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## 10

## THE IDEA OF VERBAL COMMUNICATION IN EARLY BUDDHISM

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Three reasons have impelled me to select the present theme. First, the University of Kelaniya grew out of the foundations of the Vidyalankara Pirivena which was an accepted center of Buddhist learning. Second, I was instrumental in establishing the Department of Mass Communication at this University and I was its first Head of the Department. Third, I am recognized as an international authority on Asian theories of communication. These three reasons, then, instigated me to settle on my chosen theme for today's talk.

Buddhism is one of the great religions of the world that has had a profound impact on mankind. It has influenced religious, philosophical, moral, ethical, cultural and ethical thinking in very significant ways. For a religion to have that kind of impact, it must possess very interesting approaches to the issue of human communication. The Buddha was a communicator par excellence; he was a supremely influential teacher, and that influence is largely attributable to his success as a communicator. The Buddha preached to the people in a language that was readily understandable. He paid great care and attention to the psychological background and perceivable disposition of his potential audiences. He structured his messages in a way that would readily appeal to the lay persons. From a communications viewpoint, the rhetorical strategies adopted by the Buddha in his teachings are multi-faceted and most fascinating and merit close study. The way he used parables, allegories, tropes, wit, humor, innovative narrative strategies, parallelisms, deserve a separate study.

Just to cite a few examples, let us first consider his use of parables. Once a woman who was deeply distraught by the death of her son came to the Buddha and implored his to restore his son to life. Realizing that she could be taught the truth of existence, the Buddha asked her to go back to the city, make the rounds of the total city, and to locate a house in which no one had ever died, and fetch tiny grains of mustard city from that house. The mother, with great expectations, went from house to house, but could not locate a house in which someone had not died. Before long, she realized the lesson that the Buddha intended to teach her. Saying that

death occurs to every one, she buried her. Buddhist literature is replete with such illustrative parables that vividly convey religious messages.

Another distinguishing feature that marked the importance of the Buddha as a communicator was his efficacious use of diverse rhetorical strategies. For example, in the following passage taken from the discourse on the snake (uruga sutta), the careful use of a trope for communicative purposes is powerfully exemplified. (Saddhatissa, 1985)

He who gives up anger which has arisen, as the snake poison diffused in the body is removed by antidotes, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

He who has completely destroyed lust as one cuts off a lotus flower in a lake, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

He who has completely destroyed craving like drying up a once swiftly-flowing river, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

He who has completely destroyed pride like a weak bridge of reeds swept away by a mighty flood, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

He who does not see any substantiality in forms of becoming as one does not find flowers on a fig tree, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

He who has no ill-temper within him and who has overcome all forms of becoming, that monk gives up the cycle of existence as the snake sheds its old, decayed skin.

What is interesting to observe about these statements is the functional way in which a dominant trope organizes and orchestrates the flow of thought. The trope of the snake shedding its old, decayed skin provides a useful epistemological vantage point while extending the moral discursive boundaries. The way epistemology and troping combine in these statements is fascinating.

As a supremely persuasive communicator, the Buddha often deployed various narrative strategies to convey his intended message. In the following example, what we see is the vivid use of dramatic parallelism for communicative purposes. This is a dialogue that takes place between the Buddha and Dhaniya, the herdsman. The dialogue deals with the clash between worldly security and spiritual emancipation.

Dhaniya was a herdsman who lived at the time when the Buddha was staying at Savatthi. It was the monsoon season, just before the onset of rain. He had built strong shelters for himself, his family and for the cattle on the bank of the river Mahi. The Buddha, however, realized that

this family was in danger of being overwhelmed by the flood and appeared in the cattle-keeper's shelter just when he was rejoicing in his comfort and security.

Dhaniya; I have cooked my rice and milked the cows. I dwell with my people near the bank of the Mahi. My house is thatched, the fire is kindled. Therefore, rain, o cloud, if you like!

The Buddha; I am free from anger, from passion, I abide for the night near the bank of the river Mahi. My house (body) is uncovered, the fire of passion is extinguished. Therefore, rain, o cloud, if you like!

