're not living usually in these kind of extreme situations that, that estheticians like to point out, where would you do that? So let's be careful about it. So, from the point of view of self protecting oneself, which is and also from creating basic kind of social harmony in society, the Buddha primarily talked about it not the line is being important. It's kind of like the most basic aspect of Have ethics and maybe it's the most, maybe obvious or gross, just don't lie. The Buddha had other teachings about what kind of speech to avoid. But the first principle for that kind of speech is, what is it that puts you on the path to liberation, to freedom. So liberation, liberating the heart, freeing the heart, from all its attachments, bondage restrictions, fears, that becomes a higher that's that's a first principle in Buddhism to free the heart from that kind of deep pain. So what is it that sets you on that path? What moves you in that direction and for that, a higher degree of care or under ethics is needed. Then simply doing the basic stuff of protecting ourselves and basically creating you know, some basic kind of Good social, you know, harmony in that context. So again, if you're interested in awakening, if you're interested in the path of awakening, then there are certain guidelines that will support and help that. If you're not interested in that, then, you know, maybe you're interested in something else. So the assumption is that you're interested in this particular approach to life. So, in that context with that

motivation, then the Buddha said, he also said Don't lie. But he also said, don't engage in slanderous speech, avoid slander, avoid harsh harsh speech, avoid gossip, and avoid what usually translated as idle speech. So slander is language that actually specifically is used to harm other people indirectly talk talk badly about someone so other people will think that about them harsh speech, his speech where it just so unpleasant to listen to and hear using louder profanities using a lot of maybe kind of angry, very angry tone and we speak it just feels really harsh and painful to be part of it's not gentle or doesn't feel kind gossip might not have the intention to slander. But gossip is talking about a third party in such a way that it's so easy to spread rumors and misinformation about what's going on. And even saying good things about someone as in gossip is a little bit tricky. Because you don't really understand the full context of what's being said. So you might see someone together IMC, who maybe is a really good practitioner, and really a good sincere person here and really helpful around IMC. And so, you go, maybe, you know, you're at work someplace, and you run into someone, and it turns out, you have that person, you know, that person in common. And you say, Oh, I know that person. I know that person behind See, the person is so good. They're so devoted and helpful. And, you know, just you know, it's very helpful community there and just seems like a really good person.

That person you tell, happens to know the person's parents. And the person parents are really, you know, maybe we have some very conservative uptight religious point of view, which really upsetting them to know that their child is Kenya but the Buddhists and it seemed like a nice thing to have said that you're talking nicely about Someone behind their back. It's kind of like gossip, because he's talking about them, you know, but you don't do we know that? Do we know the chain of cause and effect and how it will come back? Do we think about it is just, it should be concerned about the wider impact of, of how information about individuals spreads out into society. I think we should be some, some care around that because it's so easy for information to be misunderstood. We play the game of telephone, and all that. So gossip, avoiding gossip. There's one Buddhist teacher I know. And I'm doing the very thing he doesn't do.

We'll call him Jane.

Who's had had I don't know if it's case but a long term practice of not talking about someone else. A third party if a third party wasn't in the room wasn't present. And it's hard to do but it's very interesting to try and as we try and find how difficult it is that they're very difficulty encourages us to look more deeply. Why do I want to do this? What motivates it? So like gossip with gossip what why do we gossip when we gossip? Why do we talk about third parties when we talk about third parties? Sometimes just because it has a good energy to it's good feeling with camaraderie feeling we're learning together. Wow. And I'm really I'm really, you know, either one. I'm smart. And of course I wouldn't do that. Right. That's implication. You can't believe you can't believe that guy, girl. You know, you believe he goes Sunday morning. It's like going to church, right? It's very important day and very important. All these people come and he wears blue jeans. Can you believe it? You know, she's like, doesn't show proper respect for the Dharma for teaching and for all of us. And oh, yes. Oh, yeah, that guy, you know, he's, you know, can you believe it? And, and, and so, you know, it's that important information. And you know, what motivates it, you know, can be for some people, that sense of kind of delight being in it and feeling well, I would never do that. Why bother? So please go Don't go talk about genes anywhere. So we gossip about ourselves. So it's very hard and, and maybe, you know, I don't I don't follow that precept. I'm not talking about other people. But I try to be careful about how I say it and what I say and this is a difficult area. Because seems like a lot of our communication sometimes is about other people. And so the care that we should have behind that. And then the idea of no idle speech. And one definition of this that I've heard is you don't speak in such a way that you bore others.

