

The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path

Lecture 49: The Ideal of Human Communication: Right Speech

Mr Chairman and friends,

At present, as most of you know, week by week we are pursuing, treading in imagination if not in actual fact, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. And each week we are considering, we are discussing, even at the end asking questions about, one step or one stage or one aspect of that Eightfold Path. We've already dealt with the first stage or the first aspect, the beginnings of the path in terms of Perfect Vision, and we've also dealt with the second stage, the second aspect - Perfect Emotion, usually known as Right Resolve. We've seen and I think by this time we've understood quite clearly, quite definitely, that Perfect Vision with the arising of which entry upon the Eightfold Path takes place, is not just an intellectual understanding, however clear, however profound, of Buddhism, it's something much more than that, it really consists, we may say of an insight into, an experience of the true nature, the real nature, the ultimate nature of existence itself. In fact though we speak in terms of Perfect Vision we may say that this term covers something which is more of the nature of a spiritual experience - it may be momentary, it may come, as it were, in a sort of flash of insight, but it's something much more real, something much more direct, more intimate, more personal, more *true* than an intellectual understanding. This experience, this Perfect Vision, we can express and even communicate in various ways, principally in two ways - in terms of pictures, in terms of images, and in terms of concepts. And we saw that traditionally in Buddhism the Buddha's and his followers' vision of the nature of existence is communicated, is expressed, in terms of the great images of the Wheel of Life, of the Mandala, the sacred circle of Buddhas or images of Enlightenment, and the Path, the way which lies between, leading from the one to the other. Conceptually speaking in terms of ideas, in terms of thought, in terms of philosophy, that Perfect Vision finds expression in such well-known formulae as the Four Noble Truths, the Three Characteristics of all conditioned existence, and so on. I don't want to go into all this again, I don't want to have to recapitulate in detail, I just want to refresh the memories of those who did hear these two earlier lectures.

But whether we speak of, whether we express our Perfect Vision of the nature of existence in terms of images which appeal to the imagination or in terms of concepts which appeal to the intellect, both reveal in one way or another, through their respective medium, a glimpse, an actual insight, or as I've said also an *experience* of ultimate reality, however brief, however momentary, however as it were evanescent that may be. But that isn't enough, as we also saw, it's not enough just to have this vision, it's not enough that it should arise and transfigure us just for a moment or two, it has to descend into each and every aspect of our lives. It has to penetrate, as it were, into every limb. It has to not only transfigure, it has to transform our entire living, every level, every aspect. This is incidentally - I didn't touch upon it in previous weeks but it occurs to me just now - the significance of what we call *mudra* in Buddhism. A *mudra* is a gesture made with the hand or a certain position taken by the fingers, and very often in Buddhism we speak in terms of three things, we speak in terms of *samadhi*, we speak in terms of *mantra*, we speak in terms of *mudra*. So *samadhi* represents the inner realisation, *mantra* the expression of that in terms of speech, and *mudra* the expression of that same thing, that same realization, right down as it were to the very tips of one's fingers. In other words the outermost ramifications of one's being in terms of *mudra*, or manual sign as it's sometimes called, or magic gesture. It isn't anything magical at all, it's something quite spiritual or transcendental. But it conveys the same sort of idea - that our Perfect Vision, our spiritual realisation, is not to be kept or not confined, to the heights but it's got to descend into the depths of our being and transform and transfigure every aspect, every department, every compartment even of our lives. And when our lives are transformed in this way, at every level, in every aspect, in accordance with that Perfect Vision - that insight into our experience of the truth - then comes what we call Enlightenment.

Now Perfect Emotion, as we saw last week, the second step or stage or aspect of the path, represents the descent of this Perfect Vision into our emotional life. It represents the transformation - if you like the sublimation - of our crude, unrefined emotional energies into something much more delicate, much more rarefied, something, if we may use the term, much more spiritual. Negatively, this Perfect Emotion consists in complete freedom from attachment, from hatred, from cruelty. And positively it consists, as we saw in some detail last week, in emotions, positive emotions such as generosity, the impulse to give, to share; love, compassion, sympathetic joy, in fact happiness in general; and finally faith and devotion. Transfigured by Perfect Vision our emotional life assumes this sort of complexion, this sort of colouring.

