

2008-11-09 Mindfulness of Speaking Beneficial Speech Part 5

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SPEAKERS

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So I want to continue the topic of the last few weeks, which is speech. mindful speaking, right speaking in such things. And last week was the week that I probably got closest to talking about the Buddhist teachings on them on moral speech, the morality of speaking primarily by focusing on what to avoid to say. And so today I want to talk more about what we're encouraged to say. How we're encouraged to speak. There's a expression you know, words that hurt words that heal. So last week, it was avoiding the words that hurt and maybe today the words that heal or do you can do more than healing and so the Buddha has a variety of teachings about useful ways of speaking, beneficial ways of speaking. And I think central to this topic, then is having a vision of what's possible. Avoiding harmful speech has a lot to do, certainly with some imagination of what potentially the consequences might be. But it also has a lot to do with empathy. And empathy is really something of the present moment, most part. But empathy also includes imagination, where we imagine ourselves in the other person's shoes, we imagine what the consequences down the line will be. If you're very, very strictly only in the present moment, and only in your own direct, immediate experience as you would be deep meditation or retreat. You we actually leave behind a part of our humanity, and a very important part of life is also our capacity for imagination. our imagination gets us into tremendous trouble. But also so I think it's inconceivable to have a wise life, wise, purposeful life without some sense of imagination, some creative use of imagination that sees a little bit ahead, and what's possible in a realistic sense of that. So built into Buddhism is a sense of having vision. And in fact, the first experience of awakening in Buddhism is called, sometimes called the path of vision, having a vision, having an experience, profound experience of awakening or freedom, that then gives a person some tangible understanding of what is possible. It's like getting a hint. And then knowing that hint, it speaks for so much bigger possibility of a free heart, a compassionate way of being in this world. And so in terms of speech, then part of the vision of why speech right speech is vision of, of variety of things, but one is a vision of what's possible for us as an individual, as we speak. And also, maybe more importantly, what's possible in relationship to other people was possible to do for them. And what's possible to create in the relationship between people. And so all those three areas, the possibility of speaking in such a way that it supports the best in us allows something beautiful in us to grow and develop, speak in such a way that it supports other people and love something beautiful in them to develop, maybe heal them, help them, support them at the best grow out of them. And then speak in such a way that in the relationship between people, there's, there's harmony created, there's conquered, conquered, created, there's goodwill created. There's the ability to cooperate and be honest with each other that's created. So There's a story of man and time with a Buddha, who was going to not just test the Buddha, he was going to try to get the better of him by asking him a trick question. And he came to the Buddha and he said, and it was like a, he called he called the questioner to horn dilemma, where no matter how you answer the question, you were in

trouble. So like, you know, have you stopped beating your wife, or you're sorry, you stop beating your spouse,

the slow learner? And, you know, and so it's kind of like a difficult question to answer without getting in trouble. And so the so this two horned dilemma question was do you, Mr. Buddha? Do you ever say anything that is harmful or hurtful for other people? And the guy planning this question said, Well, if the Buddha says, No, I never do a say anything, it's hard hurtful to anyone. Then how do you know? How does he explain the fact that he criticized this month Devadatta and caused him so much he was so you know, ostracized and felt so painful that felt so you know, hurt so many I caught him. And when he says that, he does sometimes say things which are hurtful, then how could he be a Buddha? How to be someone who's awakened, enlightened and all that so? So he says, Yes, and either says Yes, he's in trouble if there's no he's in trouble. I got it. So, he goes to the Buddha and says, Do You Do you ever say That's hurtful for people. And the Buddha says that that question can't be answered with a simple answer. And, and then the fellow understands that he's, he's been caught off, you know, oh, well, I came here to trick you, but you got the better of me. And then the Buddha then goes on to explain that the, the Buddha will only speak if what he's saying is true. If what he's saying is beneficial, is useful. And if what he's saying is timely, is true, beneficial and timely in this particular list. And if it's true, beneficial and timely, and it person feels hurt in hearing it, the Buddha will still say it Criteria whether someone feels hurt or not, is not the criteria for whether you say something or not. The criteria is, is it true? And is it beneficial and sometimes it's beneficial to say something that might actually people feel kind of hurt by it or off by it or so for example, being admonished. One of the great virtues in Buddhism is being is if you can be easy to admonish any of you easy to admonish you welcome being admonished you welcome someone coming up and giving you some really good feedback. You know, I need to sell you something. Well, so usually when people come up to you that way, the defenses go up. But have you ever gone up to someone and said, You know, I invite you to tell me if I've done anything here that, you know, hurt cause harm, cause hurt been inappropriate, please. And I've had friends who are Buddhist monks, who, after spending time with me, have said to me, basically invited me say, you know, if I've said anything or done anything that's that's been off for quite some harm, please let me know. So it didn't mean easy to admonish. And so, you know, it's not doesn't feel comfortable after being admonished. But it's, I think it's can be very, very beneficial. So much. So the Buddha once said, you should treat someone consider someone who points out your faults to be a treasure. Isn't that great? So, is it true? Is it beneficial? And is it the right time? It might be mentally beneficial, but it's not the right time to say it. You know, someone who's just some of my, some of my colleagues, who, you know, my meditation teachers where I teach retreat with sometimes when we give these Dharma talks in front of big crowds of people. And some people, some Dharma teachers feel kind of tender after giving a talk and kind of expose the kind of presenting themselves. And some teachers have said explicitly to the rest of us said, you know, I'd like to get feedback if I was offered my talk or something was wrong or something. But don't do it right away after right afterwards, right? You wait till the next day or something. So they invite the feedback, but there's a time for it. And then, so is it true? Is it beneficial? And is it timely? what you're going to say? But then there's another criteria, which is found elsewhere in the texts? And that is, is it kind?

