



A STUDY ON THE RIGHT SPEECH (SAMMA-VACA) IN THERAVADA BUDDHISM

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Right speech is the third stage of the noble eightfold path as prescribed by the Buddha and followed by millions of practicing Buddhists. The Buddha lays a lot of importance on the notion of right speech (Samma Vacca). In the Angutara Nikaya, the Buddha mentioned what constitutes right speech, which are basically four kinds of abstentions; namely abstaining from false speech, abstaining from slanderous speech, abstaining from harsh or hateful speech and abstaining from idle chatter. The Buddha gives reasons in support of his view as to why abstaining from these four kinds of speeches is favourable not only for maintaining the peace and equanimity within an individual but also within a society. It is a known fact that when we say something harsh or slanderous to others it eventually affects our individual peace of mind too. We also know about the many examples of hate speeches which have led to senseless cases of violence and which are well documented within our country and the world. Also, indulging in false speech is not a healthy sign for individuals within a group as this kind of a social group which is based on falsities and lies cannot really survive for long and will eventually lead to chaos. Buddha also told us to refrain from idle chatter or gossip as generally we have seen that idle chatter or gossip does more harm than any good to the individual and the society. Hence, if most of us actually inculcate this third stage (namely, right speech) of the noble eightfold path of the Buddha in our daily life, it would be highly beneficial both for the individual and for the harmony of the society.

Keywords: Right speech, Buddhism, Individual.

INTRODUCTION

During the life of the Buddha, the sole and most important goal that the Buddha wanted to aim for and guide sentient beings to achieve was to recognize the suffering (dukkha) and find the way out of suffering (magga). That is why, after the Buddha became enlightened, he gave the first sutta "The Four Noble Truths" to Annata Kondanna with the aim of seeking liberation. This is not only the first discourse since the Buddha's enlightenment, but is also considered the most important for his disciples. Based on what the Buddha taught in the "Four Noble Truths", what is the identification of suffering in the first noble truth? Whether that suffering is considered pessimistic, cynical or this is an objective recognition of the life's nature that every being requires to realize. After seeing the first miraculous truth, the Buddha next pointed out the cause of such suffering (samudaya). Only when we understand why having suffering in this life and what causes of suffering which can we eradicate them. That is also the third truth (nirodha). And the final truth the Buddha showed which is the path towards the cessation of suffering (magga). Additionally, the most important thing is that the Buddha only acts as a teacher or guider and everyone has to be the one who practices those things to be able to eradicate such suffering. One of the paths leading to the cessation of suffering and bringing happiness in this life is indispensable to the Eightfold Path¹. This is considered one of the noble paths that the Buddha always desired his disciples to follow. "Right Speech" (Samma Vaca) is one of the eight stages of the Eightfold Path and is ranked third. In the Angutara Nikaya, the Buddha mentioned what constitutes right speech, which are basically four kinds of abstentions; namely abstaining from false speech, abstaining from slanderous speech, abstaining from harsh or hateful speech and abstaining from idle chatter. In these suttas, the Buddha gave many reasons and explanations to point out the significances and advantages of practicing "right speech". Hence, if each disciple practices seriously the third stage of the Eightfold Path, namely right speech, it would be highly beneficial both for the individual and for the harmony of the society.

¹ Mahatthanadull, Sanu., **Concepts and Principles of Buddhism**, 2nd ed., (Bangkok: International Buddhist Studies College, MCU Press, 2020), pp. 58-60.

BODY

In many texts that the Buddha preached, wholesome actions are actions based on three virtuous roots such as non-greed (alobha), non-hate (adosa) and non-delusion (amoha). If each individual tries to practice right in the present life, it will contribute to making the spiritual and material life always happy and successful, even now and in the future. On the other hand, unwholesome actions are behaviors derived from greed (lobha), hate (dosa) and delusion (moha). If a practitioner always does unwholesome actions, it will lead to suffering and unhappiness in the present and the future, even negatively affecting the spiritual path they are choosing². According to Buddhist teaching, volition or intention (cetana) is a significant factor in determining whether a particular action is wholesome or unwholesome. If the action's intent is aimed at harming oneself or those around them, this will lead to negative future results, especially unfavorable future births. On the contrary, the intention of the action is good, so that the individual's results will gain good future experiences. Depending on the channel of expression, an action can be one of three types: (1) Physical or bodily action, (2) Verbal action (speech), (3) Mental action (thoughts).

