

The Buddha's Philosophy of Right Speech

Venerable sir and friends,

Most of those who have been acquainted with Buddhism for any length of time, even for a very short time, know that Buddhism contains a prodigious quantity of scriptures, or sacred writings. We have got an enormous collection in Pali, some 40 thick volumes. We have in Tibetan no less than 100 or in some editions 108 very massive xylograph volumes of scriptures, and then in Chinese there are some 50 very, very thick volumes indeed - Chinese characters are fat, double columns and all the rest of it, comprising some 1660 something independent works. There are lots of odd or loose or scattered Sanskrit sutras uncollected and so on, so sometimes a newcomer is rather bewildered by all this variety, if not confusion, this richness of Buddhist sacred literature, but fortunately for us there are just a few texts which we find here and there, embedded in this vast mass of literature, which give us the essence of the whole thing in just - I was going to say a few words but that would be an exaggeration - in just a few pages. For instance with regard to the Perfection of Wisdom sutras we have the famous Heart Sutra, which gives us the heart of the Perfection of Wisdom in just one page of writing. And in the same way, for the Pali scriptures, the Pali Canon, we've got a little work called the Dhammapada, which gives us the gist of all the Buddha's teachings in the Pali Canon in a very, very short compass indeed.

This Dhammapada consists of some 423 verses arranged subject-wise in 26 chapters - there's a chapter for instance on the mind, there's a chapter on the wise man, a chapter on the enlightened man, there's a chapter on flowers, there's a chapter on the pairs, there's a chapter on the monk, on the Brahmin, on sin, on anger, and so on, 423 verses arranged subject-wise in 26 chapters. And this Dhammapada is one of the most famous and popular of all the Buddhist scriptures and it has the honour and the distinction, we may say, of being the first Pali text to be published and translated in Europe. Pali, by the way, is one of the ancient Indian languages which is canonical for the Theravada School of Buddhism. The first Pali text to be translated - to be published and translated - in Europe was, as I have said, this Dhammapada, and it was published and translated by the great Danish scholar [Hasbul] in 1855. And it's rather interesting to note that [Hasbul] translated the Dhammapada not into any modern language - he translated it into Latin, and that Latin translation is still available. And this Dhammapada, this little work, though so short and handy and convenient, does enable us to get at the content of the Buddha's teaching very easily and very simply.

Now this evening I'm going to talk about one of the verses of the Dhammapada. I'm going to take a verse from Chapter 8 which is the [Sahassavagga], or the Chapter of Thousands. [Sahassa] is thousand, and [Vagga] is simply chapter. And this chapter, the Chapter of the Thousands, is so called because most of the verses make mention of one thousand things. I should also perhaps mention that the verses are arranged in the chapters, not in any sort of real order, but sort of strung together and illuminate in this way different facets of the subject. So the verse that we're going to consider this evening, the verse that we're going to take up for a little study, runs as follows:-

"Better than a collection of a thousand meaningless words is one word full of meaning, on hearing which one becomes peaceful."

This verse we may say deals with what may be called the Buddha's philosophy of Right Speech. And this is also our topic for this evening, the Buddha's philosophy of Right Speech.

Now I've said that this verse, which I've quoted, is taken from the Chapter of Thousands, and that most of the verses in this chapter make mention of one thousand things - a thousand offerings, and a thousand coins and so on. And in each of these verses we find that a thousand, or sometimes a hundred things of less value, are contrasted with one thing which is of greater value, compared with all those thousand or a hundred other things. And this is basically the theme of the whole chapter - the comparison, the contrast between a hundred or a thousand things of less value and one thing of greater value. In other words this whole chapter gives expression to the contrast - even we may say the conflict - between quality on the one hand, the one thing of greater value, and quantity on the other, the many things, the hundred or even the thousand things of less value, on the other, so that the whole chapter may be viewed as one long exhortation to us to discriminate between the two, the one thing of greater value, the many things of less value, and to prefer the former to the latter.