Is it the metaphor? Or is it the way it's done with loving kindness? And that I think is extremely important criteria. So, because kindness includes many different things, is it but it is the manner which is given men and wishes communicated? Is there an expression of friendliness or kindness in what we're saying? Or is it harsh? Is it you know, not it's not an expression of kindness, but really an expression of resentment or, or self righteousness or, you know, anger, a variety of other things that can can be expressive of. So is it kind to true? Is it beneficial at a time these kind are generally given as the most as the criteria Buddhist criteria for evaluating what you're about to say. So, if you have, if you're so

you don't have to do that every time, you know, you say something, no, pass the salt. You know, but, but I think there are times when our conversation requires more thoughtfulness care, what we're going to say. And so then, the Buddhist approaches to that use those four criteria to evaluate what we're going to say. And so when we look at those four criteria, then we You know, what is the vision that is trying to fulfill? So the first you know, is it true? I think that to look to do a little bit, to be put aside for a moment that will get the value of just being true, being honest. You know, in terms of the words there's a possibility having a feeling for truth, feeling or as a truth so much, but a feeling for being truthful. There's a difference between knowing what's true, and knowing what it feels like for you to be truthful. And to have a feeling for being truthful. And I've been very inspired by some, some people I've known who has seemed to have constitutionally incapable of lying, because there's some some is the feeling a sense of being truthful is so powerful sense within them, that it just feels so off to violate I've known people as they do something like meditation practice, that that feeling for truthfulness grows within them. Because there's a sense of being more great greater kind of felt sense of integrity that comes. And that felt sense of integrity then if you don't feel like you're in it's something you want to preserve, you want to protect you want to speak from you don't want to violate you don't want to give up. So the idea is speaking the truth is not only about, you know, some more, I don't know exactly what to say moral thing about being true or logical thing about being true. But it's also to preserve some beautiful thing that I think naturally will develop and come when we do Buddhist practice or do meditation practice. And then there's a feedback loop. As we as we're more truthful, we then also feed or support or nourish that beautiful part inside of us. So it grows as it grows and we want to be more truthful. So that's a and then in terms of truthfulness to this stuff to other people. Oh, I wanted to say as a footnote, I had this beautiful discussion here in this room yesterday in the afternoon with 6514 year olds, about how truthfulness can be the door to Buddhist practice that great Medina 6514 year olds, so it's something you might want to discuss at home, you know, somewhere. How is that truthfulness is a door to this practice to the park they weren't is what I'm talking about here. And so then, you know, it's also supportive other people, because if we're truthful, hopefully it resonates with the people. People see that as a possibility. See that as a value. People then begin to trust us as they get a sense that we can be true, they can trust us with truth. We can be their hand. So just a Very powerful to be around people we feel safe with, you know, you know, we know they're going to tell us what's true, what we've what we feel, you know, you know, they're not going to lie or kind of around us. So very, very powerful significant to be around that. And it's very unfortunate sometimes the people we can be very, very intimate with, sometimes are the ones who can be most motivated to kind of a little bit you know, twist the truth a little bit, sometimes because there's, you know, very, very deeply held, desires and wishes, understandings, somehow are most

