

Right Speech (2 of 3)

Ines Freedman

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Good evening. Tonight this is the second of a three week series we're doing on wise speech or right speech. I don't know how many of you were here last week, but Daniel Bowling talked about the intention behind our speech, and also about the importance of listening. Listening is a huge part of our interrelationships. Today I'm going to focus mostly on the areas where we tend to have difficulties in our speech, and next week a merchant is going to talk about the practicalities of developing our speech and improving on our skills in the world, in the workplace and at home. The Buddha thought that wise speech was so important that he gave it its own step on the Eightfold Path, equal to mindfulness, equal to meditation.

We often take our speech for granted, but it has a tremendous impact in our lives. Just think about what happens. You know one word, you know somebody else, fire, you know that one word can have such a tremendous impact on a lot of people, very quickly. One of the things Gil—I like that Gil said—is that most of us pay attention much more to the way we dress than we do to the way we speak. Unwise speech is one of the quickest ways to create problems in our lives. I know as a teenager, I could go from totally peaceful and laid back to tremendously angry just by five words from my mother.

You know, like, "Why aren't you like so and so?" Just like that. And a lot of buttons we have are triggered by very simple words. Sometimes we don't realize the impact of our speech. For instance, getting angry at a customer service person—it's hurtful to them. It also hurts our own agenda. You know how many people think that by yelling at a customer service person you can get better service? Very few people do, but yet that's what a lot of people do. They get annoyed and irritated, unfriendly, unkind. So it affects the person that we're being rude to, it affects our agenda—getting what we want—and it affects our own peace of mind.

Speech has an amazing impact in the way we live in the world. Someone I know works in tech support, and he said that at a computer, an internet service provider tech support, when

people would call and they'd get rude and frustrated, they would put them on a penalty hold. I thought of it sort of like time out for adults. Our speech can make us lose friends, it can affect us in the world, lose jobs, it can induce wars. So the benefits of speaking skillfully are really widespread. Also, they create social harmony, friendship, and trust.

The less a society is dependent on thinking that people are telling the truth, that's basically what makes a society function. That's what makes the relationship function. The less trust there is in a relationship or in a society, the more dysfunctional that society is. So really, if you look at the world we live in, so much of that, so much of all the chaos and suffering, it's because people just aren't telling the truth. And if we look at our own lives, often that's part of the problems in our relationships. Another benefit of wise speech is psychological. If we speak wisely in our lives, we don't have regrets about what we've said.

You don't feel bad that you just yelled at your kid. You don't feel bad that, like, for instance, people who lie—once you tell a lie, then you have to support the lie, and then it can get complex, and you're spending all this energy trying to make sure your lie is consistent. It's exhausting. And the third thing that's a benefit is really, you know, what we may call karmic, the karmic benefits. What we say today has an effect tomorrow. Sometimes the seeds of kindness can come back and nourish us, or the seeds of harsh language can come back, bite us, and then the less benefit. In meditation, if my mind isn't filled with regret about this argument you had and regret about how things went, with something in the mind, can you really focus on being peaceful and allowing insights to come?

The Buddha divided or kind of taught about right speech in two ways. He gave four "no's" and four "yes's." So four things to refrain from in our speech, and four things to make sure they include in our speech. I want to first focus on the four things to refrain from. The four things to refrain from are: refrain from lying, refrain from malicious or divisive speech, refrain from harsh speech, and refrain from idle speech or gossip.

First, I want to talk about refraining from lying. Sometimes you lie and it's very gross, you know. You just say, "I didn't take it," something very simple and obvious. Or it can be very subtle. Lies take on different forms depending on the motivating root. For instance, if the motivating root for a lie is greed, your lies are going to be self-serving, to gain personal advantage for yourself or for people close to you.

For instance, you might lie to get material wealth. Cheating on your taxes is one way to do it, or in a lot of other, more obvious ways, such as something subtle government has done, and things like that. Or we might be motivated by greed for admiration. We want it, you know. We want to be a hot shot. We want to be somebody. So we might lie to try to, you know,

because we want that advantage. We want respect. A salesperson might lie. Many of us have seen not just a salesperson, but also in ads, in writings, words where products are touted as being a lot better than they really are. A lot of people exaggerate their accomplishments or even make them up.

