

Dedicated Practitioners Program Homework for August 2002

Theme: Wise Speech

The Buddha expressed the importance of wise speech in our practice by repeatedly emphasizing this theme in many of his discourses. Since the subject is so vast, this homework highlights a few specific aspects of wise speech based on two suttas from the Majjhima Nikaya. Wise speech will also be woven into our metta practice. The importance of wise intention in our speech from last month's homework is also highlighted. (This homework also includes wise effort from June's homework, as the Buddha said, "One makes effort to abandon wrong speech.") This month we want to understand what makes speech "wrong" or unwise, and how to practice with our speech (or make effort) so that it is more in accord with the Dharma.

Readings: Please read Majjhima Nikaya 41, The Brahmins of Sala, and MN58, To Prince Abhaya. In MN41, the Buddha explains to groups of brahmin householders the ten kinds of unwholesome and wholesome conduct. This homework will focus on the verbal conduct. In MN58, after Prince Abhaya tries to trick the Buddha with a question, the Buddha teaches him what kinds of speech he himself would utter and would not utter.

The ten kinds of unwholesome and wholesome conduct that are referred to in MN41 and throughout the suttas, fall into three categories—bodily, verbal and mental conduct. Four of these actions relate to our speech. The roots of these unwholesome actions are greed, aversion and delusion. We are asked to practice by abstaining from each of these unwholesome verbal actions in order to remove these three roots. What are the four?

1. lying intentionally
2. speaking maliciously
3. speaking harshly
4. gossiping

Reflections and exercises—for possible discussion with your dharma buddy, your mentor or within your DPP group.

From Sutta 41

1. Copy into your journal a complete list of the Buddha's description of the kinds of verbal conduct that are not in accord with the Dharma and the kinds that are in accord with the Dharma.
2. Reflect on your own patterns of speech in relation to the four types of "unrighteous" speech (other translations of this term might be inauthentic, unwise, unbeneficial). Have you engaged in any of these patterns in the past or recently? Can you identify the underlying motivation for these kinds of speech? Develop a practice for yourself this month to help work with the pattern.
3. Consider whether it is useful to practice "abandoning" by cutting off the pattern when it arises, or whether there are other ways to work with it. Discuss this with your dharma buddy or a friend.
4. Reflect on the "righteous" patterns of speech (other translations of this term might be authentic, wise, beneficial). Choose one and encourage the pattern. (i.e. be a promotor of friendships.) What would that mean for you? What would that look like?

From Sutta 58

1. In this sutta, the Buddha states what kind of speech he would use and what kind he would not use. What is the practical information that can be derived from this passage? How could you make it relevant to your experience?
2. Our practice is that what we say to someone must be true, correct and beneficial, whether it is welcomed or unwelcomed. What criteria can you use, or do you use, to determine whether something you want to say is of benefit or not?
3. Think of something you want to say to someone—a partner, a colleague, a friend or a family member—and reflect on whether it would be beneficial to say it or not. If you decide that it is, make a time to have the conversation, reflecting on the teaching of finding the correct time. Be prepared to discuss this with your dharma buddy or in your group.
4. The times that we want to say something that is unwelcome or disagreeable are the most difficult times to discern whether or not our speech is beneficial. Pay particular attention to these times during the month. Notice the pattern as well as the beliefs and views that are operating for you during these times. Do you withdraw, hold back, do you feel confused, or do you move forward? The pattern is likely to be different depending on the conditions present. Notice what conditions feel more supportive and which do not.
5. In 58.8 the Buddha says, in reference to using wholesome and unwholesome speech, “The Tathagata knows the time to use such speech. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has compassion for beings.” Reflect on what it means to you to use speech in a timely fashion.

Intention

1. Pay attention to your intention for speaking. How do you know your intention? What signals to you look for? Is it a feeling, or an impulse, or is it a thought? If you’re not sure, ask yourself, “What is my intention for saying what I am about to say to this person?” See if you can get a response. It’s best if you can do it before you speak. However, it is fine to attend to your intention while speaking, or even after.
2. Reflect on why the practice of discriminating between a wholesome intention and an unwholesome one is important.
3. Before you speak, if you become aware that your intention is unwholesome, can you abstain from speaking? While you are speaking if you realize that your intention is unwholesome or unbeneficial, can you stop speaking, or begin to reframe the way you are talking? Can you stay present with your experience while you are abstaining from speaking?

Metta Practice

This month focus on bringing metta into your speech, both with yourself and others.

1. With **your inner speech**, pay attention to the times that you are blaming and judging, or engaged in any of the four kinds of “unrighteous” speech. Notice how you feel when this is

happening. Notice the pattern without giving it the value of good or bad. See if you can notice with a friendly, non-judging awareness and not strengthen the pattern with identification.

2. Bring some awareness to **when you are in communication with others**. When we have negative fixed ideas about others, we believe the problem lies outside of ourselves and we easily get fixated in our positions and views. It is less likely that we will look at our own accountability in the situation. Therefore, we think the answer for our happiness lies in the other person changing, i.e. “Then I’ll be OK.”

3. Think of someone you are having difficulty with and would like their behavior to be different. What would you gain if they were different? Pay attention to your thoughts and speech in relation to this person. See if you can access your emotional feelings towards this person. If you feel that open dialog is possible in this relationship, when you talk with this person, report what is arising for you, your thoughts and feelings, using I-language, rather than talking about them, or blaming and judging them. Stay in touch with your deepest motivation for connection, harmony and compassion for yourself and all beings.

Daily Practice: This is a review of the above homework, incorporating it into daily sitting and life practices.

Week	Daily Practices	
1.	Sitting	Thoughts are simply sub-vocal speech. Every time you become aware that you are thinking, note “thinking”. Pay attention to the feeling that is underneath or generating the thought. You could also try to be notice the intention behind a thought.
	Life	Work with the eight kinds (wholesome and unwholesome) of verbal conduct. Make your speech more “in accord with the Dharma.”
2.	Sitting	Every time you notice you are remembering or anticipating a conversation, reflect on what your intention was in speaking.
	Life	Pay attention to your intention for speaking, distinguishing between wholesome and unwholesome intentions
3.	Both	Pay attention to your inner dialogue, practicing with using non-judging, non-blaming language.
4.	Sitting	Note the different kinds of thoughts you have. Do these categories also show up in your speech? Is there a connection between your thoughts and your speech? As part of the noting practice, identify your thoughts in relation to the list you made of wholesome and unwholesome kinds of speech.
	Life	Pay attention to your outer dialogue, practicing using non-judging, non-blaming language.

Please schedule a time to connect with your dharma buddy for a discussion of this month’s reflections and practices. Incorporate the exercises from this homework into your communications with your dharma buddy. Be sure you have scheduled an interview with your mentor if you are receiving monthly interviews.