Because sometimes so called idle speech is a very nice way of making connection so that people and so I think you would have two high standard is maybe not really so helpful. But, you know, to talk about things, ideally, for no purpose at all. You know, if you talk idle a for purpose, maybe it's not idle. If you're talking to idle, you just make a connection with someone. Maybe it's not the idle but if it's for no purpose at all. So the basic unit of Buddhist ethics that is no lying. But the guidelines for people who are on the path is a higher standard. And that standard is these four things. No slander, no harsh speech, no gossip, and no idle speech. The so then the question around this is, how motivated are you to try to practice no slander, harsh speech, gossip and idle speech. If someone simply comes to you, like I could have come today and sat down and said, Today, I'm going to talk about right speech. And you shouldn't lie. Shouldn't slander shouldn't speak harshly, shouldn't gossip and no speech. There. Let's go home. You know, I made duck made my That's not going to work very well. It's not gonna go very far, it seems like maybe a good idea. But one of the one of the things that required in this is to have to be motivated to do this. Not just that it's a good idea. But to be motivated. This is a good idea. And that's why I started with this idea of first principle in first state. Is that how motivated are you for the principle of the idea of following a path of liberation or freedom? Is that mildly important to you? Is it not important at all? Isn't it in list of priorities of how you live your life? Does it fit, you know, right after doing your laundry? You know, or does it fit after watching the 10 O'Clock News or just fit after turning on NPR first thing in the morning, you know, where does it fit? Or is it fits you know, is it more important than your work than your livelihood? Your job You know what, you know what, what's most important for you? What motivates you the most? And it's certainly not my place to say where it should be. But it's my place as a teacher, to point to you to question that and look at that, to be mindful of that. What is it that motivates your life? What is it? What do you really want your life to be about? What's the central organizing principle or orientation or values that hold your life? And those central values then? how motivated Are you really? I've known people, sometimes I've seen in myself where internally it seems to me I'm really motivated. This is really important for me that it you know, practice, Buddhism, awakening, freedom, compassion, these are really important values for me. But then if an anthropologist from Mars came to study me, you know, well, look at that, you know, didn't couldn't see my mind was going inside, but so my behavior They decide whether they decide that that's most important. Well, there's some days maybe they wouldn't like last week, you know that we had the World Series on my home. So they dropped into my home Wednesday evening last week. Actually, I was here teaching so I couldn't have but I guess Monday You know, when was it was that you think? I know we had the World Series on at home. And well, this guy's not doesn't think that awakening is that important. He's watching the World Series. Actually, I was watching the World Series because to support or be connected to my son, my 10 year old son because he's sister, that's his religion. So if you know this higher level of ethics has a lot to do with what motivates us. how motivated we are if you're motivated enough, then looking at these three, these four areas of life is considered very, very helpful for following a path to liberation to freedom.

doing the opposite of those things to actually slander, gossip, use harsh, harsh speech, speech and have idle speech to actually do those Not only does not put us on the path to liberation, it actually from the from the path from the path of liberation his point of view, it moves you in the opposite direction. So, is that something that you want, it makes it harder to become the Brady. So, it might be interesting for you for this next week, to spend some time, maybe one day at each considering more deeply the nature impact And motivations behind slider. Probably many of you say, Well, I never slider. But you know, look more carefully. look really carefully. What's the nature? What's the app? What can you learn more about harsh speech this next week? Studies in yourself studied and others. What can you learn about gossip? And what can you learn about idle speech? It's four big topics, so maybe four different days. And then after those four days of studying, considering reflecting on a journaling about it, perhaps you would find some friends or total strangers that you could talk to about it and say, Oh, that's my

meditation center. We were encouraged to reflect and explore on these four topics. I wonder if I could talk to you about a little bit too much. If you'd be interested, because I think it's really helpful, not just to make it something private, but mean share it with others, we learn about ourselves more, recognize we kind of explored more. And then next week we'll talk more about the positive side of ethics of speech. So that not just what to be avoided, but what actually to pick up and to do. So words that heal words that benefit words that can improve everyone's lives. So we have five minutes. And now if anyone dares speak we could have some questions or comments or protests.

Two questions about gossip. One is if I go and tell my friends who has never been to IMC there is this teacher in IMC, who's teaching them humor is great. I love going there is death gossip.

I think that if it's, if it's really depends, but if it's really simple information, that there's a place I MC, I go there and see the teacher there, and I value that teacher. That's not gossip, they're talking about me, it's talking about yourself more. However, it might be gossip. If you know if, you know, it might, it might come out of gossip, but it might, it might have a deleterious effect, depending on who you tell it to. You know, if if, you know I can make it up, but if there's some religious fanatic, who feels that there shouldn't be any Buddhism in Redwood City. And, you know, and then you say, you know, there's a Buddhist center in Redwood City and I value it, then that might feel threatened. And then we get the protests in the sidewalks. So that probably wasn't good.

