# Introduction: Practicing with Right Speech

"The problem is not one of being wrong or right, but one of being more or less skillful." - Thich Nhat Hanh

That’s a compassionate and hopeful view of human activities and sets the tone for what we’re going to do today. In this session, we’ll look at what the Buddha considered skillful and unskillful speech, and practice with his recommendations for Right Speech.

Right speech, as many of you know, is one of the steps on the Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is the Buddha’s clear and useful teaching on how to reduce suffering and stress. We did a Dharma Study Session on the Eightfold Path last spring and a study guide for it is still available on the Red Clay Sangha’s Resources menu for anyone who’d like a refresher. In addition, Gareth is taking attendees through the steps on the Eightfold Path during the new Thurs evening meditation and dharma discussion sessions.

**Group Introductions**

Let’s start with brief introductions. Please just say your name and one or two sentences only about what brought you here today.

A word on the nomenclature –

* Wrong = Unskillful, causing harm, stress or suffering to others and/or to self
* Right = Skillful, causing no harm to self or others and ideally, also bringing benefit to others and self

\*\*

**Note:** Most translations from the Pali canon except where noted are by Thanissaro Bhikkhu and can be found at <https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/>

## Excerpt: An Analysis of the Path, *Maggavibhanga Sutta*, SN: 45:8

An introduction to the Eightfold Path.

“I have heard that at one time the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. There he addressed the monks, “Monks!”

“Yes, lord,” the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, “I will teach & analyze for you the noble eightfold path. Listen & pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” the monks responded to him.

The Blessed One said, “Now what, monks, is the noble eightfold path? Right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

“And what, monks, is right view? Knowledge with regard to [or: in terms of] stress, knowledge with regard to the origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the stopping of stress, knowledge with regard to the way of practice leading to the stopping of stress: This, monks, is called right view.

“And what, monks, is right resolve? Resolve for renunciation, resolve for non-ill will, resolve for harmlessness: This, monks, is called right resolve.

“And what, monks, is right speech? Abstaining from lying, abstaining from divisive speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from idle chatter: This, monks, is called right speech.

“And what, monks, is right action? Abstaining from taking life, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual [misconduct]: This, monks, is called right action.

“And what, monks, is right livelihood? There is the case where a disciple of the noble ones, having abandoned dishonest livelihood, keeps his life going with right livelihood. This, monks, is called right livelihood.

“And what, monks, is right effort? (i) There is the case where a monk … activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the non-arising of unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (ii) He … activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the abandoning of unskillful qualities that have arisen. (iii) He generates … activates persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the sake of the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen. (iv) He … persistence, upholds & exerts his intent for the maintenance, non-confusion, increase, plenitude, development, & culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen. This, monks, is called right effort.

“And what, monks, is right mindfulness? (i) There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (ii) He remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iii) He remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. (iv) He remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—subduing greed & distress with reference to the world. This, monks, is called right mindfulness.

“And what, monks, is right concentration? (i) There is the case where a monk—quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities—enters & remains in the first jhana…. (ii) With the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhana….(iii) With the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful, & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare, ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ (iv) With the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain. This, monks, is called right concentration.”8

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.”

Now we’ll take a closer look at both right speech and wrong speech.

## What is Speech?

All speech is characterized by the following:

Vocalization, tone, facial expression, body language.

As such, speech is action, and in Buddhism, “action” means “karma” and karma applies to any “Intentional Action” of body, speech and mind.

One important thing to think about when considering intention and speech is that intention is not always deliberate – instead it is conditioned by our past experience including our habitual emotional patterns, inclinations and conditioning. This is an important understanding – insight – because it is our impulsive reactions to the actions or speech of others that can cause the most harm. Because our speech is often prompted by our thoughts, it is useful to consider to thought as speech as well.

Speech is one of the most significant actions we humans take because, not being monks and nuns, we do it throughout the day and evening as we talk with family members, friends, strangers, neighbors, coworkers, doctors, officials of one kind or another. We also speak in our minds. Some of our mental speech is “self-talk” – I’m so dumb, smart, cool, etc. – but as much is talk about others to ourselves – I don’t like/do like what so-and-so said/did, etc. This means there is a lot of time for practice.

