

2001-12-17: Gratitude

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

If this was going to be the last Monday evening that I'll be teaching here in this room, probably, who knows?

Most likely. The main sentiment that I've been filled with last days is one of gratitude. And so I wanted to talk a little bit about gratitude.

I find myself I think, through my Buddhist practice, partly as a function of it, often feeling very grateful. And I think it's a byproduct of not only being mindful, but I would say it's a byproduct of becoming simple. The mindfulness practice itself is a very simple practice at heart. It is very simple practice of noticing what's happening in the present moment. simple practice of being present for your life as it's being lived. And it's helpful to think of it something that's simple. In being that simple, it leads, if it for a person follows that path of mindfulness, it leads to capacity or leads to a simplicity of being. Not just simply simplicity of awareness, just simplicity in practice, but its simplicity and being because the usual because all that many all the ways eventually all the ways in which we unnecessarily complicate our lives are seen as being unnecessary seen as being a burden, seeing as being a drain on who we are. And the garage is a desire to let go that to let it slough off to outgrow it. And all those complications are a lot of those complications have to do with the sense of self. So there's there's kind of simplicity of self or simplicity of being that is given birth through this practice. There's no longer a need to defend oneself or to you know, defend one's ego, defense, one defense one's, to build up kind of a represent itself, then we have to kind of prove ourselves to other people or that a tendency to be self critical or be self inflating. But just as people you can be you become content just being who you are. Just being kind of simplicity of being. And I believe that that simplicity of being lends itself to feeling grateful. When we're not simple when we're complicated. We're filled with desires, for example, are filled with lots of activities. There is perhaps no room in the mind, to feel gratitude to feel appreciation for the gifts that come our way or even to know To the gifts that we have the gifts that we live that support our life. But as it becomes the simplicity of being in the mind is not so cluttered and so complicated, then I

think it becomes more and more obvious that the things that arise in our lives that appear in our lives have a kind of almost sacred, miraculous quality that kind of like gifts. Where do they come from? Certainly, in meditation, the some of the more remarkable states that can arise some of the more meaningful sacred experiences a person can have in meditation, states of great calm or insight of love, compassion. It's very hard to take credit for those. Did you know I made this happen, you know, I'm responsible for it. If you're really honest, a very present in a simple way for those experiences. They have a kind of gift like quality. They arise just as a gift

In the Buddhist tradition in the story of the Buddha's life, the sensuality of gratitude as a byproduct of simple presence simple awakening is in the story of the Buddha's awakening, where after he was liberated, not to his awakening. The myth is that he spent seven day he got up from his seat first spent seven days enjoying the happiness of being free. And then he got up and he spent and walked away from underneath the Bodhi tree, or he'd been sitting, and he turned around and face that tree and spent seven days gazing at it out of gratitude, because the tree sheltered him during the night of his enlightenment, this expression of gratitude for what supported him in the process of awakening. And then at some point, I'm not sure how long after his enlightenment but maybe a year or two he was He travelled back to his home country to visit his parents and, and his family and people he relatives, in order to teach them the Dharma, or to teach them what he had discovered. And it said in the tradition that he did, he did that out of gratitude for their support for him. That as he was growing up, they took care of him and supported him and, and that kind of gave birth to a sense of gratitude, where he wants to somehow repay that kindness that he had received. I find myself that often at the end of sittings, the primary one of the one of the attitudes that seems to get regularly born in me is one of gratitude. And for me often that kind of the putting my hands together to bow that some people like to do at the end of the sitting. For me, it's often I do it as the way to put expression to action. of gratitude. And I found when I was living in the monasteries, that it was really, for me a very important thing to be able to with my hands together to bow on a regular basis. Because of all the sense of gratitude I have we just being alive for just a sense of the gift of presence of police calm of love that would arise. And I really want to have some way of expressing that I wanted some way to channel that so it wouldn't be bottled up and held inside. And the most beautiful and simplest way ahead for expressing it was putting my hands together like this in gratitude. Some people feel that gratitude is only for people who are happy or joyful. And there are some use one point of view that says that it actually is the other way around. It's because we're grateful that we feel joy. And you don't have to you don't have to have everything going well in your life in order to feel grateful. And in fact, for me sometimes when things are actually quite difficult in my life, are times when it's sometimes it's a much more poignant for me, the sense of preciousness and appreciation I have for the support for the gifts that make my life possible to make my my world possible. It's a beautiful story that Gary Snyder tells in one of his writings. Gary Snyder is a famous American poet, still alive. And when he was a young man, he worked I think, for me up in Oregon, perhaps in the mountains during the summer. I think a fire crew were trailblazing crews. And he was writing a lot of poetry. And the end of the summer he went for a 10 day. He called it a meditative hike. by himself in the mountain summer, he decided to stop writing poems.