Now today we come to the third stage or the third aspect of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, and that is Right Speech - *samyag-vaca*. Now today, unlike on previous occasions, we've no difficulty of translation, there's no ambiguity, no nuance to be rendered with some difficulty into English. *Vaca* means simply speech or utterance in a quite literal sense. And as in the case of the previous, and as will be the case with the succeeding stages of the Path, *samyak* means not just 'right' as it's usually translated as opposed to wrong, it means that which is whole,

that which is complete, that which is integral, fully developed, *perfect*. So we shall therefore speak of *samyag-vaca* in English not just as Right Speech but as *Perfect Speech*. This is what it really is, this is what it really means. And it is very significant, we may say, if we think about it that this - speech - Perfect Speech is regarded as, is treated as, an independent stage or independent aspect of the Eightfold Path. One might well have thought that speech isn't so very important, it's a sort of action, why not include it under Right Action or Perfect Action which comes next? But no. In the Buddha's teaching and in the Eightfold Path, Right Speech or Perfect Speech gets a whole step, a whole stage, a whole aspect of the spiritual life to itself. And this indicates in fact the very great importance, the very great place which Buddhism does give to speech in general and especially to Perfect Speech.

Not only is Perfect Speech the third step or aspect of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, but abstention from its opposite - false or imperfect speech - constitutes the fourth out of the five precepts binding upon every lay Buddhist follower. So from little things of this sort we can understand the very great importance, the very great significance that attaches to speech, to Perfect Speech especially, in the Buddha's teaching. After all if we reflect upon it, as our chairman remarked, speaking, talking, communicating is something which we do, which in a sense we *have* to do all the time. You may take up meditation or you may not, as you wish, but when it comes to speech, you've hardly any choice - whether you like it or whether you don't like it you've got to speak, you've got to talk, you've got to communicate, you can't always be silent, even if you want to, and most of us anyway don't want to be silent, not very much of the time anyhow, so it's inevitable that some consideration should be given to this whole question of speech in any complete systematic programme of spiritual life and training and culture. Speech also has to be brought within the purview, within the influence, even under the control, of the spiritual life.

So therefore speech must be considered, it must be given a place. It's even more interesting, perhaps, to observe that in Buddhism there's a threefold classification of man. In the West we've a classification into body and mind - sometimes as in St. Paul's epistles into body, soul and spirit. But in Buddhism what do we find. We find a threefold classification into body, *speech*, and mind. And this is surely very significant indeed. It's one of those little things which are so common, in a sense so ordinary that we pass them over. Throughout Buddhist literature we see references to body, speech and mind, body, speech and mind, but we usually pay no attention, though it does have, as I've said, a very great significance. It means that speech is given in Buddhism the same importance as mind, the same importance as body. These are a sort of co-equal trinity - body, *speech* and mind. After all, if we think about it, if we reflect, it is speech which distinguishes man from the beasts. We do know that birds utter cries and we know that monkeys, some of them, seem to have some sort of primitive speech, and apparently dolphins can communicate, but not quite as the human being. Speech in the full, in the distinctive sense, seems to be as far as we know a prerogative of human beings, perhaps of angels, but we have knowledge only of human beings.