bumped up against in our intimate relationships. So to be very careful there as well so that we can safeguard someone else's deep capacity for trust, not just in you, but trust in other people. I've known people who've been lied to betray too, and it took them years before this They can trust in some deep way. Anybody. And then the beautiful thing that happens in relationship to other people when we're honest with each other, truthfully to each other. I'm a great believer in the value of when there's conflict, of putting on a table, what we believe happened, what are what was, you know, our perspective is, what our understanding is, and even what our delusions might be, what our inappropriate feelings might be. But to do it in such a way, in an environment where we're being really honest, where there's a feeling of tentativeness, a feeling of, I'm willing to learn here, I might be off. I might not understand my feelings, my reactions might be off. But if I can put it all on the table, and you put all your things honestly in the table, and then we try to sort through that together. Then both of us can grow, then I might be able to grow. But if I can't put it on the table, if I have to protect that part of myself, then I'm not going to grow. And so sometimes I'll sit put on the table things, which is a little embarrassing to say. But I'd rather be honest about it. And, and I would say, definitely, I value a group process where two people or a larger

group can find their way to the truth, if we're being really honest and put it all out. But there has to be an agreement ahead of time that that's what you're going to do. Otherwise, it's a little bit harder to do that process. And then is it beneficial. There's a saying cliché that if you can't improve, improve on silence, then don't speak. Maybe at our source, I think maybe next week, they give a whole talk on Sunday. Once I did it once many years ago, silence is great undervalued. And so I told the story enough times but I want to tell it again I'm not silence about buying this building here. We were the ministers who own this building were elderly couple who were kind of mystical Christians. And we talked to them for a long time and I talked to them on the phone. That's almost nine months, or more than that, by the nine months in the phone before they showed us the building. They weren't to sell it to us. We were interested. They hadn't even looked inside the building yet. And, and so they had this wonderful relationship where a lot of warmth, we felt like really connected these wonderful conversations on the phone. And then after nine months have like that, I thought we finally were going to show us the building. And so I came about an hour early or something before our board and community waiting to come to get a tour of this building here. So just me, and the two ministers husband and wife. And so you know, they started walking around showing me the building, and we were talking about things. And then there started to be a little silences in our conversation, and then silence has got to deal with longer and longer. It's not a big building to tour right. And so eventually, we kind of walked around the building and we came back in this main meditation hall, and back then there were all these pews because the church right, all these wooden pews lined up here. And so we sat down the three of us on the front Pew, and one of those silences began. And it continued, and it continued and continued. And I don't know how long it was five or 10 minutes, sitting there and stuff. wasn't no one had said, Let's be silent. No one had said you know anything about it, but it just felt so right, the three of us and, and then it felt so. So such a wonderful way to meet actually to be together. It felt more intimate in some ways that if we'd kept talking and then finally some of IMC people came to get the tour as well until they came in through the door. And so then the three of us got up from our silence sitting and I snuck over to one of the ministers and said, someday we'll have to continue where we left off.

So is it beneficial and part of video beneficial is to have some care some of evaluating what is beneficial. It's possible to attack people with the truth. You know, I'm only telling the truth. And that's not beneficial. what's helpful for yourself what's helpful for the other what's helpful in the relationship and what's really helpful. So sometimes avoiding the truth in order to or to maintain some kind of social harmony. Maybe it's not really beneficial, maybe continuously dysfunctional relationship and or codependent relationship for enabling relationship for all kinds of things. And so sometimes what's beneficial in the short term is painful, as hard as difficult. So sometimes beneficial is to know to have those difficult conversations. And sometimes what's beneficial is to not say something now they need to say that

so then is a timely talked about that little bit And is it kind. And I think, you know, one of the great delights for me in being introduced to Theravada tradition and practice in the Theravada tradition is the great feeling the great capacity for loving kindness for metta for friendliness. You know, I probably was a friendly enough person before I encountered this practice. But something happened in the softening of the hardness of my heart, the defensiveness of my heart, the anxieties of my heart, that allowed something to kind of blossom or bloom that often for me has felt very tender. Very warm, very glowing. That has a lot to do with how I feel about other people through warmth, friendliness, and to have that grow at times, to be a real strength. We all kind of furnace through time, which is like a furnace of love or kindness. It comes and goes. But that sense of a thing, kind of like a glowing furnace. It's kind of boundless is something I learned from this meditation practice here. And so to have that, to understand that, again, a felt sense of kindness, not an idea of kindness. at all, it's a good to be kind, but it felt sense of kindness, of warmth of caring for someone else, and that from that caring, then comes our