Dhaniya; gadflies and mosquitoes are not found. My meadows are abounding with grass on the marshy land. The cattle can endure the rain when it comes. Therefore, rain, o cloud, if you like!

The Buddha; by me is made a well-constructed raft (path). I have passed over the floods to Nibbana. There is no further use of the raft. Therefore, rain, o cloud if you like!

Dhaniya; Gopi, my wife, is not wanton and is obedient to me. For a long time she has lived with me pleasantly. Of her, I do not hear any evil whatever.

The Buddha; my mind is obedient and free from passion. For a long time it has been trained and well subdued. So evil is not to be found in me.

What we find in this interesting exchange that centers on material security and spiritual emancipation, illusion and reality, is the vivid deployment of the rhetorical strategies of dramatic parallelisms and verbal puns. It is primarily through these communication devices that the intended effects are secured. Buddhist literature is replete with examples of this nature that display the mastery of communication strategies characteristic of the Buddha. This is indeed a topic that merits close and sustained study, and I shall leave it for a later occasion. Here, my objective is to discuss the idea of verbal communication as inscribed in early Buddhism. This objective, to be sure, is closely related to the issue of rhetorical and communicational strategies that I have been discussing so far.

The attitude to language reflected in early Buddhism is inseparably linked to the central tenets of Buddhism, namely, the ideas of insubstantiality, impermanence, causality. Indeed, it is these concepts that lend depth and definition to the Buddhist attitude to language and verbal communication. In order to understand the distinctiveness of the Buddhist approach to language and verbal communication, we need to place it alongside some of the dominant views that were current at the time in India. One such

view was that language was sacred, it was a divine creation, that it was an instrument of divine will. Buddhism repudiated that view. Closely allied to this notion was that language incarnated essences and carried metaphysical meanings. Buddhism rejected this view as well. What is interesting about the Buddhist approach to language and verbal communication is that it marks the middle path, the avoidance of extremes that has always characterized Buddhist thought. The Buddhist approach to language avoided the essentialism that was dominant in many other views current at the time; it also repudiated a totally materialistic approach to language that advanced the view that it was totally arbitrary. As I shall explain presently, the Buddhist approach to language places emphasis on a different set of interests in keeping with its epistemology and moral imperatives

The idea that verbal communication is based on convention, social practices, is central to Buddhist thinking, which has no truck with the divine origins of language. This is vividly illustrated in the famous discourse on the origins (agganna sutta). In his explication, the Buddha tells the two Brahmins Vasettha and Bharadvaja, that human society came to be what is through a process of evolution. Social institutions, then, were not created by some divine power or creator but by the dynamics of social growth. Hinduism stresses the fact that the world was produced by the Brahma as well as the caste system. Buddhism maintains that they were the outcome of social evolution, and language is one such result. Hence, Buddhism discards the view of language as a divine creation.

According to Buddhism, language has to be understood as a social practice inflected by convention and agreed upon by the people who use it. What this means that language is not divinely-ordained or iron-clad and that it evolves in conformity to the movement of convention. In the Buddhist literature there are copious references to agreement among the users (sammuti) or the practice of users (vohara). Hence, language as a product of social interaction is central to the Buddhist perspective on verbal communication. When we examine the early discourses on Buddhism, we can identify five central concepts that are deployed in discussions of language. They are, etymology (nirutti), generality (samanna), usage (vohara), consensus (sammuti) and conceptuality (pannatti) among these the ideas of etymology and generality were current at the time. However, the Buddha was not obsessed with these in the way that some others had been, he did not reify them in the way that others did. He was much more interested in the ideas of usage, convention and conceptuality because they enabled him to focus on the idea of language as a social institution and social practice that responds to changing social and cultural forces.