Now this sort of exhortation - to prefer the one thing of great value to the many things of less value, quality to quantity - is very, very necessary, especially nowadays necessary. The majority of people - most of us, we may have to admit - are unconsciously very much impressed by sheer size or by sheer number. We tend to be automatically impressed by things when they're very, very big or when they're very, very numerous. There's a book of which some of you may have heard by [Guinnell] called 'The Rain of Quantity in Contemporary Philosophy' - rather an imposing sort of title, one wonders what it's all about, but one could very well refer to, one could very well speak of the rain of quantity in contemporary life, because it's to quantity that we tend to attach importance and not to quality. And this emphasis that we give to quantity rather than to quality shows itself in many ways, both big and small.

Supposing for instance in a few days' time someone comes up to you and says, "In the course of the ten days of the retreat I read twenty books," now you'd be quite impressed by that. You'd be more impressed by that than if someone came up to you and said, "In the course of the retreat I've read one book." You'd be more impressed by the twenty books than by the one book. You wouldn't stop to enquire or to ask about the comparative value of those books. The twenty books might have been, might have been almost anything - might have been novels, detective fiction, Agatha Christie and all the rest of it, and the one work might have been a work, a dialogue by Plato, or it might have been a Buddhist sutra, but whatever it may have been, the tendency is for us to be impressed more by the twenty than by the one, more by the quantity than by the quality.

And it's just the same with regard to things like, say, length of life. We tend to assume that it's a very good thing to live to be about eighty, or ninety, or a hundred, and rather bad, to say the least, to die at twenty - we think that's a tragedy, most unfortunate. But what we don't enquire into is the quality of the life lived. Your eighty years may have been eighty useless years, they may have been eighty wicked years, harmful years, and your twenty years may have been years full of creativity, full of promise, like the life of Keats. Keats died at the age of twenty-five and practically all his major creative work was packed into one single period of twelve months. So this is the sort of standard, this is the sort of scale that one has to adopt, but usually we don't, we think in terms of quantity rather than quality, of size, of number, we're impressed by these things. So this is the reason for the Buddha's exhortation in this chapter of the Dhammapada, the Chapter of the Thousands, to think not in terms of quantity but in terms of quality, to value the one thing of greater price more than the hundred or even thousand things of lesser price. Now among other things the Buddha in this chapter applies this principle to the question of speech and hence the statement, the verse, with which we're concerned this evening, which I've already quoted,

“Better than a collection of a thousand meaningless words, is one word full of meaning, on hearing which one becomes peaceful.”

So you see that the Buddha here contrasts a thousand meaningless words with one word full of meaning. There's a little humour here, a touch of irony. The Buddha was rather fond of a touch of irony. He suggests as it were that speech, our speech, is usually meaningless. And he suggests or delicately hints that the ratio of meaningless words to meaningful words is about a thousand to one! This is what he seems to be getting at in this particular verse. And the ratio is, we may say, perhaps a little bit on the generous side! The Buddhist scriptures go into not less than 32 kinds of idle and useless talk - there's a great list given in many passages in the Buddhist scriptures - 32 kinds of useless and idle talk. And we may say that nowadays, well if they started 2,500 years ago with 32 kinds, well you can imagine how many kinds they have at the present day! And we have to admit that our conversation usually, generally consists of a selection of these 32 or more kinds or varieties of idle and [useful] speech. And if we reflect, and if we're very serious with ourselves and honest with ourselves we have to admit that very, very rarely, very occasionally indeed among our friends and acquaintances, in the course of the ordinary contacts and communications of life, do we ever hear a really meaningful word which sinks deep into our consciousness and which we remember for a long time afterwards, a meaningful word which gives one peace.