So this is something which is special, something which is extraordinary, something which really does distinguish us, as it were, from the rest of the creation. If we think, if we reflect, we shall see, we shall realise, how great a part of our culture depends directly or indirectly upon speech. Through speech the mother educates the child, through speech the teacher educates the child, from books which are, as it were, frozen, crystallised speech, we get information, we get knowledge, we may get even Enlightenment. If all books were abolished, if all the literature of the world were burned, if it all went up in flames in one great conflagration then what would we know? We would know hardly anything, we would know just a few facts of immediate sense observation and nothing more. So all our culture, our knowledge, our understanding, even our spiritual insight to a great extent, is derived directly or indirectly from the word, from speech and from utterance. So it is natural - even it's inevitable - that we should give as much consideration in the moral and in the spiritual life to speech as we do to thought, and as we do to action. Most of you know there are three great phases in the development of Buddhism - Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana - and in the Vajrayana, the Adamantine path or way, the third of these three, the body, speech and mind are associated respectively with three 'psychic centres', as we may call them, not attaching too much importance by the way to the word 'psychic'. The body is associated with the head centre, speech with the throat centre and the mind with the heart centre. And this is why, just to digress a little, when we, say, salute the Buddha Image or our teacher, very often we touch these in succession, we salute by joining our hands here and then here and then here, and this signifies that we salute with body, speech and mind, in other words with our whole being, completely, fully, without holding anything back. And there are many other correlations of these three - body, speech and mind - for instance, with the three *kayas* or three personalities of the Buddha, but we're not going into all that this evening. At the moment we are concerned just with one point and that is with the fact that the throat centre, representing speech, is in between the head and the heart centres. The head and the head centre represents not only body but also in another set of correlations the intellect or the understanding. And in the same way the heart, the heart centre, represents the feelings, the emotions. So you've got intellect here, you've got heart here, speech at the throat centre comes in between. So what does this mean, what does this indicate? It means that speech shares the nature of both. Speech gives expression both to the head and to the heart. With speech we communicate both our thoughts coming from up here and our feelings and our emotions coming from down here. So as with ordinary speech so also with Perfect Speech. Perfect Speech represents or manifests simultaneously Perfect Vision, which corresponds to intellectual understanding without being identical with it, and Perfect Emotion, which

corresponds on its own plane to our emotional life. Or in other words very briefly and very simply, with Perfect Speech or in terms of Perfect Speech we give expression both to Wisdom and also to love and compassion. We'll see how this works out in detail in a moment. But we may say, just very broadly or very briefly, that Perfect Speech represents that transformation of the speech principle or the principle of communication, transformation by both Perfect Vision, the first step or stage of the Path, and Perfect Emotion, the second step or second stage of the Path. Now let us go a little more in detail into this and see what then is Perfect Speech.

In the texts, in the discourses, the sutras which deal with this subject, Perfect Speech is usually described as speech which is truthful, speech which is affectionate, speech which is helpful and speech which promotes concord, harmony, unity. And in the same way wrong speech or imperfect speech is described in precisely the opposite terms - as speech which is untruthful, harsh, harmful, and which promotes discord, disharmony, and disunity. Now one must confess that most - especially modern - Buddhist expositions of Perfect Speech, or Right Speech as it's usually termed, are rather superficial, not to say moralistic. They remain on the purely ethical level and usually no attempt is made to penetrate or explore the psychological and spiritual depths of Perfect Speech. In fact we may say that this is true of some people's approach to the whole teaching of the Buddha, especially to the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path. Sometimes people are misled by the apparent simplicity of the Buddha's teaching and they tend to dismiss it even if they're expounding it or professing to expound it, as something rather trite and ordinary. They don't try to penetrate below the surface and to see what the Buddha was really getting at. With regard to Perfect Speech therefore we may say that usually we think, we consider, that truthfulness and affectionateness and so on are sort of four separate qualities or attributes of Perfect Speech. As if to say you've got Perfect Speech here and that Perfect Speech has got these four qualities or attributes as it were stuck on to it. But if we go a little more deeply, if we examine more closely and carefully we shall see or we shall discover that these four so-called qualities of Perfect Speech, that is to say that it is truthful, affectionate, helpful, and promoting concord, really represent four different *levels* of speech, not qualities of speech but *levels* of speech, each one deeper than the one preceding - so much so that we may even speak in this connection of four progressive stages of communication. And it's in the light of these considerations that we're going to look at, we're going to examine, each of these four so-called qualities of Perfect Speech this evening. And this will give us at least a glimpse, at least some idea, not just of Right Speech, not just of Perfect Speech even, but some idea of the *ideal* of human communication, what human communication should be or at least *could* be according to the teaching of the Buddha. And we shall perhaps see how far short we usually fall of this Perfect Speech, this ideal communication.

We communicate, we talk, all the time, but practically all the time, if not always, we fall short of this *ideal* of human communication. But let us try to see this evening what according to the Buddha's teaching this Perfect Speech or ideal of human communication really is.

