

2011-02-14 Speaking

Tue, 8/18 10:50AM • 39:23

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, speaking, mindfulness, speech, practice, buddhism, motivates, talk, person, connection, track, connect, life, question, solitude, eye, listening, ways, caught, rejoinder

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So this evening will be the third or the fourth part of a series, depending how you count. And the core of these last two series is talk about solitude the first week as a foundation for listening really well to others, and listening as a foundation for speaking and speaking and listening together and the capacity to have kind of an upright solitude or self reliance or being centered or at home with oneself. Combined with listening and talking is the wonderful way for people to meet and to be able to have people really meet and have a strong connection. is a beautiful thing that could happen. Little aside. Mostly yesterday morning, I gave a talk here. And after the talk there was someone stayed behind. And he said to me, I grew up with a father who was a Christian pastor. And I grew up with the teaching that should always turn the other cheek. And my mother tells me, I've never I never learned to defend myself. And what does Buddhism have to say? And they said, well, Buddhism doesn't say turn the other cheek. It says, Look the person in the eye so you don't turn away. You don't meekly turn away, you don't attack. But you take your place. Take you step take your place or take your stand in a sense And you look the person in the eye and then engage in some way, talking to what's going on. You don't say no. Or you do say no, you know, if you have to say no, you say yes, if you have to say yes, but you can take a stand without there being attachment without there being a version, or does or you know, some kind of clinging to something, but there can still be taking a stand. And Stan can be very relaxed, you can completely at ease, but you're there and you look the person in the eye. And that's a very different response than turning the other cheek, or an eye for an eye. Look at personnel it means that you want to have a connection, you want to look you know, the eyes are the window to the soul. You want to kind of see someone really deeply and you want them to see you and to see what's going on and it's quite something to really meet someone else and see someone who Some of you have heard this story of Blanche Hartman who was was the one of the advocates at Sam Cisco Zen center, one of the most senior teachers there, a turning point for her in her life. And I think what they brought her into the Buddhist practice and eventually becoming a Zen priest and teacher, an advocate of Zen center, was being an anti Vietnam War demonstration in the early 60s at use at San Francisco State University. And finding herself I don't know if she was at the end demonstration or when she was there, but she was there to protest or what but she was there and she got pinned up against the crowd of demonstrators and this riot police while the riot police and pinned up against them. She he looked one of the riot police right in the eye and the eyes and saw something there they saw each other in something about the common humanity or something about seeing someone that deeply that kind of Presence changed her life. And you know, which took a whole different direction or life and became. So not turning the other cheek, not taking an eye for an eye, but looking someone right in the eye and meeting and connecting. And I think that works a lot better. If we have the capacity to be at home in ourselves where there's not a need in the relationship. We don't need someone for whatever reason. And also we're not avoiding anybody or trying to hide. And then in order to really connect with someone, I think it really helps to take the time to get to know them.

