

## *Speech for the Sake of Stillness*

*August 29, 2014*

You have a whole hour here: to be with your breath, to be with your mind. You want to make the most of it. It's very rare that we get a chance to have just these two things here, with no other responsibilities.

You'll find that you begin the hour by talking to yourself, so bring the talk in line with the principles of right speech: in other words, true, beneficial, and timely. "Beneficial" here means basically leading to stillness, to the point where you don't have to talk to yourself.

But in the beginning stages, you do have to talk. It's what's called directed thought and evaluation. That's how you get the mind snug with its object, how you get the object just right for the mind.

You're focusing on the breath. Where do you feel the breath right now? Do you know when it's coming in? Do you know when it's going out? Does it feel comfortable?

If it's not comfortable, this is where you start talking to yourself. What can you do to make it more comfortable? Is the breathing too long? Is it too short? Too heavy? Too light? Too fast? Too slow?

What kind of image do you hold in mind when you think about the breath? When we talk about focusing on the breath, we're focusing not so much the air coming in and out through the nose, but more on the sensation of energy throughout the body. In some parts it's clearer than others. The energy that allows the air to come in, allows it to go out: Where do you sense that energy? Focus there.

And allow it to have some freedom. Don't clamp down on it, because that'll make things uncomfortable, and it won't be pleasant to be here. The whole purpose of this is to get the mind in a comfortable place, give it something comfortable to focus on, so that it'll be happy to stay here in the present moment.

If you notice that it's wandered off, just nudge it right back. Drop whatever thought led you away and you'll be right back with the breath. When you come back, reward yourself with a really nice breath. What would feel really good right now, deep down inside? And keep it up.

This is speech that is true, beneficial, and timely.

Now, it helps if you've been adhering to the principles of right speech as you go through the day. Otherwise, you have a mind full of all kinds of chatter right now, talking about 108,000 different things during the day, which means you have

108,000 different things to clear out of the mind.

So it's good to remember that the meditation's not just a technique you follow when you're sitting here with your eyes closed. You have to create the right environment for it. And the main way you create your environment for the mind is through your speech.

So be very careful as you go through the day. Make sure that what you say is true and that it's actually beneficial for the people who are listening. The idea that you just want to express your thoughts or express your feelings doesn't have any room here.

We're in a monastery where words have an impact on everybody around you. They're trying to keep their minds still, so you want your words to be helpful, conducive to stillness. That's what beneficial means right now.

Of course, in the course of the day there will be other issues coming up, but you want your speech to lean toward stillness—as when you're talking to yourself right now.

You adjust the breath. Why? Because you want the breath to be a place where it's really easy to stay and you won't have to think about it anymore. That's when you can put all of this internal chatter aside.

Think about the Buddha's description of the time when he found the path. He finally got on the path when he started looking at his thoughts, not so much as to whether he liked them or not, but to see their impact—on his mind and through his mind on his actions and words

He found that there were two sorts: thoughts that led to skillful states of mind and thoughts that led to unskillful states of mind. With the unskillful ones, he said he'd hold them in check. He'd make sure that he wouldn't go with thoughts of sensuality, thoughts of ill will, thoughts of cruelty. These things are not beneficial to anybody.

As for thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of non-ill will, i.e. goodwill, and thoughts of compassion: These were things that he would allow his mind to think.

But even then, he noticed that he could think about these things all day and they wouldn't lead to any unskillful actions but they would tire the mind. So he inclined his mind into concentration. That thoughts inclining his mind into concentration were a kind of internal speech, but speech leading in the right direction.

So you want your speech to be speech that leads to stillness, speech that leads to harmony, speech that leads to peace, both inside and out. That's the right use of our human ability to talk.

You look around you and you see so many bad examples throughout society. In

the media, they actually pay people to be hateful, they pay them to incite people in all kinds of unskillful ways. And as a result, what are we seeing? Society falls apart. People can't talk to one another.

So if you're going to speak, make sure that the speech is actually useful: that it leads to peace, to harmony, and is the kind of speech that has an endpoint.

The Buddha once talked about Ven. Ananda's fine qualities as a monk. And one of his qualities was that he would speak to the point, answer people's questions, and then stop speaking before they got tired of hearing him.

And one of the ideal qualities of a monk who looks for seclusion is someone who will answer people's questions and answer them in such a way that they will be satisfied enough to go away. So our speech is not meant to tie people here or tie people to us. It's meant to meet their needs and then stop.

So there's good internal speech, good external speech, especially while we're here at the monastery. We don't have a rule of silence here, so you have to be very careful about how you use your mouth.

One of the first lessons I got from Ajaan Fuang was when he said, "If you can't control your mouth, how are you going to control your mind?" So think very carefully about what you're going to say every time you open your mouth.

There's that old Peanuts cartoon where Lucy says, "People complain that I should watch what I say. But if you go around watching what you say all the time, you never get much said." Of course. That's the whole point.

You want your words to be useful, you want them to be true, beneficial, timely. And you want them to be few enough so that they have a lot of value. Remember the valuable things in the world are the things that are hard to find. There's not too much of them.

So try to keep your speech under control. You'll help other people keep their speech under control, and that way, everybody gets to keep his or her mind more under control.

Getting the mind to stillness is not an easy thing. It's so used to talking to itself all the time. Ever since we learned language, we've been wanting to learn more and more and more language, not realizing that once you get the mind into language, it's like setting it on fire: The fire just spreads and spreads and spreads. We keep talking to ourselves all the time, even when we don't have to. It's like people who keep the TV turned on in the background all day long.

As you meditate, you want to talk to the mind in a way that brings it to stillness and then the talking stops.

If you find that you can't stay with the breath, try to think about themes that help you want to stay with the breath. If you're feeling lazy, you can think a little

about death. Death could come at any time. After all, we're here in California. Earthquakes: Who knows when the Big One's going to come?

If you're feeling down on yourself, try to think about the good things you've done: the ways you've been generous when you didn't have to be, when you were virtuous and you didn't have to be. Remind yourself that you've got value as a person. You've got your own inner goodness. You're a worthwhile human being.

When thinking in these ways gives rise to a sense of well-being, then you can drop the thinking, drop the talking, and just go into that sense of well-being. Notice how the breath is when it feels good in the body. Then you can put all that inner talking aside.

So those are the three qualities you want to look for in speech: One, is that it's true. Two, it's beneficial. Three, it's timely. Any speech that's outside of these is something you want to avoid. This applies both to your external speech and to the speech that you're engaging in right now as you try to get the mind to settle down.