evaluation of our speech. Is this caring for this person? Is this friendly if this person is is it done in a kind way, expressed in a kind way? I have to admonish this person. I have to say something really hard here. It's gonna be really tough to be rocky in our relationship for the next little while. The person is gonna be hurt. But can I say it in a way that's kind that has a person's best interest in mind? These four guidelines are not meant to be moralistic. It's not meant to managers to kind of put on this heavy yoke of now I have to kind of Boy, you know, I was, you know, I came to Buddhism to get some stress reduction, you know, to kind of be more female more relaxed, and now they you know, they throw in this heavy suit of what is those ascetics where what kind of what kind of clothes we wear? Hair shirts, yeah, there's heavy hair, shorter Buddhist morality. What a drag stress reduction after all. So it's not meant to be moralistic, but it's meant to be part of the strategy of stress reduction. Because if you follow these four guidelines, you'll have a lot less stress and if you don't follow I would probably almost want to guarantee that I almost want to give you a money back guarantee that if you don't follow me if you do the opposite, that you'll have a lot more stress in your life. Yeah, one of the things that Keane said yesterday is, if you tell the truth, you won't have regrets. So those are my thoughts for today. So kind speech, truthful speech, beneficial speech, timely speech. And I think it's worth thinking about. If it doesn't improve in silence. Maybe pause for a bit, not so much. Because there's some other capacity possibilities in silence. There's something beautiful that can But in silence, maybe wiser words will come out of you. So now it's your turn. So what are your comments, questions, testimonials around this issue of why speech for admonishments, you're welcome to admonish me now.

Yeah, I'm not sure I'm getting the full distinction distinction between beneficial and kind and I wonder if you could say just a little bit more. So,

the difference between beneficial and kind, I think kind is very beneficial can be included under kind, but I kinda includes the matter which we say it. So for example, do we say it in a friendly tone of voice a gentle way of saying it or do we say In the harsh way, it's true, it's beneficial. It's timely, and I'm gonna, you know, bark it at you, you know that it's not kind. So, for example, I think also kind of maybe includes, you know, beneficial, but kind also takes the other person's situation much more into account. And so are we listening to the person properly? Are we giving a person a chance to speak? You know, are we taking the other person into account of refuelling the other person? There's empathy there. That's my thoughts.

And I guess it's my experience. The only time it makes sense to provide feedback to people is when they actually have approached you and asked for it that, in my experience is the only time they really want to listen and hear it. I'd love to get your thoughts on that. If there's another appropriate time.

Yeah, I think that's a pretty good guideline, they invite it. But there are other times when you can maybe where it's appropriate to say, you know, to ask if it's okay. So, you know, I, you know, I'd like to say something, are you interested in hearing my perspective and what just happened or, or I have some feedback from you, we'd be, you know, would you be interested in having some feedback? And then the person might reasonably say, the person might reasonably say, No, not now, or maybe later or maybe never. Or the person might say, great. Yeah, I'd love to have that. But I think being sensitive to whether it's invited or even if it's not explicitly invited, it could be okay in the situation. But being sensitive, whether careful about whether it's appropriate, and one of the ways to know is to ask

I'd like to add about saying something because you think that it's beneficial for the other person to hear it. And then you can reflect on your intentions of why you think it's beneficial for the other person to say it. But sometimes there might be a very truly beneficial reason for people to hear your feedback for their safety or yes, some of the reason

and they're also there can be different conflicting benefits sometimes. So there could be that it's it might be beneficial for I don't know what it's, you know, if you're making chocolate cake, it might be beneficial to for the cake, if the person would mix the batter with better and so, but it might be beneficial for your relationship, not to say it or it might be beneficial for the process might be beneficial for their lives. Learning on their own their own experimentation and learning for them to actually do the experiment and learn find out for themselves. And maybe they know really well, they're not mixing it, well, maybe they think that I'm gonna see how well I can manage. So that's a silly example. But sometimes there's a conflicting benefits and so we should kind of consider the variety of things going on before we decide what's beneficial.