First of all as I've said Perfect Speech, ideal communication, is **truthful**. Now of course we all think we know exactly what is meant by that when we say that well, speech should be truthful, of course we should, we've been told since we were two years old not to tell a lie, like George Washington, that sort of ideal has been upheld, so what have we to learn? It's clear, it's obvious! But if we pause, if we consider, then the question arises - do we really know what is meant by being truthful? Do we really know what is meant by speaking the truth? Have we considered all the implications of that statement? Speaking the truth doesn't mean just adhering to factual accuracy, it doesn't consist in saying that this cloth is yellow and that is a microphone - the concept of truthfulness is not exhausted in that way. Factual accuracy is of course important, it's an element in truthfulness or in speaking the truth - we can't dismiss it, it's there but it's not the whole. Some of you may remember - those of you who know your Boswell - there's that famous remark of Dr Johnson about factual truthfulness. He says that if a child says that he saw something looking out of this window when in fact he saw it looking out of *that*, he should at once be corrected and made to say from which window really he saw whatever he did see, because, Dr Johnson adds, once the habit of untruthfulness begins there is no knowing where it may end. So factual accuracy, factual truthfulness, is important. We must recognise this, it's a sort of base, a sort of foundation. We should accustom ourselves, as Johnson also says, to what he calls accuracy of narration. This is very important. It's a sort of training ground for us in higher, more refined kinds of truthfulness. Usually we're very shaky and very shoddy, even on this level. Very, very few people are really factually accurate - we usually like, in relating about things to make them a little bit different - we like to add, we like to exaggerate, or to minimise, or we like to embroider. It may be just a sort of little poetic streak in us which makes us do this but we do it, even in the best of circles, even at the best of times. I remember in this connection once in India I attended a little Wesak celebration - celebration of the anniversary of the Buddha's Enlightenment - in a certain monastery and there must have been about 70 or 80 people present, and then I saw the write-up which appeared in the local Buddhist magazine speaking of a mammoth meeting with thousands of people present! Well, you might think that you're propagating the Dharma and stirring up faith and enthusiasm in this way, but really one is detracting from what one is supposed to be doing - one is not being truthful in the sense of not being factually accurate. So we all tend to twist and to distort or at least to bend slightly facts in the direction in which we want them or would like them to go, so we have to be very very careful here. If we say that for instance it was a lovely day, well, it must have been a lovely day, we mustn't exaggerate, we mustn't

minimise. If we say that there were 10 people at the meeting well let's be sure that there were 10. If there were a thousand at the meeting, let's say that there were a thousand. But if there were only 50 let's not make it 150, or if somebody else's meeting had a thousand let's not make it 150 again. So strict attention to factual accuracy. But again we must emphasise truthfulness in the real sense, in the deepest sense, the fullest, the most spiritual sense, the *real* sense, is something very much more than this, very much more than mere factual accuracy, important as that is.

Truthfulness is also, we may say, psychological, also spiritual. Speaking the truth involves not just factual accuracy, accuracy of statement about things which happened or didn't happen, it also includes, it also involves, an attitude of honesty, an attitude of sincerity, it includes, it involves also, saying what we really think. You're not speaking the truth unless you speak the *whole* truth, unless you say what is *really* in your heart, really in your mind. Say in other words what you *really* think or even what you really feel - if you don't do that you're not being truthful, you're not really communicating.

