

Right Speech

What now, is Right Speech?

Abstaining from Lying

1. Herein someone avoids lying and abstains from it. He speaks the truth, is devoted to the truth, reliable, worthy of confidence, not a deceiver of men. Being at a meeting, or amongst people, or in the midst of his relatives, or in a society, or in the king's court, and called upon and asked as witness to tell what he knows, he answers, if he knows nothing: 'I know nothing', and if he knows, he answers: 'I know'; if he has seen nothing, he answers: 'I have seen nothing', and if he has seen, he answers: 'I have seen'. Thus he never knowingly speaks a lie, either for the sake of his own advantage, or for the sake of another person's advantage, or for the sake of any advantage whatsoever.

Abstaining from Tale-Bearing

2. He avoids tale-bearing, and abstains from it. What he has heard here, he does not repeat there, so as to cause dissension there; and what he has heard there, he does not repeat here, so as to cause dissension here. Thus he unites those that are divided; and those that are united, he encourages. Concord gladdens him, he delights and rejoices in concord; and it is concord that he spreads by his words.

Abstaining from Harsh Language

3. He avoids harsh language, and abstains from it. He speaks such words as are gentle, soothing to the ear, loving, such words as go to the heart, and are courteous, friendly, and agreeable to many.

In Majjhima-Nikaya, No. 21, the Buddha says: 'Even, O monks, should robbers and murderers saw through your limbs and joints, whosoever should give way to anger thereat would not be following my advice. For thus ought you to train yourselves: 'Undisturbed shall our mind remain, no evil words shall escape our lips; friendly and full of sympathy shall we remain, with heart full of love, and free from any hidden malice; and that person shall we penetrate with loving thoughts, wide, deep, boundless, freed from anger and hatred'.

Abstaining from Vain Talk

4. He avoids vain talk, and abstains from it. He speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, speaks what is useful, speaks of the law and the discipline: his speech is like a treasure, uttered at the right moment, accompanied by arguments, moderate and full of sense.

This is called Right Speech. (*Anguttara-Nikaya*, X. 176)

Mundane and Supermundane Speech

Now, Right Speech. I tell you, is of two kinds:

1. Abstaining from lying, from tale-bearing, from harsh language, and from vain talk; this is called 'Mundane Right Speech' (*lokiya-samma-vaca*), which yields worldly fruits and brings good results.

2. But the avoidance of the practice of this fourfold wrong speech, the abstaining, desisting, refraining therefrom—the mind being holy, being turned away from the world, and conjoined with the path, the holy path being pursued—this is called the 'Supermundane Right Speech' (*lokuttara-samma-vaca*), which is not of the world, but is supermundane, and conjoined with the path.

Conjoined with Other Factors

Now, in understanding wrong speech as wrong, and right speech as right, one practises *Right Understanding* (1st factor); and in making efforts to overcome evil speech and to arouse right speech, one practises *Right Effort* (6th factor); and in overcoming wrong speech with attentive mind, and dwelling with attentive mind in possession of right speech, one practises *Right Mindfulness* (7th factor). Hence, there are three things that accompany and follow upon Right Speech, namely: Right Understanding, Right Effort, and Right Mindfulness. (*Majjhima-Nikaya*, 117)

Source: Nyanatiloka (compiler, translator). *The Word of the Buddha: An Outline of the Teaching of the Buddha in the Words of the Pali Canon*. 14th edition. Kandy, Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1967. (Pages 48-50) [This format has been produced by Alexander Peck.]