

# Material for discussion on Communication

*Ratnaprabha, Windhorse:Evolution.*

*"Let us use words that do not cause us pain  
Let us use words that do not hurt each other:  
Those, truly, are wholesome words.  
Let us use pleasant speech, where the words make people glad,  
Not laying hold of others' faults, let us use pleasant speech on others.  
The words of truth are ambrosial. This is eternally the case.  
As the old saying goes, words of truth cannot die.  
And good people, they say, are well grounded in truth, welfare, and virtue.  
And the words which the Buddha speaks, words that lead to Nirvana, putting an end  
to suffering, are the supreme words." (Vangisa (poet-disciple), Sutta Nipata, 451-54)*

The Buddha had earlier said that speech is well spoken, faultless, and praised by the wise if it is:

1. Well said,
2. Spoken according to the Dharma (alternatively "just"),
3. "Affectionately and is not unkindly spoken"
4. If it is the truth.

## **The Sangrahavastus (means of unification or Sangha-building)**

Tibetan: the essentials of partnership or co-operation.

The altruistic dimension of the spiritual life, following on from the six Paramitas: the sangrahavastus "are really due to the outflow of the bodhisattvas compassion." (*Jatakamala*)

They originate in the Pali Canon, e.g. The *Hatthaka Sutta* from the *Gradual Sayings of the Pali Canon* (23 and 24 in the 8s, collated):

The Buddha said: This following of yours, Hatthaka, is very large. How do you keep united?

"My teacher, it is by the four means of unification (sangrahavastus) which you taught me that we keep united. When I know that I can make a connection with someone through generosity, then I use generosity. When I know that I can make a connection with someone through kind speech, then I use kind speech. When I know that I can make a connection with someone through beneficial activity, then I use beneficial activity. When I know that I can make a connection with someone through exemplification or empathy, then I use exemplification or empathy." "Sadhu! Sadhu!, Hatthaka -- this is just the way to unify a large following. Whoever has done so in the past has used these four means of unification, likewise in the future and present."

## **Types of Perfect speech**

The speech precepts.

I undertake the training principle to abstain from false speech.

- ... from harsh speech.
- ... from slanderous speech.
- ... from meaningless speech.

With truthful communication, I purify my speech.  
With words kindly and gracious, I purify my speech.  
With utterance helpful and harmonious, I purify my speech.

Sangharakshita's progressive explanation: When you are speaking, first be truthful, then speak from a loving awareness of the other, then make sure that the conversation is really meaningful. If you can achieve that, then there is a chance of complete harmony. This can become mutual self-transcendence, where you feel no barrier between you and the other, and you are communicating, but need hardly any words that all. This is the "perfect speech" on the eight-fold path. (*Vision and Transformation*)

In one place in the Pali Canon, the positive versions of the speech precepts are given as follows: speech should be: true, non-backbiting, harmonising, wise.

## **The four powers: Wisdom, energy, faultlessness, kind speech**

Wisdom here is learning to distinguish between skilful and unskilful mental states. Energy, Virya, refers to giving your attention and your effort to the skilful, and withdrawing it from the unskilful in your own mind. Faultlessness then means using the precepts to apply this discrimination to your behaviour. Now you have really set yourself up, and you are ready to communicate!

"The Bodhisattva's loving speech is the expression of his delighted awareness of peoples' spiritual potential" -- the fact that they can grow, *together*. (Sangharakshita, lecture 144)

## **Speech and mental state**

Perfect speech must come from a volition of emotional positivity.

The Sanskrit for kind speech is *Priyavadita*; *Priya* as dear (of beings), or pleasant (of words etc.).

A delighted awareness of another's spiritual potential.

## **Harsh speech**

Harsh speech is defined as: "Such words as are rough, hard, hurtful to others, offensive to others, bordering on anger, uncondusive to concentration." (MIII, 48)

The basic reason for avoiding harsh speech is because it is conducive to unskilful mental states, and diminishes skilful mental states. Buddhaghosha defines harsh speech like this: "the kind of speech by which one makes both oneself and another harsh, the kind of speech which is also itself harsh, being pleasant neither to the ear nor to the heart -- that is harsh speech."

Buddhaghosha says "harsh speech is the entirely harsh volition initiating an effort by body or by speech to wound another's vital feelings." He gives a couple of examples to make this clear: A little boy ran away into the dangerous forest, ignoring his mother's orders, though she shouted to him not to go. So she said, "I hope you get chased by a wild buffalo!" When he got into the forest a wild buffalo appeared in front of him and threatened him. So the boy made an asseveration of truth: "let it happen not as my mother said, but the she thought in her heart!" The buffalo stood frozen to the spot, and the boy escaped! Because of the gentleness of her mind it was not harsh speech. Buddhaghosha goes on to say, "teachers and preceptors sometimes say to their pupils, "what is the use of these shameless and heedless brats? Drive them out!" Yet in reality they wish for their success in learning and attainment." On the other hand, Buddhaghosha says, it might sounds gentle but actually be harsh. His example is of the murderer standing over his victim, whispering: "you're going to have a nice peaceful sleep." (*Commentary to Samma Ditthi Sutta.*)

"In truth, to every man that's born  
A hatchet grows within his mouth,  
Wherewith the fool, whenever he speaks  
And speaks amiss, does cut himself...  
He by his lips stores up bad fortune, and by that ill fortune finds no bliss." (A V, 171)

## Slanderous Speech

Avoid "repeating elsewhere what is heard here... for the purpose of causing division" (M 41).  
Complaining about others in public, teasing, hurtful humour.