But then another question arises: do we really know what we think? Or do we even really know what we feel? Most people, we must admit, most of *us* if we're honest, live or exist in a state of chronic mental confusion, bewilderment, chaos, disorder, whatever else you may like to call it. We may repeat as occasion arises what we've heard, what we've read, we may regurgitate it when required to do so, whether at the time of examinations in the case of students or social occasions and so on in the case of other people, but we do all this without really understanding, without really knowing what we say. So how can we therefore really speak the truth? We don't really *know* what we think so how can we say what we think, how can we be truthful? So if we want to speak the truth in the full sense or at least a fuller sense than usually understood, we must clarify our ideas. We must introduce some sort of order into this intellectual chaos of ours, we must know quite clearly, quite definitely what we think, what we don't think, what we feel, what we don't feel. And we must be intensely aware, we must know what is within us, what are our motivations, what are our drives, what are our ideals, and this means that we have to be completely honest with ourselves and this means that we have to *know* ourselves. If we do not know ourselves in the depths as well as on the heights, if we can't really penetrate into the depths of our own being, if we can't really be transparent unto ourselves, if there isn't any clarity within, any *light* within, any illumination within, then we cannot speak the truth. And this is something which we all have to realise. And if we realise it we shall see that speaking the truth is no easy matter. We might even go so far as to say, and I don't think this is an exaggeration, that most of us, most of the time, deal in what is not true. Most of us, most of the time, do not speak the truth. If we wanted to put it forcibly, not to say paradoxically, we might even go so far as to say most of us, nearly all the time, speak what is in fact a lie, and our communication is really most of the time just a lie. Because we're incapable of speaking anything else except that, we're not really capable of speaking the truth in the fullest sense. And if we reflect again we might have to confess, we might have to admit and recognise, that most of us go through life year after year from childhood, or at least from adolescence, right through into old age without perhaps being able - even once - to speak the truth in the fullest and clearest sense of that much abused term. We do know that if it ever does happen that we can, if we ever *are* in a position to speak the truth, then it's a very great relief to be able to do that. Very often we don't realise how many lies we have been telling until we have an opportunity once in a while perhaps of speaking the truth, then it's a very great relief to be able to do this. We all know if something has been weighing upon our mind, even pressing upon our heart, something about which we were very worried or very concerned, if we can only communicate this, if we can only speak out, if we can only tell somebody the truth of this matter without holding anything back, then this is a very great relief indeed. But this is something which happens for most people very, very rarely in their lives, if indeed at all.

Speaking the truth, we may say, to define it, really means being ourselves. Not being ourselves in the conventional, almost a party sense, which usually means not being ourselves at all, but being ourselves in the sense of giving expression in terms of speech to what we really and truly are and know that we are. This is really what speaking the truth means. Now speaking the truth even in this sense, this more rarefied sense, this fuller, this deeper, this more spiritual sense, is not done, is not spoken in a vacuum as it were - you just don't go up to the top of the Post Office Tower and speak the truth to the stars, as it were. The truth is always spoken *to* someone, to another person, another human being. And this brings us to the second level of Perfect Speech or the second stage of communication.

That is to say Perfect Speech is **affectionate**, is loving. It's not only truthful even in the fullest sense, also it is affectionate, it is loving. The truth spoken with or in love. Now what does this mean? It doesn't mean just speaking affectionately in the ordinary sense saying, 'Oh my dear, so glad to see you, how are you, such a long time since I saw you,' nothing of that sort. Speaking with affection or with love in this context means speaking the truth in its fullness, with *complete awareness of the person to whom you are speaking*. Now how many can do this? If we just think about it, we realise that when we speak to people, when we talk to people, we don't usually look at them. Have you ever noticed this? It's probably true in your case and it's probably true in the cases of the people who speak to you. When they speak to you or when you speak to them you don't look at them, you look over their

shoulder, you look at their forehead, you look over the other shoulder, you look up at the ceiling, you look down at the ground, anywhere almost except at the person to whom you are speaking. You don't really look *at* them. So if you're not even looking at them, and this is one of the things we try to correct in our communication exercises, as some of you know to your cost, I believe - if you don't even really look at them you can't be *aware* of them. And we can say that love, in the sense in which we're using the term at present, means awareness of the being of another person. So you can't speak truthfully *to* someone, you can't speak affectionately *to* them, or with love *to* them, because we don't know them. If you don't *know* another person how can you possibly speak *to* him or *to* her? This just isn't possible. We like to think of course that we have love towards people, that we're affectionate and so on, but this is very rarely so. We usually see other people in terms of our own emotional reactions to them. We react emotionally to them in a certain way and then we attribute our emotional reaction to them as a quality *of* them. This is what we usually do. If people for instance do what we like them to do then we say that they're good and they're kind and helpful and so on. So what really happens is we're not communicating with that particular person, we're really most of the time communicating or trying to communicate or pretending to communicate with our own mental projections. And this is especially so in the case of those who are alleged to be 'near and dear' to us - that is to say parents, brothers and sisters, husband or wife, children, as the case may be, they very, very rarely know one another, or hardly at all. Well, they might have lived together for twenty, thirty, forty years but they don't usually know one another. They know their own reactions to one another and those reactions they attribute to the person concerned. They think therefore that they know them but they don't really know them at all - they only know their own projected mental and emotional states.

