

Sharon Salzberg
Week 3, *Real Happiness at Work*
February 17th, 2014
“Communication & Connection”

The next two sections we're going to discuss are: first, communications and connection, and then integrity or ethics. And interestingly, they're very connected. Both of these, communications and integrity, are in the realm of knowing what our intention is—the intention behind an action, the intention behind something we're about to say, or that e-mail we're about to send. What we actually want is another way of describing our intention.

What do we want from this conversation, from this encounter, from this particular moment in time; as we're discussing something, as we're about to take action? What do we really want? Do we want to be seen as correct, as right, as righteous? Do we want to be helpful, collaborative? Do we want to find a resolution, a reasonable resolution to a dilemma? Or do we want to like vanquish somebody and grind them into dust? What do we want from this moment in time? That's a really crucial thing to be able to notice, to be aware of.

And going back to our very first lesson in terms of mindfulness, we used mindfulness to just turn a little bit of our attention toward that motivation or that intention before we speak, before—if not, before we write the e-mail; before we press send. At some point in time we take that moment: the opportunity to pivot our awareness. In Tibetan Buddhist teaching they call that spy consciousness. It's not like some huge cumbersome laborious thing but it's just a little turning: so that even as we're doing something—or whatever it might be—we're in touch.

We kind of pivot a little bit of our awareness and we see either in terms of the body, in terms of a visceral sensation; or maybe clear words in the mind, "I'm going to get you" or "Wow, let's see if we can work this out." We see what that motivation is, because knowing that is going to make a huge difference. We say in Buddhist psychology that the motive behind an action is a critical component of the action. That's not maybe so common in the West where we're more in to like, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions" or "What do you mean you had a good intention? You failed miserably." But in the East, the intention behind an action is considered to be an intrinsic, powerful, essential part of the action itself.

So I may reach down and—so I may reach down and hand you this book and all anybody sees is my hand moving down and picking up an object and moving it forward, but why? What was in my heart that generated that action? Maybe I'm offering you the book because I like you and I want you to have it. Or maybe I see you have this other

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book and I think, "Well hey, you know, maybe I give you this book and you'll give me that book" or maybe because I know I'm on video and I think, "Oh, the whole world's going to see me being generous, how cool is that?" Or maybe I'm giving you the book because I don't like you so much and I think, "Well, there is that part right in the beginning which I think is going to upset you."

It's like the same smile, it's the same gesture but it's coming from a very, very different place within. And that is important for us to know because that's what will distinguish one act from an act that looks, on the surface, that it's completely identical but is really very, very different because it is coming from that different motivation. So we start with knowing our motive both in terms of communication, in terms of speech and in terms of action, in terms of integrity—where are we coming from? And, in terms of integrity, what are our values? Do we really prize honesty, collaboration, competition? What is it that is really kind of the theme of what we think will make us happy?

And here we need to be mindful of what it is, what our motivation is, and also to have a kind of critical intelligence to take a look. How do we feel when we are completely lost in a sense of competition where someone else's success brings us down; where we feel bad because they did well? And we may not even—I mean, I say competition—but we may not even be in competition with them. They may be doing something else within the same firm or have a different field, but we feel less because they have succeeded. What is the tendency to try to define who we are relative to someone else; rather than looking for what really makes me happy?

This is not so easy to discern. We get a lot of messages about what will make us happy from all kinds of people, and places, and advertising, and this culture. So what if I can set those aside a little bit and look at each one of them very carefully, before we let it guide us into action? How do I really feel when I'm just out to destroy somebody or when I don't take into account that happiness may not be a limited commodity in this world and the more someone else says, "That may not mean there's less for me." What assumptions am I making about permanence? "You have everything and you will forever and I have nothing and I will forever." But really nothing is forever. So what does it feel like when we're lost in that kind of assumption, that preconception?

I don't have to listen to you; you don't count. You're not important enough. You're across some other line of who's on my team, right? It's self and other, and us and them with a great big other out there. So we need to be mindful, we need to be aware, we need to pay attention and we need to have that kind of discernment—really check it out. How does it

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feel when we have these states very strongly and then we have the power of choice. Even if something keeps coming up—some kind of jealousy, some bitterness whatever it might be—we can keep letting go of it and make some other choices in terms of where we're going to act from. So we pay attention to our motive.

