

2020-11-05 Eightfold Path-Right Speech

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SPEAKERS

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So today I begin the third factor of the Eightfold Path. And this is right speech. And this is the first factor of the path which has to do with our actions in the world. In this case, actions of speech. The first two are establishing the wisdom, the orientation, the consideration of how we're going to live in the world. And the next three are very much about then what we do, how we manifest and express the wisdom in our lives. And I think of these next three, right speech, right action and right way of living, right lifestyle, maybe, to really be in some ways they're the center of the Eightfold Path, and maybe the center of gravity. Maybe the heart of them maybe. That how we act, how we live in the world is so important. And there is a spiral in this, that through the Eightfold Path that we have wisdom. Wisdom supports us in how we live and act in the world. That in turn supports the deepening of our inner life, which is the last three factors of the Eightfold Path. As we deepen our inner life, we have more wisdom for acting in the world. So it's a kind of a circle or spiral. And we don't have to start any particular place. But there is a way in which understanding is seen as the beginning because with understanding something naturally follows. So the first two factors of the Eightfold Path lead to an interest, a desire, and valuing of how we speak. And most of our contact with other people, the way we interact with other people, for most people one way or the other happens through speech. Through speech, direct speech, we talk to them, to means of communication, or how we talk to ourselves about other people. So even our thoughts are a kind of speech.

And so to have a right speech. And the idea here is not to do it because of a moral code that says you shall do this, you have the right speech. But to really understand closely how it arises out of the first two factors. That there's a real appreciation for what is wholesome, or healthy, or nourishing, or beneficial. And then to feel, to consider that and to orient around that, and to have an intention around that. To want to do that, to manifest it. Partly because to not do that is more suffering, is unhelpful, is debilitating. And so to really feel and sense, oh, this is the wholesome direction. And also to have a

feeling, to really recognize for oneself, the ways in which we lose our freedom. We get caught and entangled and constricted, and what leads to more freedom. And so having this as the background, we come to speech. And so what speech is wholesome, is nourishing and supportive, and what speech is freeing? What speech keeps us free, or keeps opening the doors for freedom? And what speech constricts us, gets us caught preoccupied? Is the opposite of free freeing? What speech is unwholesome? Is de-nourishing? So and that's why mindfulness is so helpful with this, is that the stronger this mindful sensitivity is, the more we can recognize the consequences of how we speak.

It's not easy to be mindful of speaking. We often get caught up in our speech and are just so lost in what we're saying or want to say or the flow of the conversation. And it's easy to say things later, we regret. But to learn how to practice mindfulness of speaking to stay in our body, be aware of what's going on our body, or our thoughts, our impulses, or the emotions that are coming into play is really a powerful place for mindfulness. And it's well worth learning that skill, developing that capacity. And the greater the sensitivity is to this world of speech. The easier, or more natural in a sense, or more obvious it is, to be concerned with those ways of speaking, which are beneficial that are that lead to benefit to happiness, to well being. And to avoid those ways of speaking which are detrimental to ourselves and to others. That constrict us and limit us.

And so, there are four forms of right speech that the Buddha talks about, in this regard. There is speaking what is true. It's actually usually said in the negative, not speaking falsehoods, not speaking divisively, not speaking harshly, and not speaking pointlessly. So each of these will be explained over these days. But there's ways in which speaking falsely; divisively, sometimes it's called slander; harshly; hurtfully; and pointlessly. It diminishes ourselves or diminishes others or brings suffering, brings what's unwholesome. And to do the opposite. To speak the truth. And that's a topic for today.