So this is a very sobering thought. I know there used to be the saying in the old days, 'It's a wise son who knows his own father', but it's a wise father who knows his own son. It's a wise wife who knows her own husband and it's a very wise husband who knows his own wife - and so on. Because the more you live with people, especially those to whom you're related by blood and by these very strong biological ties, the less in the real spiritual sense you know them. After all to the baby what is mother? Mother is just a wonderful sensation of warmth and comfort and cosiness and food and drink, that's what mother is. He doesn't know mother as a person. And the same with other relations, and usually it remains like that most of our lives, with a bit of refinement and rationalisation here and there. But this is really what happens to most of us most of the time. And this is why there's so much misunderstanding between people, so much failure to communicate, so many disappointments - especially in the more intimate relationships of life. So often, as we know, people are at cross purposes because one person doesn't *know* another and therefore doesn't love another, there's just a mutual communication between projections and nothing more. I know this sounds rather drastic and perhaps rather horrifying but this is what happens, and I think it's best, it's most salutary, if we really face up to the truth about ourselves and other people as quickly as possible, and realise that we're just in a maze of these mutual projections, but no mutual knowledge, no mutual understanding, not to speak of mutual love in most cases, *at all*.

But if there *is* such a thing, if we are able to speak the truth to another person, being *aware* of that other person, which means of course loving that other person, loving being awareness of their being, then we shall also know what they need. If we really know them we shall know what they need - not what we think they ought to have because it would be good for us if they had it! - which is what most people mean by knowing what is good for others, but really knowing what is good *for them* quite objectively without any reference to ourselves - then we know what has to be provided, what has to be given, how they have to be helped and so on and this brings us to the third level of Perfect Speech or third stage of communication:

That we should speak, according to the Buddha, that which is **useful**. Not just useful in the ordinary sense. Not just telling someone which horse to back or something of that sort - that is useful, of course, especially if the horse *is* the right horse and does what he's *supposed* to do. But in this sense what is useful means promoting or speaking in such a way as to promote the growth, especially the *spiritual* growth, of the person concerned, the person to whom we are speaking. This need not necessarily involve specifically religious instruction or anything of that sort, this is far too formal as it were. I think even though this is very useful, what we may say is that this aspect of Perfect Speech, speaking that which is *useful* consists in speaking in such a way that the person or the people to whom we are speaking are raised in the scale, as we may call it, of being and of consciousness, and not lowered. At least we can be positive and appreciative. Most people are so negative. We tell them about something good, something happy, they either pull a long face or they depreciate it or they try to undermine you, and in the end you sometimes feel quite guilty about having enjoyed that particular thing or having liked it or having appreciated it. So at least we must be positive or can be positive and appreciative, realising that a person is helped to grow when we're positive and appreciative - not when we're negative and critical and destructive.

There's a very beautiful story comes to my mind about this sort of thing taken from one of the apocryphal gospels, I think. You probably know there are not just four gospels which you find in the Bible, there are scores of gospels, even hundreds of gospels, in the early days of Christianity, and some of them have come down to us which relate very beautiful sayings and anecdotes concerning Christ which we don't get in the orthodox Bible but which are