I had a relative who used to like to gamble, and if you listened to him, he always won, always, but he wasn't wealthy. But you get the idea. So with hatred as the motive—for greed you seek out advantage, for hatred as the motive—the intention is to hurt someone or to damage them, such as you might talk about something that someone did and then color it a lot worse. If aversion or fear is the motive, it might be trying to avoid a consequence. Have any of you spent time coming up with ideas, ways to escape the park, a speeding ticket? I mean, have you fantasized about, "OK, what would I say if I got stopped right now?" We want to avoid something, we want to avoid a consequence. "I'm sick" might be an excuse to not go somewhere.

Sometimes people lie by omission, which is usually due to fear, like hitting a car and not leaving a note. Another way that we might lie out of fear is a parent or someone in a position of authority—a parent, a teacher, a leader. We're used to knowing everything, right? You're up here. You know everything. Teachers must have all the answers. Or the parent's supposed to know everything. And so there's a tendency for the person in power to not want to be seen as not knowing, and so they fake it. It's a very powerful motive for lying. A parent does not want to give up being seen as the one who has all the answers. Didn't want to be seen as vulnerable. We get very hooked into these roles.

I'll tell you my own history of lying. You know my background, my parents. We were in Europe during World War II and my father—he was a Polish Jew who joined the Russian army to fight the Nazis. And even though the Russians were fighting the Nazis, they still didn't have a love for Jews, and it was very dangerous to be known as a Jew. In the nine years that he was in the army, most of the time was spent outdoors. One of the things that is very hard to come by is privacy. In Russia, at least at that point in time, circumcision was not common, so that if you were circumcised it was the sure sign you were Jewish. So for the nine years, every day he had to find a way to urinate where he wasn't seen, where he had to hide, and that created a very deep level, a very strong habit of hiding, of lying. Many other things during the war period, where lying was really essential to his survival. My mother came from a similar background in World War II, and also developed a very keen sense for lying to survive.

So I grew up in an environment—they went to Argentina, where I grew up, and where lying was just normal. It was just something we did. It's the way you got by in the world. But it

spread to everything. If they didn't want me to do something they'd lie to me about it. It just became pervasive. The only thing they didn't lie about was money. They kind of held, "Well, we're honest people, when it comes to money, we hold that sacred," you know, money or possessions. My mother would walk a mile to return a dime, because it was so important to be honest that way. So it was a very kind of a little bit of a twisted dynamic. I knew my parents lied, but I didn't know that they lied to me.

Until I was eight, and my parents decided to emigrate to the United States, and we went by this big Japanese ship. There were me, my sister—I was eight, she was ten—and my parents in this little, tiny cabin for a month, going to Los Angeles. My father was really worried that my sister and I weren't going to be able to behave, since there was nothing to do on that ship. So he told us that a week into the trip, the deck would be opened up, and there'd be a swimming pool there. Of course, as an eight-year-old, my father told me that. I believed him for the whole week. When the week was up, and it wasn't there, I didn't get angry. I didn't get angry with him. But something broke inside. I just stopped trusting my parents, because my mother had supported the lie also, and it really damaged my relationship with my parents at that point. It also made it okay for me to totally lie to them. So at that point, I became a better liar than they were, and I did whatever I wanted to when I wanted to do it, and just lied my way around it so that I could get away with anything, because I was such a good liar until I started a spiritual path.

And, you know, I started embarked on the spiritual path, and now here we were seeking the truth. It finally dawned on me that there's something incongruous about seeking the truth and lying. So I realized that I needed to live the truth and speak the truth. It was kind of a very gradual process for me. One of the problems with lying is that you suspect everybody. It doesn't matter what anybody says, they're suspect. I mean, if you're lying, how do you know? My husband was the exact opposite. He believed everybody. I just thought he was really, really naive. But his trust and his honesty, his radical honesty was so strong that it allowed me to trust him. In that trust, I began to see that people were trustable. People still lie. My eyes are open, people do that. But I was able to see the difference. It was years before I really found the compassion to really understand and forgive my parents for what they did, because it was really the conditions of their lives. They did the best they could. But it took me many years for me to let go of that separation in myself.