And it's not so easy to do, because often we come with agendas, ideas, things we want. bias, nothing but to really take the time to find out who are you and that could just be spending time looking. It could be spend time listening. That's the idea. Just listen carefully. And find out what's Who is this person? What makes this person tick? What into what interest is this person? What's going on below the surface of what this person is saying? You know, how do you connect to something deeper about the person and every human being has depth. And the depth is there to be discovered if we listen, if we take our interest if we spend time. And I think all too often in our life, we don't take that much interest in someone else in some deep way. So, in order to really connect, I think that helps you take interest into listening is kind of part of that to listen. And then Today the topic is speaking. And so how we speak is very important. The in the Zen tradition, they have a very powerful expression, where they say that words and save how you say it other places to visit it where I heard it first words can Kill, and words can give life. And that's literally true actually. But we can kill something. Now they can kill people, but you can kill so much. Goodness in the world, so many things. It's been said that, you know, you can spend years building up a friendship, slowly, slowly building the trust. And in two minutes in a minute, you can end it by what you say. Words are very, very powerful. And we know something about the power of words, because of things like taking an oath, or making a vow or a commitment like a marriage or partnership commitment, you know, as making a public statement with friends and community around you. And something very powerful of making that kind of public statement in the presence of others. The kind of inspiration from then, the fact that the Chinese word for that that's the word but that Character the way that Chinese Chinese writing characters which kind of like pictures, and the Chinese characters for the word faith is a character of a person is a radical of the person on the, I guess on the left side as he was, and then on the right side is the character for speaking or words. So the person standing by her words is faith. Isn't that interesting? That can so the idea that there's harmony between who you are and then also the image of the person and the this radical character of the person that's in the image is a very tall and narrow. So I think of it's a person standing standing straight, tall, upright. So when you're upright and you're in harmony lined up, by your words, then there's faith or if you're supported by your word, the words are in harmony with your words. So they do have a speaking in such a way that that your good faith comes through good faith. That means that your sincerity you're here. And I think people who practice mindfulness should be very interested in truthful speech in good speech. Because the very act of being mindful is an act of right speech. The act of mindfulness is to be honest and truthful. And if we're not honest and truthful, then how can we practice mindfulness? It's just the two of us don't go together over counter purposes with each other. And also, the lack of honesty is pretty stressful. A lot of people like mindfulness because of stress reduction involved. But one of the reasons why I don't know exactly the science or the of lie detectors, but my understanding is that when people lie, that variety of biochemical, neurological or physiological things that happen when people get stressed, kick in and with light factors and measuring is actually stress. Not necessarily if you're lying or not lying, it's where the stress in your system, because it's stressful to lie. And so, accumulation of stress of lying over time, produces a lot of stress. So there's a Tibetan Buddhist saying that in meditation, watch your mind. in public, watch your mouth.

And part of the reason it was saying I think is that it's hard in daily life and work and daily activities to really track your mind as carefully as you are in meditation. But speaking is a much coarser activity than the speed and width and subtlety in which the mind can operate. So we track something that's coarser. So At least try pay attention to your mouth to your mouth, what you do there and what you say what, but more than what you say as you say it. One of the most powerful ways of coming to self understanding is to explore, understand why you're going to say what you're going to say. If you look at the motivation for what you're, you're speaking before you speak, you'll discover everything you probably you need to know about yourself. And probably a certain percentage of the time it's a little bit

embarrassing. You know, it's not an innocent thing to talk to someone else. Often we come along with all kinds of agendas, all kinds of things we want. None of you of course, but you know, the other kind of people. The so the idea of looking good We want to say something that we get that gives us makes a good impression on others, or we want something and so we say things so that we can get what we want. It's remarkable to me, you know, the, how clever My son is beginning when he wants something, we've had this, you know, campaign at home for months about getting an iPad. And, you know, it's quite something all the clever ways he has to explain, you know, you know, it's clear what he's about. But, you know, I don't think sometimes you know, it's he says things indirectly, that really he's trying to build up his build up the case. So he has something in mind that simply Oh, Dad, you need to know this piece of information. It's just good information to have everyone should have this. It's like, it's like you should have this because you know, It builds my case. So they do you know of one thing, something desire, you know, and we shape and shift what we what we say depending on what we want, or what we want to avoid. And so we say things we say certain things because we want to avoid having to answer certain questions. And, or just not to expose yourself not to show ourselves to, you know, to other people. The idea of being transparent to others, is really frightening to many people. That says, that's how much you really get to know me. It's, you know, I guess it's pretty dangerous, who knows they might reject me. And in being rejected is by other people is one of the great sufferings that motivates a lot of people to avoid somehow rather avoid being rejected or being not loved or not included or something or being treated as kind of odd or strange or crazy. Heaven forbid there's bad news about maturing in Buddhist practice. Have you want that? Jack Kornfield, you know, spend a lot of time kind of studying people who've matured in practice. And, and he says that as people get more and more mature as Buddhist practitioners, they become more centric. So that's not good news, right? I mean, you're centric, then. And I think the centric because there's less inhibition. You know, you have to protect yourself and be just, you know, the kukuku, cookie cutter kind of member of our society. But if you have your own interests, your own way of being in the world, you're much more willing to kind of let it out and be that way. Rather than always, you know, protecting yourself for defending or, or, you know, doing something. So this idea of being the city of the idea of two weeks ago, being a capacity to be solitary, is equivalent to the capacity to willingness to be transparent, that you don't feel like you have anything to hide, you know, to stay in your home, to keep some people who are hurting That's a mistake kind of closed up in their homes or on their computers or under what they do. Sometimes part of the motivation for that is they're afraid of coming out and encountering human beings and human beings are pretty frightening. That's the only thing I can conclude, based on how some people live their lives and certainly how I live my life. When I was in my late teens and early 20s. There were times I was petrified to encounter people and let people see who I was and get to know who I am. As as an antidote to that in my early Zen training.