Um, I guess we're kind of covering this topic, but a little bit but I'm, I'm always conflicted about a lot of times, feeling like, Oh my God, if I don't say something, you know, I'll, you know, that's not the right thing to do. But, you know, not sort of being in that in the headlights like that. A lot of times I don't have time to think, what's the right thing to say? So, you know, when you're sort of taking your place and a conflict, for example, you know, like, especially with this, you know, past elections, And I found myself in a situation where I was like, Oh my God, if I don't say something right now, it's, it's really, I'm going to feel really bad I'm going to feel, but then I didn't take just kind of didn't have time to figure out what was a really dharmic thing to say. And then kind of getting in a fight with people, but so maybe I don't know. So, could you

hear that there was out there you could know something. So what to do? What to do if in the in the, you know, how do you know what's beneficial or how to speak wisely or when to when to speak in the middle of conflict, something which seems to require something in the moment right now. I think that one of the important areas of things about conflict, any kind of conflict is to be prepared is that is that is to prepare oneself train oneself ahead of time. So learn for example, Right Speech techniques. So for example, some people like to do training and non violence communication, where you, it becomes almost a habit or second nature to consider. You know, to learn how to speak, for example, you might learn to say, you know, this is really hard for me to say, but let me let me I'm not going to tell you what's true here. But let me tell you first, why I'm so conflicted or why I'm so troubled or why it's so hard for me to deal with this particular issue right now. So rather than going into the, into the conflict, step back and say, you know, I don't feel safe right now, or, or I think I need a moment to think about it, or are you really interested in what I really think here? You know, so there's a variety of things for things to learn skills to learn. And so there are trainings to take in, in, in speaking. So if you if you plan ahead that way and train yourself, then you're more likely to know what to say in the new Middle of the heated conversation. But if you don't haven't haven't trained yourself prepared yourself, then you're, you're kind of caught.

Usually when I start thinking of having a truthful conversation, I look at my intentions and the benefit is for me.

What do you do next?

Well, I look at it to see if silence is the best path. I, I do examine that

usually is

great. That's a great reflection and a great observation. What other options does a person have? When they see Oh, this is truth, but I'm gonna say it because it benefits me. So certainly, One option is to be

silent what other options might be in that situation? I've asked everyone, not just you, but Yes. So one option is just to say it, this is I'm gonna say something, but it's for my own benefit. And the advantage of that is it allows you other persons participate. And then maybe you can have a discussion about, well, I do care about you, maybe it's okay, it's beneficial for you. I'll do that for you. Or maybe we could step back and take a bigger, bigger picture on this and understand it more widely. Other ideas?

So it's not necessarily bad that It's for your own benefit, but then you can consider the other criteria in addition to that, great. Yes.

So always keep in mind attachment of views, attachment, views, beliefs, opinions. Good. Yeah.

If I have the presence of mind to do this so

during this political time I have many times felt like I've had to use a very quick criteria because it would a conversation or something would be said with a stranger or that didn't allow for a lot of time. So my criteria has been, am I going to bite on the bait or am I going to throw the bait so I don't want to bite I don't want to bait so many times, I just have to say nothing. And so that's been, especially in the, this the, in the political arena. Because I have felt so much passion about the subject. But that if I throw the bait and somebody bites I know that I initiated that tangle for her that we're going to get into. So that's just been a quick little, something I have to kind of pay attention to and the first

time I tried it, it didn't work. Great. Thank you. So what one more because we're about to stop but maybe I saw your hand.

One of the things that I find that I do frequently in, in my relationships in my work is I will use some of these words that represent truth Or beneficial or whatever, rather than speaking what I think as whether what what is happening or what they're saying is true to say, Well, do you think that's true? Or do you think that that is beneficial? Or is there another option another way we could look at this, okay?

So that's very, very nice, a little more open ended or tentative, so that other people can participate in exploration together. So, I want to end with mentioning four categories of words or speech, which can often be beneficial in many different directions. And, and so the first one is to say thank you. The second one is to ask someone how they are, or are you really really mean it? The third is to say what do you need and The fourth is to say I'm sorry. Those are great, great things to say.

So.

And the end, the last thing to say, it's often very helpful to end today with is to say hello to someone. And so I guess we're having the key today. That right? So some of you will stay and some of you're new. So if we can do it without getting too loud in here, I think it'd be great if those of you who sat near someone who you don't recognize if you would turn to them and say hello and introduce yourself and before we all scatter in our ways. So thank you all very much.