

2020-07-26 Speech that Nourishes

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SPEAKERS

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I've become, you know, very aware and reflective about the amount of divisive speech that exists in this country these days. And not only divisive, but also some speech which is filled with hate and animosity. And so I want to talk a little bit about speech, but about what the Buddha had to say about wise speech or right speech.

And as an introduction to this, there is a Tibetan Buddhist saying that if you want to while you're meditating, you should watch your mind. While you're in the world, you should watch your speech. And there's something very significant about really tracking what you're saying. And really being bringing a lot of mindfulness to what goes on are all the speech acts we do. In fact, the speech acts we make, how we speak, what we say, is a window into the depths of our being, into what's going on deeper. And it's a way of accessing ourselves and what's going on deep inside, that sometimes works better than meditation. Certainly meditation, watching our mind, we see a lot and quiet it and touch into some deeper way of being. But also, sometimes we don't see parts of ourselves. That in our own privacy of eyes closed and quiet, there might be somewhat selective the range of things that come up, our beliefs, our impulses, our motivations and our attitudes to things. But when we're out and about in the world, all kinds of events can trigger us, can evoke different parts of who we are. And if we're watching our speech, how we talk, how we communicate, how we write, how we sign people who do sign language, that how we communicate with each other, carries a lot of information about ourselves, and to really turn and really use that to tap into ourselves in a deeper way.

For the people who have done this in meditation, and have discovered the kind of world of inner resources that are available through meditation, then there's a very important reference point for understanding speech, being motivated how we speak, the kind of speech we do, and that is when we sit in meditation as we go further and further into this inner world of meditation we have a clear experience, immediate experience or clear, tangible feeling for peace, for ease, for calm, for quiet, for a certain kind of intimacy. There's many different perspectives on what happens in meditation. But we

start tapping into some kind of inner resources that are valuable in our way of being that's valuable. And usually it's a way of being that has less and less strife less and less unease, it's more, there's more ease, there's more subtleness, more being at home, something like that. And that is actually a very important reference point. Because if we really taken in and registered and felt and been nourished by these inner wealth, these inner resources, then the question is, why give it up? What do we do? What do we what comes out of our mouth, what comes out of our fingers, if we're writing or signing? What comes out of us in our communication? Is it in harmony with what we're discovering in meditation? Or is it in the most dramatic situation, is it a kind of violence to it? And I use that kind of dramatic language, language violence, because of the tremendous difference there is, between a sense of deep well being that comes in meditation, and some of the forms of speech that go on in the world. Speaking in angry ways and hostile ways, speaking in harsh ways, speaking in false ways, in lying. All these manipulative ways, all these ways in order. What's really fascinating for meditators, is all these kinds of forms of painful speech, is that we feel a loss if we're really paying attention, we feel a loss of the peace, the well being, the happiness that's here. People who don't have a deep sense of inner life won't see the degree to which hostile speech, manipulative speech, lying speech, harsh speech is actually harming the speaker. Sometimes where there's people are so focused on what they're saying and the purpose of what they're saying, revenge, you know, to get someone to poke at someone or, you know, make sure people feel that we're angry or to get rid of someone or I know all kinds of things we do, that we're so focused on the what we're trying to do and can feel justified in doing it, that we don't really turn around and see what is the impact mean for us personally, through these acts of speech, and then I believe the more a person has really developed a deep inner life, deep inner life where we're settled at home and ourselves in a deep way. Content calm, there's a certain kind of rich, wealthy quietude and peacefulness inside that will feel the dissonance between that, and how some of these more painful forms of speech exists for us, the impact it has on us.

And independent of the morality of speech, the ethics of speech, even independent of how the speech acts we make affect other people. The way that affects us becomes more and more important reference point for meditators for people who are following the Buddhist path to liberation. And it isn't only that we have a reference point for how we lose something, how we do a kind of violence to ourselves through this way, but we've come more we're aware of the opposite as well, how certain acts of speech that come from this place of well being inside, that they actually work to nourish ourselves to feed ourselves, support this growth and development, this place of goodness inside. And to feel, just feel the impact that has internally for ourselves will give us plenty of reason for us to either to avoid harmful speech to avoid speech which is hurtful to other people, and to avoid speech which is harmful, hurtful for ourselves. And rather than that, to do speech, which is supportive for ourselves, feels good for ourselves seems like it supports and nourishes the place of goodness inside of us. And if it's nourishing us, it's chances are very high, it's nourishing for other people, it's beneficial for other people. If it's really beneficial for other people, then the hope is that we figured out a way to speak, that is beneficial for us.