There are many different ways that people lie. One of the ways that particularly bugs me is when people pretend to listen to you. We don't think of that as lying, we don't think of it as dishonesty, but here they are, they're paying attention to you, they're looking at you in the

eye, and they're thinking about something else. Now, the reason I have to be very forgiving about it is, yes, I do it too on occasion. Somebody says something, and it triggers my own thoughts, and then they're moving their mouths while I'm thinking about my own thoughts. But it's a level of dishonesty because they're under the impression you're listening to them. So that's a very important part of really being an honest person, is to actually listen when you're pretending to listen, not just pretend to listen.

Another area that's really important is a lot of people forget that the tone of our voice and our posture are an integral part of our speech. The same words with a different tone can have a very different meaning. You may say, "Oh, you look tired," and be very compassionate. Or you may say, "You look tired," which most people take as, "You look terrible." The tone is really crucial. Sometimes I'm talking to someone, and I don't think I'm being listened to, and I might say, "Well, are you listening? Are you listening to me?" And then they go, "Yeah, I've listened to you," and there's a sense of, they didn't quite get what I was asking.

I'll tell you, I've told this story before, but I'll do it again in case some of you have heard it. We had a little group like this, we were actually doing a discussion about right speech. It wasn't a talk, but more of a discussion. I was sharing something that my husband and I do sometimes to help ourselves with our speech and our relationship. We've given each other permission to do this. For instance, if I'm irritable, I ask him to come up to me and just ask me to be kind, and just the fact that he asks me that kind of gets me off it. We do that with each other. On that day, my husband was sitting in the audience, and he said, "That works a lot better than saying, 'Please don't be a bitch.'" So the next morning, I was kind of in a rush and trying to get out the door, and just a little bit irritable. He comes up to me, puts his arms around me, and very sweetly whispers in my ear in the sweetest tone, "Please don't be a bitch." Anyway, the tone is everything, right?

Sometimes your posture—if somebody's talking to you, and you're sitting with your arms crossed, or we say a lot by rolling our eyes. It reminds me of a story from Gil, of a student that came up to him. He said, "You know what you did a year ago in our conversation? What you said to me really hurt my feelings, and it's taken me a year to come back and talk to you." Gil said, "Oh, what? What did I do? What did I say?" "Well, you raised your eyebrows." And they really meant it. So body or posture, the way we hold ourselves, are all constantly talking.

The second part of what we're asked to refrain from is malicious or divisive speech. That's speech that tends to alienate one person from another, or alienates one group from another. Sometimes, even in a Saṅgha like this, or where people are really trying, working hard to really speak wisely, sometimes we divide ourselves into us and the government, or Democrats

and Republicans, or, in a way that we speak about it, in a way that's very divisive, that's alienating, that we're not in it altogether. Divisive speech is usually motivated by hatred, by anger, by jealousy. I remember when I was a teenager, a relative told me about what another relative had said about me. I never spoke to that person again. I should have checked on it, but it just created such a gap that I just never wanted to cross it. So that's divisive speech.

I've also been at the other end of it where somebody's told me a lot about someone and it's all negative. Then I had to meet them, and the only thing I could think about—it was so hard to see this person newly. All the stories, everything, just right there. What was really interesting for me was that I tried really hard to just keep putting it aside. When I actually got to know this person, I really liked them, and it really made me aware of how much damage that can do. So the guidelines that we like to use, as when we're talking about someone, are: are we representing them with dignity, and is what we're saying creating divisiveness between people, or is it helping bring people together?

Sometimes we disguise malicious speech as concern about another person's behavior. I could say something like, "I'm so worried about Jane. I'm so worried. She's been sleeping with a different guy every week." It's easy to pretend there. Sometimes people can give backhanded compliments. "Oh, your gray hair is so becoming. Isn't it wonderful that looking older is okay these days?" Or, "Oh, you're not as dumb as I thought."

The next area that we're asked to refrain from is harsh speech. In general, harsh speech is abusive speech, belittling, like verbal abuse, profanity, sarcasm, putting down people, using words as weapons. What's interesting is what's harsh to one person may not be harsh to another. In some cultures or subcultures, profanity is really part of the way that people communicate. So it's really important to be aware of context and not just have this really hard and fast rule: "You guys are wrong. You're doing this, you have bad speech." Not to stand outside of it, but really look at it from the intention of the person who is speaking.

