

THE DHARMA OF BENEFICIAL SPEECH: COMMUNICATION AGREEMENT

The SZBA discussion group is dependent on a common understanding of Right Speech, Shakyamuni Buddha's third step on the Eightfold Path. Here in the West matters of conduct and speech often need to be expressed in terms that expand on the language of the Bodhisattva precepts.

In our communications, in person and online, SZBA members agree:

- To avoid speech that is intentionally hurtful. Speaking with this principle in mind we can create safety in relationship, knowing that any hurt we may experience is a matter of misunderstanding or ignorance, not intention;
- Not to use harsh language, which includes name-calling and ad-hominem attacks;
- That if we are hurt or angry, we will wait before we respond and think about the impact and usefulness of our words, as the Buddha's explains in the sutta below;
- That as a community we will try to be helpful and truthful to our dharma sisters and brothers. If we can't be helpful, we can at least be silent.

The excerpts below from Thich Nhat Hanh and from the Pali Suttas provide helpful guidance on principles of Right Speech.

The Fourth Precept: Deep Listening & Loving Speech

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create suffering or happiness, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize or condemn things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

— Thich Nhat Hanh

from the "Abhayarajakumarsa Sutta," Majjhima Nikaya, 58

. . . So to, prince, such speech as the Tathagata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: such speech the Tathagata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial, and which is also unwelcome and disagreeable to others: such speech the Tathagata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, but which is unwelcome and disagreeable to others: the Tathagata knows the time to use such speech.

Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be untrue, incorrect, and unbeneficial, but which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathagata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true and correct but unbeneficial,

and which is welcome and agreeable to others: such speech the Tathagata does not utter. Such speech as the Tathagata knows to be true, correct, and beneficial, and which is welcome and agreeable to others: the Tathagata knows the time to use such speech. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has compassion for beings.