And then he was hiking in the mountains. And then at some point, poetry started flowing out of him. And he would join it down. And he claims his writing that, from that time that he was up in the mountains. He never needed to write another poem. He felt no personal need to write anything anymore. It didn't provide him a sense of identity. It didn't provide him with images. He didn't he felt content in himself and suddenly found some inner peace with himself that he did not have a need for poetry. However, poetry happened through him. And when he when that poetry comes, he said it was a lot better than it had been. And also he felt it was a gift. It was a gift that came. He didn't quite know where it came from even just able to come. What's the difference between having an ability and having a gift? I think the one of the differences is when you have a gift, you don't quite take personal credit for it. It's something that's, you know, where'd it come from? Why do you have that particular gift. And in fact, maybe all our abilities are kind of gifts that we can appreciate from that point of view. So we come to the last Monday evening here in Palo Alto. And I feel a lot of gratitude. And my gratitude goes out in many different directions. But the primary one right now is it goes out to the friends to have hosted us here for these many years. And I think it's really a remarkable thing. That the friends have hosted us from you. People come in from a different religion and their own, opening our doors with tremendous trust and goodwill and generosity. To me, I'm quite inspired. There are such people in the world who do such things. I'm inspired by the fact that when the press is built this buildings, I understand the story. They had doubts about whether they should build such a fancy building. And Senior friends don't like to do things in an ostentatious way. But they decided to build it in the end, provided that it was also available to the community, for the community and people like us to come and use the building. So they didn't just build it for themselves. They built it as a service for the wider community. And we came and asked them if we could use it, they really opened their doors wide open for us to use it. I feel grateful for the friends because in the years that we've been here, in a kind of by osmosis, kind of without any You know, even without even talking to many of the friends, I feel like I've picked up some of the spiritual sensibilities or understandings or values of the friends. For me, I think that the This room is not necessarily ostentatious room, I think it's kind of simplicity to this room that makes it has made it very easy for many people to come and join our group. I don't know how it is, or any of you feel that way also, but I've had people tell me that coming in here, it was so easy, almost anywhere else to go where there's a group of people meeting on a weekday evening, you know, they're a little bit intimidating, or something's asked of them and expected of them. And here it somehow is building lends itself people to kind of come in, and it's kind of kind of friendly, it's kind of simpler. And so somehow the friends created this building space. That worked really well for us in a simplistic practice that we have, that we're hopefully about. I'm very inspired by the volunteer nature of the Quakers here in Palo Alto, that they feel a tremendous sense of responsibility. Many of them, I think, to the wider community, and also, I think, to their own community. So the whole thing here is run on a volunteer basis. And it's one of the things that I aspire for, for our own organization, that as we move to Redwood City, and as we grow it, we can continue being actually a very simple in some ways, a very simple organization. Simple in the sense that people who come into the door would not know whenever they wouldn't be burdened or not be troubled by a sense of obligation or sense of needing to join or belong or that anything's really asked to them, that they've come here and they can just come here and find a refuge for meditation for mindfulness Buddhists. Spirituality

in a very open ended way than anything asked to them in return. And I'm very inspired by the fact that we've managed to acquire this building Redwood City, in a process that I believe has been very clean. I don't think we've been pushing I don't think we've been demanding or I don't think we've asked anyone to do anything they didn't want to do. But people have come forward out of their own generosity, their own inspiration, their own desires to to be of service. And somehow the collection role people have done that. We've managed to kind of manifest this amazing thing in Redwood City. amazing thing here in Palo Alto for all these years, and now in Redwood City. To me, it's like a shining light, that, that there is an organization like us that we're stuck with. There's a kind of simplicity built into it, and the generosity and inspiration, non obligation seems to be hopefully, hopefully, hopefully is really a hallmark of who we are. I'm hoping that as we take root in Redwood City in our own center, that we become a little bit of a model or an inspiration for other groups around the country. There are many other be passionate groups like us, who are a couple of years behind us. And they're making kind of growing and growing and growing. And now they're beginning to think about Oh, it'd be nice to have a center, just like we did some years ago. And they're all kind of calling me these days. They want to talk to me, who knows what happened? How'd you do it down there. And, and I started telling them a little bit of how it how it function, you know, how it worked here, and they're just blown away by how clean this process has been, and how how relaxed it was, I think it was fairly relaxed, I believe, for the most part. In the wild, when we have some discussion, you can, you can certainly welcome to counter with my view

on this.