The Buddhist perspective on language and verbal communication that stresses the ideas of language as a social practice as a phenomenon that is consensus-driven, along with the central tenet of Buddhism regarding causality- the dependent co-origination and its concomitant multi-causality, focuses on a very important dimension of communication. In Western communication theory, until recent times, the process of communication was conceptualized in terms of solitary addressers and addressees or communicators and receivers, and the focus was how messages were conveyed from one solitary mind to the other. This is indeed a cartesian legacy. What this leaves out of consideration is the all too important fact that verbal communication takes place within specific contexts of operation. What the Buddhist attitude to language does is to focus on the commonly shared world that communicators and receivers share and how it constitutes a very important facet of the communicated meaning and the communicative event. Contexts and conventions that Buddhism focuses on are sets of practices and concerns that deepen the communicative act that is being performed. Hence, the Buddhist way of re-conceptualizing verbal communication opens up very productive pathways of inquiry.

Verbal communication, according to the Buddhist view of things, is a social practice that underlines commonalities of usage, consensus and mutuality. At the same time, verbal communication is understood within a moral space that imparts a sense of gravitas to the communicative event. Let me quote from the Buddhist text the discourse on wholesome speech (subhasita sutta) in addressing a group of monks, the Buddha said

'Speech which has four characteristics is speech well spoken, blameless and not censured by the wise; namely, the speech of a monk who speaks only what is wholesome and not what is unwholesome, who speaks only what is worthy and not that is unworthy, who speaks only what is pleasant and not what is unpleasant, who speaks only what is truthful and not what is untruthful. Speech characterized by these four factors is well spoken, and not ill spoken, blameless and not censured by the wise. This is what the master said, and having said this he went on, as teacher, to say this

Wholesome speech, the saints say is the foremost.  
One should speak what is worthy and not what is unworthy and this is the second.  
One should speak what is pleasant and not unpleasant, and this is the third.  
One should speak what is truthful and not what is false and this is the fourth.

These passages clearly establish the fact that the Buddhist conception of verbal communication takes place in a moral space where normative

imperatives play a significant role. The fact that one should be truthful in speech is a desideratum that is constantly encircled in Buddhist popular discourse. For example, in the popular compilation *The Dhammapada*, it is stated that there is no sin that cannot be committed by a person who states falsehoods and violates virtuous speech. Hence, what we find in the early Buddhist attitude to speech and verbal communication is the idea that a speech event is more than an exchange of information; there should be some direction, edifying impulse, to the entire communication event. In other words, Buddhists would maintain that speech acts, communicative interactions, verbal interchanges are not value-free. There should be a discernible point to the direction in which such an event or interchange develops. The ideal speech situation proposed by the well-known social philosopher and communication theorist Jürgen Habermas (1984) would share this viewpoint.

The Buddha was a supremely effective communicator who interacted with various types of people, educated and uneducated, pious and impious. So far, I have been discussing the Buddhist attitude to communication in general and the Buddha's communications with ordinary people. At times, he had to engage theoreticians, logicians and scholars of various persuasions. In those instances, his strategy was different, arising largely out of the subject-matter and the context. For example, the Buddha stressed the conscious and responsible utilization of language. He said at one point the following: 'These two conditions, monks, contribute to the confusion and disappearance of the genuine doctrine; which two? An ill-placed terminology (*dunnikkhataṇa ca padavyanjanam*) and a meaning ill-conveyed (*attho ca dunnīto*). When the terminology is ill-placed, the meaning is also not approvingly conveyed.' This is indeed a comment that carries great implications for verbal communication.

The way the Buddha responded to questions of metaphysics, to unanswerable questions and profitless queries reflects his deep-seated ideas about verbal communication and rationality. With regard to questions and challenges about the nature of reality and truth, the Buddha adopted a four-fold method of approach. First, he saw certain questions as meriting categorical or direct explication. Second, there were those questions that demanded to be explained analytically. Third, there were questions that invited explication only after a counter-question was posed. Fourth, there were those questions that should be laid aside. The last mentioned questions were those that could not be meaningfully answered in terms of experience or those that had little relevance to the problematic issues countenanced by human beings. What this mode of responding to questions reflects is another facet of the Buddha's views on language, truth and reality and its implications for communication.

