

Dharmette: Right Speech (4 of 5) Impact

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So we come to the fourth form of wise speech, beneficial speech, *right speech*, perhaps, fitting under the acronym of *AUDIT*: accurate, useful, the disposition with which we speak today, its impact, and then tomorrow is timely.

And in terms of impact, the way that is closer to what the Buddha actually said is: Is it endearing or agreeable? Do we speak in ways that are agreeable to people, pleasing to people? And it actually describes it in a bigger way. And I'll read you the quote:

“Is it gentle, pleasing to the ear, lovable? Going to the heart, courteous, desired by many. Many want to hear us speak. Agreeable to many.”

So this idea that it's pleasing, agreeable, or nice for people to hear is part of the *AUDIT*. Part of asking, “How am I speaking now?” A way that's not agreeable or pleasing is to be harsh, to be mean, to say things which are unkind, not gentle, or callous. That doesn't touch people's hearts in a good way. It doesn't inspire people in a nice way.

If anything, they close down their heart. They shut their heart. They turn away. They back up. They tense up. And the idea is, why do that?

Why are we trying to protect ourselves by being mean or angry? Are we trying to do a one-upmanship? Are we trying to prove that we're better than other people and more capable? By diminishing people, are we trying to convey our frustration with them that we have to somehow get across?

The corollary for this idea of paying attention to the impact and being concerned with a positive, agreeable impact is that the Buddha talks elsewhere about speaking words that are unifying. For people who are not in concord, it brings them into concord. For people who are

divided, it brings them together to be unified. And so that implies: don't speak words that are divisive. Don't speak words that separate people, us versus them.

Find a way that's appropriate and doesn't deny the challenges we live under, but use words that keep the door open or help create a kind of nice world for everybody, one that is agreeable to everyone. And one of the guidelines for this, which some practitioners do, is fascinating even to do for one day. I'd recommend, for today, for the next twenty-four hours, spending one day from waking up to going to sleep with this exercise.

Don't say anything about someone who's not present that you wouldn't want them to hear you say. For that day, say nothing behind people's backs that would be awkward if they heard you say it. They'd be upset. They'd be challenged. They'd be offended. They'd be concerned.

"What does this mean? What are you thinking about me?" So simply don't say it, and see what impact that has. Instead, find a way to talk about the person in ways that you're happy for them to hear, that might be agreeable to them, pleasing for them, that speaks right to the heart. And not in a saccharine way, not in a pretend way or kind of artificial way.

Rather, do it in a way that is honest, inclusive, and takes care of everyone, because that is unifying. If you said this, spoke about them this way, maybe they can participate in a conversation about how it's going. So it could be, for example, that someone said something to you that was offensive, but you don't want to tell them that directly.

Maybe, as you talk about it with a friend, you say, "You know, someone said something, and I don't want to tell you what they said, but it had an impact on me where I felt diminished. I felt disrespected. And I value this person, and I wonder how, after feeling disrespected, I could be open and now find a way to open the channels of communication, or somehow soften what happened and reestablish the connection."

You're saying there was a challenge, but you're approaching it as something that you want to try to do some healing, some good with. Rather than just kind of crossing your arms across your chest and saying, "You know, that person was a, you know, a lousy person, and I can't believe how lousy they were. And the person's always like a louse." Then there's no room for conversation.

There's no emphasis on unification, coming together. It's more that we're divided. If the person hears you say this, it strains the relationship. So the idea of saying what's agreeable, pleasing, and touches the heart, what comes from our heart, is a very powerful way of practicing Buddhism.

This is a way of speaking that is good for us to do, that supports us. It supports us from not being attached, not clinging, not being reactive. It supports us to do things which feel nourishing and supportive, that unify us within ourselves. If we just say someone is really a lousy person, and it's focused outward in that kind of aggression, perhaps it actually harms us because it divides us. It separates us from what's deep inside.

But if we talk this other way that I just described, or just acted out, we might feel, "Oh yes, I'm here. I'm available. I want to include this person." And it's good for your heart. It's good for your inner life itself.

So this idea of how we speak to ourselves in meditation, privately when we're by ourselves, and how we speak with others, is not two different worlds. They often go hand in hand. When we speak harshly to ourselves, the chances are we're going to do something like that to other people. If we are divided in ourselves, being for or against part of ourselves, chances are we're going to be divided with other people in some way or other.

So, to have this practice, this audit of checking out, "What I'm about to say, is it agreeable, pleasing? Does it touch the matters of the heart? Is it unifying? Is it supportive for people, or is it the opposite?" And if it's the opposite, will I make the situation worse? Will I make it less helpful to do that?

And so, if I don't know any agreeable way or pleasant way to say something, maybe I'm better off being silent. And that's also a very powerful force for our inner life, for our practice ourselves. Because I know for myself that sometimes the compulsion to want to speak, and how it has to be now, is so strong that to be silent and wait and allow something else to happen, give time, begins to relax the compulsion. It relaxes the place that's tense.

I've seen it myself sometimes, that the tension says, "No, you know, you can't not say anything. You have to do something now." And then usually, it actually doesn't have to happen at all. But then, with that kind of immediacy, by waiting and not speaking, eventually something quiets down, calms. There's a different perspective.

Then I'm ready to find a way to say something that has integrity for myself and that is more supportive of a rich conversation, being connected to someone and not creating division or separation. And finally, I want to say around this thing: words like gentle, agreeable, pleasing, lovable. It's a little bit too easy sometimes for those kinds of things to somehow not treat other people, or ourselves, with dignity, with a certain kind of seeing them as mature and capable human beings.

There's, I think, too strong a movement in some circles to see other people as being wounded

or somehow incapable, or as somehow needing to be reassured, needing to be treated a little bit, maybe sometimes a little bit, juvenile-like. And I see too much of this. I think there's a whole thing that kind of supports that side of people.

So this idea of doing things which are pleasing, lovable, it's possible to do that in a way that views other people as mature, capable, and dignified. We're not trying to placate them. We're not trying to talk down to them as if they're not capable. We're treating them as equals.

And for that to happen, well, we have to treat ourselves that way, understand ourselves that way. And that's why, in that last meditation we had, I had us begin with the idea that we sit with a certain kind of inner strength, of dignity, maturity, and confidence in ourselves. And that is magic.

When we can do that ourselves, and we can speak in ways that touch the heart, ways that connect and unify, where we treat other people that way as well, and we treat them as people of dignity, maturity, and capability, but do so in a friendly way. So that's the instructions for today. The idea is to try, if you would like, to spend one full day, during your waking hours, not saying anything about anybody else who's not present that you would not want them to hear.

If you don't want them to hear it, think about it first. Then just keep quiet. Maybe figure out another way to talk about what you want to talk about, or just drop it. So, thank you all very much.

And we have one more day of this topic, and hopefully talking about this tomorrow is going to be very timely.