Abusive speech is pretty obvious—yelling or bitter words, insulting, "You're a slob." But the area that gets really tricky is sarcasm. Sarcasm is often saying something and meaning the opposite, with the idea that you're taunting someone. There is a difference between teasing and taunting. There's this desire to hurt on some level with sarcasm. An example: someone shows up late and someone says, "Right on time." There's a quality to it that's a little bit mean. In fact, when you look at the word sarcasm, it's actually made up of two words: "sarx" comes from flesh, and the "asm" comes from ripping the flesh. That's what sarcasm means: ripping the flesh. So there defines that quality.

Now, men tend to have a different style of bonding than women, and you see a lot more teas-

ing in male bonding, and teasing that can very much be very close on the border of sarcasm or teasing. What we look at is the intention behind it. Sometimes men can be competitive with each other, and when competition enters into it, that's when it starts getting slightly mean, slightly cutting, as opposed to just friendly teasing. Friendly teasing makes you feel close to someone. Sarcasm makes you feel a little bit put down.

Another thing about harsh language, as in a culture, is that sometimes we take language that's harsh in a group that's oppressed, and that has been oppressed by language, and it has been co-opted by that group to decrease the power of that language. For instance, the word "dyke" was often used as a put down for lesbians, but it was co-opted by the lesbian community so that they call each other dykes. That took away the power of that word to hurt them. That's happened in a lot of other subgroups where the group itself—as you know, the word "queer," I've even seen the word "crip" being used by people with disabilities. I don't think it's supposed to be used outside of their own group, but those things are things that are always changing within a culture.

The next area that I wanted to talk about is idle chatter, which includes gossip. Idle chatter can be described as speaking without connecting, speaking without a helpful purpose, without value. It can be just talking for the sake of talking—pointless. Sometimes even forgetting that there's anyone else sitting there listening to you. Sometimes you want to break the ice, so the words you say may be trivial, but the intent is to connect. So really the difference is where your heart is. Are you really making connection with this person, or are you just babbling?

Sometimes we just chatter because we're uncomfortable with silence. Someone defined idle speech as, "Idle speech in any way that bores others." I don't know about that definition, but I thought it was, you know, some of the time that really applies. Have you ever listened to someone talk about a subject that you have no interest in at all, and they just go on and on and on? Has anyone not experienced that—every holiday, right? And have any of you done that? Chances are somebody here has done that, or at least at some point, or at least for a while.

The other thing that can also be seen as idle speech is habitual complaining—complaining about the economy, complaining about the weather, complaining about the government, complaining about what's on TV, about the computer being too slow or whatever. All this habitual complaining, it doesn't have value. It's not like a real conversation about politics, about economy, but it's just a kind of whining type of habit. The problem with a habit like that is that it reinforces in our own minds the sense that something isn't right. It creates a kind

of certain chronic unhappiness in our mind: "Oh, the world's not okay. Oh, the world's not okay." Part of what's tempting about it is that sometimes people bond over their complaining. So there's a little bit of a benefit that we get. It's not a healthy bonding, but it's a bonding nonetheless and makes us feel connected on some level.

The same thing with gossip. Many people—gossip is talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private lives of other people. It's one of the oldest and most common means of spreading information in the world. Before massive newspapers and internet, that's how people found out about stuff, usually through gossip, through just this casual way of spreading information and of spreading misinformation. I'm not sure what the balance is, but so much of the hatred in the world about other groups and strangers is really just a bunch of misinformation being spread about them. Really, with the same words, the same way that we spread gossip about people we know, it's the same way of doing that.