As has been remarked by Kalupahana (1999), the Buddha adopted a number of important measures to safeguard the validity of linguistic communication. First, he paid great attention to the interconnections between experience and articulation in language. This led him into the investigations into the growth of language. Second, there is always the danger of language slipping into metaphysical modalities of thinking and expression. This meant the constant guarding against the perils of substantialism and absolutism. In order to avoid this, the Buddha often deployed passive forms, the aorists and past participles instead of active forms. Third, he sought to scrutinize concepts while paying close attention to the ways in which they changed in their usage over time. What this meant was that he focused on the mutability and changeability of concepts. Fourth, he was sensitive to the inherent limitations of experience and language, and paid sustained attention to the complex ways in which they were intertwined and intersected. Fifthly, looking from this, he sought to maintain a balance between experience and explication and focus on the blind spots of rationalities. Sixth, he sought to construct a philosophy of language that was in keeping with his privileged epistemology and moral imagination. These considerations of the Buddha gave the Buddhist perspective on language and verbal communication its distinctive outlook. As students of communication, it is of the utmost importance that we pay focused attention on each of these considerations.

Against this background of discussion, I wish to draw out a number of important themes embedded in the Buddhist approach to language that we as students of communication should find to be extremely productive and relevant to our pursuits. These themes should prove to be of great heuristic value in our efforts to re-think communication theory and its implications. First, according to early Buddhist thinking, as I stated earlier in this essay, language comes into being as a social practice based on usage and convention and is not a divinely-ordained product. This focuses on the non-essentialist and non-absolutist approach to language advocated by Buddhism. It was seen as an instrument, but a purposive one that best operated within a normative space.

The idea of convention and consensus as guiding linguistic communication has to be considered very carefully. As has been pointed out by Tilakaratne (1993), while recognizing and explicating the non-absolutist nature of language, the Buddha unambiguously underlined the need to adhere to linguistic conventions if the wider society has opted to abide by them. This is borne out in the following passage.

There are these three linguistic conventions or usages of words or terms, which are distinct, have been distinct in the past, are distinct in the present and will be distinct in the future and which are not ignored by the

wise Brahmins and recluses. Whatever material form (rupa) that has been, which has ceased to be, which is past and has changed, is called, reckoned and termed 'has been' (ahosi) and is not reckoned as 'it exists' (atthi) or as 'it will be' (bhavissati) this is repeated for the other four aggregates; feelings, perceptions disposition and consciousness. whatever material form has not arisen nor come to be, is called, reckoned as 'it exists' (atthi) or as 'it has been' (ahosi)... whatever material form has arisen, and has manifested itself, is called, reckoned or termed 'it exists' (atthi), and is not reckoned or termed 'it has been' ahosi nor as 'it will be; (bhavissati). it is clear from this passage that the Buddha admonishes his followers not to transgress the conventions of time cited above. Conventions, to be sure, transform themselves over time, and what Buddhism points out is that in adhering to convention one must be prudent and exercise discriminatory judgment. This attitude to linguistic convention carries with it important implications for verbal communication.

The second important theme from a communications viewpoint that is significant in early Buddhist writings is the idea of linguistic embeddedness that characterizes a communicative event. A communicative event does not signify the sending of a message by a solitary communicator to a solitary receiver; it takes place within a linguistic context in which both are embedded, and this linguistic context forms a vital part of the meaning of the communication act. It is important to bear in mind the fact that consciousness is forged in the linguistic signs produced by the participants in the communicative act. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs and it mirrors their logic and imperatives. Indeed, the logic of consciousness is the logic of semiotic interactions of a given communicative event. Indeed, if we deprive consciousness of its semiotic content, there would be nothing left in it.