I had a practice for a while when I lived the San Francisco Zen Center to try to live live as an open book. Meaning that I kind of tried whatever anybody asked me. I was going to tell them I wasn't going to volunteer for people weren't interested. You should know this about me. But, but if he asked me how I was going to You know, not not holding anything back and just say this, you know, just say what was going on was true was really the case. And it was a powerful practice to do because of, you know, sometimes like, wait a minute, do I want to say they asked me, but I really want to tell them the answer to that, you know, is that safe to tell them? What are they gonna do with that information? And what does that give? What kind of impression? Am I going to leave them? Leave them with now, but who I am, there's a lot of things came up. And so the idea of experimenting was a great experiment for about a year. We just kind of seeing what would it be like to just kind of let people know, and it turned out to be much less dangerous than I anticipated. In fact, I think people appreciated the honesty the fact that you know, someone who could trust someone or someone would speak directly.

So to go back and look into why do you say what you're going to say is a very, very interesting thing. But you're really asked that because you might you might get a quick answer. And you know, a quick simple I think often silly answer would be. I said what I said, because they asked me a question. So you're doing them a service, your public service announcement, they ask the question, but, you know, I think that if you you know, if you go behind why are you answering a question or why are they answering the question that way? all kinds of interesting, interesting things come up. And one of the interesting things that can be behind why you asking your question or what are you trying to accomplish in the question or in talking, or what is happening in the talking is whether real connection is being made. Whether the people involved are meeting as individuals meeting in harmony or meeting in conch quarter, or trying to find some neutral place to connect to the speaking bring us together, or just bringing or the speaking take us apart. And I think we all know there's all kinds of speaking They can separate people can put a wall between people on set, you know, and sometimes people speak intentionally to do that talk unkind, mean you know or say things that are to end the conversation or. But what happens if we're not interested in ending the conversation of creating separation we're interested in, in bringing people together and connected to each other. And one of the, one of the one of the kind of aspects of Buddhist, one of the values that Buddhism is Concord is a social harmony is bringing people together. And one of the ways we do that is through speech. And, and one of the strong values in Buddhism around what brings Concord harmony between people, is when we can speak motivated by either kindness or compassion, and kindness and compassion, I think of as being warmed to human basic human warmth. Then we meet and encounter someone We're seeing how can I meet this person with basic warmth, basic care and basic basic kindness, basic friendliness? Is there that is that is that is there a motivation in the way that you speak. And in the business and activity of life, sometimes it's very easy to forget that. And so part of what we do in Buddhist practice is to learn how to cultivate and develop and remind ourselves of the humanists, the basic human warmth possible in human relationships, and how do we, you know, how can we speak from that place can we speak and one of the ways that I've learned these common ideas and one of the ways to show warm and caring and friendship is don't talk so much. You know, it's good to talk you saw you have to share yourself with people. But don't go on and on and on. Something gets lost. He goes on and on and on. It's been a while now, but there have been times in my life where I've been in conversation with someone. And they have gone on, and they're talking very intensely. And I look in their eyes. And as far as I could tell, they're, I mean, they're not stoned, they're not on drugs. But their eyes are like this person is this person's addicted, this person's caught and they're caught in the web of their intense need to talk to say something. And so you know, not Don't talk too much. There's a one on one teaching, listen, Buddhism, it's more more like for teaching Buddhism. Something I need to listen to more. But you're not supposed to teach everything when you teach Buddhism. You're supposed to only like, say a third of what you could say And just little bit right to the third. And then and then if they ask questions, then you could say the next third would you know, you know, you don't kind of, you know, you don't. They say, you know, what's, what's the basic teaching of Buddhism? And then you sit them down for an hour and a half and you know, a long lecture, you say something simple. Maybe it's only all they wanted. And then they can ask, or, you know, they asked something about you, you know, how was your vacation? You know, and there's there it started, they started looking at your wife at their watch after you've gone on for 20 minutes. They don't want to hear about the details of your vacation. They just want to know that you had a good time or that you're okay. So you say it was fine. You know, it was nice, or you know, I went to, you know, I went to the boardwalk in Santa Cruz.