So the benefits go in both directions. It's not that they're only benefiting others, only benefiting ourselves. But there's something very significant that the same acts of speech can do it in both directions. And then it's not a zero sum game. It's not like I have to sacrifice myself for the sake of you, or I have to sacrifice you for sake of myself. It's beautiful, that the same act of speech done carefully and well supports both self and others. So how does this How is this done? The most important thing is I think, for people who are meditators is to avail themselves is to really tap into review minded feel, remember to play that place of subtleness that they have in meditation. Don't forget it when you get up. Don't try to hold on to it either. That doesn't work so well. But don't forget about it. Stay in touch, stay in touch that place where that subtleness can be or the calm or the love or the generosity, stay in touch with it. And then use it even if it's just a matter of remembering it. So you can feel the difference. You can feel what happens to your heart happens to your chest happens to your body, happens to your mind. In those places where you're calm, those places with his goodness lives in you. Even when it's not there, you've made it as second nature to tap into it, to touch into it, to be aware of it because those are the places where hostile speech, lying speech, harsh speech is going to undermine yourself, you'll feel how to undermined you. So this is a great thing, I think.

So the Buddha gave all kinds of guidelines that are very helpful for being mindful of speech. Speech in such a way that it's not just a matter of being mindful of it, but being mindful so that we learn how to have speech which is nourishing, supportive, inspiring, meaningful to have and supports the what's happening in meditation. So that the axiom in meditation watch your mind in life, watch your, your speech, your communication becomes so acute, so also clear, that that attention to speech is as effective as in meditation, paying attention to your mind or focusing on your breathing. That's the potential we have. And so the guidelines that Buddha gives are kind of like mirrors or helps or supports or little pointers, where we can look and how we can pay attention. So that this happens for us that we can, you know, you practice with the full potential of speech.

And so, today I'm going to talk about four things that the Buddha said around speech. There's lots of different lists around speech. And then for these next five Monday mornings at 7am 730 talks, I'm going to go through another list which is a list of five so that's convenient one for each day. Five criteria for right speech, five reference points of support us in our speech speaking. But for today I want to talk about the four there's there's a list of 10 things called the 10 skillful actions. And these are kind of like precepts except they're not like the five precepts, even though they correspond to them, some of them. They are five wholesome or skillful ways of acting in the world. Four of these have to do with speech. And they are to speak the truth, to speak, so to speak the truth, to speak what's beneficial, to speak what is polite or gentle or pleasing, the word is pleasing or inspiring. And then to speak, what is connecting for people brings people together, as opposed to separate people.

So, the first speaking the truth, this should hopefully be very meaningful for people who do mindfulness practice. Because mindfulness practice is a practice of telling ourselves the truth, being honest with what's happening for ourselves, and really seeing what's here for us. Even you know,

noticing, you know, every time we notice what's here, even with the breath, sensations of the body, the emotions we have, and we recognize it, that's a small movement or a big movement of truth telling, we're telling ourselves what's actually true and happening here. And sometimes, what we see in ourselves is maybe things we don't necessarily want to even admit to ourselves. And so it's a big step to be honest to ourselves. And this mindfulness opening of our inner life up to in mindfulness is a kind of process of truth telling for ourselves.

To bring that into the world is mindfulness into the world is to be honest out loud, is to be dedicated to be truthful, but what's happening in the moment, and, and certainly not to lie, because lying goes against the grain lying is the opposite takes us takes us in the opposite direction of mindfulness practice. If mindfulness practice Buddhist practice is really something that is a foundation of a person's life, what they really are building and trying to create a nice support for themselves and put a lot of time and effort into studying and practicing Buddhism. You know, you would don't want to do anything that takes you in the opposite direction. And so lying takes you in the opposite direction. It closes things down. It's actually an alien, alienating movement to lie. We not only alienate ourselves from others, because we're not connected, we're not, they can't really connect when there's lies. People can't know us. They can't really there's nothing there to meet. That's deep and authentic. But also we alienate ourselves from ourselves, the more we lie. So telling the truth, that doesn't mean we have to tell every truth that we could possibly say. We want to tell that that's why the other criteria are important as well. So we certainly want to be dedicated to saying the truth.

And then we want to avoid divisive and we wanted to avoid malicious speech. We don't want we don't want to so and that is the opposite of malicious speech is benevolent speech or beneficial speech? So is what we're going to say beneficial? Or is it harmful. So even the truth spoken can be harmful to people and sometimes truth is used as a terrible weapon. Sometimes people say the truth about and it's, you know, he's spreading not only gossip, it's spreading, letting the world know things that that are private and confidential. There are people who have committed suicide because they were outed in some kind of way that someone else said, I know the truth about that person, but it was very private and not really something they want other people to know and there was nothing illegal, nothing wrong with how they were, but they were outed and it was devastating. So just the fact that we know the truth about someone is it beneficial to say it is it harmful? Is it beneficial to tell someone? Something about them that actually harms them or hurts them a lot? Or is it better than to be quiet and not say it? So sometimes silence is the best way to communicate, to not say anything if it's going to be harmful.