Let us explore this notion a little more deeply. Language consists of signs; they arise only on the basis of inter-individual interaction or intersubjectivity. Signs are organized socially and are fuelled by intersubjective interactions. It is only under these conditions that signs come into life in verbal communication. Hence, when we discuss the nature and significance of verbal communication, it is always important to bear in mind the importance of the social context which invests the communicative event with meaning. The early Buddhist attitude to language that we have discussed leads us productively in this direction. In verbal communication, a transaction takes place between the addresser and the addressee through the medium of language. The linguistic and social environment in which this transaction occurs determines its nature and meaning. The orientation of the word towards the addressees carries with it an extremely high significance. In point of fact, the word constitutes a two-sided act. It is determined equally by the person whose

word it is as much as for whom it is intended. The word, then, is the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, communicator and receiver. In a communication act, each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other.' I give my words verbal shape keeping in mind the image of the intended receiver. In an act of communication, the word can be regarded as a bridge thrown between myself and the potential interlocutor. If one end of the bridge is dependent on me, the other is dependent in my addressee.

According to the Buddhist approach to language and communication, a word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the communicator and the receiver. Consequently, in an act of communication, we can identify three important constituent elements. First, there is the physical act of speaking, the production and emittance of sound. Second, there is the act of creating verbal signs, drawing upon the social stock of signs available to the speaker. Third, there is the manipulation and orchestration of the verbal sign so as to set in motion a communication process, and this is totally determined by the social relations that exist between the participants in the communicative event. Therefore, we see clearly, the importance of the social context as a generator of communication. As we examine Buddhist expository writings on this theme, what we come to realize is that Buddhism placed great emphasis on language as a sign system within which individual words as well as clusters of words acquire the force of meaning. What this means is that both communicators and receivers, owing to their shared backgrounds and contexts, respond to words as both articulatory patterns as well as hermeneutic patterns, based on prior experiences. This embeddedness in a common sign system, and its implications, are clearly established in Buddhist writings. This is a line of approach underlined by the Buddhist perspective on language and communication.

A third theme which emerges from early Buddhist expository writings is the self-reflectivity and introspection that characterizes human communication. For Buddhists, to use the terminology of communication scholars, in communication, interpersonal communication is as important as intrapersonal communication. According to Buddhism, ultimately, language and communication should lead to spiritual liberation. Hence, introspection, self-reflectivity, intrapersonal communication is of paramount importance. For Buddhists, this self-reflexivity is built into the very process of linguistic communication. In communication, Buddhists stress, one is not involved in merely stringing together a cluster of words but also reflecting on them. Communication presupposes this reflective act. This self-reflexivity is vitally connected to our attitude to the world we live in as well as to the people in society with whom we interact. Hence, according to Buddhism, to communicate, to use language

to interact with others, is to adopt a moral posture. From this flows the inescapable fact that language deals not only with information and knowledge but also with feelings, at times directly and at times obliquely. Therefore, to communicate in language, according to Buddhism, is to be aware of how one is constituted as a human being. This is a very important facet of communication that has been relatively ignored by contemporary communication scholars both in the West and the East.

Earlier, I discussed the importance of the context in verbal communication from a Buddhist perspective. This gives rise to another theme, the fourth in my list that I wish to broach, namely, the importance of the public space in verbal communication. Meaningful verbal communication arises from, and leads to, an identifiable public space. By public space, I refer to the arena in which we discuss, argue over, explore, matters of common interest as human beings. As I pointed out earlier, for Buddhists verbal communication implies a social activity with a purpose and certain gravitas. This is because language is seen as a precious resource that should ultimately pave the way for human welfare. There are different ways in which the relationship between language and the public space has been glossed. Some would argue that while language shapes the public space, the public space in turn shapes language. Those who subscribe to a Wittgensteinian (1958) approach to things would argue that there must exist a consensus in judgments as a pre-condition of language being a mode of communication, and that is what the public space does. As there needs to be public agree criteria for meaningful verbal communication to take place, the public space becomes important. A linguistic concept, if it is not shared or shareable, does not lend itself to communication. Hence the importance of Wittgenstein's arguments against private language. Those who favor a more symbolically-oriented approach, like some modern anthropologists, would maintain that a community comes into being as a symbolically constructed system of values, norms, codes and conventions of behavior and judgment, and that the public face of language enables this to happen. Buddhist theorists of communication, while not disagreeing with these propositions, would go a step further and assert that thinking and language are inextricably linked, and that thinking is language. Thinking takes place in public. Even when one is thinking in solitude, one is interacting with others. Hence thinking and the public space are vitally connected. A Buddhist approach to communication would stress this dimension of verbal interaction.