And then it looks nice. And then but then they can ask more questions of you. And if they ask questions, then they know they care and they want to connect. But the same thing works in reverse. Which is very powerful, is it's very useful to be interested in them and to ask them questions about them. Don't expect that it's all about you. And so, you know, when it when they when the opportunity, they ask you a

question about you or have a conversation, look for a, you know, appropriate opportunity to just ask them something about them. What did you mean there? How does that work for you? Or what do you think of that? And sometimes that's inappropriate. But that's one of the ways of showing warmth, showing care, showing kindness. It's also one of the ways to create a stronger connection by asking questions, you know, finding out who is this person, what's going on here. Another kind of value in Buddhism around speaking is part of the evaluation. If you're mindful, you're kind of trying to be mindful of speech and you speak what motivates you and what you're doing as you speak. And so one of the evaluations is, is what you're going to say useful. So that puts an end to a lot of conversation. But you know, is it useful? And, you know, and sometimes it's useful to talk about silly nothings because it's connected, creating connection, just a chat about stuff and, and has no, you know, obvious use except for two people meeting and connecting. idle chatter can be connecting to people. But is it useful because sometimes when we talk about is not useful at all, and, and so can we have a sense of when it's useful, not not useful. So it's not useful to undermine people, it's not useful to criticize other people. It's not useful to slander other people that a gossip. In fact, not only not useful, but it can cause a lot of problems for a lot of people to be engaged in that kind of activity. And so they ask the question is what I'm about to say useful? You know, if you feel like you're going to give, so you need to give somebody some really important feedback. She asked you a question. It's useful. Because when you take the time to ask the question, you, you realize, well, maybe I need to tell them, maybe if I feel like I need to tell that person that, but the person is not gonna be able to hear. If a person can't hear it, or can't do anything with it, is it useful? It has no use then. And except maybe to get it off your chest. And so perhaps it's more useful for you not to talk of talk, you know, say say it that way or find something else to say that is useful or say it another way that is useful.

Recently, I was involved in helping With some conflict resolution, and so a chance to talk to both parties, and ask them, you know what we're going to say to the other person, and one person had to apologize. And so how are you going to apologize? And it was very interesting to listen to him kind of explain, you know, yes, I'm gonna apologize. I'm sorry for what I did. And and, you know, I need to tell the person you know, and you know, and, you know, he was gonna explain all these different things about, you know, kind of poke it right back it wasn't really going to take ownership of the apology was going to like apologize and but you have, you know, you really messed up here also. And what was needed, was useful in this situation was, was a clean apology, very short to the point and then it could be over and that was to actually try and help these people have it over. That was my do, but I could see the way This guy wanted to apologize. He was gonna go on. And on and on, you know, he said, he said, he said, you know, it's like, and if you just did this clean apology would have been much more useful. And everyone would have settled down, and it would have been over. So is it useful? The other thing that the value or guideline around speaking in Buddhism is, is a timely, and timeliness is really important. So is it the right time to tell? Are they ready to hear it? Is it the right time? Are they you know, what's going on in their life? You know, you, you know, you sit down at dinner, and you know, and you say, you know, that's not the time you talk about. I don't know what maybe, I don't know. But there's all kinds of you know, the wrong time for things. Someone's rushing to get out the door to get to work. He said, I have something really important to tell you. I already have some feedback to give you You know, maybe it's useful that way, because then you don't have to deal with it. That really useful but is a timely is a very so. So the four guidelines in Buddhism and sometimes there's a fifth is is what you're going to say true is what you're going to say kind is what you're going to say useful is what you're going to say timely. And the fourth is sometimes given is what you're going to say. We're going to create Concord connection between people. And so we're a tradition that focuses on mindfulness. One of the most difficult place to be mindful is while you're speaking, in so in social situations, it's such an easy place to get caught up in what we're saying caught up in the relationship. Caught up in our opinions caught up in our desires caught up in the interview. of the exchange, that people often lose themselves