One popular etymology of the word gossip I'm going to tonight is it comes—some people think it comes from when politicians used to send out their assistants to go to bars and listen to conversations, to get a sense of what the pulse of people thought about what was happening. They would instruct them to go sip a beer and listen. That's one of the thoughts of where the word came about. Historically, gossip has helped normalize or hold the boundaries, the moral boundaries of a culture. Because what happens is that people talk to each other, and what's interesting in gossip is when people go beyond that boundary. Somebody does something that's out of the norm, and so they'll say, "Oh, so and so, you know, back in the fifties, they had a child out of wedlock," and so that kind of reinforces, "So it's wrong to have a child out of wedlock." There's this quality of really strengthening the values of society that happens with gossip. People who gossip, again, feel a bond, and that supports the continued gossiping. But there are much more skillful ways to bond with people. We can bond over common interests, over the things we enjoy, the joys in our life. A lot of gossip is just actually malicious. They're just ways of spreading hatred. "Do you know what she said about you?" That kind of activity.

To summarize, the four things that we're asked to refrain from are: lying, malicious or divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle speech or gossip. All unnecessary speech that's not motivated by generosity or kindness or compassion is harmful. So it's really about where we come from. Back to dāna—what is our intention in our speech? The four guidelines that are helpful to support developing and improving and refining our speech are four questions that we like to ask:

- Is this truthful?

- Is it useful?
- Is it kind?
- Is it the right time to say it?

Those four guidelines pretty much keep us within the realms of connecting with people in a really skillful and healthy manner. One of the things that's part of being truthful is keeping our word. If we say we're going to be there, to be there, to be timely, that's part of being truthful. Some of us may have a habit of being late to stuff, and we think that it's not a big deal, just late a lot. But the truth of it is that what happens is that if we say we're going to do something and we don't do it, we stop trusting ourselves. People don't trust us. So it's very damaging internally when we don't keep our word.

Sometimes telling the truth might not be easy, and it might not be welcome, but it still might be what's needed. An example of that is, I know I made a commitment in my life that when I'm confronted with racism, sexism, that I won't stay silent. By being silent when those things happen right in front of me, it really gives those ideas a legitimacy that I don't think we should give. One of the areas that it can happen in, that can be very difficult, is in social situations, like a family gathering. Here you have twenty people, and you're supposed to be celebrating, and somebody just makes one racist remark. But they go on about it, and then everybody tries to keep the peace and be silent, but just giving them that audience legitimizes that that's OK. That hatred, that type of hatred, is occasioned to be there. For me, the challenge is to do it in a peaceful way. Say, "Please don't talk about that. I don't want to have that in my, you know, in the room." To say it as kindly as I can and as non-reactively as I can. But I think it's essential that we don't tolerate those things with our silence.

When we have a conflict with someone and we don't talk about it, what happens is the resentments develop. So often telling the truth is really speaking our truth, not holding it back. One of the areas that I was very—a couple years ago I did this three-year training through Spirit Rock, the Community Dharma Leader program, where they train you to be a teacher, a meditation teacher. We would have these week-long retreats, and the group of us that took the training got very close, and we had a couple in the group who decided to get married at the training, which was kind of cool. Everybody was getting very excited, setting up a party in the evening for the wedding, and a few people were really upset during the day, but everybody tried not to ruin the fun of the wedding. Finally, one of those people—we do a check-in every day—and she had the courage to say, very heartbreakingly and very painfully to her, "I'm really sad today, because this is a joyful occasion for them, and I hate to say this, because I don't want to do anything that takes their joy away. I love these people, and I'm a

lesbian, and I've been in a relationship for ten years, and I can't get married, and it's so sad to me at this point." Then that opened up the space, and somebody else raised her hand and said, "I lost my husband a couple of months ago, and I've been really sad all day, but I've been trying to hide it because I didn't want to take away their joy." I always remember that. The woman who was getting married thanked them, and she said, "You've just given me a gift. This closeness that we have, this intimacy we have, it doesn't take away our joy. It's just so wonderful that we have the room for all these things at the same time. We have joy, and we have sadness, and we have sorrow." It took the courage of this one woman to speak her truth. It was very powerful for all of us.

The next guideline for speech is: is what we say useful? Is it helpful? One of the things that can be easy to do is we start speaking while somebody else is speaking. When that happens, nothing useful is happening because they can't hear. When two people are talking at the same time, but it's sort of interesting—I did a workshop with someone who teaches nonviolent communication, and she's from Israel, and she said, "Here, when people interrupt each other like that, it's considered rude. In Israel, if people don't interrupt each other, it means you're not interested." That is a really interesting concept, how the way we speak and the way we treat, define, has a lot of cultural differences. I call it overlapping.