Fifth, the idea of meaning is pivotal to the early Buddhist understanding of verbal communication. In Buddhist writings, communication is perceived as a quest for meaning, where the communicator and receiver act as co-investigators of meaning. Even in the case of intrapersonal

communication, the quest for meaning is a joint one, because an imaginary interlocutor or set of interlocutors is posited. Buddhists maintain that human beings inhabit a world of meaning, and hence any meaningful communicative event must be involved in the exploration of meaning. The communicator and the receiver are embedded in a linguistic and social context, that is to say, in a context of meaning. They are co-discoverers of meaning. Consequently the common pursuit of meaning becomes an important consideration in the eyes of Buddhist thinkers. According to the Buddhist way of thinking, a human being is a linguistic animal as well as a self-interpreting animal; human beings are sharers of meaning. Hence questions of meaning are not only of paramount importance to him or her but also inescapably and irreducibly present in human interaction. As in the case of Jurgen Habermas' ideal speech situation, in the Buddhist thinking also, there is a strong ethical component to linguistic communication.

The Oxford English dictionary defines communication as the imparting, conveying or exchange of ideas, knowledge etc. Columbia encyclopedia defines communication as the transfer of thoughts and messages, as contrasted with transportation, the transfer of goods and persons. In keeping with this tenor of thinking, the early conceptualizations of communication adhered to a transportational and manipulative view of communication. According to Osgood, (1957) in the most general sense, we have communication whenever one system, a source, influences another, the destination, by manipulation of alternative signals which can be transmitted over the channels connecting them. Shannon and Weaver conceptualized communication as the procedures by which one mind affects another. Since then communication scholars have abandoned this manipulative notion and gradually moved towards a transitional notion. For example, George Gerbner (1956), saw communication as the interaction through messages. Kincaid (1979) defined communication as a process of convergence in which information is shared by participants in order to arrive at a mutual understanding. Pearce and Cronen (1980) explicated communication as the co-creation and co-management of reality. Since the 1980s, communication scholars have moving along this path and focusing on the interactional aspects of communication and reciprocities of meaning-making. It is evident, therefore, that the idea of communication has undergone a significant transformations during the past two and a half decades.

Broadly speaking, then, there are two generic models of communication; the manipulative and the transactional. The models of communication advanced by scholars such as Lasswell (1948), Shannon and weaver (1949), Osgood (1957), Westley and Maclean (1957) and Berlo (1960)

can be termed manipulative. On the other hand, the models associated with Barnlund (1970) Schramm (1973), Kincaid (1970) and Pearce and Cronen (1980) paved the way for transactional models. This is, of course, not to suggest that there are no variations and differences of emphases in the models included in each generic category. However, one can justifiably categorize term into two broad groupings. The differences between these two generic models can be represented schematically as follows.

MANIPULATIVE MODELS	TRANSACTIONAL MODELS
1. Linear and one-way	Non-linear and two-way
2. Emphasis on communicator	Emphasis on relationship between two
3. Focus on persuasion	Focus on understanding
4. Attention on psychology	Attention on psychology and social effects
5. Mechanistic	Organic
6. De-contextualized	Contextualized

We see, therefore, that the transactional models have made significant progress over the manipulative models in conceptualizing communication. This applies to verbal communication as well. Despite their manifest differences, both types of models agree on fundamental consideration, namely, the adoption of an instrumentalist view of language. In both types of models, language is seen as an instrument of manipulation or as an instrument which facilitates a two-way transaction. Language is never perceived or explained in a more fundamental way as constitutive of meaning. Speaking of verbal communication, we can identify two approaches. The first recognizes language as an instrument of meaning. The second privileges language as constitutive of meaning. It is only in very recent times that such an approach to verbal communication has made its appearance. The second approach to verbal communication has two dimensions.