disconnected, lose a connection to themselves, who sometimes lose the connection to the other people. These times when people kind of, you know, kind of have this drug look drug, like look in their eyes talking about something, I feel like I've almost got like that and say, you know, I'm still here. And you know, and they would, you know, all you. They're not really connected. And so, you know, it's easy to lose the mindfulness in speech, but it's also one of the most useful places to cultivate it. And as we cultivate it, there's two different directions in which to cultivate mindfulness of speech. One is cultivating awareness of the speech act as we're doing it. So the actual kind of event of speaking what's happening. So one of the useful things always in mindfulness practice is to come back to your body. So are you connected to your body as you speak and there's a lot to learning A lot to learn about yourself in what your body's doing as you speak the word posture in English has meanings you know the posture you take a physical stance you take, but also it has a psychological or social meaning of people kind of posturing each other because we do that with our with it with how we stand hold ourselves up. So if you feel like you know, afraid we collapse perhaps or feels like giving up we collapse or if we feel kind of proud we puff up if we feel angry, we may be you know, step forward if we feel afraid we step back. I had an interesting phenomena. I mean, no notice in the senior for many years, but it seemed like a whole series of people for a few years, maybe was a trend fashion, I don't know, back in the 90s. But I kind of like to face someone when I talked to them, maybe to a fault but like to face them. And there were some hosts a number of people were they would turn 90 degrees to me and look over the show kind of kind of shoulders.

And so that was okay, but you know, so then I would I'd walk around walk Right. And they would turn. And literally, they didn't know what was going on. But we walked through, I worked 360 degrees around. something was going on about, you know, kind of not really being comfortable about direct contact. So drop into our body and feel what's going on there. And I feel like one of the places that I have been somewhat fortunate to practice mindfulness speaking, is sitting up here teaching, because I get the hot and so I get, you know, so I'm, you know, I'm always, always pay as much as I can try to stay in my body connected to my body as I'm speaking. And I there's cues inside of me and my body tells me sometimes the first indication I have about what's going on what I'm feeling inside as I'm speaking. Sometimes, for example, I'll notice that my body begins leaning forward, and my belly tightens up a little bit and I noticed that it When that happens, I need to kind of take a look back and see what's going on. Because sometimes what happens is that I've gotten a little bit afraid about losing a connection with all of you. And then I'm kind of motivated by that concern, that fear to try harder. And that's not useful. That kind of, so then I forgot that that's what goes on my body tells me that's not doesn't tell me, my body kind of helps me to see that. And then it's interesting to settle back. You know, as is coming forward, and sometimes going forward doesn't mean I'm afraid but but but, you know, and then settle back and see the difference. So, notice what goes on in the body, notice what gets activated. If you're in your body, you're much more likely to notice what your emotions are, what emotions are kicked in as you're speaking. And if you're aware of your emotions, you pay much more likely beware of your motivations. What motivates you to speak what you're trying to accomplish when you're speaking so that's useful. certain emotions, when they're strong, are often indication that you shouldn't have certain conversations. So like, if you're really angry, there's probably certain conversations you shouldn't have when you're angry. Maybe you need to change what you're talking about or how you're talking about it. Or maybe you need to take time out. One of the great times out, that most people will allow you to do is tell people that excuse me if I need to use the restroom. And most people would want to ask you what you're gonna do in the restroom. But if they do ask you say, Well, I'm going to rest you know, you know, it's cool out. The so tracking our emotions, as you know is part of what we do in mindfulness. And then if you're subtle enough, you can also track the movements that You're thinking, what you're what you're actually thinking while you're speaking or while you're listening. It's a great thing to know that you're listening to someone, kind of and you're already

rehearsing your answer. And that's generally not very useful, because then you've lost the real warm, living connection to someone. And it's better to pause and prepare what you're going to say, then, than to rehearse your your rejoinder while they're speaking. I know that I maybe I have actually lost, you know, been so caught up in my rejoinder that sometimes I haven't tracked what they've said. And that makes it very awkward. Because you know what? What? You know, maybe it's not relevant anymore. What I had to sit would have to say I'm so