One area in terms of something being useful is advice. We all know how it feels, or most of us know how it feels, to be given advice we don't want. Most of us have felt that place of advice where it's being given for our sake—it appears like it's being given to help us—but what it's really about is the person wants to show off how smart they are. Giving advice can create a power dynamic of one person being stronger and the other person weaker. In a very basic way, receiving empowers the giver. For some of us, learning to receive graciously requires letting go of always wanting to be the top dog, always wanting to be the one in the know. So receiving is really an important part of speech.

Some people never want to be told, never want to be told. A classic place where that happens—it's a stereotype of men not wanting to get directions. That's about a psychodynamic, it's like, "I'm the one in the know, that's where the power is. To get directions is, 'Oh, I'm weaker, I'm the receiver.'" One psychologist recommends that we make it easy for kids to buy us gifts and accept them from them, so that they can learn to feel good about themselves that way. For the parent to be the receiver, to give the kids, to empower the kids by letting them buy you a gift.

The next thing that we want to be really conscious of in our speech is whether our speech is kind, whether it's not harmful, that even if we disagree with someone, even if we have to

say something unpleasant, that it's still coming out of kindness. When we have a conflict with someone—conflict happens all the time, between all individuals, all communities, every society. Conflict is a given. How we deal with that conflict really comes into play the moment that conflict becomes competitive. Two people can disagree, you can have a conversation. When it becomes competitive, it means somebody has to win, and so you're in it to win. You've stopped listening. The moment it becomes competitive, no communication is going on. Listening stops. Daniel said last week, we often have the choice in life to be right or to be in relationship. We often choose to be right, and so can we disagree with kindness, with patience.

The last guideline is to be timely in your speech, to say what we say at the right time. That's when the art of listening really comes into play. Sometimes you might be telling the truth, it might be very helpful information, it might be kind, but it might be absolutely the wrong time to tell it. I remember somebody called me a couple of weeks ago, and they said, "Hi, do you have time to talk?" I said, "No, I actually have to leave in a minute." They said, "Well, just let me tell you this," and it was really important what they had to tell me, and it was not brief. Timeliness is really important. I hated to cut them off, but I had to cut them off in the middle of something really important, and to say, "I'm leaving, bye." That's another timeliness.

When I first started giving talks, a group of us started giving talks, and we were told to give each other feedback—what did we do that worked? But Gil cautioned us, he said, "Give each other feedback, but don't do it after the talk. Wait." There's a certain kind of openness and sensitivity that someone has when they give a talk, and that's not the time to criticize them. So timeliness.

One last thing that I think requires, in today's day and age, a special consideration is email. In this day and age, when we have so much internet, email stuff, it's very easy to get careless with our email, and so much miscommunication can occur. There was one email that went out that actually caused somebody to kill somebody. People have lost jobs over mistakes in email. It's become such an issue for people that Google actually came up with an interesting little gadget. What it does is you set it up so that between certain hours, like if you write an email between midnight and five o'clock in the morning, it makes you do some simple math problems before it lets you send out an email. So it's available if you feel you need that.

When you have doubt about your speech, ask these questions: Is it true? Is it useful? Is it kind? And is this the right time? I'd like to finish with a quote from the Dalai Lama:

To be aware of a single shortcoming within oneself is more useful than to be aware of a thousand in somebody else. Rather than speaking badly about people and in ways that will produce friction and unrest in their lives, we should practise a pure perception of them. And when we speak of others, speak of their good qualities. If you find yourself slandering anybody, just fill your mouth with excrement. That will break you off the habit quickly enough.

So does anybody have any questions or comments? Yes, could you please use the microphone? Thank you. Is it useful at the right time? It seems to me that quite often you might not know the answer to that. So the example you gave with people getting married, two people who raised their concerns, objections—if they had thought about it, didn't know how it was going to be reacted to, they probably wouldn't have said anything. So it seems like holding things in reserve, you're missing some opportunities for good and for bad. So it's not very clear cut, is it?

It's not clear cut, you know? And we'll make mistakes, you know? But that happens. If we look at our intention for speaking, and when those people brought that up, they did it for the intention of not making anybody wrong. I think that as long as intention is really clear, it doesn't matter if you make a mistake.