1. The idea that language is not a mere instrument or tool of communication but is constitutive of the meaning of verbal communication
2. The idea that language arises out of the social matrix in which the users live. Outside of this social interaction there is no verbal communication; no such entity can come into being.

The Buddhist approach to language and verbal communication, as we have discussed so far, clearly belongs to the second constitutive approach. However, it needs to be noted that there are some important

differences that mark the Buddhist approach off from the generality of approaches that belong to this category. First, there is a much greater emphasis placed on the idea of consciousness in the Buddhist perspective. Consciousness is crucial to language formation and use. Second, the idea of intrapersonal communication is as important as interpersonal communication in the matter of verbal interactions. Buddhism stresses that intrapersonal communication is not an act if solitude. But a social act in that it takes place in the context of implicit social norms and imperatives. Third, the Buddhist approach to verbal communication operates in a moral space with self-clarification and edification being and important desiderata of language use. This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that Buddhism is above all, a religion, a way of life, that teaches people the path of spiritual liberation. Fourth, flowing from this is the idea that when one says that language constitutes meaning, according to Buddhist thinkers, it also means that language constitutes novel meanings that are relevant to leading a good life. This focus on the creation of new meanings for life is a vital aspect of the Buddhist approach to verbal communication.

In this article, I have sought to focus on the early Buddhist approach to verbal communication. As Buddhism evolved over the centuries, and spread to various countries in the world, different sects and schools emerged. In this essay, my focus has been on the early Buddhism or the Theravada School. The Mahayana schools and various other forms of later developments of Buddhism are also important in terms of the philosophy of language and verbal communication. I have discussed in a different chapter in this book the relevance of Nagarjuna, who was instrumental in paving the way for the popularization of Mahayana Buddhism, to modern communication theory. The later Buddhist schools sought to place emphasis on different aspects of communication. For example, if we pause to examine the Zen Buddhist attitude to verbal communication as concretized, for example, in the writings of Dogen, we see how he focuses heavily on the phenomenology of pre-reflexivity. It is his conviction that compassion, wisdom, equanimity and the absence of selfhood can be productively comprehended by paying close attention to the pre-reflective dimensions of human experience. The implications of such a line of inquiry for understanding the dynamics of verbal communication are different from the ones foregrounded by early Buddhist perspectives that I have discussed in this chapter.

Similarly, we can focus our attention on aspects of later esoteric Buddhism as represented, say, in the expository works of Kukai. He was deeply interested in the truth of words, and he sought to understand this by exploring the ritualistic structures of language. For him, truth is manifested in ritual, and consequently sacred incantations and ritualistic

usages of language became exceedingly important. Kukai evinced a great interest in the mysteries of language, and in his mind, biological gestures, reflective thinking and verbal incantations were inseparably linked. This interest of his grows out of his privileged epistemology and ontology. Hence, it is hardly surprising that he chose to pay close and sustained attention to the ritualistic, incantational facets of verbal communication. Clearly, this marks a different approach to language and verbal communication from the one that is inscribed in the writings of early Buddhism that I have discussed in this talk. This celebration of mysteries of language, the emphasis on ritual, is one that did not find favor in early Buddhism.

When we discuss traditional Asian theories of communication, there is a tendency to think in large and capacious categories such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and so on. This is, of course, understandable; however, in order to comprehend the true complexities of the situation, it is important, I think, to make finer discriminations and subtler assessments. In all religious traditions, there are different schools, sects, cults, with their own specific agendas and interests. Each claims to interpret the central doctrinal core of its professed religion, but in distinctive ways using different vocabularies of interpretation and different methodologies of investigation. That is why, in this article, I have aimed to discuss the idea of verbal communication specifically in early Buddhism, as opposed to Buddhism in general.

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