## What’s the purpose of speech?

To communicate a feeling, thought, or idea. And like all feelings, thoughts and ideas, what we communicate can arise from positive inclinations and feelings such as love, appreciation, and generosity, or from negative, more harmful ones that are informed by greed, ill-will, and confusion or ignorance.

So being aware of the quality, kind, and content of our speech can help us speak and act more skillfully. The Buddha saw that and saw the suffering caused by it and so gave us some important guidelines to use when we speak.

## What Prompts Speech?

Simply put, speech is a desire to communicate something positive or negative; from the Buddhist perspective, it is a reaction to contact and consciousness (awareness) via one or more of our sense doors:

* Contact: We hear something, see something, touch something, taste something, think something, smell something.
  + Awareness of the contact
* Feeling tone: Pleasant, unpleasant, neutral.
  + Feeling tone + perception (identification)
* Mental formation: We fabricate stories based on our conditioning including fears, insecurities, and other habitual pattern of mind.
* A reaction or response based on all of the above.

Goal in learning to speak more skillfully: Change reaction to response, to more measured, mindful, careful speech.

# The Buddha on Right Speech and Wrong Speech

## Excerpt: To Cunda the Silversmith, *Cunda Kammāraputta Sutta* (AN 10:165)

This excerpt is from a conversation with the Buddha on purification rituals and what purifies the heart, mind and body.

“Now, Cunda, there are three ways in which one is made pure by bodily action, four ways in which one is made pure by verbal action, and three ways in which one is made pure by mental action….

“And how is one made pure in four ways by verbal action? There is the case where a certain person, **abandoning the telling of lies**, abstains from telling lies. When he has been called to a town meeting, a group meeting, a gathering of his relatives, his guild, or of the royalty, if he is asked as a witness, ‘Come & tell, good man, what you know’: If he doesn’t know, he says, ‘I don’t know.’ If he does know, he says, ‘I know.’ If he hasn’t seen, he says, ‘I haven’t seen.’ If he has seen, he says, ’I have seen.’ Thus he doesn’t consciously tell a lie for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of any reward.

**Abandoning divisive speech**, he abstains from divisive speech. What he has heard here he does not tell there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he does not tell here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus reconciling those who have broken apart or cementing those who are united, he loves concord, delights in concord, enjoys concord, speaks things that create concord.

**Abandoning harsh speech**, he abstains from harsh speech. He speaks words that are soothing, pleasing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large.

**Abandoning idle chatter**, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is based in fact, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, timely, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal. This is how one is made pure in four ways by verbal action.”

Now let’s take a closer look at the Buddha’s definitions of Wrong or Unskillful speech. What are characteristics of each type of speech – what is meant by them? Why does the Buddha consider these categories harmful – where’s the harm in each?

* Lying – falsehoods, embellishments
* Divisive or harsh speech
* Abusive speech
* Idle chatter – gossip

## Excerpt: The Fruits of the Contemplative Life, *Samaññaphala Sutta*, DN2

This is a long, excellent sutta on the fruits of practice also gives instructions on how and what to practice. The following excerpts of the Buddha’s examples of first idle speech and then divisive speech.

"Whereas some priests and contemplatives, living off food given in faith, are addicted to talking about lowly topics such as these — talking about kings, robbers, ministers of state; armies, alarms, and battles; food and drink; clothing, furniture, garlands, and scents; relatives; vehicles; villages, towns, cities, the countryside; women and heroes; the gossip of the street and the well; tales of the dead; tales of diversity [philosophical discussions of the past and future], the creation of the world and of the sea, and talk of whether things exist or not — he abstains from talking about lowly topics such as these. This, too, is part of his virtue.

"Whereas some priests and contemplatives, living off food given in faith, are addicted to debates such as these — '[Do] you understand this doctrine and discipline? I'm the one who understands this doctrine and discipline. How could you understand this doctrine and discipline? You're practicing wrongly. I'm practicing rightly. I'm being consistent. You're not. What should be said first you said last. What should be said last you said first. What you took so long to think out has been refuted. Your doctrine has been overthrown. You're defeated. Go and try to salvage your doctrine; extricate yourself if you can!' — he abstains from debates such as these. This, too, is part of his virtue."

