

# Speech (5 of 5) Speaking with Goodwill

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## **Summary Keywords**

Timely, honest, beneficial, heartfelt, Thich Nhat Hanh, freedom, confidence, respect, mirror

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We come now to the fifth of the five talks on wise speech. These are five reflections that we can do before or after we speak. We are not obligated to be this way. These are five ways where our hearts and the Dharma path can flourish in us. They are also ways to support the flourishing of others.

Speak when it is timely – the right time. Do not rush to speak or avoid speaking. Consider what is the right time.

Is it now? Is it some other time? Speak honestly. Speak the truth. We are not in any way trying to deceive or manipulate anyone with our speech.

Speak in a way that touches the heart. Speak in a pleasant way, but deeper than pleasure. Speak in a way that pleases the heart – our heart and that of others. Speak about what is beneficial and what is helpful. If it

is not helpful, or the opposite of beneficial, consider not saying it.

Today, we will consider speaking with goodwill. Speak with *metta* – with loving kindness, kindness, or friendliness. These are all words that translate as *metta*.

One of the remarkable things that I discovered as I went through this Buddhist practice is that when I do not have goodwill, when I am not open-hearted with people, to use that metaphor, I am close-hearted. There is a way in which I am not fully myself, not coming from a place where I feel most at home, comfortable, or free.

It isn't that I am supposed to always have goodwill. There can be challenging situations to be in. But not having goodwill for an extended period means I am somehow caught or stuck in something. It is not that I must have goodwill for others. I just don't want to be limited by the opposite. I don't want the suffering, the strain, or the stress. It doesn't feel good to perpetuate that and to live that way.

I came to have a profound trust that, in theory, it is possible to have goodwill for everyone. I am motivated to live that way, or to practice to attain that – not as an attainment, but more as a way of arriving, of being free and fully here in the world. The reference point for this is, “Is there goodwill or not?” If there is no goodwill,

then there is work to be done. There is practice to be done, internally. I don't try to force myself to have goodwill.

Speaking with goodwill has benefits for oneself. I said earlier that there is an axiom – in meditation watch your mind, in the world watch your speech. There is a reciprocal relationship between the mind and our speech. The state of our mind is often reflected in how we speak. The mind influences our speaking, but how we speak will have an influence on the mind. If we speak angrily – if we are angry and speak angry words, that will usually reinforce the mind's tendency or habit to be angry. If we speak in a friendly way, that reinforces the tendency, and the disposition of the mind to be friendly.

Sometimes it is okay to speak in a friendly way with goodwill if it feels sincere enough so that it benefits us. One reason to speak in a friendly manner is the self-benefit that comes. I want to emphasize this so that we don't take it as a moral obligation to be ethical or live from goodwill. If we see it as a moral obligation to fake it, force it, or pretend to have goodwill, it can become a saccharine, surface kind of goodwill that won't benefit us.

In Buddhist practice, we always want to check in with ourselves. How are we right now? Is this really serving

me? Is this beneficial for me? Does this touch my heart in a deep way? If we use that as a reference point, then it is a lot easier to find a way to live with an open heart, with freedom and goodwill. Expressing that goodwill is more likely to support further goodwill than if we don't. The benefit continues for us.

We also get an added bonus that is very important. It could be a primary motivation that there are times when we are actually wishing well for others. We want others to be well and good.

We are not overriding ourselves or trying to sacrifice ourselves for others' well-being at any cost. We care for ourselves as much as we care for others. We are using the reference point of our own freedom or lack of freedom as a guide for how to be useful to others in the world.

How we are is as important as what we say. That is why when we ask if this is the right time to speak, we check in with how we are. Is this a good time for me to be able to speak right now? Perhaps we should walk around the block and meditate a bit. Then we might be in a better place to speak. How I am is where the truth comes from. You have a much clearer sense of what is true if you are settled, calm, attentive, and sensitive. If we are in a friendly, kind, compassionate, loving place then it is

easier for us to speak gentle words that touch the hearts of others.

Is it beneficial? I would like to propose that sometimes the actual content of the words we are saying and what they mean has less to do with what is beneficial than how we say it. I think it has been said that people who can speak with respect and kindness to others, with a certain level of confidence and presence can have a much bigger impact than those people who say the same thing but don't have a sense of confidence, care, or respect for who they are speaking to. How we are might be a more important part of the communication than what we are saying.

Finally, is there goodwill? This again has to do with how we are. Are we expressing goodwill and friendliness in our speech? If we do this, it is good for us. It is healing for us. So, these are the five criteria of speech.

I would like to end the series with a teaching by Thich Nhat Hanh about right speech. I think the context for it has to do with the precept of not lying. It is a lovely kind of thing. I took this from a book by Thich Nhat Hanh called *For a Future to Be Possible*. I just love the title.

“Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy

and happiness to others and to relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined to not spread news that I do not know to be certain and to not criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.”

We want to live and speak in a way that makes a good future possible for all of us. I hope that these talks on wise speech have given us something to think about. Maybe we can use these concepts and any good history we have had with goodwill, friendliness, and kindness as a reference point, like a mirror to see ourselves better. If we use that as a mirror to understand ourselves better, I wonder if we will move towards having more goodwill. This may happen without intentionally wanting it or intentionally making it happen.

I have a tremendous trust in the power of looking at ourselves deeply. If we do so, we will naturally want to move toward a way of being which is better for ourselves and others. Thank you, and I look forward to being here with you again on Monday.