

The Languages of Right View

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Ever since we learned how to talk, we've been talking to ourselves. The amount of chatter we share with other people is nothing compared to the amount of chatter that goes on inside.

And so, as you might expect, when you come to meditation you have to learn how to talk to yourself in a new way, a way that'll get the mind to settle down, and in a way that has a specific purpose. All of our talking has a purpose of some kind or another. But here we're trying to focus it on training the mind to see how we're creating unnecessary suffering for ourselves and how we can stop doing that.

That means learning how to step back and watch the mind talk and not get too involved in the conversation. Ask yourself, "This conversation, where is it going? Is that where I want to go?" If it's not, how do you reframe the conversation? Some conversations you can simply drop because they're not all that interesting. Others are really interesting, either in a healthy or an unhealthy way, and you have to learn how to disengage yourself from those, too.

This is why the Buddha teaches appropriate attention as a way to talk to ourselves. And basically it speaks two languages: There's the language of karma, which talks about actions, people who do actions, people who receive the results of actions, the worlds they live in, and the worlds they create. And then there's the language of the four noble truths, which doesn't talk about worlds or people at all. It talks simply about actions and whether they lead to suffering or away from suffering.

It's good to be able to switch between those two languages. Sometimes you need to talk to yourself as you, as a person, to remind yourself of why you're meditating, the good that comes from it. If you find yourself wandering away from the meditation, you remind yourself of why you want to go back. But then there are other times when you want to get *you* out of the way. Because all too often, the concept of you—who you are, who you've been—carries a lot of other concepts along with it that can get pretty entangled.

It's like pulling a tree out of the soil, and its roots carry lots of soil stuck to them. And if you're sitting here meditating and you're getting discouraged about how the meditation is going, thoughts of "you" can lead to other thoughts about how you've not done other things well in the past. That can get really entangled and goes nowhere good at all.

That's when you've got to switch languages, with a different set of concepts, a different set of perceptions. Here we're not talking about the person doing the meditation, we're simply talking about acts of mindfulness, acts of mindlessness; alertness, lack of alertness; right effort, wrong effort: all impersonal things. In fact, this is one of the reasons why the four noble truths are so effective: They don't deal with beings or people or worlds.

Remember the different types of craving that can lead to becoming. This means that they take you to a new world, they create a new world, and you go living in it. And one of the types of craving that does that is craving for non-becoming. You don't like the world you're in and you want to destroy it. In the process of destroying it, though, you take on a new identity. So either way you're stuck.

So the Buddha pulls you out by telling you to simply look at everything in terms of actions. Something comes up, and instead of creating a new world out of it, you just simply see it as a process and decide where you want the process to go. That way, you get past both the craving for becoming and the craving for non-becoming.

It's like learning a different language that lacks some concepts in your native language that you've been using to drive yourself crazy. For instance, in Thai they don't really have a word for guilt. They have the concept of the guilt of someone who's guilty of a crime, but for the neurotic feelings of guilt that many Westerners carry around, there's no word for that in Thai. Think about what it would be like to have your mind speaking to itself in a language that didn't have that word. The words you use, the perceptions you use, really do make a big difference.

Say there's a pain in your knee. If you call it "pain," there'll be one reaction. If you call it simply "a sensation," there's another one. If you call it "sensations"—i.e., little dots of sensation arising and passing away—that has another impact on the mind.

When you think about your meditation and its ups and downs, and you start focusing on the downs, that'll have one impact on the mind. If you say simply, "Okay, there's something wrong here, there's a problem to be solved," and thinking of it in terms of, "Is there mindfulness? Is there alertness? Is there ardency?": That changes the whole discussion, and it has a different impact on the mind.

This is what you're looking for: how to talk to yourself in a way that has a good impact on the mind, that gives the mind energy when it needs it, calms it down when it needs to be calmed, frames things in new ways so that you can get around

problems. This is how you take the conversation going on in the mind and direct it toward one big purpose: i.e., the end of suffering.

This way, when a thought comes up, you don't ask yourself, "Is this what I really believe? Is this what I really think?" You ask yourself, "If I were to believe this, if I were to think this, if I were to feel this, where would it take me? Where would it go?" When you realize that you have the choice, you don't have to stay stuck with the old voices, the old conversations, the old languages that you used in your mind. You can create new, more skillful conversations in a new, more skillful language.

So in a lot of ways learning how to meditate is like learning a new language. In fact, you've got two languages: the language of mundane right view and the language of the four noble truths. And you want to learn how to use both of them when they're appropriate.

Of course, this encourages the part of the mind that stands apart from the languages. It'll have its own language, but its language should be, "What is the most skillful thing here? What's the most skillful way to think?" This is how right view reflects on itself. It's another way in which it goes beyond itself, seeing which way of talking to yourself is good to pick up, which way of talking to yourself is good to put aside—realizing that it's all a fabrication, and realizing the times when you won't need either: when the conversation gets really simple as you finally settle down with, "breath, breath, breath." When you adjust the perception of what it is to breathe and you get really engrossed in this one thing, a lot of words go silent. A lot of words don't really have any relationship to what you're doing, so you can leave them alone.

So try to learn the languages of right view and get a sense of when they're appropriate. Again, it's like learning another language where they have different ways of speaking for different levels of society, different situations, and learning how to master them so that you don't use vulgar words in a very polite society or very high-sounding words in more common surroundings. You get a sense of time and place, and learn how to talk to yourself in a way that keeps you going regardless of the ups and downs.

This is the quality Ajaan Maha Boowa talks about in his definition of the word *ekaggata*, singleness of mind. It's a mind that just can be there with the ups and downs, and yet not get knocked over by them. The mind on an even keel. The more you can develop that mind on an even keel, the more you develop the observer inside that can tell you which language is appropriate for which time and when it's appropriate to put them down, because you're coming from a position of real balance.

It may take a while to develop that sense of balance, but that's one of the skills that'll keep you going. Keep reminding yourself that you're on a good path, with a good purpose. Learn how to adjust your thoughts, not in terms of what you like to think or what you think you really believe or really feel, but in terms of what works.

I had a friend once who was going to Korea. This was after I'd come back from Thailand. She was concerned that, as she was learning Korean, she might not be able to express her real feelings in Korean. And I told her, "Look, you're going to become a different person in Korean. The Korean 'you' will be a different person." And the same principle works in the meditation. As you meditate, you become a new "you," so don't let the old "you" keep you entrapped.

It's the same way with any skill. The more you learn a particular skill, the more new facets of "you" get developed. And in mastering the language of right view, you develop a lot of good facets that lead to a really good destination.