## The Five Conditions of Right Speech

In another sutta, the Buddha clarified Right Speech this way:

"Monks, a statement endowed with five factors is well-spoken, not ill-spoken. It is blameless & unfaulted by knowledgeable people. Which five?

"It is spoken at the right time. It is spoken in truth. It is spoken affectionately. It is spoken beneficially. It is spoken with a mind of good-will." - Vaca Sutta, AN 5.198

**Note:** In the Buddhist context, “beneficial” can be translated as “connected with or leading to the goal of liberation from suffering” and “unbeneficial” means not connected with the goal of liberation.

### Excerpt: To Prince Abhaya, *Abhaya Rāja-kumāra Sutta* (MN 58)

In this sutta, Prince Abhaya’s purpose is to question the Buddha on aspects of Right Speech to trip him up and thereby prove that the Tathāgata, the Buddha’s word for himself, is not as wise or great as people think he is.

Pronunciation tip for the reader: The “h” in Tathāgata is silent. So phonetically: Ta-ta-ga-ta.

“…Now at that time a baby boy was lying face-up on the prince’s lap. So the Blessed One said to the prince, “What do you think, prince? If this young boy, through your own negligence or that of the nurse, were to take a stick or a piece of gravel into its mouth, what would you do?”

“I would take it out, lord. If I couldn’t get it out right away, then holding its head in my left hand and crooking a finger of my right, I would take it out, even if it meant drawing blood. Why is that? Because I have sympathy for the young boy.”

“[The Buddha replies] In the same way, prince:

[1] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, unendearing & disagreeable to others, **he does not say them**.

[2] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, *unbeneficial, unendearing & disagreeable* to others, **he does not say them**.

[3] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, *but unendearing & disagreeable* to others, **he has a sense of the proper time for saying them**.

[4] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be unfactual, untrue, unbeneficial, but endearing & agreeable to others, **he does not say them**.

[5] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, unbeneficial, but *endearing & agreeable* to others, **he does not say them**.

[6] In the case of words that the Tathāgata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & agreeable to others, **he has a sense of the proper time for saying them**. Why is that? Because the Tathāgata has sympathy for living beings.”

Now let’s go over each recommendation more slowly. In sum, Right Speech consists of the following elements:

* Factual/true
* Beneficial
* Agreeable/endearing to the listener
* Spoken at the right time (timely)

What is meant by timely? Why is timely included? What does that mean for our speech? And which of these factors resonate most with you in terms of what you’d like to work on in your own practice?

### Excerpt: Investigate and Establish, *Anguttara Nikaya V*,

The Pāṭimokkha is the basic code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for fully ordained monks (bhikkhus) and 311 for nuns. Translated by Ñanamoli Bhikkhu. These are the guidelines, based on the five conditions of Right Speech, we should each use when having a difficult conversation with someone else. This teaching uses the word “admonish” but I think for us, as lay people, it can be used as an excellent guideline for conversations in which we want to discuss a disagreement or misunderstanding.

"These five conditions must be investigated in himself.

[1] "Do I speak at the right time, or not?

[2] "Do I speak of facts, or not?

[3] "Do I speak gently or harshly?

[4] "Do I speak profitable words or not?

[5] "Do I speak with a kindly heart, or inwardly malicious?

“O bhikkhus, these five conditions are to be investigated in himself and the latter five established in himself by a bhikkhu **who desires to admonish another**.”

Comments or questions so far?

**Short break**

Five minute bathroom break; please grab a pen, pencil and piece of paper.

# How to Speak Skillfully

Now we’re going to read a powerful sutta on how to develop careful speech and other actions and perform two simple exercises that utilize its prescriptions.

## Excerpt: The Exhortation to Rāhula at Mango Stone, *Ambalaṭṭhikā Rāhulovāda Sutta* MN 61 T Bhikkhu

**R1:** “What do you think, Rāhula? What is a mirror for?”

“For reflection, sir.”

“In the same way, Rāhula, bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions are to be done with repeated reflection.

“[Before] you want to do a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I want to do—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then any bodily action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction… it would be a skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any bodily action of that sort is fit for you to do.

“While you are doing a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both… you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not… you may continue with it.

