**What Is Right Speech?**

Right Speech means speaking in line with the truth, and it has four forms:

1. *Not lying.*
2. *Not speaking divisively*. For example, talking about this person to that person so as to give rise to misunderstandings leading to a falling-out between the two.
3. *Not speaking harsh or vulgar words*. That is*,* casting aspersions on a person's family, race, or occupation in ways that are considered base by the conventions of the world.
4. *Not speaking idly*. That is*,* in ways that are of no benefit to the listener. For instance, *criticizing* or *gossiping* about the faults of other people in ways that don't serve to remind our listeners to correct their own faults. *Grumbling*, that is, *complaining* over and over about something until our listeners can't stand it any longer; the way a drunkard grumbles repeatedly without saying anything worthwhile. *Speaking extravagantly*, even if what we say may be good, if it goes over our listeners' heads it serves no purpose. *Babbling*, that is, speaking excessively without any aim: Talking at great length without really saying anything serves no purpose at all, and fits the phrase, "A waste of words, a waste of breath, a waste of time."

In short:

First, don't speak anything *bad* or *untrue*.

Second, speak only things that are *good* and *true*, that will give knowledge to our listeners or bring them to their senses. Even then, however, we should have a sense of time, place, and situation if our words are to qualify as Right Speech. Don't hope to get by on good words and good intentions alone. If what you say isn't right for the situation, it can cause harm. Suppose, for instance, that another person does something wrong. Even though you may mean well, if what you say strikes that person the wrong way, it can cause harm.

There's a story they tell about a monk who was walking across an open field and happened to meet up with a farmer carrying a plow over his shoulder and a hoe in his hand, wearing a palm-leaf hat and a waistcloth whose ends weren't tucked in. On seeing the monk, the farmer raised his hands in respect without first putting himself in order.

The monk, meaning well, wanted to give the farmer a gentle reminder and so said, "Now, that's not the way you pay respect to a monk, is it?" "If it isn't," the farmer replied, "then to hell with it." As a result, the gentle reminder ended up causing harm.

Source: Adapted from "The Path to Peace and Freedom for the Mind", by Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo, translated from the Thai by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight (Legacy Edition)*, 1 December 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/thai/lee/pathtopeace.html>