As we all know, speech is the official tool for conveying thoughts, emotions and emotions. It has a strong impact on the person who is directly receiving those words. If using the wrong, not having mindfulness or harm thought to the receiver will lead to negative consequences such as conflict, loss of peace and mental damage to them. That is why in the Dhammapada (Collection of verses uttered by the Buddha), the Buddha pointed out that the state of mind determines whether a person uses that speech as a wholesome or unwholesome action.

“Mind is the chief forerunner of all good and bad states.

If you speak or act with a bad or good mind, unhappiness or happiness follows you just as the wheel follows the hoof of the ox or like your shadow which never leaves you”³

² Mahatthanadull, Sanu., **Theravada Buddhist Practice and the Access of Happiness**, (Bangkok: International Buddhist College, 2019), p.15.

In Pali, right speech is “samma vaca”. The word “samma” refers to a sense of complete or perfect and “vaca” means speech. It is the third of the eight factors of the Noble Eight-fold Path, such as: Right view (samma-ditthi), Right intention (samma-sankappa), Right speech (samma-vaca), Right action (samma-kammanta), Right livelihood (samma-ajiva), Right effort (samma-vayama), Right mindfulness (samma-sati), Right concentration (samma-samadhi). It is also the first of the three factors, namely: morality (sila), concentration (samadhi), wisdom (panna). Right speech is more than just correct speech, rather for The Buddha, it is a passionate manifestation of our Buddhist practice. Speech or verbal communication is something that we have to engage in all the time, whether we like it or not we have to communicate. Right speech is a mindful practice. By undertaking this practice we commit to greater awareness of our body, mind and emotions. Mindfulness makes it easier to recognize what we are about to say, and thus it offers us the freedom to choose what we speak. With right mindfulness we learn to restrain ourselves in moments of anger, hostility and confusion.

Kammapatha, in Buddhism, refers to the ten wholesome and unwholesome courses of action (karma)⁴. Among the ten in the two sets, three are bodily, four are verbal, and three are mental. The ten courses of unwholesome kamma may be listed as follows, divided by way of their doors of expression: (1) Destroying life, (2) Taking what is not given, (3) Wrong conduct in regard to sense pleasures, (4) False speech, (5) Slandorous speech, (6) Harsh speech, (7) Idle chatter, (8) Covetousness, (9) Ill will, (10) Wrong view⁵. The ten courses of wholesome kamma are the opposites of these: abstaining from the first seven courses of unwholesome kamma, being free from covetousness and ill will, and holding right view. Though the seven cases of abstinence are exercised entirely by the mind and do not necessarily entail overt action, they are still designated wholesome bodily and verbal action because they center on the control of the faculties of body and speech. In particular, right speech is the stage that depends on four of the

³ Acharya Buddhārakkhita Thera, **The Buddha’s Path of Wisdom**, The Dhammapada, (Kandy: Buddhist Publication, 1985), p.24.

⁴ Karma (Sanskrit, also *karman*, Pāli: *kamma*) is a Sanskrit term that literally means "action" or "doing". In the Buddhist tradition, *karma* refers to action driven by intention (*cetanā*) which leads to future consequences. Those intentions are considered to be the determining factor in the kind of rebirth in *samsara*, the cycle of rebirth.

⁵ The Noble Eightfold Path by Bhikkhu Bodhi

ten wholesome action elements, namely: false speech, slanderous speech, harsh speech, idle chatter⁶.

1. The Concepts and Characteristics of Right Speech

1.1 Abstaining from false speech (*Musāvāḍā Veramaṇī*)

“Putting away lying words, the Bhikkhu holds himself aloof from falsehood. He speaks the truth, forms the truth, he never swerves; faithful and trustworthy, he breaks not his word to the world”⁷

Truthfulness in speech is a very necessary thing to maintain peace, harmony and trust between individuals and people around each other. By nature, every human being does not like to be lying, that is why we should not perform that behavior towards others. There are four main factors that lead to false speech based on Buddhist scriptures, namely: an untruth, the intention to deceive another person or persons, effort to convey the untruth to the other person or persons, the untruth is accepted by the listener as the truth. False speech can appear in different guises depending on the motivating root, whether greed, hatred, or delusion. They can exist alone or combine each other to create unwholesome actions. For the root of greed, in order to gain fame, money, matter, relationship, it will give false speech to satisfy one's existing needs. If the root of hatred, false speech will be interpreted offensive, hurtful words and directly affect to opposite people. False speech based on delusion can have a negative effect on others if it involves topics of spirituality and it is believed by the listeners.