Now meaningful speech is the same thing as what is elsewhere called Right Speech, and meaningless speech corresponds to wrong speech. And Right Speech, or Perfect Speech, as I expect you know many of you, is the third step of the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, and abstention from false speech is the fourth precept out of the list of five precepts which are incumbent upon every professing follower of the Buddha to observe. From these facts therefore we can understand the importance which the Buddha attached to speech - from the fact that Right Speech is the third step of the Noble Eightfold Path, and abstention from false speech the fourth precept in the list of five.

In fact in Buddhism we find that a very important place is given to speech or the principle of speech or the principle of communication generally. In the West we are familiar with a twofold classification of man, or of human nature, or the human being, into body and mind - sometimes under the threefold classification into body, soul and spirit, St. Paul's classification. But in Buddhism we have a different threefold classification. In Buddhism we have a classification of man, of the human being, into body, speech and mind. And this is surely very significant, because it means that in Buddhism speech is given the same importance, the same rank as it were, as body and as mind. If we reflect a little we can see that speech, the principle of communication, is in fact very important indeed, because it is speech, perhaps above all else, which distinguishes man from the animals. Without speech, without language, we should degenerate, there would be no civilization, there would be no culture, there would be no thought, there would be no literature, there would be no philosophy, there would be no real communication between one human being and another. So therefore we can see that speech, the principle of communication, is of the utmost importance and value and significance and therefore we see that it should be given as much consideration in the moral and spiritual life as action or as thought. So this is why we find in Buddhism this threefold classification of man into body, speech and mind.

Now we've seen that meaningful speech, the meaningful speech of the Dhammapada, is equivalent to the Right Speech of the Noble Eightfold Path. But what exactly is Right Speech? In what does it consist? Usually in Buddhism Right Speech is described as speech which is truthful, speech which is affectionate, speech which is helpful and speech which promotes concord, and wrong speech is the opposite of these things. In other words, wrong speech is that which is untruthful, harsh, harmful and which promotes discord.

Now if we look at most contemporary expositions of Buddhism, expositions of the Eightfold Path, expositions of Right Speech, we find that this is usually understood in a rather superficial, not to say moralistic manner, and no attempt is made to penetrate what we may describe as the psychological and spiritual depths of the subject and to explore what is really meant by Right or Perfect Speech. And this I think we may say is true of our approach to the Buddha's teaching as a whole. Sometimes people are very much misled by the simplicity of the Buddha's teaching, so they are content to remain on the surface of it, thinking that they have mastered it, and not go right into the depths.

So it is so with regard to Right Speech. We usually think, or those who write about the subject usually think, that truthfulness, kindness, helpfulness and promoting concord, usually think that these are four separate qualities or attributes of Right Speech, as if to say, well, Right Speech is such and such and it has as it were stuck onto it different little attributes that it is truthful, that it is affectionate, that it is useful and so on. But this isn't so. This isn't going nearly deep enough. We may say that these four successive qualities, as they appear to be, the truthfulness, affectionateness and so on, really represent what we may describe as four successive levels of speech, each deeper than the one preceding, or even four stages, four progressive stages, of communication. So let us look at each of the four briefly, in turn, in this light. And we shall then be in a position to appreciate what the Buddha meant by that very rare and very precious thing, a meaningful word.

Now first of all Right Speech is truthful. Now we all think that we know what is meant by that. We take it for granted that we know what is meant by truthful speech. But do we? Do we really know what is meant by speaking the truth? When we refer to speaking the truth we surely don't mean just factual accuracy, though this is in fact very important. It's very important to be precise, to be accurate when we speak, factually precise, factually accurate. Sometimes I refer in this connection to the famous remark which you might have read about, of Dr. Johnson, speaking on the subject of training children. He said that if a child relates that it saw something looking out of this window when in fact it saw something looking out of that window, then he said that the child should at once be corrected, and made to realize its mistake and that it saw the thing looking out of that window and not this one. Because, he goes on to say, once the habit of untruthfulness begins, there is no knowing where it may end. And he adds, one should therefore accustom oneself to accuracy of narration, factual accuracy. This is the first thing that is required, if we are to speak truthfully.