So we ask ourselves versus a true, is it beneficial? If it's not beneficial, then maybe the most beneficial thing to do is to be quiet. Or we find something else to say maybe there's the truth, but there's other truths that exist as well. And so if someone has a wearing a shirt, and they ask you what you think of it, and you think it's horrendous, you don't that's not the truth, you should say. Maybe it's completely appropriate and honest to say it's a wonderful color. Just leave it as that. And maybe that's enough and the person can be settled.

So then, the next criteria that Buddha gave is that is that to avoid speech, which is harsh, but rather speak words, which are inspiring, that are pleasing. I like very much the idea of nurturing that support something to grow and develop. It's really good and wholesome inside of us. So, sometimes the word is translated as gentle speech. But in the explanation of it, they use the word inspirations inspiring for us. So maybe we have to say maybe we're going to say the truth, maybe we're going to say what's beneficial, but are we going to say it in a way that is harsh, we're going to say it in a way that is kind and supportive or sweet or inspiring or gentle or you know, So we can kind of see which of these do we want to follow. And if we can only say it harshly, because we're in a hurry or because we're, you know, grumpy ourselves, maybe even though it's would be beneficial for the person to hear some truth, to get some information, we're not in a state ourselves, we can communicate that in a way that's inspiring and meaningful or so they can be really be heard in a good way.

And then the fourth criteria is, and this is one that I feel is very important these days, does it bring people together? Or is it a lost opportunity where there's no connection? The opposite of it. And what the precept is is the skillful action precept is usually translated as to avoid idle speech, or pointless speech. It's not really clear what this word how this word should be translated. But the opposite of it is speech which connects people. So sometimes idle speech. It's just the idle not really talk about anything at all. But part of his purpose is in fact to connect people and talk about something that's in has no no particular charge, nothing, just a nothing kind of conversation. But people feel bonded more they feel closer, they feel connected. Or we can speak pointlessly about things that just people miss each other and there's no connection at all. Or it can be divisive speech, again, no connection at all, or it can be allying and dying, as I said, doesn't make any real living, valuable connection. It does make a connection but it's a one fraught with difficulty. How do we bring how do we heal divisiveness? How do we bring people together so they're connected in friendship? They don't have to agree but can they be, can they care for each other? Can be a sense of kind connection between people. And this is particularly important in this political world we are right now because it's remarkable. And in all directions that I see how, if easily people get evoked in their anger, their despair, their hostility towards other people. And hostility and anger and such things are not valuable means not useful ways of communicating, if what we want is to as a community to find the truth in the community to find what's beneficial as a community to find what is inspiring and pleasing as a community. We can find out how to come together, and then hand how to come together and somehow find a way together as a community as opposed to being divided. How we speak to each other, and how we speak about each other is really, really important. And it might be the key to solve a lot of a lot of the difficulties, that kind of stalemates that exists in this country. And so, to come out of meditation and have a meditators reference point where it's clear, really clear, hundred percent clear that we do violence to ourselves, when we lie, when we speak maliciously, when we speak harshly when we speak kind of way that really missed the other person disconnected from someone else. We disconnect from ourselves too. And we do something really beneficial. We can do something beneficial, that stays close and true to the depths of who we are the goodness we have inside this wealth that we have inside. When we speak the truth, when we speak beneficially and speak what's good and useful when we speak in

ways that are inspiring, pleasing, or polite or caring, and most importantly, when we speak in ways where the speaker is saying things, maybe it's difficult things that we need to say. Maybe very strong, difficult things need to be said. But we're saying it with an eye out with a care that how can I say this to connect us together? How can I can hear The divide, how can we have reconciliation? How can we become family? How can we become, walk this path of life together? Even though we might have differences? How does that work?

So we don't have to do this of course, but that's what the meditators, meditation can inspire in us. If we want to stay true to what we discover in meditation. And it's reciprocal. Because when as you begin watching and monitoring your speech and trying to find how to apply these four principles into one's life, that that in turn will support your meditation and help the meditation go deeper, and the wonderful spiral of being engaged in communication with people around you and then being in meditation, in deep communication with yourself, that you'll discover more and more and more, that they'll be truthfulness, focus on beneficence, focus on kindness, focus on connecting in both directions. And to do that for the world outside. And for us to do that for ourselves. To become our own best friend, is one of the beautiful things that can happen through this practice of right speech.

So thank you. And for those of you who coming these next Monday mornings will do more of this kind of exploration of speech and maybe this week for you come Monday mornings or not. Maybe you can spend the week making this one of the primary kind of focuses of your mindfulness practice and see what you learn. Give extra time to pause, to reflect, to look, to track what you're saying, and why you're saying it. Ask yourself why do I want to say something before you say it? Ask yourself while you're saying it, why am I saying this? And ask yourself when it's over, why did I say that? You'll learn a lot about yourself, I believe, if you really explore deeply this question, these questions.

So, thank you. I appreciate the chance to teach with you and meditate here and I look forward to our next time.