

# 2020-11-06 Eightfold Path: Right Speech

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

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So continuing on the topic of right speaking, right speech, I want to step back a little bit to emphasize the continuity of these factors of the Eightfold Path, starting with right view, right viewing. And one of those, as I've been saying now repeatedly that one of the components of right view is to appreciate the consequences of our actions. And this is a fascinating and a very important issue, that something inside of us registers the impact that our actions have. The impacts they have on other people, the impact they have on us. And so in the teachings of the Buddha, consequences of actions are hugely important. And this is a little bit obscured in the Dharma teachings that kind of come out of United States and Europe, where for our own philosophical reasons, history and what we've picked up on intention as being really important. For the Buddha, surprisingly, given how much we teach it that's the case, intention isn't that important for him. It's difficult to dig deep down and find that that's the case. What's much more important for him is the consequences, which in modern language is impact. We can have, if we rely and rest in our intention, we can then overlook the impact. Or we could have an intention and not care about the means, how we get to the goal of the intention, because the goal of the intention is more valuable than the means. But if we're interested in consequences and impact, then every step along the way we're concerned, we're taking in, we're registering the impact we have. And so if what we want is world peace, but we approach that with hostility, maybe we can clear away the playing field of the people who we don't like so there can be peace. But to feel the impact that has on us and on them, the people who get cleared off the field, it's painful. It has a very, kind of tears at the fabric of the heart, if we're sensitive, if we're present. And we are social beings. And our connection, our empathy, our resonance with other people, actually counts a lot for the individual. And this is one of those surprises for me, that I discovered my early years of meditation, that as a meditation kind of tenderized, softened, opened me, took off the armor that I carried, and the fear that was between me and the world. That I felt much more attuned and sensitive to what was happening in

the world around me, both directly and also indirectly. And much more sensitive to the impact that I have on other people.

And so this idea of impact then, or consequences, becomes very important. And so we learn then that the impact of greed, the impact of hostility, and the impact often of delusion, is not beneficial. And it causes harm to others and to ourselves. And to begin to not be moralistic around greed, hatred and delusion, but rather to be sensitive around it. So that of course, we don't want to harm ourselves or harm others by acting out, especially greed and hatred. And so to recognize the difference between doing those things which are motivated by greed, hatred and delusion. Or actually in the with right consideration, the second one, those things that involve addiction to sensual pleasure, ill will, and cruelty, that correspond to greed, hate and delusion. And be more attuned and more considerate, more considering those things that are involved in non addiction to sensual pleasure, renunciation of that kind of pursuit. Non ill will, friendliness, and non cruelty, compassion, that's how we're considering things. We're looking at things. And so we go about our life, we're asking ourself is this wise consideration? Is it right consideration?

And now we're applying it to our speech. And speech has a huge impact. And the second factor, second in the list of rights speech that the Buddha gives, the first being speaking the truth. The second one is speaking, avoiding speaking words that divide people. Sometimes it's translated into English as slander. So not speaking divisively. And rather speaking words that bring concord, unification, bring people together. And so why would we do that? I think it goes back to this idea of the way that consequences are attuned to them, we're interested in them, makes a difference to us. Whether we cause harm, whether we create divisions between people, because it affects other people, which kind of affects us. But also we are changed for the worse when we do slander, or do divisive speech that really puts people at odds to each other. And this doesn't have to be just through words, not speaking can be divisive. Not speaking up to make a difference. Not saying anything sometimes enables falsehoods to continue. Not speaking sometimes allows for divisiveness continues and more suffering.

So the the movement here is to what does speech look like when it's not motivated by greed, hatred and delusion? When it's not motivated by addiction, to sensual pleasure, will and cruelty? What does it look like? And one of the ways it looks like is that it's interested in unification, concord, unifying. The Buddha talked about this kind of speech as speech which unifies those who are divided, and maintains or supports the unity of those who are already unified. And it's to delight in concord. It's to cherish concord. And this is how we speak. So how do we do that? How do you speak about people behind their backs? You speak in ways that are divisive, slanderous? That if they heard what you said they'd feel hurt? If you could track the the trajectory or the consequences of your speech, would it be that two three generations away from that conversation down to other people hear the same news, same idea, that it comes back and bites the person they're talking about? That they wouldn't be happy about it and it makes their life more difficult. Or do you talk behind people's backs and say things which are unifying? That people say, oh, they're happy to see that person next time they see them.

They're happy to figure out a way to work together. It's fascinating that how much emphasis the Buddha emphasized concord or social unity. And he encouraged his followers to – with acts of body, acts of speech, and acts of the mind, how we think about things and how we view the world around us – to do so with an eye for creating concord. Creating unification. An eye for creating a community of human beings that care for each other. That support each other. That are friendly to each other. And it's easy to have this as an ideal. It's much more challenging to maintain that principle and talk this way when other people are talking with hostility. Other people are divisive. And so what are the skillful ways to step towards that, to begin healing that divide? Or to say it more simplistically, maybe simply, sometimes more to the what we can do, is how not to continue put fuel on the flames of that divide? How not to participate in further dividing? How not to get imbued or take on the divisiveness other people have and then just contribute to more and more of it. And I think that meditation practice makes a huge difference in this regard. To learn in meditation how to be open, relaxed, sensitive, we really become attuned to consequences and impact. We get attuned, it makes a difference for us because of the empathy thing. Makes a difference for us, the impact of our words and what's going on in the world around us. And can the impact we have be one this disarms people? That opens people? That predisposes them to look upon us and others in a friendly way. Can we be forces of bringing people together?

And that's certainly my wish for Buddhism in this country. That Buddhism somehow is a bridge builder. Buddhism is a force that doesn't exactly take sides. But rather is more interested in bridging people together, bringing people together. So we all can be in the table together and find our common good, find our commonality. As naive or simplistic as that might seem sometimes, I believe in it. I believe in that it's possible to have an inclusive heart that leaves no one out. That we never turn our backs towards anyone/ That we never maintain and hold on to our resentments, our hurts in such a way that we banish people from our hearts. That we always are ready, in a wise and safe and appropriate way, to be inclusive. And step forward and say this too, this person too, I will meet. I don't agree with what the person is saying, I don't agree with what the person is doing. But this too, I will meet. This person I will relate to in a friendly way. And if the person is too complicated and difficult and maybe even dangerous to do it overtly, at least we can do it in our hearts privately. So that no one is left out of our hearts.

So finally, what we see here is that this central teachings of the Buddha, the Eightfold Path, is right at the heart of it is a social teaching. Is a teaching about how we live our lives in the world and how we relate to other people. This is really, really important for the Buddhist path. And this is a path to liberation. And that path to liberation is completely inclusive of our social relationships and caring for them and unifying them. It's hard to be free spiritually if we are living divisively. Maybe impossible.

So may you consider over the next 24 hours, how your speech and sometimes your silence, how your speech can support unification support, concord. That people can come together with respect for each other, with friendliness, and with sympathy for each other. How can you speak in that way? And how

can you avoid, maybe for the next 24 hours, run the experiment and try to the best you can even if you break out in a sweat to avoid saying things which are divisive. Or which if someone, the person you're talking about couldn't hear what you said, would feel hurt or upset. Don't say anything divisive or anything negative. See if you can do that for one day. And instead say words that are unifying and support others to kind of open their hearts and be unifying. Run the experiment. See what that's like. And for one day, it's probably a worthwhile thing to do.

Thank you.