But factual accuracy is something which you can expect of very, very few people. Very, very few people are content to tell you something or describe something exactly as it happened. They usually tend to embroider, to exaggerate a little, to make it look a little better, or a little worse, as the case may be, to exaggerate, or minimize, and so on. We all know that we have this tendency at work within ourselves as it were and we find it extremely difficult to be really and truly and honestly factually accurate. I remember in this connection some years ago in Kalimpong I attended a Buddhist Wesak celebration, that is to say, the anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. There was a very nice little meeting, about a hundred people attended, but I was rather surprised when about a month later I saw a report in a Buddhist magazine about this Wesak celebration describing it as a mammoth meeting! Well you can hardly describe a hundred people as a mammoth meeting! But this is the description which was given because no doubt that whoever wrote the report thought, "Well, this will increase people's faith and devotion when they hear that in Kalimpong there was a mammoth meeting on the occasion of the Buddha's birthday, or anniversary of enlightenment." So they didn't hesitate to deviate from the strict factual accuracy, and this is the sort of thing that people usually do. If it's two they make it three, or if it's four they make it five. If it's big they make it a bit bigger. If it's small they make it a bit smaller. But they don't present a thing exactly as it is. This is

something which is very, very difficult, apparently, for human beings to do. So factual accuracy is the first thing in this connection that we must train ourselves in.

But speaking the truth involves very much more than factual accuracy. We must not only be, or rather we must not only speak the truth with factual accuracy, but as it were with psychological and spiritual accuracy. In order to speak the truth in this way we have to have honesty and we have to have sincerity. We have to say what we really think and what we really know.

But then the question arises, and this is a very important question, a very relevant question: most of the time do we know what we think? Do we know what we think? You can't really speak the truth, you can't really speak truthfully, unless you know what you think, unless you know what it is that you want to express, and most people, we have to recognize, exist and live in a state of what we can only describe as chronic mental confusion. They're not able to speak the truth because they don't really know what they think. They may think that they think but they don't know what they think.

Most of the time when we speak, even when we think we speak truthfully, we're only repeating something that we've heard, or read, without really understanding it. We just reproduce it at second hand but we haven't really made it our own. We don't really know that it is so. So in these circumstances, how can we really be said to speak the truth? It isn't possible. So if we want to speak the truth in this fuller sense, we must know what we think, and this means that we must clarify our ideas, we must think more clearly, we must know what we think and know also what we don't think. And in order for this to be possible we have to be much more intensely aware of ourselves, aware of what it is that we know, what it is we don't know, and so on. We must be much more honest with ourselves than we usually are.

In other words we must know ourselves, and we cannot speak the truth in this fuller sense unless we know ourselves, and know what we think, and why we think it and so on. So it becomes clear that speaking the truth is by no means an easy matter. It's very, very difficult indeed to speak the truth. And most people in fact we may say very, very rarely speak the truth. Most of the time we fall very far short of the truth, we don't speak the truth at all. We may not speak a positive lie, but certainly it isn't the pure white truth. It's all sorts of little shades of greyness, merging sometimes almost into blackness. This is the sort of thing that usually we deal in. In fact we may go so far as to say that some people unfortunately seem to go through life, go through the whole of life without ever once even being able to speak the truth. If you just survey your relationships with other people you realize that there are very, very few people to whom you can really speak the truth in the fullest sense, to whom you can really speak your mind.