“Having done a bodily action, you should reflect on it: ‘This bodily action I have done—did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful bodily action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful bodily action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to an observant companion in the holy life. Having confessed it… you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction… it was a skillful bodily action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful qualities.

**R2**: “Whenever you want to do a verbal action, you should reflect on it: ‘This verbal action I want to do—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful verbal action with painful consequences, painful results, then any verbal action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction… it would be a skillful verbal action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any verbal action of that sort is fit for you to do.

“While you are doing a verbal action, you should reflect on it: ‘This verbal action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both… you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not… you may continue with it.

“Having done a verbal action, you should reflect on it: ‘This verbal action I have done—did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful verbal action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful verbal action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should confess it, reveal it, lay it open to the Teacher or to an observant companion in the holy life. Having confessed it… you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction… it was a skillful verbal action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful qualities.

“Whenever you want to do a mental action, you should reflect on it: ‘This mental action I want to do—would it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Would it be an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it would lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it would be an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then any mental action of that sort is absolutely unfit for you to do. But if on reflection you know that it would not cause affliction… it would be a skillful mental action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then any mental action of that sort is fit for you to do.

**R3:** “While you are doing a mental action, you should reflect on it: ‘This mental action I am doing—is it leading to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Is it an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it is leading to self-affliction, to affliction of others, or both… you should give it up. But if on reflection you know that it is not… you may continue with it.

“Having done a mental action, you should reflect on it: ‘This mental action I have done—did it lead to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both? Was it an unskillful mental action, with painful consequences, painful results?’ If, on reflection, you know that it led to self-affliction, to the affliction of others, or to both; it was an unskillful mental action with painful consequences, painful results, then you should feel distressed, ashamed, & disgusted with it. Feeling distressed… you should exercise restraint in the future. But if on reflection you know that it did not lead to affliction… it was a skillful mental action with pleasant consequences, pleasant results, then you should stay mentally refreshed & joyful, training day & night in skillful qualities.

“Rāhula, all those contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the past who purified their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, did it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“All those contemplatives & brahmans in the course of the future who will purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, will do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“All those contemplatives & brahmans at present who purify their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions, do it through repeated reflection on their bodily actions, verbal actions, & mental actions in just this way.

“Thus, Rāhula, you should train yourself: ‘I will purify my bodily actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my verbal actions through repeated reflection. I will purify my mental actions through repeated reflection.’ That’s how you should train yourself.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, Ven. Rāhula delighted in the Blessed One’s words.”

## Practicing with Reflection Before, During, and After Speech

Now we’re going to take a few minutes and practice with some of the Buddha’s recommendations for Right Speech. In the following exercises, we’ll take turns speaking slowly and pausing after every 2-3 sentences to reflect on what we are saying and how we want to continue. The idea in these exercises is to simply practice *the action of pausing for reflection* before, during and after speech to help us develop more skillful speech habits. Though practicing with the five factors isn’t possible in these small short Zoom groups, there are a few ways we can effectively practice with the five conditions outside the classroom and we’ll talk about those later.

So first, I’ll describe the exercise parameters and you can tell me when I finish if you don’t want to participate.

* Breakout groups of random pairs of two.
* Each person gets a chance to speak and to listen.
* The exercise duration is 10 minutes, with 5 minutes allocated to each person to speak and to listen in each role.
* There is a timer on the top right of your breakout window. Check the timer to ensure that as speaker you don’t go over. I will send a broadcast message to switch speakers at the 5 minute mark but the message flashes only briefly and you may or may not see it depending on your browser configuration and the mysteries of technology.
* **Speaker:** . I’ll give you a topic for each exercise. Speak slowly and pause after every third sentence. Take a few deep breaths during the pause, ask yourself: are you speaking mindfully? Are you choosing your words carefully? What feelings or thoughts are coming up as you speak? Observe how the listener is responding with body language and facial expression. Watch the timer and switch at the halfway mark. There’s no right or wrong way of speaking here; it is all just practice.
* **Listener:** Please just listen attentively with respect and without judgement.
* If you finish speaking earlier than 5 minutes, take a few minutes to pause and reflect, then let the other person start. If you both finish before the 10 minute mark, please sit silently reflecting or meditating until the 10 minutes are up.
* At the 10 minute mark, you’ll see a message telling you the breakout group is ending in 60 seconds. That’s your cue to wrap up if you haven’t already. At the end of the 60 seconds, the room will close and you’ll be taken back to the main session.
* If you click a wrong button and lose your Zoom connection, just wait a few moments and go back to the announcement or the Red Clay home page and click the link to rejoin.