The Buddha strictly forbade this lying by giving very convincing explanations. It shows that everyone is living in a common atmosphere, particularly society, and linked together by a belief. By many different motivation, if someone breaks the mutual trust between the individual and the people around them by lying, this is completely considered false speech. The nature of lies will continue to increase rapidly rather than once because when they lie, they will continue to create other lies to protect their false reason is the truth and for those who directly

⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)*, Cunda Kammaraputta sutta, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), pp. 22-25.

⁷ D.I.63; T.W. Rhys Davids and J.E. Carpenter (eds.), *op.cit.*, p. 79

accept it to believe it is the truth. In the Ambalattthika-rahulowada Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya (Collection of the Buddha's middle length discourses) the Buddha advised the young bhikkhu Rahula who happened to be his own son that:

*“When anyone feels no shame in telling a deliberate lie,
There is no evil he will not do,
So, train yourself not to tell a deliberate lie even for fun”⁸*

Therefore, the Buddha concluded, one should not speak a deliberate lie even in jest. In the Cunda Kammaraputta sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has described how one engages in 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 and tell, good man, what you know: If he doesn't know, he says, 'I know.' If he does know, he says, 'I don't know.' If he hasn't seen, he says, 'I have seen.' If he has seen, he says, 'I haven't seen.' Thus he consciously tells lies for his own sake, for the sake of another, or for the sake of a certain reward”⁹

In the Cunda Kammaraputta sutta mentioned above, the Buddha describes how a person who has decided to abstain from false speech engages in telling the truth,

“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 and 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 false speech, he abstains from false speech. He speaks the truth, holds to the truth, is firm, reliable, no deceiver of the world”¹⁰

⁸ Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**, Ambalattthika-rahulowada sutta, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), p.108.

⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)**, *Op.cit.*

A person who practices right speech will not lie, even if it is for the purpose of joking or making fun. Abandoning false speech is of utmost importance for an individual if she / he has to walk on the path of a Buddhist monk. For example, in today's life, the fact that life has to run over time causes the mind of each to sometimes fall into a state of fatigue, deadlock and despair. If we practice telling the truth to close people, we will stop that feeling of anxiety. Because if we share the truth of what we have, they will listen, share and take steps to help us overcome that fear. For the Buddha, realizing the truth and respecting the truth in communication will prevent us from making mistakes in wrong , which in its nature will lead to negative results in the present and in the future.

1.2 Abstaining from slanderous speech (*Pisuṇāya Vācāya Veramaṇī*)

“He is one that abstains from slanderous speech; having heard something here. He is not one to repeat it elsewhere for not one to repeat it here for (causing) variance among these people; concord is his pleasure, concord his delight, concord his joy, concord the motive of his speech”¹¹

In Pali, the word "Pisuṇāya" means malicious or slanderous speech in which the intention is to create rifts and divisions and to inflame other people who are already in names or disagreements. The motivation behind slanderous speech is jealousy, resentment at the success and happiness of competitors and using divided words to lower their reputation. In addition, other motivations such as: intentionally hurting others with detractors, feeling happy when the opponent's surrounding relationships are broken or exaggerated, distorting the opponent's words when conveying to a third person. More generally, the slanderous words are derived mostly from a state of unwholesome mind, such as: resentment, ill-will, anger, hatred, jealousy and so on. In the Cunda

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹¹ M.II.345; I. B. Horner (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 10.

Kammaraputta sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has described how one engages in slanderous and divisive speech,

“What he has heard here he tells there to break those people apart from these people here. What he has heard there he tells here to break these people apart from those people there. Thus breaking apart those who are united and stirring up strife between those who have broken apart, he loves factionalism, delights in factionalism, enjoys factionalism, speaks things that create factionalism”¹²

The opposite of slander, as the Buddha indicates, is speech that promotes friendship and harmony. Such speech originates from a mind of loving-kindness and sympathy. If we practice right speech in this way, we will easily win the trust and affection of everyone around us. Then we will easily become a fulcrum, who always listens and accompanies them. This is seen as a huge and practical benefit in today's life because they will not be afraid that we will reveal their secrets or they will be used for any purpose. Moreover, abstaining from slanderous speech will never have a chance for anyone who opposes us with slanderous words. Instead of each of us intending to cause discord, divide, and disunity among individuals and organizations, we should heal each relationship to make this life more peaceful.

