

## Wise Presence, Wise Speech, Wise Listening, Wise Dialogue

San Rafael Meditation Group

November 9, 2011

This month, we're doing a series on Mindfulness and Relationships. Last week we looked at how people we are in relationship with can serve as role models, refuges, and resources. This week, I want to begin exploring the challenges of relationships as spiritual practice, relationships as the 9<sup>th</sup> step of the 8-fold path. One of the 8 steps on the 8-fold path is Wise Speech. Tonight I want to expand that step a bit, to look at Wise Presence, Wise Speech, Wise Listening, and Wise Dialogue.

### Wise Presence

We practice coming into presence all the time in our mindfulness practice of course, focusing our awareness on being here, now, in this body, in this moment. And noticing what happens when we come into presence; noticing what's different. Settling into an embodied consciousness is itself a refuge, is a resource. Jon Kabat-Zinn says: *To be present is far from trivial. It may be the hardest work in the world. And forget about the "may be."* *It is the hardest work in the world...and the most important.*

And it's skillful means to anchor in a sense of presence before we engage with the dynamic energy of relating to others, for when we can relate to others from a felt sense of presence, we have the best chance of staying grounded, staying aware, in the swirls of the dance that happens between us and another person, or a group of people.

Anytime, but especially as we head into the coming holiday season, we want to be real, be ourselves, and see the true nature of the people we are spending time with. We hope that they reciprocally see and honor our true nature, and we try to keep our sense of our true nature intact if they don't reciprocate. We practice, and prime ourselves, and do our best to stay in wise presence as we move among family and friends, connecting and dis-connecting, and noticing what happens as we try to be kind. As we try to be equanimous. What happens? It is from this deep, steady sense of presence that we can be generous, grateful, compassionate, forgiving.

I'd like us to practice this sense of presence from an exercise I learned from Fed Luskin in practicing presence to be able to forgive:

Allow yourself to sit comfortably, let your eyes gently close. Focus your awareness on being in your body in this moment, here and now. Notice your feet, your knees, your set in the chair, your spine comfortable erect and tall. Focus your awareness on your breath flowing in and out of your belly, your chest, your throat. You may even notice your whole body breathing.

Let your awareness of your breathing drop into your heart center. Breathe into your heart center a sense of ease, of peacefulness, your breath resting in your heart center. If you wish, breathe a sense of kindness into your heart center. A moment when you have been kind to someone, or someone has been kind to you. Breathe into your heart center a moment of loving presence into your heart center, when you have been loving toward someone, or they have been loving toward

you. Breathe into your heart center a moment of forgiveness, when you have extended genuine forgiveness to someone or you have receive genuine forgiveness from someone. Breathe into your heat center a sense of peace and well-being, a sense of ease and presence in this moment, here and now.

### Wise Speech

There is so much to practice in speaking what is truthful and useful, and refraining from saying whatever isn't. I suggest we focus on one particular aspect on wise speech, identifying our stories or beliefs that we have about the people we are speaking with, understanding what filters or projections or old history we might be bringing to any particular encounter.

This comes from a larger context for me: last Wednesday, after our sitting group, I had the opportunity to watch the current NOVA series on the Fabric of the Universe with 3 other friends, all of whom have deep spiritual practices, some of them for more decades than me. So we all have our understanding of form and emptiness from the wise view of a spiritual tradition and our practice with anicca - impermanence. Modern quantum physics, from observing the expanding universe and observing the behaviors of sub-atomic particles and sub-atomic energies is, of course, all about form and emptiness, phenomenally parallel to the Buddhist view – the Tao of Physics. And we're noticing how science will develop one theory about how the universe works – Newton – and then Einstein develops another theory, and then later physicists develop other theories. Someone local, Saul Perlmutter at U.C. Berkeley, just won the Nobel Prize for physics for demonstrating the acceleration of the expansion of the universe. And that "truth" may change as science advances. We began to notice: in quantum physics "truth" or existence is completely impermanent. So in the discussion afterwards, one of the women says, "Well, the story I believe in this moment is..." as thought that was the most natural way in the world to begin a conversation. It's a skillful way to begin a conversation.

So I'd like you each to take a moment to identify a belief or a story you might have about someone you will be engaging with in the near future, tonight or tomorrow or next week or at Thanksgiving or beyond that. What, for now, you believe to be true about them. Moving into an awareness that this story could change, could be no longer true, or maybe even never was.

### Wise Listening

We hold those insights for the moment as we shift our explorations to Wise Listening.

*The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.... A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.*

*- Rachel Naomi Remen*

*Deep listening is miraculous for both listener and speaker. When someone receives us with open-hearted, non-judging, intensely interested listening, our spirits expand.*

*- Sue Patton Thoele*

*We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that something deep inside us is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch.*

*- e.e. cummings*

*Being listened to is so close to being loved, that most people don't know the difference.*

*- David Augsburger*

So, we're going to practice wise listening. You've each identified a belief, a story, you may hold about another person in your life. We'll turn to a partner now, and share that experience of holding that belief, not focused so much on the content of the particular belief, but on the process of holding any belief at all, and your sense of how holding that belief may affect your relating to that other person, and your partner will simply listen, deeply, hmmm, hmmm.. We'll take turns; speakers, two minutes each; listeners, all you have to do is be present, and open and attentive, and connect.

De-brief

*Since true listening involves a setting aside of the self, it also temporarily involves a total acceptance of the others. Sensing this acceptance, the speaker will feel less and less vulnerable, and more and more inclined to open up the inner recesses of his or her mind to the listener. As this happens, speaker and listener begin to appreciate each other more and more, and the dance of love is begun again.*

*- M. Scott Peck*

### Wise Dialogue

To listen closely and reply well is the highest perfection we are able to attain in the art of conversation.

*- Francois de la Rouchefoucauld*

Now the model that is being taught at Spirit Rock and other places is what began as Non-Violent Communication, now called Compassionate Communication, because it emphasizes respect for differences, respect for sovereignty, and privileges the relating over being right while still discerning what's wholesome from what's unwholesome and firmly asserting the wholesome.

There is a formula....

1. When I perceive, or when I experience...

So wise, acknowledging the relativity of our story, our belief, right off the bat, not claiming a "truth" about the other person or about anything. Acknowledge our subjective sense of truth in the moment, knowing it could evolve or dissolve in the next moment.

2. When I perceive...what happens inside of me is...

So good to practice mindfulness! To tune into our own subjective experience in the moment (and we do know from modern neuroscience that steady repeated mindfulness practice strengthens the functioning of the part of the brain we use for interoception, sensing what is going on in our bodies; it's the same part of the brain, the insula, we use for empathy, tuning into the subjective reality of another.)

3. When I perceive...what happens inside of me is... What I need/wish/desire in this moment is...

This is the wise effort of cultivating the wholesome, conscious skillful selfing as opposed to unconscious reactivity. I need safety, honesty, tolerance, slowing down, presence, breathing and connecting.

4. Therefore I request...in the formula specific positive behaviors from the other within a certain time frame so that we get validation that the other person is present, tracking, and cares about our well-being or the well-being of the relationship.

We don't have time to practice the entire formula tonight, though you have your entire lives to practice out there. And we don't always use this mechanical way of speaking, any more than we begin every conversation with "the story I'm believing in this moment is...." But we hold the principles as a compass to guide our dialogue with another in a wise way. Questions

Next week: boundaries in connecting-disconnecting, how to work with boundaries skillfully so can stay anchored in our own true nature, recognize and honor true nature in other, and open to the profound inter-connectedness that is the true nature of the universe.

Let's sit for a moment.