

Dharmette: Right Speech (5 of 5) Timely

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So, hello everyone, and welcome to this fifth and last talk on *right speech*, wise speech, and maybe we can consider it considered speech. This part of Buddhist life is much more than just being mindful. It is also being considered, being thoughtful of what we do, and being thoughtful in a way that feels more contemplative. You are, you know, deeply thinking in a way that warms your heart, that feels part of a peaceful life, part of a generous life, a compassionate life, a caring life.

And to discover how to think and how to speak in the right way, at the right time, so that our speech can be a gift to the world, rather than a weapon, rather than a bullet to the world. Some people use their speech more as weapons, more as knives to stab—verbal knives, the Buddha called it. But rather, to have words that are beneficial, supportive. They do not have to be Pollyannish. They do not have to be excessively sweet.

They can be very direct and very engaged, or take seriously some of the issues of our life, issues we have, and challenges we have. We can speak directly into what is uncomfortable. And so, yesterday's criteria was to pay attention to the impact and try to have a good impact. Try to speak in ways that are pleasing, where your words are gifts. However, the Buddha recognized that this particular part of the five-part audit—the impact thing—might not work that way all the time.

Sometimes we have to say something that is disagreeable for someone, something that makes them uncomfortable, something they have to hear. It is not agreeable. They do not agree, or they are not pleased to hear this. There might be some important feedback you have to give them, or some important information you want to tell them about the impact they have had on you by their behavior. You have to really sit down and have an honest conversation about it, and talk about some difficulty that exists between you.

So, simply to wait until you can say that in a way that is pleasing will never work, because it is going to be a difficult conversation. And so the other criteria then become important. Is it true? Is it accurate? Is it really useful, what you are going to say? Some people are not ready to hear anything.

Some people, you can exhaust yourself in trying over and over and over again to get through to them and get them to have even a conversation with you, and it seems impossible. They are closed off. They are unwilling. And so, if it is not useful to keep trying, it might actually make things worse. Then the criteria are: do not do it.

Only do it if it is useful, and if you have some sense that it is possible, that the person is ready. The person is capable. And then, is it kind? Is it friendly? Is there goodwill in it? That is always a good thing to have.

Even if you have to talk about something very difficult, something very challenging that involves a different opinion, differences, conflict, even there it is possible to enter into that with goodwill. But when it is not possible to say things that are going to have a pleasing impact on people, that are heartwarming for them, that touch their heart—and that will happen for sure in this life of ours—then the fifth criterion is important. And that is: is it the right time? Is it timely? Is it the right time to say something?

A person might not be ready. It might not be the circumstance in which they can really sit down and hear it, and it is useful to be in this conversation. If you have a conflict with a neighbor, and it seems like they are always—I do not know what—it seems like they are starting to fill their trash can so full that, when trash day comes, it spills over and blows out onto your property. And this has now happened for many weeks in a row. You have kind of mentioned it to them, and nothing happens.

So you feel like, “I need to go over there and talk to them, and have a real conversation with them, because we are neighbors and we are supposed to get along, or not have this kind of impact.” And then you find out that their parent just died a few days ago, and that all along, for the last weeks, they have been caring for the dying parent. And you say, “Oh, this is not the time to go. I have a right to talk to them. They are troubling my property. They are making a mess. I have cleaned up for them many times, but it is not the time.”

They just had a death, and let us see what happens. Let us wait until maybe there is another time that is better to talk about it, or let us even see if it continues now that the caretaking of the parent is over. And so, to ask, “Is it timely?” Someone might be harried. Someone might have a headache.

Someone has different conflict styles than you do. Some people's conflict style is that they want to talk about something right away, immediately, and that is what is important. Someone else's conflict style is that they want to sit and think about it for a while. They want to just mull it over, and they do not even know how to participate in the conversation until they have had 24 hours to really kind of mull it over in their mind. And if those two conflict styles meet, they can feel very dissonant and actually add to more conflict.