The Buddha has described skilful speech in terms of abstaining from divisive speech in the above discourse,

“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”¹³

¹² Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)**, *Op.cit.*, p.78.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.37.

Therefore, the Buddha says that right speech is not only truthful but is also affectionate and loving which originates from a mind of compassion and sympathy. As the Dalai lama says, “There should be a feeling of mutual love between people, a feeling of understanding, only then shall we also know what the other individual’s needs are and only then can a society be said to be truly harmonious, truly in synchronization”.

1.3 Abstaining from harsh speech (*Pharusāya Vācāya Veramaṇī*)

“Whatever speech is gentle, pleasing to the ear, affectionate, going to the heart, urbane, pleasant to the manyfolk, agreeable to the many folk”¹⁴

Harsh speech or hurtful speech can be understood as speeches intended to hurt the feelings of the listener or the person directly receiving it. That statement can be criticism, shouting, scolding, cursing and so on. To reflect on a more logically rude speech, it can be divided into the following three categories: One is abusive speech: scolding, reviling, or reproving another angrily with bitter words. A second is insult: hurting another by ascribing to him some offensive quality which detracts from his dignity. A third is sarcasm: speaking to someone in a way which ostensibly lauds him, but with such a tone or twist of phrasing that the ironic intent becomes clear and causes pain.

Harsh speech often has a root of unwholesome action, namely hatred (*dosa*). When a person uses a harsh speech in anger, it becomes even more fierce and harsh, even bringing about consequences that the person directly speaking can never foresee. If this speech reaches the receiver's ear and they perceive it as a disregard or demeanor, then they can use counter-attack and retaliate. That will lead to undesirable and negative results for both sides. Consequently, each person needs to learn how to control ourselves before anger can be released outwardly. The ideal antidote is patience — learning to tolerate blame and criticism from others, to sympathize with their shortcomings, to respect differences in viewpoint, to endure abuse without feeling compelled to retaliate. The Buddha calls for patience even under the most trying conditions.

¹⁴ M.II.345; I. B. Horner (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 10.

Only then can an individual and a society be said to live in perfect harmony and peace. In the Dhammapada, verse 133, the Buddha has stated how harsh speech can bring unexpected results through retaliation.

*“Speak not harshly to anyone
Those thus addressed will retort
Painful indeed is vindictive speech
Blows in exchange may bruise you”¹⁵*

, not all harsh speech can bring negative consequences as often happens. A typical example is the following: some teachers or parents often use harsh speech for the purpose of reminders and admonition to bring a good result for the host subject. Although these speech are considered harsh or hurtful, they contain goodwill and affection that prevent the receiver to feel hatred or intention to take revenge and will not cause morally negative results.

In the Cunda Kammaraputta sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has described harsh speech as follows,

“He speaks words that are harsh, cutting, bitter to others, abusive of others, provoking anger and destroying concentration”¹⁶

In the same sutta, the Buddha has described the speech of one who has abandoned harsh and abusive speech as follows,

“He abstains from abusive speech. He speaks words that are soothing to the ear, that are affectionate, that go to the heart, that are polite, appealing & pleasing to people at large”¹⁷

¹⁵ Acharya Buddharakkhita Thera, *Op.cit.*

¹⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)**, *Op.cit.*, p.41.

1.4 Abstaining from idle chatter (*Samphappalāpā Varamaṇī*)

“He is one that abstains from frivolous chatter; he is a speaker at a right time, a speaker of fact, a speaker on the goal, a speaker on dhamma, a speaker on discipline, he speaks words that are worth treasuring, with an opportune simile, discriminating, connected with the goal”¹⁸

Vain talk or idle chatter is speech which is purposeless, pointless, useless, shallow and is of no value to the speaker or to the listener. Saying like that does not actually bring any benefit to either side, but on the contrary cause much more trouble about things unrelated to the interest of the speaker or the listener. So why do people often use idle chatter. It can be understood that idle chatter is primarily intended to fill up time when free time or not have work to do. The topics they usually talk about include: politics, religion, sports, music or famous celebrities and so on. People who have a habit of vain talk or idle chatter will cause the other person to have less contact or not care about what they are saying. From time to time, their speech will lose value, meaninglessness and their quality will decline, even those around them will gradually alienate and avoid them because their speech will not bring benefits for the masses. The Buddha advised that we minimize our chatter, especially on important topics. More specifically for the monks, such speech must be considered more and more selective, mainly revising the Buddha's teachings (Dhamma) and avoiding saying things of the world.