And very often it happens that even to those who are supposedly nearest and dearest to us, we can't say what we really think. We can't really speak the truth. Very often you can't speak the truth to your own mother or father, you can't speak the truth to your own son or daughter, or to your own husband or to your own wife, or your own friend, or your own employer or employee. Something holds you back. There's something which you can't say, something which you feel is not proper to say, or something which you feel you dare not say, or something which you're even afraid to say, or something which you think might hurt so you'd better not say it. But so often we find that the truth is held back and even if we know the truth, and we can't even speak the truth until we know it, but even when we know it, we very often hold it back and don't speak it or at least don't speak it in its fullness. You know when you go into the witness box in court you're supposed to swear to speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. If you're a Buddhist, of course, you'll affirm and not take an oath. But the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and very, very few people find it possible to speak that to very, very few people again. So that if it ever happens that in any of the relationships of life, whether it

is to a parent, or to a friend, or to a husband or to a wife, if it ever so happens that we can at least for once, speak the truth in its fullness, say what we really think, say what we really know in the fullest possible sense, then this comes as a very, very great relief, the fact that for once one has really broken through as it were and has really uttered one's whole mind.

We all know very well that it sometimes happens that we're worried about something, that we've been turning it over in our mind for a long time, we're very anxious, it may be something to do with our health, or our finances, or somebody with whom we're concerned or involved, but for some time it may be we're not able to talk about this to anybody, so it becomes as it were a sort of heavier and heavier burden. But if it ever so happens that we're able one day just to speak about this, just to tell someone - it may be a friend, it may even be a doctor, it may even of course be the psychoanalyst - but when the time comes and we're able to speak out and tell what we have kept so far in our minds, we are able to communicate this, then we find that it's as though a great weight has been lifted from the mind and we feel free.

We may go so far as to say that it's only when we're speaking the truth in the fullest sense that we are really and truly being ourselves. In other words we are giving expression then to what we are, not what we appear to be, or would like to appear to be, but what we are and what we know also we are. So this is speaking the truth. This is the first degree, or first level as it were, of communication, and this in itself is difficult enough to achieve.

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Now the truth is never as it were spoken in a vacuum. You may have some truth to speak but you don't go out into the garden and just speak the truth among the trees and the flowers. You don't do that. It isn't psychologically possible apparently.

So the truth is always spoken to someone, and this brings us to the second level of Right Speech, or the second stage of communication, which is that Right Speech, or Perfect Speech is affectionate, or is loving. Now what does this mean? It doesn't mean that it's affectionate in the ordinary sense, in the sort of gushing, sentimental sense. If someone comes along and starts talking to you and calls you dear or darling, it isn't necessarily affectionate. It may be something else behind it. So when we say that Right Speech or Perfect Speech is affectionate or loving we don't mean this sort of thing. When we say that Right Speech, or the truth, should be affectionate, should be loving, we mean that the truth should be spoken in full awareness of the person to whom one is speaking. But how many people can do this? How often do people speak the truth or even speak at all with full awareness of the person to whom they are speaking? If we just reflect we'll recollect, perhaps even to our horror, that usually when we speak to people, or even when they speak to us, we don't really look at the other person, this is the first thing. We don't even look at the other person. Either you look at their ear, or you look down a bit, or you look a bit above their head, or you look a little to the side, but you don't really look at the person to whom you are speaking. So because you don't even look at them, you can't be really aware of the other person.

Now there are many definitions of love, and the Rev. Jack [Horton] only a few minutes ago when we were waiting to come in remarked that he was surprised to see how many books there were lying about this retreat centre all about love. Well I've read myself some of those books and they give some excellent definitions of love, but there's one more definition which is perhaps possible. I think for the purposes of this context, this talk, we may say that love, love is the awareness of the being of another person. Let me repeat that, love is the awareness of the being of another person.

And this means, or from this it follows, that we can't speak truthfully, we can't speak affectionately to another person, for the simple reason that we don't know them. We're not aware of them. We don't see them as they are, because we don't even take the trouble to look. If we look at all, if we are aware - or conscious I should say - to any extent of

them, we tend to see them in terms of our own emotional reactions to them, just like the weather. If we want to go out, well, the sun is shining, so we say it's a lovely day. But if the farmer was looking out of the window and if he wanted rain for his crops, well if it was raining heavily he would say, it's a lovely day.