**Exercise 1:** Each person in a breakout room will have five minutes in which to describe a favorite book, movie, or TV show. Explain what it is and why it moves and interests you. You may include a short plot summary.

While I create the break out groups, you’ll have 1-2 minutes to jot down a few favorite books, movies, shows.

**Observations**

When we’ve all returned from the session, we’ll share experiences and observations: How did it feel to speak more slowly and to pause every few sentences to gather your thoughts before continuing? What did you notice?

**Exercise 2** (if time allows): Think of a positive or interesting encounter you had with someone sometime over the past few weeks or months. Could be a stranger, neighbor, friend or family member. Examples: You helped someone or someone helped you; someone made you laugh or you made them laugh. Jot down a couple of sentences about it while I create the breakout groups.

The parameters for this exercise are the same as before – when speaking, pause to reflect before speaking and after every three sentences. What are your intentions? Do you want to move the listener emotionally? Impress them?

### Practicing the Five Conditions of Right Speech

I encourage people to find a partner outside of this session with which to occasionally practice applying the five factors in a challenging or difficult conversation. Right time, facts, gentle, beneficial, kindly spoken; am I speaking with irritation or frustration; am I anxious?

A helpful related exercise is to write down your experience with a difficult conversation you had with someone else and frame it in terms of the five factors and noting when you were unskillful and where you were skillful.

Finally, ask yourself: Do you need to speak at all? Feelings come and go; everything is impermanent.

### Some Notes on Listening and Hearing

Going forward, here are some guidelines based on the Buddha’s teachings on how to be a good listener:

* Keep the focus on other, not self;
* Be compassionate and empathetic;
* Listen without judging;
* Let go of any clinging (reaction) to the content;
* Remember that listening is an act of generosity and kindness; it is easy gift we can give to others and ourselves.

Finally, be mindful that **hearing is not the same as listening** and is more likely to be informed by conditioned experience and habitual inclinations of mind. This means, as many of us have experienced, that what is heard is not always what was said. Not hearing has been the cause of many a misunderstanding. That is why being mindful of our thoughts and how they inform our actions is important in helping us turn our reactions into responses.

## On the Speech of Others to Oneself

In closing, I thought it’d be helpful to share the Buddha’s useful Simile of the Saw sutta, which is about how we can handle harmful action or speech directed toward us.

### Excerpt: The Simile of the Saw, *Kakacūpama Sutta* (MN 21)

“In the same way, monks, there are these five aspects of speech by which others may address you: timely or untimely, true or false, affectionate or harsh, beneficial or unbeneficial, with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate. Others may address you in a timely way or an untimely way. They may address you with what is true or what is false. They may address you in an affectionate way or a harsh way. They may address you in a beneficial way or an unbeneficial way. They may address you with a mind of goodwill or with inner hate. In any event, you should train yourselves: ‘Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic to that person’s welfare, with a mind of goodwill, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading him with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with him, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill equal to the great earth—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.

“Monks, even if bandits were to carve you up savagely, limb by limb, with a two-handled saw, he among you who let his heart get angered even at that would not be doing my bidding. Even then you should train yourselves: ‘Our minds will be unaffected and we will say no evil words. We will remain sympathetic, with a mind of goodwill, and with no inner hate. We will keep pervading these people with an awareness imbued with goodwill and, beginning with them, we will keep pervading the all-encompassing world with an awareness imbued with goodwill—abundant, enlarged, immeasurable, free from hostility, free from ill will.’ That’s how you should train yourselves.

“Monks, if you attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw, do you see any aspects of speech, slight or gross, that you could not endure?”

“No, lord.”

“Then attend constantly to this admonition on the simile of the saw. That will be for your long-term welfare & happiness.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.”

# Closing Discussion

Closing comments, questions, suggestions. What resonated? What didn’t? What would help most going forward?