

# 2020-07-29 Wise Speech (3 of 5) Is it Nourishing?

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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So good morning. And thank you for those of you who are here. So the topic for this week is the five questions we can ask ourselves around speech when we're speaking. And this idea of questions is an interesting approach to a spiritual life, a life that asks questions. So there are some when I was studying zen, there was the idea that we should that rather than asking, what do we want? The question the Zen students carry with them is the idea, what's being requested of us in any given situation? What's the request of the thing that we're doing, that people were with? The activities that are happening around us. And that's a very different orientation than the oriented what's in it for me, myself and mine? What do I want here? What's my preferences? And to turn that around, and what's the request? Request does not mean a demand. It means what is the request? What is what is the opportunity that's being requested of me and being asked of me?

And so that's an example of using a question, what is the request? And with speech to have these questions we ask ourselves, partly so that maybe we're free ourselves from ways in which were caught in the grip of me, myself and mine, being selfish, where the orientation maybe successively, what do I want? What are my preferences?

And so to this question of the start off with this week is what is true? If you're going to speak, what is true? Yesterday, is it timely? What is that the time for something? Today, the question is, is it supportive? Is it soothing? Is it a gentle? Is it heartwarming? Exactly what the Pali, the original word is, it's not so clear, but it is clear is that it's the opposite of harsh speech. And some people translated as gentle, some people as polite. But today I'm thinking about it in terms of, we have an idea in modern psychology that we're kind of wired sometimes to either fight or flight. And then in more recent times, the people have said we're also wired for something very different. we're wired for approach and sooth. So if there's a child who is in distress, we approach The child and comfort the child, reassure

the child and the idea of neither fight nor flight. But maybe what is it that situation and needs to be reassured? What needs to be when there's conflict ridden between people, we sometimes have the language of smoothing things out. And that word smoothing out is close to the meaning of the Pali word. Some people translated as soft. But what I'd like to point to is something deeper principle that what we're learning through meditation is how to not harm ourselves. And this idea of speaking harshly or soothingly, some of the language and some of the descriptions of this in the texts are, speak ways, words that are gentle pleasing to the ear, lovable, that go to the heart, are courteous, desired, by the many other people would like to hear it and agreeable. So it's pointing to a way of speaking, that is opposite of harsh, painful, uncomfortable, rude, that somehow these people feeling uncomfortable with how it is in meditation. We're learning to do that for ourselves. We're learning to talk to ourselves in ways that are not harsh. We're learning to talk to ourselves in ways that are reassuring or inspiring, or go to the heart as it says there.

And so, as we in meditation, we're learning how to relate to ourselves in a deeper and deeper way. If we can ask ourselves, what is what are we being requested by our own heart? What's the request of our inner life to ourselves? What is it that needs us for our care or reassurance or support. And so I know some people report that they are harsher to themselves, more critical to themselves than they would ever dream to be to anyone else. Some people only discover this, when they sit down to meditate how hard they are, and towards themselves and how they're the tone of the inner voice that's talking, if that's the way they think, is quite harsh and maybe sometimes even angry or cruel or something. And so in meditation, we're learning to shift the relationship we have to ourselves. A lot of it not by doing it differently, but by letting go of how we are doing it, softening, relaxing, quieting the mind. So that the, I like to think of the harsh mind, the critical mind, the angry mind as being kind of a surface mind, that's actually acquires a lot more activity that begins to quiet down as we meditate. And the more quiet we are, then the thinking can come from a deeper place inside. The thinking can come from places where there's a tendency to care, to approach to sooth, to be kind, and to learn the difference, the different impact in ourselves, on how we speak, how we speak to ourselves, what the inner voice is like, is quite powerful, because then we can also learn what that impact is on ourselves. When out in the world, we're speaking to people in harsh ways, and we start feeling within ourselves the difference between harsh speech and soothing speech or smoothing speech or soft, gentle speech, or speech that goes right to the heart.

And this goes to a principle, Dhamma principle, that what we're looking for is to live a life which is inwardly nourishing for ourselves, and inwardly nourishing for others. And those two are not that separate. If we are harsh towards others, if we speak in words that are frightening or discomforting for other people, we are doing the same for ourselves. We partake in the impact of harsh speech, it's actually painful for ourselves to speak that way, even though we don't realize it because sometimes are so motivated for the purpose by which we speak to push people a way to get our revenge to attack people, to kind of vent our anger or something. And we don't because we're so focused on the purpose of the speech and because the purpose seems righteous or it seems like somehow I'm more important that way, or just good to be able to say someone else is wrong, that we're so focused on the

purpose. We don't really feel the impact within ourselves. But harsh speech effects ourselves towards others, is harsh for ourselves. We partake in the quality of our acts of speech.

So if the acts of speech are as the Buddha talks about, gentle, pleasing to the ear lovable, they go to the heart, are courteous, and many people would like to hear then we are nourished by that. And others hopefully are nourished. To live a life that is willing to approach and sooth I've been in, I've encountered people who are very angry, not necessarily towards me. And I found that an important thing to do was to step towards them, to sooth them to quiet them. I've done that with small children who are angry, and to step towards them to approach them and be reassuring. To go towards a young child who's upset and be angry with a child or be harsh, really just makes it worse for the child. It also makes it worse for us as the speaker.

So this kind of reciprocity or no, this mutuality, or this way in which speaking, has an impact in both directions, on ourselves inside and in the world outside. If we speak in harsh words, it has One impact. If it's we speak in gentle, courteous, smoothing, smooth, soft, inspiring, heartfelt kind of words. It has a very different impact on self and others. And as we begin to as we meditate and go deeper and deeper in meditation, we realize more and more, that it's simply not worth it to do anything that is the opposite of nourishing, to do anything with our speech that is harmful to ourselves. It is simply not worth it. It simply, it goes against kind of its kind of what's really valuable, what's supportive for ourselves and the world. And this is not an ethical issue, not like a moral principle you shouldn't, but rather, it's as simple as not putting your hand on the hot stove. Meditation makes us so sensitive to the impact of how we live. That of course, we're going to live in a kind way, of course we're going to live in a non harsh, non aggressive way.

So, is it gentle? Is it soothing? Is it soft? Is it inspiring? Is it is it reassuring? These are all the kinds of questions for this fourth criteria that Buddha gave is the words were speaking nourishing is my favorite way of saying it right now. And then I guess the follow up question is, if it's not nourishing, is that really worth it?

So, thank you. And I think I hopefully have the sound issue understood and hopefully tomorrow it'll be better. And now one announcement, we you know, we miss kind of miss the you know doing all the meditation today, I'm going to be offering another meditation today on YouTube. I'm the teacher for the our retreat center, the insight retreat center, every Wednesday morning has what we call a mini retreat. And that's about two hours from about 10 to 12 or 12:20 or something. And I'm the teacher for that. And so there'll be two meditation sessions and I'll give some teaching. And you can find the mini retreats I think it's on might be an IMC Schedule page, but sorry. If you go on [insightretreatcenter.org](http://insightretreatcenter.org) there'll be a reference pointer to the mini retreats. So thank you very much