So our judgements in this way tend to be subjective. And it's just like that with regard to people: we see them in terms of our own emotional reactions to us. If they do or if they say to us what we like, we say how good they are, how kind they are and so on. But usually we never get to the core of the person himself or herself because we're never aware of them, never know them, and if we communicate at all we tend to communicate with our own mental projections onto that person. And this is why there are so many misunderstandings between people and so many disappointments, why so often we're disappointed by the people we meet, and the people with whom we come into contact, even the people that we've known for a long time, because we're not really in contact or communication with or aware of them, but only of and with our own mental, emotional projections.

Now if we are really aware of someone, if we are really aware of, if we really know, truly know the person to whom we are speaking, then we shall also know what it is that they need, and this brings us to the third level of Right Speech, or third stage of communication, that we should speak that which is useful. Now, not useful just in the ordinary sense, but useful in the sense of what promotes the growth, especially the spiritual growth, of the person to whom we are speaking, what helps them in the language or in the words of the Dhammapada to become peaceful. Now this useful speech doesn't necessarily consist in specifically spiritual instruction - it doesn't mean that you've got to be talking about nirvana, or about right means of livelihood, or anything of that sort, but it means that through your awareness of that other person, through your appreciation of their needs, you speak, or you are in such a way, of such a kind, that they are stimulated and their growth is promoted. Your sensible subject can be anything you like, it hardly matters.

What it really means is, we may say, that we should speak to people in such a way that they are raised in the scale of being and of consciousness, and not lowered. In other words, by speaking what is useful, we mean speaking in such a way that the people to whom we speak become really more alive. If we can't sort of inspire them spiritually, or stimulate them spiritually at least we can be positive and we can be appreciative, not all the time negative and critical.

You know that some people you meet have a sort of very depressing effect upon you. Whatever you want to do they've got a reason for not doing it. They always sort of dampen your enthusiasm just like a sort of wet day. And sometimes we describe such people colloquially as being a wet week. And this is what sometimes they are. They have a sort of very depressing and negative effect upon us. So this is very bad.

So we should watch ourselves also in this way and try to be positive, try to be appreciative, and try to be constructive. I remember some time ago talking to somebody about someone whose name at least many of you know and that is Lama Govinda, and it did occur to me while I was speaking to this person about Lama Govinda that in the course of the time that I've known him, which is now I think practically twenty years, and we've had quite a bit of contact and correspondence, I think I can say that I never remember any occasion on which Lama Govinda was negative, or on which he really disapproved of anything or even criticized anything. Whatever one suggested, or put up, or whatever he commented upon, he was always in a very positive and constructive and appreciative sort of way. And even if confronted by a rather unpromising sort of situation, he would still manage somehow to be quite positive about it and not negative. And this is I would say a very rare sort of quality, or a very rare faculty, and one which we should do our utmost to cultivate. Even if we can't speak usefully to anyone in the full sense of stimulating and promoting their spiritual growth, at least we can be positive, at least we can be constructive, at least we can be appreciative and even creative. If in

addition to this, within this sort of context, within this sort of framework, we can actually give some sort of spiritual help or spiritual guidance in words, what we call the gift of the Dharma in Buddhism, well, so much the better. But even here, there's no question of giving it as it were in the abstract, just as a form of cold words, as it were, but only in the preceding context of truthfulness and of love, because it's only then that the instruction becomes really effective.

Now if we are aware of another person's needs and if we are concerned to provide for them, which means thinking about the other person, then we shall tend to forget about ourselves, tend to think less about ourselves, just as say a mother does when she is caring for her baby she doesn't think about herself at that time. So in this way we come to the fourth and the deepest level of Right Speech or stage of communication, and this is that Right Speech or Perfect Speech promotes concord or harmony. Now this is not just agreement, mental agreement, intellectual agreement. It's not just sharing the same ideas, following the same religion, accepting the same philosophy, belonging to the same political party. It's much more than this. It really means a sort of mutual helpfulness, as we may describe it, leading to a sort of mutual self-transcendence. This means you as it were think about somebody else's needs so much so that you forget yourself or tend to forget about yourself. That person on the other hand is preoccupied with your needs so much so that he tends or she tends to forget about their own self, tends to transcend their own self. So in this way you get each preoccupied with the needs of the other, each forgetting himself or herself and therefore you get a situation arising which I've described as mutual helpfulness leading to mutual self-transcendence. So there's a sort of reciprocity of services and helpfulness but within a context of continually decreasing selfishness and increasing selflessness. And this is really what we mean when we speak of Right Speech or Perfect Speech or perfect communication promoting concord, bringing people closer together by making them as it were transcend themselves in mutual helpfulness.