And so we might even ask, "You know, I have this difficult thing to talk to you about, about the trash that keeps blowing. But is there a time that works well for you that we can talk about this?" They might say, "Right now, if it works for you," or they say, "Oh, I did not realize this was a problem, an issue, and right now is not a good time. I need to get my kid to school. But can we come back to it this afternoon?" And you say, "Sure, thank you."

Rather than insisting and pushing, like, "This is terrible what you are doing. This is horrible. You have to stop it." To speak in such a harsh way, an unkind way, to speak at a time when it is not going to have any real impact—you are exhausting yourself. You are wasting your effort, your energy, and you are also wasting your credibility and your trustworthiness with someone. If you treat them that way, they might not want to talk to you so easily; they are cautious around you.

But to ask the question, "Is this the right time?" And how can it be the right time? Maybe not now. Can we set up a meeting? Can I wait? And sometimes, they wait.

I have sometimes waited years to have an important conversation with someone, until I felt there was an opening. Because I felt that until that opening is there, it is not going to work to have this conversation. They are going to shut down even more, and so I will wait. And sometimes, because there is an opening, they bring up the topic. They have understood something about themselves, and now we are ready to have a deeper conversation about it.

So, some people have this impulse: when things are uncomfortable, we have to talk about it right away. But that is not the case. So, to be wise about the timing in which speech goes on. The examples I have given here today are about challenges we have with people, but also appreciating people, saying words of love or care. There is also a right time for that and a wrong time.

It can have a deeper impact. It is not the time to tell someone how much I have appreciated them, how much I have valued their friendship, because I am harried right now. It is going to come out of my mouth kind of like a flippant thing, or I am a little bit giddy. I am a little bit

grouchy right now. I do not think this is the right time.

I want this to be said in a way that has a nice impact. They are not ready right now. They are grouchy, and if I say it now, they might bite my head off. Better just kind of wait. So the idea is to become wise about the timing: is it the right time?

So these five criteria work together, and to hold them all in your mind so they become second nature. Maybe by taking one of them at a time, and living them for a while, and see how it goes and get a sense of it. So, to help you remember, I have suggested the acronym AUDIT, the acronym AUDIT. Is it accurate? Is it true?

Is it useful? Is it beneficial? Is it kind? Is the disposition, the way I am disposed, a kind, supportive way? What is the impact? Is it agreeable, disagreeable?

Does it close people down? Does it open people up? Is it conducive to more trust or less trust in the relationship? And then the fifth today is: is it timely? And so, the other reason to have this kind of audit is that it is a form of mindfulness.

It is a way of kind of slowing down or heightening the attention to oneself. We are paying attention to ourselves more deeply, and we are paying attention, hopefully, to that place inside that is capable of wisdom. That place inside that is possible to take in a bigger view of things, and not be caught in the drama of the moment, but step back and allow the deeper place inside that maybe is not itself so reactive. Itself can sit and be a little bit free and independent from what is happening around us.

Where we are not automatically defined by it, we are not automatically being pushed by buttons inside of us, of reactivity and places that make us angry or greedy or something. And so, we are cultivating this deeper place. Sometimes I like to call it the contemplative source within us, the *Dharma* source within us, by using these criteria in how we speak and before we speak. And it can be done very quickly.

And once we get the hang of it, it can take just a few moments to kind of step back, recognize what we are about to say, and recognize how well it fits these five criteria. So each day this week, I have offered you an assignment, if you wanted it, for how to follow through on this. And the assignment I have today is: if you have an important conversation to speak to someone about some important topic, wait. Wait a little bit.

It is up to you how long you want to wait. But do wait, and before you speak, ask yourself: Are both of you ready? Are you ready? Are you really ready to be engaged in this conversation? Are you really in the best place to do this wisely?

And are the person or the people you are talking to ready for this conversation? And if they are not, consider whether it would be wise to wait, maybe wait a while, or maybe wait until. So that you can create the conditions for a better conversation. So, thank you all very much, and I am looking forward to coming back here in, I guess, about ten days.

I am going off to teacher retreat again, and Nikki Murgraffore is coming next week, which is quite special. And I will—so I will be back here on, I think, the 12th or so of October. So, thank you all very much.