## Descriptions of kind speech

The Pali Canon describes the kindly speech of the Buddha in verse:

"He is no speaker of abuse, /Harsh and painful, hurting folk, /His voice is gentle, kind and sweet, /Appealing to the hearts of folk/And delightful to their ears.... /Folk will take his words to heart/And set great store by all he says." (DIII, 174)

This is the very common list of epithets for kind speech found in the Pali canon. You should speak "what is blameless (or gentle: *nela*), pleasing to the ear, loveable (*pemaniya*), going to the heart (*hadayangama*), courteous (*pori*), pleasing (*kanta*) and attractive (*manapa*) to many people (*bahujana*)". (MIII, 48)

"They who talk angrily, full of wrath and proud, /Carp at each other's failings when they meet, /And take delight in blame and finding fault, /And in their rival's fall. .../Thus speaks a sage, not angry, well restrained/With humble mind, not laying down the law, /Not curious; but wisely speaks fair speech, /Welcomes the kindly word, rejects the cruel, /Knows not resentment, does not carp at faults, /Does not retort nor crushes rival down, /Nor from the issue speak. O true it is/That Ariyan's words alike instruct and please!" (A I, 199)

Be "a uniter of the divided, a promoter of friendships, harmony is his delight, he exults in harmony, he is passionately fond of harmony, he becomes a speaker of words that promote concord." (M 41)

The huge effect of a few kind words, passing on praise, the value of encouragement.

Misunderstanding other people: awareness, patience because people see the world so differently, helping people to understand each other.

## How to admonish.

The Buddha explained how one monk should exhort another: what he says should be timely; it should reflect what has really happened; it should be said with gentleness; it should be connected with the good or the goal; and it should be spoken with a mind of metta. (Remember to apply this to oneself, rather than using it as a means of being dissatisfied with others!) (Also see M 21, 58)

## Defensiveness.

One of the traditional negative mental events is defensiveness (*pradasa*). Bhante quotes a Tibetan commentator in *Know Your Mind*: "it is the urge to use harsh words of disagreement due to anger and resentment when other's raise one's shortcomings" Bhante says that in such a case, if one is not in a position to move forward, one is likely to react defensively, with resentment. He gives some telltale phrases to look out for: "I am not getting angry" "what's your problem?" "I don't know why you always misunderstand me" "you're just projecting

your own anger onto me" "back off, will you -- I just need some space to sort myself out" "you're always saying that -- why can't you say something positive for a change?" He says that the phrase "you're always" is a particular sign of defensiveness.

"It really means "I'm aware that is a problem here that I need to address, but I cannot bring myself to be rational about it." but instead of being able to say this, one absolutises the other person's action, completely identifying them with it. The expression... signals that one's reaction is out of all proportion to what has been said or done.... We distract attention from the objective situation by attacking the bonafides of the person who points it out, or playing the injured innocent, or whatever. An element of paranoia can develop such that we begin to imagine that other people disapprove of us when they have said nothing at all; we start to react to criticism that no one has yet thought of except ourselves. Before we create that kind of rift between ourselves and our friends we have to be prepared to be open with them, having sufficient confidence in them to be able to confess our shortcomings" (p. 213)

## **How to receive unwelcome communication**

In the Pali Canon (MI, 126), the Buddha points out that it is easy to be kind and gentle while nobody is saying anything that you don't like. But it is much more difficult when somebody is saying something that you wish they would not say. And the Buddha goes on to talk about how one monk should be admonished by another. First of all he says that your motivation for being prepared to be admonished is that you revere and respect the Dharma. Then he emphasises that you need metta.

Whether what they say is timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, in connection with your good or your harm, and whether spoken with a mind of metta or with inner hate, you should resolve to be unaffected, uttering no evil words, abiding compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of metta. Then pervade them with metta, and spread it to everybody in the world, "with a mind imbued with metta, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility or ill will". The Buddha then gives four similes, and one very extreme example, of how to receive harsh or unwelcome speech. He says be like the earth, which does not mind when it is broken up by the hoe, or when liquids are poured into it. Be like space when somebody tries to paint on it, nothing sticks, nothing pollutes it. Be like the river when somebody tries to set fire to it: it is impossible because there is nothing inflammable in it. Be like a cat skin bag, when somebody tries to make it rustle: it is so soft and pliable, that it cannot make any noise at all! Finally, he gives the example of a monk who is caught by robbers and tortured with a saw. "He who gave rise to a mind of hate towards them would not be carrying out my teaching." (M I, 126)

Elsewhere, Shariputra follows up some very similar advice on how to be admonished by saying that if you are exhorted, whether rightly or wrongly, then you should find your support in the truth and in what he calls "the immovable", which I think means in the imperturbability of positive emotion. If the thing that is pointed out *is* in you, then you say so. If it is *not* then you say that it is not. (A III, 175)

Being easy to speak to guards you from all harm. Another sutta in the Pali Canon lists 10 things that you need if you want to live protected or guarded. The third one is spiritual friendship, and the fourth is "a monk is pleasant to speak to, he is blessed with qualities that make him easy to speak to." But "sorrowfully lives the unprotected monk." (A V, 24)