In the Kathavatthu sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has advised the Buddhist monks that it is not proper for them to engage in idle chatter talking about topics such as:

“Conversations about kings, robbers and ministers of state; armies, alarms, and battles; food and drink; clothing, furniture, garlands and scents; relatives; vehicles; villages, towns, cities and the countryside; women and heroes; the gossip of the street and at the well;

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, P.44.

¹⁸ M.II.345; I. B. Horner (tr.), *op.cit.*, p. 10

*tales of the dead; tales of diversity; the creation of the world and of the sea; talk of whether things exist or not*¹⁹

In the same discourse the Buddha goes on to describe ten topics that are proper to be spoken by the Buddhist monks: (1) Talk on modesty, (2) Talk on contentment, (3) Talk on seclusion, (4) Talk on non-engagement, (5) Talk on arousing persistence, (6) Talk on virtue, (7) Talk on concentration, (8) Talk on discernment, (9) Talk on release, (10) Talk on the knowledge and vision of release²⁰

In the Verse 100 of the Dhammapada, the Buddha has stated that one useful word is better than a thousand useless words;

*“Better than a thousand utterances
Comprising useless word
Is one single beneficial word
By hearing which one is pacified”*²¹

In the Cunda Kammaraputta sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has described idle speech as follows,

*“He engages in idle chatter. He speaks out of season, speaks what isn’t factual, what isn’t in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya, words that are not worth treasuring”*²²

¹⁹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)**, Kathavatthu Sutta, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012), p.19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.108

²¹ Acharya Buddharakkhita Thera, *Op.cit.*, p.54.

²² Bhikkhu Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya)**, *Op.cit.*, p.78.

In the same sutta, the Buddha has described the speech devoid of idle chatter as follows,

*“Abandoning idle chatter, he abstains from idle chatter. He speaks in season, speaks what is factual, what is in accordance with the goal, the Dhamma, & the Vinaya. He speaks words worth treasuring, seasonable, reasonable, circumscribed, connected with the goal”*²³

It can be asserted that the Buddha was a practical witness of knowing when to choose the right time to lecture on what topics and those topics were always central and beneficial to those who directly listen to the teachings. Specifically, in the Mahasihananda sutta of the Dighani kaya, “The ascetic Gotama speaks at the proper time, what is true and to the point the Dhamma and the discipline”²⁴. Therefore the Buddha knows when to speak, how much to speak and what to speak. Speech and other forms of communication should be aimed at benefit of the individual and the betterment of the society. Since the metaphysical questions regarding the cosmos and the origin of the world are not aimed at the ending of suffering and hence for the betterment of the society, therefore even asking these metaphysical questions and pondering upon them is useless waste of time and is considered as idle chatter by the Buddha.

2. The Benefits of Right Speech

In a more general way, when we practice right speech, in a certain positive aspect, right speech includes the following general connotations. Firstly, speaking is the truth. Secondly, speech promotes harmony and friendship among others. Thirdly, speech is friendly, gentle, comforting and polite. Last but not least, speech that is truthful, factual and useful to others. In the same point of view, in the Vaca sutta of the Anguttara Nikaya, the Buddha has stated that well spoken (*vācā subhāsita*)²⁵, blameless and unfaulted speech is endowed with five aspects: (1) It is spoken at the right time, (2) It is spoken in truth, (3) It is spoken affectionately, (4) It is

²³ *Ibid.*, p.80.

²⁴ Bhikku Bodhi, **The noble eightfold path (The way to end suffering)**, (Kandy: The Buddhist publication society, 2009), pp. 95-99.