So I'm going to focus more on the truth thing. That for mindfulness practitioners, truth is really precious or important or valued action. Because mindfulness and truth are almost or are synonymous. That mindfulness is the the act of being truthful about our experience to ourselves. When we do mental noting, just recognize that this is what's happening, this is what's happening. It might not seem it's so consequential what we're recognizing that we call it truth. But as a practice deepens and deepens, we'll come to layers of our being where Wow, I guess I have to admit this or acknowledge this and see if this is true too. And some of that might be difficult things to see, painful. And some of the things that we discovered is true, might be some really wonderful parts of ourselves, our beauty. And this is one of the great delights of settling deep into meditation is to discover capacities, inner capacities of wonder, of beauty, of value, of goodness, that might not have been recognized so clearly early in her lives. And are felt as fully as what it is. And to recognize the truth of this goodness within us is as important, maybe more important, than recognizing the truth of what's the opposite happening with us.

But recognizing the truth is a big part of what mindfulness is. And so speaking truth out loud, I call honesty. To be able to speak the truth. And in such a way that has the same beneficial impact

consequences as telling the truth to ourselves. And for that purpose, the Buddha gives three different, four different. Well, three different qualities that will go along with speaking the truth. He says that it should be kind, it should be beneficial, and it should be timely. We only speak the truth if it's timely to do so. And if it's beneficial, and if it's kind. Because we want the truth, to be spoken in ways that free people from suffering, that don't cause more suffering, don't cause harm. And truth itself can be a weapon. Truth can be used painfully. So the fact that something is true, doesn't mean that we're speaking kindly or supportively, or could be we're causing a lot of pain.

So speaking the truth goes along with the consideration, which is has to do with a second factor the Eightfold Path, the consideration of non ill will, and non cruelty. So that it's often translated as kindly – with kindness or loving kindness, friendliness – and with compassion and care. And so to speak the truth when it's the helpful thing to do and it's the right time so people can hear it. We think it's helpful, but it's not helpful in the middle of someone's big crisis about something else and you want to come and tell them about your difficulty with them. You wait for the right time. And you also try to do the inner work. To put aside, have worked through on your own, and any hostility you have, or any ways in which you're triggered to be hostile, or upset, so that communication is not clear and direct and to the point.

So mindfulness is we're doing our inner work. Not to deny or repress anything, but so that when we talk this truth, we can be a clear channel. For really the communication to be there in a way that's productive for all parties involved, yourself and others. It seems that speaking the truth, knowing the truth, being connected to what's true, being honest, is probably one of the most valuable resources we have. Most kind of wealth that we have. It's more important than how much money you have. It's more important than how intelligent you are. It's more important than who you know. It's more important than what recreational opportunities you have. It's more important than just so many things that people are pursuing. It's for the purposes of really growing, maturing as a human being. Really maturing on the path of freedom, the Buddhist path. It's being honest, which is really is the way forward. And this is what's important, not money, or smarts, or people that you know, or status, or pleasures, or all these other things which don't have the same power, as the power of truth.

So to discover how to be truthful to oneself and to others in ways that are freeing, ways that are kind and friendly, ways that are beneficial, nourishing, wholesome. And ways that are timely, knowing the right time. These are wonderful ways of considering what we're speaking. And part of mindfulness of speech is to be considered in our speech. To give some reflection in what we're saying, and when we're saying it. And so this Buddhist path is a path of considered path. A path of consideration, a path of reflection, a path of contemplation. Starting with the right view and then the second factor right consideration. And then now with all that view, the right view, and right consideration goes into considering how we speak. So that we can speak in ways that benefit the world. We can speak in ways that benefit self and others. We can speak in ways that are freeing and supportive and inspiring and meaningful.

And for today, for the next 24 hours, until we meet again to talk about the second factor of Right Speech, avoiding divisive speech. Maybe you can spend the day reflecting on the idea of truth. And being true and how it works and what your own personal relationship to it is. And your beliefs around it, and your experiences of it, both difficult and also wonderful experiences. Maybe talk to friends about your relationship and your experience of truth and truth telling. And maybe ask them what they've learned in their life about that. Maybe today can be a day that you spend more time reflecting and thinking about and talking about and learning about the value of truth, than who happens to be elected as president? Both are important, but maybe the topic of truth in the long term is much more.

So. May you enjoy the subject of truthfulness. Thank you.