

Dharmette: Right Speech (AUDIT: 1 of 5) Accurate

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Nope, I can start now. So, hello everyone, and happy to be here.

As I said earlier, I was away for a month teaching a month-long silent meditation retreat. The whole month was dedicated to this *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the discourse on the *Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, and it was a wonderful time. Wonderful practice, wonderful, I think, experience for everyone there and for myself. Now I'm happy to be back here for a week, perhaps swinging to the more difficult places to do mindfulness practice, which is in daily life and, in particular, with speech.

Many people find it almost impossible to stay mindful while they're speaking, but it's also one of the most rewarding. It's a way of learning to speak in ways that are true to ourselves, that are beneficial for ourselves, and also are true for other people and beneficial for others. It's a way of building continuity with mindfulness. So mindfulness is not just something we do in meditation, but it's something we bring to our lives.

In the process of that, we really get to see ourselves in different ways than we see ourselves in meditation. We see our reactions. We see our beliefs. We see what drives us and what our responses are to what happens around us. In doing so, we become wiser and wiser about clinging, about grasping, about fears and desires, and about finding a wise way to live in this world.

So, the Buddha gave five different ways of contemplating, considering what to say or how to speak. There are guidelines for how to be mindful of what's particularly useful, what really awakens something very significant inside of us, connects us to the *Dharma* inside of us, the best inside of us, and connects us to where freedom is possible. So, a wonderful way to be mindful of speech is to consider these five criteria for speaking.

I've put the five together with an acronym. Since it's a way of considering your speech, I'm calling it an audit, a speech audit. Hopefully, receive this idea without any kind of idea that it's being tested or being investigated. It's just a way of being more aware of what goes on when you're speaking.

In the Buddha's time, the five were in a little different order and in a little plainer English. They are: Is what I'm going to say timely? Is it true? Is it gentle? Is it beneficial to speak? Is it useful? Can we say it with a mind of goodwill?

For this acronym, AUDIT: Is it accurate? Is it useful? What's the disposition? What's the impact that our speech has on ourselves and others? Is it timely?

So, the first one that I have is: Is it accurate? Is it true? That's for today. Each of these days, we'll do one of these. Is it true?

One of the inspiring aspects of what the Buddha teaches is something called protecting the truth, preserving the truth. This is to be very careful when you speak about something, that you let people know the source, the basis, the evidence for what you're saying. Many people will make declarative statements as if this is the truth. When that's the case, people can't participate.

They don't understand where the orientation is or where the origin is, the source, to be able to think for themselves and consider how it works for them. Go check your sources. Reply not with your opinion, but reply with the reason for why you believe what you believe. So, there are these sources that the Buddha provided, and again, this is more the colloquial, modern way of saying it.

In ordinary speech, it might be saying, "I believe what I believe is." Then people know it's a belief rather than you claiming you know the truth. I think it's very generous and very appropriate and very helpful for conversations to just say, to make a claim that you know the truth, the absolute truth. Sometimes our conversations stop there.

The next would be that there's an idea that you like. You like this idea. You prefer this idea. It's just an idea, and you have a preference for it. You have an orientation toward it.

Again, it's very personal, and you're not making a claim that it's absolute, that other people have to either take or leave. The next is, "I was told," or, "I read," or, "I heard." Again, the source is something outside of yourself. You don't know if that source is accurate. You don't know if it's true.

But you're not going to repeat it as if it's true. It might be important for you to say, "This

is something I've heard." That again allows the listener to take it in and reflect on it, and consider it for themselves and consider if there's any merit in what's being said, as opposed to having to either receive it as true or false.

Then the last is, "My reasoning tells me." When I reason it out, when logically this is what I come to, people understand the source and how you got to it. Then you might be able to explain the logic that brought you to the conclusion, and people can engage with that logic. They can appreciate it. That helps them understand better why.

Maybe they follow that logic and will go along with it. Maybe they can see the flaws in the logic, or they can offer an alternative reasoning and logic that they have. Then you begin to understand each other, understand what's behind it, and there's room in the conversation for everyone to change, to grow, to respond. No one is having something forced on them.

There are a lot of conversations where people are presenting their opinions as if they're true: take it or leave it. Sometimes the opinions that people provide, not only do they hold them as true, but there's an insistence, there's an assertiveness behind it, and there's almost a demand: You have to agree with me, or you're wrong. But if you provide the source for what you're saying, it's easier for people to participate in a conversational way.

It's also a way for you to do what the Buddha called preserve the truth, be truthful. You can say all kinds of things, but if you say where it comes from, that's what's true. If you don't say that, then you might actually be saying something which is not true.

Related to that, another way of being truthful and accurate in your speech is to not be slow in judging, presenting judgments as fact. So, if I say to someone, "You're awful," that's a huge judgment that can be very painful to hear. But if instead I talk about one's own experience and say, "I found myself feeling very uncomfortable when you said that. Could we talk about it?" the focus is on oneself, the impact it's had, and now you're inviting a conversation.

If you make a heavy judgment and tell someone what you think of them as if it's the truth, it can't be the truth. The judgment is not a truth. It's a judgment. It's an opinion. It has particular reasons and background for why we might say it that can be explained.

Part of it is that I'm too uncomfortable to stand here. I need to push you away, or I don't want to look at myself. So, be very careful not to have the feelings we have be presented as statements of fact, but rather statements of feeling. "This is how I feel. This is what's going on for me."

That's a way, again, of speaking honestly. Then the last one is that I'd like to say that speaking the truth and being honest and mindfulness are the same thing. I'd like to believe they're the

same. Honesty is mindfulness out loud.

The real primary characteristic of mindfulness, more than anything else, is self-honesty. There are a lot of questions about whether we should always be honest in our social life. People will come up with all kinds of horrific examples of when maybe it should be okay to lie. But one of the core aspects of Buddhist teachings is that it's never okay to lie to yourself.

We always want to sit in the honesty with ourselves and see ourselves, and to know how to do that in a way that is kind and useful and supportive, rather than one that undermines ourselves. It hits us over the head with what we think is the truth. But when we speak the truth to ourselves, this preserving the truth is also very important. What's the basis upon which we say something is true about ourselves?

It might just be opinion. It might be just something we've worked out logically. It might be based on what we've heard from our society about what is right and wrong. So, to be able to really look deeply at our own speech, how we talk to ourselves, is invaluable.

Then to start being able to do more of this in our social life, and to be known by the people around us that we're honest, is invaluable. This starts making social peace. But we need to know how to be honest in a useful way, in an appropriate way, so that people feel safe around us and reassured. It's a gift to the world.

It's a powerful way of bringing greater mindfulness to our day-to-day life, the moment-to-moment life, by paying attention to what's behind and underneath what we say. Is what we say true?

If you're interested in an assignment for this next day around this, I would suggest that when you have the occasion to offer an opinion, some idea that you think is true, you explain the source of that opinion, the basis for it, where you get it from. Is it because you read it in the news? Is it because you thought it out? Is it because you prefer this? This is your preferred way of seeing it.

Experiment with preserving the truth by talking about the source, the basis upon which you are expressing an opinion. So, thank you very much, and I look forward to being here tomorrow.