very helpful and revealing nevertheless. So one story that Christ was one day walking along the road, somewhere in Galilee I suppose, and he was with his disciples and they happened to pass a dead dog. Now we don't usually see dead dogs in the streets of London but believe me in the East it's a common sight even now. A dead dog is not a pretty sight, as those of you who read I think Baudelaire's poem will realise. So this particular dead dog, it might have been there for several days - even a week, also it wasn't a pretty sight. So the disciples as they passed by held their noses and looked away and one disciple said 'Oh, what a horrid sight' and another disciple said, 'Oh how disgusting', and another one said, 'It ought to have been taken away. There ought to be a law about it', and so on. But when Christ, it is said, passed by he just smiled and he said, 'What beautiful teeth that dog has'. What beautiful teeth that dog has! You see. So in the case of Christ in this anecdote, in the Apocrypha, he saw the beautiful thing even about a dead dog. Now this is the sort of attitude obviously which we're inculcated to take - see the good, see the bright if you like, the *positive* side of things. Don't harp upon, don't stress the negative side. Don't be over critical, don't be destructive. There is a time of course for criticism, even destructive criticism, there is a time for that, there is a place for that, it's a legitimate activity, but most of us take to it far too readily, far too easily, to the neglect of the more positive side.

So even if we can help in no other way, even if we're not in a position to give specifically spiritual instruction, to enlighten people - and very very few indeed, believe me, can do that *any* way or to *any* extent, I think we may safely conclude that *we* can't. At least we should be helpful, at least we should be positive and at least appreciative of whatever good we see growing in, emerging from, that other person. In any case even if we do upon occasion give some sort of instruction, it's only effective within this sort of context, within this sort of atmosphere, if you like, of a helpful spirit, something positive and constructive and not the other way around.

Now if we communicate in this sort of way - if we speak the truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth as they say when they swear you in or try to swear you in - some of us like to affirm of course - if you speak with love, with awareness of the other person's being, if you speak in such a way as to promote their growth, to have a healthy, positive effect upon them, if you're more concerned about their needs than about your own, if you're not projecting or just using or just exploiting them; the result will be that you'll tend to forget yourself, you'll forget all about yourself, speaking, communicating with that other person, and this brings us to the fourth and the deepest level of Perfect Speech, the fourth stage as we may also call it, of communication -

That Perfect Speech promotes **concord**, promotes harmony, promotes unity - even, we say, promotes oneness. Now this unity, this concord, this harmony is not just a verbal agreement. It's not just my saying or you saying 'yes, yes' all the time. It's not even sharing the same ideas - you believe in Buddhism, I believe in Buddhism - this isn't what is *meant* here. It really means - this idea of unity or harmony - it means what we may describe as a sort of mutual helpfulness based on truthfulness, awareness of each other's being, each other's needs, mutual helpfulness leading to a mutual self-transcendence. And this mutual self-transcendence, we may say, is Perfect Speech *par excellence*. We may say it's not only Perfect Speech, it is the perfection of communication, this mutual helpfulness leading to mutual self-transcendence. And when this sort of oneness, this sort of harmony, this sort of, if you like, mutual understanding is complete, is perfect, nothing more need be said. You all know even on a comparatively ordinary level, when you get to know somebody for the first time for a while you do a lot of talking, you exchange ideas, you get to know one another, but the more you get to know each other, the *better* you know each other in a sense the, less there is to say. So therefore we may add that Perfect Speech, when it culminates in harmony, in oneness, in mutual self-transcendence, also at the same time culminates in *silence*.

What the Buddha calls Perfect Speech represents the principle of communication - this third of the three principles of the human being, the other two being of course mind and body - in its highest form, even its ideal form, it's the ideal of human communication. But we shouldn't think therefore that speech, even Perfect Speech, is the *only* form, the *only* vehicle of communication. In the Vajrayana form of Buddhism, the Buddhism of the adamant Path or way, there are three levels distinguished of transmission of the Buddha's Teaching, or spiritual experience. The first - the lowest - is the verbal, where the teaching, the spiritual experience, is transmitted, is communicated, by means of words, by means of speech, by means of writing.

Next, the level on which it is transmitted through symbols, through signs, as in the Zen story of the Buddha holding up a golden flower in the midst of the assembly. This was a sign, it had a meaning, that only Mahakasyapa understood, and through this sign or through the meaning of this sign, the essence of the teaching, the Buddha's spiritual experience, was transmitted to Mahakasyapa and from him down a whole line of Zen Masters.

