

Thank you, everyone, for your presence in class. I appreciated the check ins about practice plans. Keep experimenting with them. Next week we will look at practice with difficult, sticky emotions.

We checked in on the deep listening homework using the following three guidelines.

- A) Listening with compassion.
- B) Listening with mindfulness (to ourselves).
- C) Listening from silence.

Cultivating listening from silence, compassion and mindfulness will shed light on habitual patterns of responding with words, advice, fixing and commiserating. It also opens territory to deeper understanding of ourselves. This happens most clearly when we listen without trying to fix or change anything.

Deep listening creates joy and harmony, it benefits ourselves as well as others, both when we are listening and when we are deeply heard.

(B) came up as important, that we listen to our own needs and make sure we are just as much an object of our own compassion as the person we are listening to.

We also noticed there are many times, for a number of reasons, we do not listen well. This is not about 'fixing', which comes from the ego-identified mind, which always has an agenda and feels lack, in the world and in ourselves. Fixing actually continues to empower the ego-identified mind which is the seat of suffering. This path is about uncovering a different place from which to live life.

An important point is not to beat ourselves up for imperfection. It is rather to see that the part of us that notices when we do not listen well IS our innate awake nature. By seeing both listening and non-listening, and paying attention to the resultant feelings, we can trust awareness itself to naturally cultivate listening for our own well being and benefit.

SKILLFUL SPEECH

We start with speech because it is so powerful. Many of the ‘cringe’ memories that I have come from saying something that was harmful, mean spirited, or just out of touch. I’m guessing I am in good company.

We cultivate skillful speech for our own happiness and joy, as well as the happiness of those around us.

What is right speech? Here are some teachings from the Vipassana tradition:

From Thich Nat Hanh’s mindfulness trainings, the precepts, here’s his take on right speech:

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. I will refrain from spreading news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord, or can cause family or community to break. I am determined to make efforts to reconcile conflicts, however small.

From various suttas:

Majjhima Nikaya, 141 Saccavibhanga sutta: The exposition of truths

And what, friends, is right speech? Abstaining from false speech, abstaining from malicious speech, abstaining from harsh speech, and abstaining from idle chatter—this is called right speech.”

“And what, bhikkhus, is wrong speech? False speech, malicious speech, harsh speech, and gossip: this is wrong speech.

“And what, bhikkhus, is right speech? Right speech, I say, is twofold: there is right speech that is affected by taints (here he is talking about anger, greed, and delusion), ripening on the side of

attachment; and there is right speech that is noble, taintless, and supramundane (meaning not coming from egoic energies), a factor of the path.

“And what, bhikkhus, is right speech that is affected by taints (These are words that have unwholesome roots in the afflictions: ill will, greed and delusion), ripening on the side of attachment? Abstinence from false speech, abstinence from malicious speech, abstinence from harsh speech, abstinence from gossip: this is right speech that is affected by taints...on the side of attachment.

This last part is hard to follow, but is basically tells us that when the impulse to speak comes from an affliction, right speech is to remain silent.

Anguttara Nikaya N 5.198 Vaca Sutta

Monks, a statement endowed with these five factors is well-spoken, not ill-spoken. It is blameless & unfaulted by knowledgeable people. Which five?

*“It is spoken at the right time.
It is spoken in truth.
It is spoken affectionately.
It is spoken beneficially.
It is spoken with a mind of good-will.*

Majjhima Nikaya 21: the simile of the saw

*Monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you:
timely or untimely,
true or false,
affectionate or harsh,
beneficial or unbeneficial,
with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate.*

Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate.

We all say things we regret.

An important point again: working with skillful speech is not a self improvement program.

Looking at this work and seeing the shortcomings in our aspirations can feel perjorative. We will miss the mark over and over, it is part of being human, and we are not in control of what is triggered from the unconscious and from our conditioning.

Seeing takes time and patience. The potential for self criticism is here. Yet this is about creating joy and connection.

Key: focus NOT on missing the mark, but seeing what in us notices that we missed it. That which notices is our true center, our awake nature.

As we go along, we find we can trust this center deeply, implicitly. It is the light unto ourselves. **This shift, from the one who missed the mark to the one who noticed, is the path home.**

Here are five qualities the Buddha suggested all need to be present before we speak:

Please note that these apply equally to refraining from speech.

1. *True (not false): do I absolutely know this is true, or is it something I want to be true or hope is true?*
2. *Timely (not untimely): Is this the right time to say it? Is the other person in a place where they can hear it?*
3. *Gentle (not harsh): Can I say this in a kind, comforting way?*

4. *Beneficial (not unbeneficial): consider if it is - not really going to help*
- *blaming*
 - *giving advice or our opinion*
 - *harms a third party (gossip)*
 - *not taking your own needs into consideration, not having compassion for yourself*

5. *Loving intention (not with ill will): Do I want the best for myself and the other person? If I'm angry or irritated, can I both hold that and speak my part?*

ALL of these need to be present.

We talked about examples where four of the qualities were present, and missing only one.

Saying something that was gentle, well intentioned, trying to make someone feel better but is untrue.

Saying something at the wrong time, when someone was not able to hear it, or when we were wrapped up in conflict.

Saying it in a harsh way that makes someone feel badly instead of pointing out a possibility of different action,

Looking at this deeply leads to the clearer seeing of why we speak as we do. We see the fears of not being included, or loved, or part of the group, or of being judged motivate all of us. Seeing it deeply in ourselves is what opens compassion to seeing and forgiving it in others as well.

Here's another yardstick useful in finding skillful speech:

Skillful speech opens the heart: It fills you with energy, so the energy of life can come pouring in. There's a true connection, a loving intention that feeds the truest part of ourselves.

Ever have a heart to heart that left you flying afterwards?

Wrong speech has a draining effect. Ever have a conversation that leaves you feeling tired and irritated? Sometimes it's not even negative, it's just idle conversation. (Think of the typical cocktail party.)

Why is this?

When you encounter unskillful speech, either internally or externally, it leaves a stickiness in the mind. A karmic stain of sorts. It comes back to mind later because it didn't feel quite right, or left you feeling drained and empty. Something feels 'wrong'.

Right speech does not leave a karmic trace, it is clean. My own guideline is that whenever I find my mind returning to a conversation, something in it does not sit right or is unresolved, that there was unskillfulness.

It may need to be looked at for possible further attention. Sometimes it was something that was not said that needs to be said. Or what was said was not communicated fully or with love, and needs to be reopened, or amends made.

When a conversation leaves you with afterthoughts, or you find yourself reviewing what was said, or left you with that funny feeling, review the conversation and see which of the five guidelines were present and which were absent. Notice any patterns that might emerge.

HOMEWORK Your homework is to test out the concept that skillful speech creates energy and joy, and unskillful speech is draining and irritating.

You received a "notecard" of the qualities on a small card for reference. Put it somewhere where you can see it during the day.

TRUE?

RIGHT TIME?

GENTLE?

FOR GOOD?

WITH LOVING INTENTION?

When you notice a communication that left you feeling open and connected to life, review it to see if the five qualities were present.

When you notice a communication (and this includes internal self talk, email and media as well a spoken conversation) that left a sticky

residue, (either your emotions become more negative, or it niggles your mind), review it to see which of the five qualities were missing.

Continue to work with a practice plan.

best wishes,
Susan