²⁵ Mahatthanadull, Sanu., **Human Behaviors in Promoting Balance of Family according to Buddhist Psychology**, Vol.8 No 1, (Bankok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, 2020), p.50.

spoken beneficially, (5) It is spoken with a mind of good-will ²⁶. With a similar content, in another sutra, the Buddha taught the bhikkhus the specific qualities that a true disciple should practice. Such disciples should abstain from the four types of wrong speech and diligently cultivate the four types of right speech. Specifically, in the Subhasita sutta of the Samyutta Nikaya (collection of the Buddha's connected discourses), the Buddha has stated that how speech is well spoken and faultless: speech that is well spoken, not that is poorly spoken; speech that is just, not that is unjust; speech that is endearing, not that is un-endearing; speech that is true, not that is false²⁷.

In the theories which the Buddha preached, the practice of right speech is not simply about telling the truth and avoiding evil words, it is also understood as a way of silently regarding the problems that they should not answer those questions. For metaphysical questions that do not help us put an end to suffering and samsara, the practice of right speech should be based on the principle of listening and keeping silent. That silence is another understanding of right speech because no matter how we interpret and answer these questions, they will lead to false results and the mind is not pure anymore. Controlling speech, actions and mind is also purely observing the precepts that the Buddha established²⁸. The Buddha's avoidance of these metaphysical questions has been called "The silence of the Buddha". Some of these questions to which the Buddha remained silent are as follows: "Is the universe eternal or non eternal?"; "Is the universe finite or infinite?"; "Is the soul one with the body or is it anything other than the body?"; "Does a Tathagatha exist after death?" or "He does not exist after death or He both exists and not exists after death?". In the Brahmajala sutta of the Dighanikaya , the Buddha explains and lists the sixty two ways in which the Brahmins and recluses "reconstruct the past and arrange the future". The Buddha says "they are trapped in the net with its sixty two divisions, and wherever they emerge and try to get out, they are caught and held in this net".

For the Buddha, another important factor that helps those who practice and gain the benefits of right speech is right listening. The practice of right speech can be broadly understood

²⁶ Bhikkhu Bodhi (tr.), **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nīkaya**, (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 600.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.615

²⁸ Mahatthanadull, Sanu., **The Five Precepts: Criteria and the Promotion of Individual and Social Peace**, (Thai Version), (Bankok: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya Press, 2018), p.181.

as controlling one's own speech in a conversation with one or the other people. If our speech's benefit is useful and bring the best to the speakers, then we must be a good listener and understand what the other person is saying. Then, the practice of the right speech will bring into full play and the speech do not become hollow and wrong. In his book "The heart of the Buddha's teaching", Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh said:

*"Deep listening is the foundation of right speech. If we cannot listen mindfully, we cannot practice right speech. No matter what we say it can never be mindful , because we will be speaking only our own ideas and not in response to the other person"*²⁹

Before teaching the Dhamma , the Buddha used to propound to His disciples "Listen carefully, pay attention and I will speak". The Buddha laid more focus on listening profoundly which includes the whole heart, complete presence and focus to the words of the speaker and being totally in the present moment while putting aside our egotisms and actually truly listening. To speak is to express words that carry certain meanings , and to listen is to be conscious of the words that are spoken. That is why Buddha gave great importance to right listening as a part of human communication and when the Buddha spoke about right speech, He was including in it both sides of the communication process ; namely intentional speech and listening.

CONCLUSION

The practice of right speech will help one to avoid negative moral consequences of wrong speech in this life and in future lives. It would also facilitate happy and harmonious social relationships and one's good reputation as a trustworthy person in the society. Finally, it is

²⁹ Thich Nhat Hanh, **The heart of the Buddha's teachings**, (RRHUK publications, 1998), p.102.

essential for someone aiming to cultivate the spiritual path of liberation from suffering as right speech is an essential factor of the three factors of the group of morality (sila) in the Noble Eight-fold Path. Right morality is essential for the development of right concentration (samadhi) and right concentration is essential to cultivate right wisdom (panna). In one's spiritual journey towards liberation, a disciple needs right understanding as the forerunner to decide what is wrong and right speech and to avoid wrong speech and cultivate right speech. One also needs to apply great effort and constant mindfulness to cultivate and maintain right speech consistently. Hence, within the Noble Eight-fold Path, right understanding (samma ditthi), right effort (samma vayama) and right mindfulness (samma sati) can be described as the three main facilitating and contributory factors in cultivating right speech (samma vaca).

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