And some of them have actually already been inspired by the model and what we've done here, just one place that I've been talking to whether they've already hired a halftime person to kind of help with administrate the organization. And they found out that we don't have anyone on paid salary here. And they said, oh, maybe we have to rethink this. Maybe there's something spiritually significant, like a community that takes responsibility for itself, but without any sense of obligation from anyone. So I find myself very grateful to this community of ours. I've been now involved in this mid Peninsula in St. Meditation Center community for over 11 years and I had no idea 1990 that I would be around this long in this community. I had no I wasn't planning on it. That's for sure. I had no plans to stay. I just came to go to school at Stanford. Now let me get my degree and leave and go somewhere else. I was gonna go up and live in their spirit rock and, and, you know, I had no plans of being here. But the commitment and the maturity and the love and the dedication of all of you are the people who came here over the seven years, was very inspiring to me and became something that I felt a tremendous love to be part of tremendous inspiration to be part of and very grateful to be part of it. There's a wonderful reciprocal relationship between anybody who's in kind of teacher role and people who are receiving the teachings and then reciprocal role has been very obvious for me and this for me, because when I started in 1990, I was a

a

teacher in training. So I wasn't a regular teacher, right? I was just the teacher in training, just beginning the training. And so my growth as a teacher, happened together with the growth of this community. So I was very aware that that's the way it wasn't. So it wasn't so clear, you know, where the cause and effect was, you know, where the community grew and therefore I could grow or did I grow and then the for the community could grow. They kind of went back and forth. And I felt very much that part of who I was becoming as a teacher I was being developed and trained, was one of the people who sat in this room and received the teachings and helped shape me as a teacher. I feel that for me, part of my desire to be part of this community here Been that I feel I felt it's very significant place for me personally, to be practicing. Some people think of a teacher as someone who just gives teachings and you guys have to practice you know, and I just dispense, you know, whatever the wisdom, whatever the foolishness or whatever

goes on and

and sometimes it is true sometimes it's really easy to be a teacher is phenomenally easy because all you have to do is it's kind of like, it's as easy as being a teacher as being the menu writer for a restaurant. You know, you write the menu and people come and read the menu, it's up to you, which would you choose to eat? And then you have to eat the food. And you have to cook it maybe it's like a cookbook writer. I don't know but it works very well. But the point being, that, you know, I, I can say various things, but the Dharma the preciousness of the Dharma Does not reside in the words that are spoken, that resides in the lives of the people who put it into practice. And so any words of wisdom you read off a page or you hear from a teacher are only wise in their having some wise impact in your lives. They're not wise in themselves. So what's really hard is the debt is that the making the practice person. So in that sense, being a teacher is easy, because I tell you what, you know, tell you what the teachings are, and you guys have to do it. I can't do it for you. But there's another perspective. And that is I'm also a practitioner of this, this practice of Buddhist practice. And so even though I'm in the role of a teacher, I'm very cognizant that I'm practicing with everyone in this community. And there are times where I felt very uncomfortable, by the way that our arrangement was set up here in our tradition. We're all of your sitting facing me. And now I'm even more comfy once we've got this planet. form from now sitting higher than many of you, it didn't, you know, remember I was resistant to that. And because what I wanted to be in the center of our community was not a teacher. But what I want in the sense of our community is the Dharma or the practice. And that's something we all share, that I have the same kind of important relationship to the Dharma as my teacher is for you the Dharma or the practice, is your teacher also, that's the real teacher. So for me, I'm very grateful that this has been become a community for me to practice within. And is one of the reasons why I've stayed is not just because of the dedication I felt from all of you, but also because I felt it was a very valid and very significant place for me to practice for myself,

So I think you're most of you know that one of the central teachings of Buddhism is the teachings on impermanence and impermanence has different aspects to it. There's certainly the loss when things go away. But the other half of the equation is that impermanence also allows the possibility of something new to arise and allows for a tremendous variety of impermanence has built in built into it, a lot of potential. And so whereas I feel a certain sadness about leaving this place has been so central for us for all these years. And some, occasionally some trepidation about what the military was silly means for us as a community. I also am very cognizant that it's the change the change this marks now opens up a wide realm of potential And I feel the potential the potential is just immense, maybe infinite. And I'm really curious to see what we do with that potential. I'm very curious to see what bubbles up what arises in the space. And since it's created by this change. So far, I feel that we've been I've been very surprised what's happened so far. So I'm looking forward to being surprised again, in the new place. And I hope that all of you help us all surprise each other. And in letting the Dharma the practice, take the lead, and for the Dharma then to provide us with the wonderful gifts that it gives us. And those gifts are something that where we can continue feeling grateful. down through the years. I would like to believe that there's no real spiritual practice in the long term, without some sense of gratitude without some sense of feeling that life that the sacredness of life is a gift that we all partake in the part of what mindfulness allows us to do is to relax enough be present enough for life as it's lived, that we can sense that part of life, which is a gift

and therefore feel grateful.

