

2002-05-05: Assumptions - Faith

Fri, 6/26 12:41PM • 32:49

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddha, faith, true, teacher, teachings, view, people, buddhism, student, investigates, truth, memorize, person, greed, brahman, belief system, practice, oral tradition, engage, peace

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, last week I talked about assumptions. And I said I would continue to talk this week. And assumptions, belief systems, what we do when people take on faith, whether you can know as being really authoritative or authoritative Lee true. And in this is an important issue, I think for many people involved in spiritual religious practices and paths because there's often a creed or belief system, or set that is fundamental to being engaged to believing it or being involved. And how does that work in Buddhism? Is there a creed in Buddhism? Is there faith, there's something you have to assume on basic assumptions in Buddhism or basic articles of faith that you're supposed to buy into. And I believe that Buddhism has a little different approach to this issue of beliefs and philosophy and articles of faith. Then some other religious traditions. And so I think it's interesting, it's different. It's interesting to see that difference. And notice what's unique. And for the most part, I think Buddhism, especially the teachings of the Buddha, tends to be very nuanced or very sophisticated are very critical of the human tendency to believe things. So much so that when the word for dictate the word for belief, or view, the word is dipti, is used without a qualifier in front of it, that the word deity believes means wrong view. To have a view to have a just you're just taking kind of automatically saying it's wrong or sometimes he's off about it. And it's only right if it says if it says some deity right view. And so what is right view, you know, and who are these Buddhists to claim they have the right to use You know, what, how are they going to manage that? And there's a very beautiful texts or teachings by the Buddha, some scholars feelers, among the oldest teachings of Buddhism or the Buddha, kind of and in the suit Tony pata. And it says this, those who stick to their own views, and argue that this alone is true, either bring blame upon themselves or obtain praise. Obtaining praise is a trifling thing, and not enough to bring tranquility. realizing this one should not dispute but rather see the peaceful state we're in there is no dispute. Those who are upright and you have investigated the various teachings, relying either on others your own views, not seeing one doctrine is better than another. They have gone Beyond disputes, having understood those who are upright, do not rely on imagination, views or intellectual knowledge, knowing the many types of opinions, they are even minded toward them all saying, others may take them up if they desire. The Whys have nothing to do with doctrines based on what has been

thought out, seen or heard from others. They've set down their burden and are free, neither attached their craving for anything. So what does that do to most philosophies and religious points of view? It kind of takes the rug from underneath a lot of things. In fact, it takes a rug so far away, it says, a carrot claim as someone who wants to become peaceful. And that's one of the goals and early Buddhism is to become someone who's at peace with the world has attained a peaceful state. You wouldn't be involved in disputes about philosophy and views and religious doctrines and what's right and wrong. But rather would see the peaceful state we're in there is no dispute. So is there some point of view is there some way of being in the world in that state, the person would not be inclined to be disputing with anybody else being arguing with people or feeling threatened with other points of view, or feeling a need to impose your point of view on someone else. In the last days of the Buddha's life, the Buddha didn't mind is made a remarkable statement where he was going to review a summarize what he had discovered. