

## Right Speech

**Gil Fronsdal**

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OK, so the topic for these weeks that I'm here is the Eightfold Path. And the Eightfold Path is the most classic presentation of the Buddhist path, and it's a comprehensive description of different facets of our life that we address if we're interested in this Buddhist path. Some people, when they hear the Buddhist path and the classic model, the Buddhist path, some people I know react negatively because they do only be Buddhists, and it's too religious and things like that. But the primary purpose of the Buddhist path is not to make people into Buddhists. In fact, you could walk the Buddhist path and the Buddhist path and not be Buddhists and the Buddha's happy with that. We find that it was quite remarkable to be in Asia when I practised there, and actually here in this country too.

I don't think any of my Buddhist teachers ever that I had cared whether I was Buddhist or not. That was just that was not, you know, not the kind of how the game is played in Buddhism. So the purpose of the Eightfold Path is to live a life liberated from suffering, liberated from those inner psychological forces that keep us in bondage, keep us caught, keep us in suffering, keep us in distress, or bring us distress. And it's a really remarkable thing that there is such a path. It's really remarkable that, you know, it certainly remarkable the depth of despair and struggle, depth of fear, depth of trouble that people get into, and how difficult life can be. I very much, my vision of human life is that it's basically pretty difficult.

And even people who conventionally have privileged lives often have tremendous difficulty sooner or later. And to get through a life without, you know, to get through a human life is to get, you know, in with some grace, and some freedom, and some dignity. Is to have to be able to negotiate people dying, and things changing, and dramatic ways, and loss and oppression, and now all these kinds of issues that come up in human life finding work, dealing with livelihood, dealing with family. There was a cartoon many years ago of this big, huge convention

auditorium, and the big banner above the auditorium was, it said, a convention, annual convention for functional families of America, and scattered in auditorium worth three people so senior. I think life is pretty I believe life is very challenging for people, and so how do we face these challenges? How do we deal with them?

And so some people find it's very meaningful to have a path to walk that you can walk yourself. It's up to you. You don't have to rely on something that's supernatural you have to rely on Buddhism verse. You have to rely on something you some belief or tenet. But rather, you'll not rely on practices that you can take on and practices you can engage in that carve a way through the wilderness or a way through the difficulties to some place where it's possible to experience peace, abiding, peace, compassion, wisdom. So the Eightfold Path describes eight practices that we can do, and there's a certain kind of logic to them.

Part of the logic is that the first two have to do with the basic understanding that's needed to have to be engaged in the practice. The next three have to do with the external behaviour of how we live our lives. And the last three have to do with the practice, have to do with our inner landscape, the inner ecology of our own minds. The first three, the first one, has to do with understanding how there is suffering in this life. And it's useful to have a sense of that suffering, to face it honestly and fully, and then to appreciate there's a path through it, and to look for that path through it. And if that's what you want to do is to find this liberation from suffering, the peace of the other side of suffering, then a

The second step on the Eightfold Path, which I talked but two weeks ago, was a sometimes it's translated into English as intention. If one translator says it is resolve, it's you need to be resolved or intent on three things that really help this process. One, it's really important to be intent on not causing harm in this world. Intent on being compassionate doesn't mean you can be compassionate or not cause harm, but you have to be resolved on that. Then the other thing is intent on being, on having good will. Go through this world with some degree of good will.

You can't find peace for yourself if there's ill will in your heart. That suggests it's diametrically opposed is impossible. When there's ill will, your heart's not going to be at peace. When there's cruelty in your heart, there is not going to be peace nor freedom. And then also intent on letting go. And a lot of people think that they can be happy and peaceful without letting go.

So that's because you know, the first two were okay. But what about letting go? But you know, you can't be peaceful if you're clinging tightly to something, holding on tight, or resisting really tightly. So part of the beauty of this path is to find a way to the heart, the mind. The

hands can be open, relaxed, without clamping down or restricting or resisting anything. And how to live a wise life, how to live an effective life, how to live a life that we stand on our own, to feet, and we face the difficulties of our lives and difficulties of this world without needing to close down or grasp or something.

It's part of the task. And so this idea of being resolved, as one translator translates the second Eightfold step, I think it's a very interesting word, more powerful than the word intent, the right intention, right intention is kind of like kind of be kind of like wishful thinking. But resolve means you're going to put yourself on the line for this is important, and you're on a kind of gather yourself around. And some people, I think a kind of approach Buddhism is kind of like a nice idea, and you know, it's better if don't want to Buddhism to ask anything of them, because, you know, if you get another kind of religion, you know, religion after all, and so, you know, you want this kind of benefit for me to appreciate the ideas, or somehow be in the scene, or something. But heaven forbid, but that you have to kind of muster yourself together and you know, really apply yourself and be resolved. But the possibility is there to be resolved.

The possibility is there to be really intent. This is important. This is what I wanted to do. And as I said, if you want to live a life of profound peace and freedom, there needs to be some resolve intent on being compassionate and having good will, and not having the opposite. So then we come to a step for today, which is right speech. So here the fire, the first kind of practical step that affects how we behave in the world, is this thing about right speech and the rights.

What's what, in a sense, defines right speech? It's right. It's the speech which is like a tool is right for a certain task. So it's a speech that's the right speech for a certain task, and the task is to help us become free. And it's a step defined partly by the second step, the resolve. So if we were so resolved on being compassionate and kind, then the expression of that is in speech, which is compassionate and kind.

If we resolve on letting go, then we have speech that somehow represents or expresses letting go. One of the really dramatic forms of letting go that happens in speech is asking for forgiveness, or offering an apology, or saying, Thank you. Sometimes even saying, I love you. It's a very dramatic thing to say, but sometimes it requires a certain degree of letting go. Sometimes people say, I love you. You wish they'd let go.

Certainly it's not necessarily the case, but it can be. So the right speech is to be, to be concerned about how we speak. It's very important, because how we speak expresses what goes on in our inner life, what goes on inside and if we. If we are angry, it's much more, much more,

much more likely to speak in an angry way. If we're greedy, some people are much more likely to speak in manipulative ways and try to get what they want. And so to be careful with our speech not only for the sake of ourselves so we can be on that path to freedom, but also so we don't cause harm in the world.

And now, because idea of not causing harm is so important, you know, it's really, I think, that, you know, we're kind of caretakers for each other, the degree to which we're so connected and involved with everyone, in the degree to which we're a community in a global community, a local community of families. And how deeply we're connected to each other is really something. And now to appreciate how to care for that and be supportive of people. So the Eightfold Path is eight steps. Four of those eight steps have to do with our relationship to other people, how we live in the world with people. It's such at such a hugely important aspect of our life is our interpersonal lives.

So this right resolve, since two of them, too, this two of the right resolves, is a compassionate kindness. You know, mostly that's about how we are with people. Right speech is all about how we speak to people around us. And then, as we see the net, the next few weeks of the next two are also have to do with our actions in the world and then our livelihoods in the world. So right speech. So there's a Buddha gave a fair number of teachings about what he considered right speech, meaning speech that supports this path and a heart.

Classically, there are four things that define right speech and is usually described as the absence of something. So it's the absence of lying, the absence of discursive speech, slander, the absence of harsh speech, hate speech, for example, and the absence of idle speech, or, you know, I don't know what the right word is, but to chatter, idle chatter. So the idea of being careful with what we say. So we don't lie. You know, it's pretty much, I think, most people appreciate the value of it. What people who do mindfulness practice might appreciate even more is that a honesty in speech is mindfulness out loud, or mindfulness is honesty internally.

Because what mindfulness is is really being very clear and acknowledging what's actually happening in the present moment to yourself and being honest about it. This is what's happening, whatever it might be. I'm angry. I'm impatient. I'm happy. I'm feeling kind.

I'm uncomfortable. I'm comfortable. One of being in what you see around you and in the world. Be able to see clearly and name it yourself. This is what I see. So mindfulness is a kind of honesty.

And so if you are being dishonest, you can't practise mindfulness in that moment. And being

dishonest, you're going against a grain of that kind of practice of honesty. Honesty is really concerned, seen as the kind of one of the basic foundations of the path to freedom. How can you be free if you are not being honest? To be lying, manipulating, deceiving people means that you're caught by something. You know that you're not. You are at rest. You're not at peace. And so to be careful with speech.

There is some I've been told by that in maybe it's Chinese are. When they translate the this precept into the city of not lying into Chinese, they use the character for a no rootless speech, no speech that has no roots. And so I'd like this idea of speech, which has roots, something that's rooted deep inside of us. And if we're connected and connected deeply inside of us, then you probably wouldn't speak. You probably wouldn't lie. So then the next one is a no divisive speech, the idea of concord, of taking care of our community is a very important part of Buddhism.

And so how we speak has a big as a big role to say about, you know, whether we create harmony in a community or whether we create separation between people. So very interesting as a guide for speech is the speech that you're is a thing you're out to say is what you are saying, or is what you have said has divided people, that separated people? Has it? Do people feel less connected to each other because what you said, or they feel more connected, is a speech I'm saying, connecting speech, or disconnecting speech? So to consider that. And I hear a lot of people who say things that I don't feel more connected. When they speak to me, they say things in anger. They say things that are not is towards me. But they say things to other people that are angry. They complain, It doesn't seem harmonious. It seems divisive, not the way they talk to other people.

Then no harsh speech. And harsh speech means, you know, it can be just a tone of voice that seems harsh, but it also includes, like, things like hate speech, angry speech that, you know, talking in ways that are very uncomfortable people to listen to. So I was, you know, I was thinking a little bit this afternoon, this evening, about this talk I was going to give, and my son, my older son is a freshman in high school right down the street. Here you can see the high school faces during the day, and then there was something I need to try to understand for him today about the high school. So I went on the high school website and was looking around, and I came upon this, and I was actually quite kind of touched, moved, and I know that's the right word, but by what I read, a little bit disturbed that this had to be here. But I guess this is the world we live in.

And it kind of made me feel very tender towards people. Sequoya High School has adopted a policy regarding the use of hate speech by students and staff. This policy is intended to

increase the atmosphere of acceptance and respect at Soquoya. We view the use of hate speech against any person on the basis of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or appearance as unacceptable behavior. The use of hate speech works against the basic principle of our school's mission statement. to provide a safe educational environment for students. Hate speech is painful and oppressive. Using language that characterizes a group or individual in a negative manner can be psychologically damaging to the person at whom it is directed and to others. To overhear the language even if the parties using it are not offended common use of these terms by students teaches that hate speech and slurs are acceptable and inconsequential. Our responsibility as educators includes creating a learning environment that respects diversity and advocates for the rights of individual students.

We appreciate the aid of parents in maintaining this environment at home because we feel so strongly about each individual's right to exist in a safe, positive learning environment. Students who violate this policy will be subject to school discipline. So I don't know. It was kind of may be sad that this is a high school, but I'm also glad that if that's being talked about and made explicit, and you know, we have. We live in a society, in a world where there's lots of hate and no shortage of it. And so to emphasize this and to stress this and make it a real mission. In high school, you know, I was kind of both very saddened by it, but also heartened that was there. The concern was there. And, you know, I can't imagine that I never heard that when I went to high school. So it's long ago now, but I don't. I wasn't aware of any policy like this. Maybe there was, and I wasn't told the A. It's a harsh speech, you know, as hate speech includes hate speech. And so be careful with that, and do the opposite. Try to find speech that expresses our care and love for each other, not our animosity to each other, and it's kind of self fulfilling. too, is one of the sad things about and big great things about this, that anger, angry speech, hate speech, divisive speech, is self reinforcing and a kind of self fulfilling in some ways, and kind of proves itself almost. But that, but the wonderful thing, is the opposite is true. That speech that's kind speech that is brings people together, and creates harmony, and expresses kindness and friendship, creates more of the same, and that becomes self fulfilling.

So which world, what kind of world you want to live in, and what I think is really great here is that creating a better world of harmony and peace and respect for each other, as it is, goes completely together. with helping us become free internally. It's becoming peaceful ourselves. The two can't be separated. We can't expect to be able to sit on our cushion and become free and peaceful and happy and full of smiles without any care and concern about how we live and express our life in the world around us. And then the last of these kind of The

guideline around right speech has to do with avoiding what's usually sometimes translated and translated into English as idle speech or idle chatter, I guess.

And now I don't be all that cautious about this, because sometimes we can look like idle chatter. A light banter or talking about nothing at all is one of the important ways in which human beings connect and find each other, and get a sense of each other, and important part of it all. But there's sometimes, you know, filling the empty space with stuff that basically has no point. That some people are uncomfortable with silence, and I think that learning to be comfortable with silence so that we can meet each other in a deeper way or sense each other in a deeper way is a beautiful thing. I've told the story a few times before, but you haven't heard it. For those people who haven't heard it, let me tell you.

So we bought this building eleven years ago from two elderly Christian ministers, and they learned about us that we were looking for a building to buy, and they wanted us to buy it. They wanted us to have at their building more than other Christian groups because their primary practice was to sit in silence, and they wanted us to because we sat in silence. They want to continue that. And it took a long time before they showed us the building. I think it took like nine months from the time we heard that they were interested in selling to us until we had a phone call to and then another nine months from that phone call until they showed us the building, which was great for us. We'd like to do things slow, and, you know, that actually worked very well for us.

And so I talked to them for a few times over those second nine months on the phone, and it was like we kind of became really close. It was they were so full of love is these ministers, and such bright spirits, and just like talking to them, I get so high and happy. And we were like friends, you know. We never met right still didn't meet. Finally they were. We're going to meet for the first time, and they're going to show us the church, the church here. And so I came first because we were friends, right? And by not by phone calls. So I came first just to meet the couple. And then an hour later, the people from our community were going to come and look at the place, and so you can see the building is not very big, you know? It looks like almost like one big room, right? Ell shaped room, and a few small rooms. So they started walking around, because that's what you do when you want to sell a building. They walk on, show you the building to someone, and and they were talking a bit about the building to us, to me. And as they talked, it went, you know, then there was little gaps in the conversation, and those gaps in the conversation became longer and longer. So we kind of spin around the building, and we came back to the apartments here. But we back in their time. And so we sat down on the front porch, the three of us, and there was one of these

silences, and so we just sat there. We was always sat there in silence for about ten minutes. And it wasn't planned, you know, was it? It wasn't self consciously done, or just it was just beautiful. It was actually quite profound, and In some ways, it was more meaningful to sit there in silence than it was to keep talking about buildings and plumbing and now the kind of, you know, real estate questions that probably you could think of asking. And we sat there in silence, and appreciated the presence, the silence, being together. And then some of our people start coming, and so we had to get up and welcome them. And then we started talking again. And so when we had a chance, I walked up to one of the ministers and whispered in his ear and said, Some time were going to have to pick up where we left off.

So if I had been uncomfortable with that silence, you know, and filled with idle chatter and stuff like that. Then, you know, and when I was I don't know twenty one or so twenty I was staying at a place called The Farm in Tennessee. I was in the largest hippie commune in America at that time. They were like eight hundred hippies there. And there was a teacher who was kind of spiritual teacher named Stephen asking who was there. And when I got there to stay there for a while, he was in jail. He'd been in jail for a year because, you know, one of the spiritual practices of the commune was drugs. And so, you know, at work, and he started off, and hid Ashbury, and that kind of work there, but didn't work in Tennessee. So he was in jail when I got there, and but for a year, and then they let him out. And so I'd been there for a while, and I met him for the first time, and when I met him, I mean, I thought we'd have an ordinary, simple conversation. How are you? know you asked me where I'm from and what I'm up to, and just one of ordinary things. Instead, he just was quiet and looked at, and he looked into my eyes, and my experience I had with my mind exploded in a beautiful way. It's like my mind just went out and out and out into the stars, and I felt quite profound, and then miss contact high from all the acid he'd done, and but anyway. But then I got nervous because you suppose to say something socially, right? You was the decease socially. You can't just stand there in silence, but just talk and say something. So I blurted something out, and I collapsed back. So I hadn't learned how to be comfortable yet with silence. Let things happen. So idle speech, what does it cover? What does it prevent? What does it get in the way of? In terms of depth of connection, what's possible?

So if you want to walk this Buddhist path, one of the things you could do is to start paying attention to your speech and what you say and give some care to it. Not because it's a moralistic obligation to do it, and you're not. It's ethical. You know, I mean, it's some kind of moralistic idea that thou shalt be honest, but I hope relates a happier motivation than that. It's a beautiful and happy thing to walk a path of freedom and liberation. It's a beautiful, happy



thing to walk a path that supports our community around us and benefits the world around us. And so to be, in one of the primary ways and many of us interact with the world and interact with ourselves, it's through speech. And so to give some care to that, and take some responsibility, and take your time, and speak. Be mindful as you speak, be aware of what you're doing when you're speaking. Stay in touch. Take ground in yourself when you speak. It's so easy when we speak to lose touch with ourselves. I've talked to enough people, kind of not so much a goose, but outside the I get a sense when they are speaking that they're addicted, and you know that they're kind of catheters are certainly really absorbed in some kind of addiction, some idea or some feeling or something. And, you know, there's in a few times, so I want to just go. I could wave my hand from their eyes and say, You know, wait a minute. If, you know, it's in to break the trance they were in. So any way to be careful with our speech, to pay attention we're doing, to be grounded. Ky, I think I hope it's an idea of this path of right speech. It's something that you'll think about and hopefully think about in ways that will make you happy. It's a beautiful thing.

We have about five minutes before the end. Does anyone want to make any comments? or have questions or have any protests. Yes, right. The right is the word *sammā* in Pāli, and as can mean right, it also means complete, and could also mean thorough. It's almost always translated into English as right. But it's the right not in terms of right and wrong in some moralistic way, but rather the same idea that we would say when we use right to talk about the right tool. So if you have a screw that needs to be screwed in, the right tool is a screwdriver, not a jack hammer. So we say you the right tool for the job. So in that sense of right, the appropriate for the task, yes.

Sometimes we are in a situation where we might say something which is literally a lie, but the intention is the truth might hurt another person. So the body is might be noble. So what to do inside? So he said sometimes there might be a situation where the intention is to benefit someone, but what's required is to lie. And, you know, there is, you know, philosophy departments are filled with questions like this. You know, they love these kind of questions, extreme questions. What would you do if they? And so the question is, So I think the Buddhist general Buddhist approaches, you won't be really cautious with that, and try to figure out a way to say what you need to accomplish without having to lie. So, you know, you know, after the bride is dressed for the wedding, and she asks you what you think of the dress, and you really think it's hideous, it's probably not the time to have that kind of honesty. It's not what's called for. But you don't say, you know, you may be don't say, Well, it's, you know, it's gorgeous, or like, That's the greatest dress I've ever seen. But maybe it's possible to say

something like, You don't. You don't answer the question directly. Or it say something like, You know, you look stunning in it, you know it. So is there some way of not lying, but also not, you know, but saying something which is appropriate? And so I think giving some care and thought about how you can say things. It doesn't sound manipulative. You're not trying to, you know, get around it, but something that's honest, that suits the task that you're trying to do. The caring for someone, I think, has a high value. Because I think it has a lot of value that people know, that they can trust you, that people. You can know some. I know some people who it's so clear to me that this is a person who is not going to lie. They can be really careful about it. And to me, it's, for the most part, those people are. It's very reassuring to be around those kinds of people, very meaningful to be around those people. And so if you feel like you need to kind of say things where you have to lie, then you know you might not. You know, and they find out their trust in you might not be there. So try to find some other way to say it. But then I do also know people who can't lie. They really know them. We really can be honest but they're not very wise about how they're being honest. And sometimes I've even felt that they're being not exactly lazy, but kind of lazy. They're not really taking responsibility. The situation they're in there is going like, It doesn't really matter what anybody else thinks. I'm going to say it, say it as I see it, and they're very honest. But there isn't a care. There isn't. It isn't kind and is not compassionate. I So how to hold these things together? I think it's very important.

Yes, I, Yogi eusedomike, please. It seems like bluntness and compassion are rarely going to happen at the same time. Whether examples in Darla were kind of a blunt tool or blunt speech is appropriate, it turns out that in the Buddhist discourses supposed to be the record of the Buddhist conversations with people. When he spoke to his disciples, people who is monks, he are the word in English is. It's often enough he's rebuking them. Jane's like these pretty blunt. He says, You know, sometimes he says, You fool. Now, is that the right speech? I don't know, but he asks for examples. And it's interesting that in Buddhism, you know, in like Christianity, I believe they know the idea of being a sinner is really important, or not being a sinner is important. And in Buddhism, they don't have the notion of sin, and the idea of someone being a sinner is not such a, you know? Now, not a concept, but the comparable concept is a fool, you know? So rather than you've sinned, you've been really foolish. And I think it, in my mind at least, it has a different kind of meaning and connotation. If it just to end up enough you to see, you know, you fool by itself, it seems kind of harsh and cruel. But there are behaviours which are really awful that people do. And rather than saying, You know, you've sinned now and you're damned as you say that was foolish, it actually kind of opens up a possibility for them to become wiser. That's the task. So I think it's had some

meaning to saying you fool in the right in the right time and place. And the right time and place with Buddha was people who had committed themselves to him as their teacher. So there's a whole different permission that's allowed.

The last one, yes, that actually led right into my question, which is about deceptive speech. Can you talk a little bit about how you can disagree with injustice or you know something that you really feel you need to speak out about? I mean, when there is a difference of opinion or a different view, I mean, how do you get around that? I think one of the things on it I don't know, because it's so situational, so many different contexts and ways. But one of the starting points to address a cut. Your question is, of for what purpose do you want to speak? Do you know the purpose? What are we trying to accomplish? Is it just before you can get your opinion out? So there's other guidelines that Buddhism gives as well around speech. The ones I gave here about right speech was no lying, no a divisive speech, no no harsh speech and no idle chatter. The other guidelines that Buddha gave elsewhere was, as you speak, and consider these things before you speak: Is what you're going to say true? Is what you say I'm going to say timely? It's the right time to say it. Is what you're going to say beneficial? This is useful to say it. And even something might be true. Sometimes it's not useful to say it, so why bother? And then the other is that does it lead to concord? Does it bring people together in harmony in some way? And the fifth is it kind? And so classically in Buddhism, you would actually know, not all the time, but especially in important conversations like this, you would ask yourself those questions. And so for you. But first question is, for what purpose do you want you speaking up against injustice? A: If you really feel like it's useful, you can make a difference. A: That's very different. Then you just kind of feel like you need to vent, and you know, speak up, and which might not be useful at all for anybody. But if it was useful to you, if injustice is happening in front of you, then I hope I hope that would make a difference and help out somehow. But that takes a lot of wisdom to know each situation, what's needed. I remember once trying in sarcisconto intervene. There was a car that came careening down the street and kind of screech to a halt in the intersection, and out of the back seat, this woman tumbled out and kind of stumbled on to the middle intersection, and these two big football kind of guys got out the car, and they wanted that woman, and so, you know, she was backing away, and they were going after her. So What do I do? You know, they were big, you know. So I kind of got into the intersection, and kind of stood between them, and between those two guys and this woman, and they were they would approach me, and I would take a step back, and they'd approach me if we had a little conversation, you know, and I'd step back, you know? And it was basically to dance. And it wasn't, didn't look so good. And I was trying to help with an injustice. I think I wasn't. I don't know what's

going on, but, you know, I didn't seem good to me. Was going on. And then this other guy came out, you know, came on the sidewalk, and he came over, and he kind of didn't exactly in the middle of the whole scene, but standing right next to it, and said, he said, he said to the two big guys, he said, You know, if I was in his woman's position, I hope you would come and intervene and check out what's going on. The whole thing calmed down. Every one calmed down. It's the whole thing, you know? So, you know, he didn't stand there and say, It's what you're doing. So in just, you know, he just had to do a very wise thing that made a big difference that time. So what, you know? But my hope. So I don't know how we say it, what we do, but I hope that we always find a way to try to intervene and try to find the wise way, and that one of the functions of Buddhist practice is to make us fearless, so that we're willing to stand our ground. We're willing to face injustice, face struggle, face conflict, and deal with it in an honest and direct way. My hope is that Buddhists are a Buddhist practice leads to people who are unlikely to get into conflict, but who are not conflict averse. So if there is conflict, they're willing to stay there and be present for it, and then figure out what needs to happen. That's my hope. OK, so thank you.