Now, how about the second question is one common case I see in gossiping, whether it is about myself or others is venting about something that somebody has done or said that has bothered you? So you're either seeking clarification by talking about it to someone else, or you're seeking solace. You're wondering whether you're taking it personally or just that's just the way that person is. And if that's just me, that person is then it eases the hardship on the pain on you. So what about that? How should one

go about it? Good question. There's not just venting, but there's also trying to understand something better exploring it all and sometimes we do that with friends. You know, this is a difficult situation in my life, has difficulty with this third person and can we talk about it's like, understand better what's going on and sometimes feel feel And then to get get the energy or the emotions out the anger out initially to talk for a while. And I think that's one of the issues is, what's the motivation? Is the motivation in speaking to cause harm to someone else to slander someone? Isn't motivation to gossip. If that's the case, then we should refrain. But if the motivation is to get to some clarity, to get some balance, and hopefully then be able to come back and talk to the kids take care of that third party in a wiser way. Then perhaps, when you when you go to your friend and say I need to talk, you say first of all, you say, I need to vent. Please don't take too seriously what I'm telling you right now I just need to kind of have someplace to let this stuff go. And or you might say, I don't think I have the full perspective here. So I'm going to tell you my perspective of what happened and what I think is going on, but I don't really know yet. And one of the reasons I want to talk to you is I want to have a sounding board, someone to ask me questions and explore it with me. And maybe I can get it to a better understanding. Please beg and beg your friend, please be careful before you agree with me. You know, yeah, I need you to kind of help me get a bigger picture here. So then you have a very different motivation. And also then you're preparing your friend. So they don't think what you're saying is true. And then they can take more, they'd be more careful what they say. You know, what's going on?

Hello, and the outer wall? How do you deal with a problem situation where these things can be in conflict, for instance, your desire, I might be in conflict, the desire not to spread gossip. If somebody asks you your opinion about somebody, for instance, and you feel that the person who's se has a

legitimate reason for caring or wanting to know for some reason. Now if you answer you're spreading that you are gossiping innocence, but you're also telling the truth

You know, there is a potential conflict? I would I would believe.

So, perhaps we don't have time now. But having an example would be better. But I'm a great believer, as a default kind of first kind of approach to something like that is to state your dilemma, your conflict before you answer. Say, you know, Oh, that's interesting. You ask me that. But that puts me in a difficult situation. I don't know, I, I'm gonna struggle. You know, my beliefs, my practice, my Buddhism, whatever makes me want to be very careful about talking about the third person. I also don't want to lie. I don't want to you know, I am in a difficult situation right now. Could you restate the question? Or how can we how can we go forward here this conversation, given the fact that I'm struggling right now?

Well, I guess generically, I'm still seeing if somebody wants information about a third person who isn't present. And you have this information to what extent did Is your responsible just to withhold that information? Or, alternatively, to give that information if it's being asked for?

This? My question makes sense.

As opposed to, but I think there's a there maybe I have to kind of think about all this all the situations. You know, we know. We know, when is it? You know, when when is it appropriate? When the immigration officer comes to your door and asks about your neighbor, your neighbor, do you think your neighbor has a green card? Oh, I think I think you know, I think I'm blatant making dinner for my family. Excuse me.

You're not lying. But you know, no, is that is that you know, are we obligated to talk about the fact that our neighbor doesn't have a green card?

Well, I mean, a classic example. Manager I get employee a cold phone call about an ex employee asking for reference.

Now this employee was not very good. You know, I don't want to gossip about them.

But you know, I think if you say I'd rather not do recommendation that that says a lot. You know, so you're not really giving details but or many years ago, 20 years ago, when I was applying for graduate school, one of my professors said, claimed that there was an art to writing recommendations for graduate students or potential graduate students, because almost everyone who write good recommendations, and but you had to kind of know how to read those recommendations. And if they were kind of like, generically good. You don't take them too seriously. But you have to kind of emphasize really emphasize the specialist to the student to really get across. So you know, if you say oh, you know, He came to work every day. It seems fine. He He said he means well, I don't know. But, you know, there there are ways of avoiding lying, which are voids, you know, you avoid you don't lie, but you also don't divulge that sometimes. You know, it leaves leaves it to that leaves it to the listener to kind of sort through what actually is being said. I think it's wise sometimes not to say anything at all. I'd rather not say. So I'm not suggesting here that these areas, especially with these areas are easy because we're in this life. We live are often talking about each other in a variety of different ways. And sorting out the impact and the motivation and all this takes takes a while. Or maybe it takes a lifetime or never stops. It's not easy, but it's really worthwhile. And it's worthwhile for our community. It's worthwhile for taking care of ourselves. And it's really worthwhile. If what you want to do is to set your heart at

peace, at ease, and then live a life where your heart can express that the potential for peace and compassion. It's really worthwhile. So explore it, and then next week, we'll take it to the next level unless politics intervenes.