It's also taught, by the way, that if we do loving kindness practice, if we cultivate the power of loving kindness and compassion in our lives through the meditation practice; then the underlying motivational structure that is, you might say our default story, will start to change. If largely we have been coming from a place of fear and anger and a sense of separation in what we do and what we say, and we do loving kindness practice; we will find we are more and more coming from a place of connection.

We understand that our lives are all connected—that maybe people are playing different functions, but we all count on one another. We don't do what we do all alone as a completely solitary figure, ever. We don't live as completely solitary individuals. We are interdependent. We live in an interdependent universe. That's not romantic or sentimental or fanciful. It's not even always pleasant, but it's how it is. That's how life actually is, and so the more we are in touch with that; the bigger a playing field we have for understanding that we can be motivated by connection, rather than having such a tremendous sense of separation and division.

So we pay attention to our motivations through mindfulness, and we shift the motivational feel through lovingkindness. So we have motivation as one whole arena of looking at communication and also action. And the second is skillfulness. We actually learn certain skills. If somebody is really late, for example, with presenting a memo; rather than saying, "You're an idiot and you've ruined my life," it is probably more skillful to say with great specificity, "I would have been able to leave on Friday except for the fact that I need this memo to do the next step, now I'm going to have to work through the weekend. You know, this is not really acceptable,"—something like that.

So that skillfulness of speech where we are being more specific, where we are talking about ourselves, which is really undeniable, our own feeling, our reaction, our own reality, the more likely we are to get a better response. There are very few people who can constructively change through being told you're an idiot, but having another kind of guideline might actually be a path to some constructive change. So we learn skills and communication. We learn how to speak to one another in a very different fashion because what we want probably, if we're paying attention to that best motivation we can find, is to

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have a solution; is to move from self and other to a kind of we in trying to get something accomplished, trying to get a task done.

And we bring that same recognition of skillfulness into the realm of behavior. This is also based on the understanding that our spiritual life or our sense of deepest values—it's not contained. It's not something we exercise twenty minutes a day, like looking for the truth, and then we tell lies all day at work and it works out okay. Our lives are all of one piece; they're seamless. And what we do in an inner journey will affect everything else. What we do externally will affect that inner journey. We can't live as though fragmented and compartmentalized anymore, because it's simply not true. And so we pay attention.

We see whether we're feeling that sense of integrity or our own values reflected in how we treat other people; and how we behave in the quality of wholeness that we are able to bring to our work. Do we feel that we're in an environment where this is challenged or even gravely threatened? And if it is, if we feel that much angst, then we have to really look at the cost of what is happening to us. But, short of that, there are usually ways of bringing more of ourselves in the best sense of the word. The true ideas that we might have about not harming and creating a different kind of environment; working together rather than in such isolation and sense of alienation; having a sense of straightforwardness—rather than exaggeration and some kind of deceit in some way—to really practice.

As the Buddhist said: "Say that which is true and that which is useful." That's not so easy. It demands a huge amount of mindfulness of context—kind of seeing where you are, being able to set boundaries in a useful way that isn't cruel or divisive—but maybe simply saying, "I can't, you know, do that other thing," whatever it might. It's just understanding that this is an enormous area of experimentation, and therefore of creativity and possibility.

Why don't we do a thought experiment here where you think of an e-mail you need to write to somebody? And just as you sit, as though meditating, begin to mentally compose that e-mail. And then practice that pivot. Bring your attention to the question: "What do I really want most out of this communication?" What do you feel in your body? What are you aware of as a motivating force, as an intention? "What do I want most out of this communication?"

And without judgment, without condemnation, recognize that each of these different motivations has a kind of consequence to it. And then decide, "Do I want to refrain this?"

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Do I want to keep it the way it is?" And bring some of this awareness to the next time you are composing an e-mail. Do it once just as you begin and do it one more time before you press send.