So in this way we come to what may be described as the very perfection of Right Speech, the Perfection of Communication. This occurs, we may say, when understanding is so perfect that nothing needs to be said. We all know that when you meet someone for the first time there's a lot to talk about. As you get to know them better you tend to talk less. So therefore it logically follows we may say in a way that the better you know someone the less there is to talk about. The closer you come the less there is to say. And in this way Right Speech culminates eventually in silence.

Now from all this, from all these considerations, we can say that Right Speech is by no means the simple matter that it might at first have appeared. We can perhaps begin to understand why, in the Dhammapada, the Buddha has said:-

“Better than a collection of a thousand meaningless words, is one word full of meaning, on hearing which one is at peace.”

So having reminded ourselves of that perhaps this speech of mine also had better culminate in silence in the hope that to some extent some of you at least have become in the words of the Buddha peaceful.

Now I want to add something to that because it connects with something which is going to happen tomorrow. Most of you I think by this time have heard about our by now famous communication exercises. To some of those who haven't either witnessed or participated in them, these communication exercises apparently have all the fascination of the unknown. But they're not anything really very mysterious, they're quite simple and I expect, I anticipate, that we shall start upon them tomorrow. I want to say a few introductory words. I've spoken about the Buddha's philosophy of Right Speech this evening because it provides us with a sort of bridge to these communication exercises and I want to make that bridge a little more perfect before I close this evening.

In the course of the talk I think it has become obvious that most people find it very difficult to communicate. This is a very fashionable word nowadays. Often you hear

people saying, well I meet so many people, I talk to so many people, but we never seem to communicate. And sometimes this is why I think people just go on talking and talking and talking, just in the hope, almost by accident as it were, of being able to communicate. But only too often they don't communicate, it just doesn't happen, and they get more frustrated than ever. So obviously something is seriously wrong somewhere. And so much so in fact that eventually one has to have recourse even to exercises to restore or help to restore one's lost faculty of communication.

Now these exercises, which we shall probably be starting tomorrow, as I've said are quite simple and they just start by trying to make us more aware of other people. This is where they start from - that we're out of communication with other people in the first place because we're simply not aware of them. And we're not aware of them because we don't even take the trouble to look at them. So the first thing that we do in these communication exercises is to learn to look at other people. And it's a simple aspect. And though it's so simple, it's very helpful and people find it not only helpful but even enjoyable and really paving the way to real communication.

Now a few of you have done with me these exercises before, but I'm going to request you not to say anything about them, about their nature, to those who haven't done them. It's much better if people approach them and do them with a perfectly fresh and open mind, not expecting and not anticipating anything. As I've said they are very simple, but they certainly are very effective and I've no doubt that the majority of you, if not all of you, by the time you've done them for a few hours - we shall do perhaps these exercises for three days, one hour or so each day - by the time we've done them for these three hours you will definitely be able to communicate better than you were able to do before. And in that way you will get not only more out of this retreat than you might have got otherwise, but even more out of life. I think most of those who've done the exercises would agree with that claim.

So having I hope aroused if not excited your interest, not to say your hopes, about these communication exercises, I don't propose to say anything more. I think the connection between the Buddha's philosophy of Right Speech and these communication exercises, if it hasn't been made clear this evening, will certainly be made clear tomorrow morning when I hope we embark for the first time for most of us upon these exercises.