So those are my thoughts on this closing evening. And now a fair amount of time left over before nine o'clock. It's your turn. Would you like to say any questions or comments,

your own

feelings about this moment? Yes, end of one era and beginning of another

A teacher that my wife and I sat on her for a while, I thought was very perfect.

The one time and egocentric emotion is gratitude.

Thank you. If you're too egotistical, you won't feel grateful.

There's no space for it.

I want to say, as part of this community,

how valuable it has been for me to have this yet but the Sangha and the Dharma that flows into it, but specifically now I'm feeling grateful to you as the embodiment

of a respectful teacher that seems to know the way to guide us

dispensing dynamize appropriately. Thank you.

Thank you.

Quick, grateful that

I found this book.

Yes. I'm grateful that that this space was here, non judgmental and very open for people of many different backgrounds to come and find some wisdom and some peace. And so as a member of St. Mark's church,

we are very grateful for the space and the reciprocal

relationship that's been between the two I didn't know you were part of St. Mark's, or maybe told me I forgot. I see. So this is another place I feel grateful because we're leaving St. Mark's Thank you.

We were meditating on the word gratitude. One of the things that I noticed for myself was that sometimes when I'm feeling gratitude there's also this feeling of either doing it because I want to encourage letter of unfailing gratitude for to continue or to at least sort of have the energy continue along. And so now put that in in the context of ending our relationship here and moving around the city and started wondering Okay, so

this You know,

what are some of the things we could do

to

provide space for other groups? Or is there something we could do for the friends to make it easier for them to provide space for groups are gone.

now have the answers to any of their

great concerns. So one of the things I mentioned last week, I was wanting to do some kind of gesture of thankfulness to the friends who have these years here, I thought, some kind of gift or something.

And so I asked a couple of the friends what we would if they had any suggestions, what might be an appropriate thing. And one person couldn't you didn't have anything to say that. Think about it. But the other person had to kind of very immediate response and one was was a donation to The Urban Urban Ministries. And so it's wonderful, and it's selfish and it wasn't for themselves, but it's very much in the spirit, I feel that what the friends are about being a service organization. And the best thing we could do for them was continue in the same spirit. And so that's what we're going to do. And so if we're going to give from our community, a donation of \$1,000, to the urban ministry, in the name of the friends, and the dāna baskets was in the back of this room to that tonight, if you want to participate in that little you know, making a donation to the urban ministry, as a thanks to the friends. You can just put a little put more money in the dāna basket, in the Sangha basket, the rent basket, and we'll just use that towards the gift. The second thing that they said when he said almost you know, without missing a beat was he said, Oh, just make sure that your place is open for the year community over in Redwood City. Do the same to same For other people that you know, and

so

I've tried for a little while I toyed with the idea of naming our center in Redwood City Mita in like really sounded so much but it'd be but, but the meaning of it was it means friend in Pali and, and there's a lot of connotations with having with the word friend, but one of them of course, is the friends. And I like the fact that if we had a name like that, they would within perpetually tie us in some way to the friends and I would like to continue for myself at least, I use the friends spirituality, the friends as a reference for you know, the spirituality of our group in some ways.

So

Being grateful to the friends

who comes in and out of the sadhna. I'm very grateful because I know that there's a lot of work done by a lot of people and want to thank everybody who has

participated in this. I think it's wonderful.

Very grateful for

everything that everybody's done.

It's really I'm kind of in awe of how much people have done. Just do you know, it's been phenomenal. It probably if we knew how much you know, if we'd known, you know, ahead of time if I'd known ahead of time what it was gonna take. I would say we can't do that impossible. And, but I was naive. I didn't

you know, either. And if I'd really been pressed it's been a lot of thought a lot of hours by a lot of people and,

and and,

and the best part of it is, it seems to this done with real joy and inspiration. They're just wonderful work parties over there at the new place and few times I've gone by when they've been working, it's it's the spirit of joy and inspiration has been inspiring to me.

So let's let the homeless come in. So they can get out of the cold and get their meal.

And I want to just

express it once again, my tremendous gratitude and thanks

to all of you and I look forward to seeing you

in Redwood City. Thank you