I was wondering how humor falls into this. You're like Don Rickles and you've made a career out of insult comedy. But I've heard he's a very sweet man, you know. So he probably doesn't intentionally mean any harm to anyone. But that's his humor, you know. We often laugh at what hurts. A lot of people like pratfalls. I don't particularly like those in humor, but a lot of people think they are really funny. Some of it is just cultural. Humor can be at somebody's expense. For instance, like lawyer jokes. I know lawyers who tell lawyer jokes, but they're basically put-downs of a group of people. For some reason, some jokes like that seem to be more acceptable than others. Humor, it's an area that isn't clear cut. Some of it depends on the heart of where the medium is coming from. There's a certain—even with put-down humor—my own perception is that a comedian can have a certain quality of friendliness in the way they do it that holds a lightness. I've seen it done that way, and that's when it's really good. There's humor that can be very mean-spirited, too. I think that if we actually listen carefully, we can tell the difference. Even though the same joke or similar jokes can seem, one can be coming from a much more vicious point, and the other one can be actually—the purpose is to just lighten everybody up. I think laughter is great. I think laughter is something that really bonds people. People laugh together, they feel close to each other. So how we do

that—laughter that's done in a way that really separates people, like sometimes you'll get a group of people who put down another group of people in a very racist humor. Maybe that group is bonding, the group that's being racist, but that's a very harmful type of humor. So we just really have to pay attention. But having said that, my cousin started—he was the founder of ComedySportz. Any of you have heard of that? I think they still have a place in Santa Clara. What they did is they set up these really interesting guidelines for comedy where they have two competing groups and a lot of improv, and their humor is supposed to be non-racist, non-sexist, and no cussing. It's really supposed to be a place you can bring your kids to. I went to hear them, and they are really funny, and it was really interesting at such a show. You actually can do that, you can get away with it. Of course, if somebody slipped, it wasn't like a crime. They would lose a point if they accidentally said something like that, and they also took off points for punning. Again, what we really look at is what the intention of it is. But I don't know, I don't have a really very strong guideline. Anybody else have any other thoughts about that, about humor?

I'll sing the role of Stephen Colbert at the White House, a roast where, yes, in sort of a classic role of the court jester, where the fool can make fun of the king, and it's OK because that's the role and that's the place for it. Nobody was stuck, he couldn't do anything about it. Yes, I mean, ideally we have an environment where everybody can laugh at themselves, and that's really what we're looking at. But it's not necessarily how it works, especially when we're so polarized in our culture. So what's really hysterical to the Obama supporters was not all that funny to the McCain supporters. That's how it happens. So is it skillful? It felt good to lighten up something that was so heavy. There was so much pain around the election, around what's happening in the country, that just the lightening up was so helpful. So, regardless of that polarizing that might happen, I think it was really valuable. So just, what's really important is our intention. I think that's really the main thing I can say about humor. What is the intention when we tell a joke, when we make people laugh?

So we have room for time for one more question. If there's any question or comment, you have a quick comment. It occurred to me the whole notion, or the carry-around of right speech, is that if you can have the other's best intention in mind, then the majority of right or wrong speech kind of goes away. So I guess the question is how to get oneself in the position of always having the other person's best interest in mind.

I'm really glad you brought that up. It ties into a little bit of what Daniel said last week about having a theme in our lives. One of the things that I'd like to do in my life is I really like to periodically reflect on, "What is it that I need in my life right now? What would bring the most

growth in my life?” For instance, once one of the things I chose was working on patience, so that I just kept using patience as my reference point in my life. So that when I get up in the morning, I don't go meditate, it's like, “Oh, I'm not going to rush through this, so I am going to pause.” In the same way, like what he used was listening. That was the theme that he used, really listening to the people around him, really listening. So in the same way, if that's what comes up for you, in every conversation just keep that in mind. Do that for a month. It's a practice. It can be an amazing practice for a month to really, in every conversation, think about, “Oh, what's the best benefit for the person I'm speaking to?” That would be a very powerful practice. So keeping a theme in mind in our lives helps us do that. I think it's a really great thing to just take a little time and see what is it that we need to help us communicate better with each other, what's helpful for us. So thank you very much.