But the highest level, higher even than this, is what is known as the telepathic communication which takes place of course in silence. This is the highest kind, the highest type of communication according to the Vajrayana, the direct communication of mind to mind, mind with mind, without the interposition either of the spoken word or the visual symbol. Mind as it were flashing, I was going to say signals, but really itself directly to another mind without

any intermediary, without any medium of transmission at all. Mind if you like directly, immediately, impinging upon mind.

Now we shouldn't think that silence is just absence of sound. When all sound dies away, when the sound of the traffic in the street outside dies away, or even the sounds in the room, the sounds of breathing and creaking of chairs dies away, when even the sound of our own breath dies away, when even the sound of our own thoughts, rattling as it were through our minds, dies away, what is left is not just something negative, not just something dead, not just a vacuum. The silence, we may say, which is left is something which is alive, which as it were vibrates without motion, it's a *living* silence as someone once called it. And I recall in this connection the example, the very great example, perhaps the greatest example of this sort of thing in modern times, that is of that great Indian sage and teacher Ramana Maharshi or Ramana Maharishi who died in 1949 - but before he died I had the good fortune to be with him for some time just about a year before he died and he perfectly exemplified this sort of attitude. He just sat in the hall of the monastery, on a raised dais, on a sort of settee with a tiger skin spread on it, he just sat there, and he said most of the time just nothing at all, nothing at all. He'd sat there for 40 years I think, but the hall was usually full of people, and when you went in there was a strange, vibrant quality to that silence. And it quite literally seemed as though that silence flowed from him. You could almost see the waves of silence flowing from him, flowing over all those people, flowing into their hearts, flowing into their minds and calming them down, and as you sat down yourself you felt the silence quite literally - I'm not speaking poetically or imaginatively - but quite literally you felt it as it were flowing over you and calming you down and quietening you down, and if you like washing away all your thoughts, and you felt it as a sort of power, as something very positive, just like a sort of wave as I said flowing over you all the time. So this was the silence, the real silence, the true silence which Ramana Maharshi so beautifully, so perfectly, exemplified.

But silence of this sort, silence of this quality is only too rare. Even ordinary silence, we can say, the lowest form of silence, is only too rare. In modern life, and certainly in most of our lives, there's far too much noise, we've got far too much noise even - I won't say here but outside - this evening. There's usually far too much talking. When I say talking I don't mean real communication through speech but just verbalisation, just multiplication of words and sounds without too much meaning, just a modicum of meaning to keep the whole thing going but not too much. A sort of what one modern Indian teacher called, perhaps rather crudely but rather effectively, 'lingual diarrhoea' which so many people suffer from. So one cannot help thinking that speech which is so precious and which is so wonderful, which is so expressive, which is such a treasure, speech should be something exceptional, at least something like eating. Something which you do sometimes after thought and after preparation, because usually it's the other way round, as we know that speech is the rule and silence is the exception. But perhaps there's hope for us all just like there was for instance for Macaulay - you probably remember the rather caustic comment on the young Macaulay - someone said - I think it was Sidney Smith, who was a great wit, he said, 'Macaulay's improving, he has flashes of silence'! So most of us are in this sort of position, maybe we are improving, maybe we do have occasionally even brilliant flashes of silence.

So we should try perhaps to make more time in our lives for silence, just to be quiet, just to be alone, by ourselves, or at least even if we can't be alone or by ourselves, at least quiet. Because if we're not, at least sometimes, at least periodically, at least for an hour or two every day, we shall find the practice of meditation, for instance, even in our meditation class, rather difficult.

Now perhaps we have strayed some distance from Perfect Speech, and it might have seemed strange if not paradoxical to some of you that one should speak, especially at such lengths, in praise of silence. It's rather like the description of Carlisle's works, 'The Gospel of Silence' in forty volumes by Mr Wordy! So perhaps I'd better close now with the hope that it might have become obvious to everybody that much more is involved in Perfect Speech than had at first sight appeared. That it isn't just *Right* Speech in the ordinary sense, but that it represents the Buddha's ideal of human communication - perfectly truthful in the fullest sense, perfectly loving, perfectly helpful, promoting growth and development, and perfectly self-transcending.

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