It's interesting as you're, as we're speaking of the part of the event of speaking to notice what parts of the body are most activated, as most energy is the energy in the belly and the chest and the throat, up in the head in the forehead. And I these for me, I can I can see sometimes my energy, what gets most activated or most shifts and changes depending on how I'm feeling what's going on for me as I'm talking. I mean, you know, all of you, I mean, I could, I could probably get to all of you get kind of right, get your energy to kind of just shoot right up really quickly wake you all up. If you're asleep. I could say, okay, we're gonna we're going to take about five minutes now, to sit and you know, to face each other and have a little discussion. Can we do that periodically here to have, you know, really explore some really important Dharma issue that's important for everybody in their life. And so I'd like you to turn to some One and talk to them about the details of your sexual history. Oh, you were asleep but now and the energy I bet you know if you set it up so I don't think he took me seriously but you know, if you found yourself I said, Okay, first I said make a diet and then I'll tell you what you're gonna talk about in your face someone I can now talk about your, you know, I've got the energy would, you know, you'd be like be plugged in. And it's interesting to feel that that energy how it surges up. It's also interesting to watch when the energy drops. And notice that and find out what's going on and track that what's happening. So part of mindfulness is to be aware of the event of speaking itself. And a lot of information that comes just from that. The other is to evaluate what we're saying and work we're about to say. And some people who like mindfulness meditation think it's only about relaxing and being present. And it's not supposed to be have any kind of valuation as part of it. But Buddhist practice, Buddha spirituality has a huge part where we use our intelligence to consider and reflect and evaluate what is useful and not useful. We don't do that in meditation, that's a time where we drop a lot of that generally, but part of living a wise life is to be able to reflect wisely and consider in an active way. And so, in terms of speaking, then there are these four, if you like, five guidelines that people use to evaluate their speech. Is it true? And there's a phenomenal, phenomenal amount of speech that goes on. That's not quite true. exaggerations, lies of emissions. And so what's that about then is you know, for trying to be honest and true, do we exaggerate Then there's so the first is, is it true? The second is? Is it kind? Is there human basic human warmth in their relationships in the reaction and interaction? The third is, is it useful? The fourth, is it timely? And then the fifth, which is optional, I mean, it's not that is sometimes talked about is that there's a create Concord does it create? does it bring people together as opposed to, you know, separate people. So a lot to keep track of. But if you start evaluating this way, after a while becomes a little like second nature becomes easier and easier because you get more familiar with it. And if you're more relaxed and centered in your body, if you have this capacity to be at home and yourself two weeks ago called solitude, then you're less likely to spin out and you're much more likely much more likely to be able to catch the inception of your speech act, whereas that's a good place to notice these things. If this interests you these five ways of evaluation, what I would recommend is that you take one a day for five days. And then and thinking, evaluate your speech from, from that quality that that particular day. So like if you start tomorrow, tomorrow is all about honesty, and truth. And then Wednesday can be all about kindness. Thursday can be about usefulness. Friday can be about timeliness. Saturday can be about Concord, and Sundays when you get to put them all together, or that's a day of rest. And then then Monday, you put them all together.

But there it is to do one at a time and kind of explore it and expand for yourself and talk to your friends about what they think about that topic. Run through speech and kind of make it a kind of theme that kind of informs your life and engages your life and you can reflect on for some time. And if you engage in actively that way, reflecting on it, thinking about it, journaling about it, reading about it, then it you start to internalize it, and it becomes easier and easier to do. And you might, some people will complain, well, that seems like adding something extra on top of who I am, I should just be natural. But, you know, you've probably internalized all kinds of other ways of speaking. You know, that you've you're living by that you feel build up from our society, from family, all kinds of places. And so this is really, for many people kind of corrective. And, and, and it supports practice. And as we kind of practice more deeply and become freer, then all this becomes more and more natural. Because it's natural to speak the truth. It's natural, to be kind So, those are my thoughts. I hope that interests you to take a new look at speech. Thank you.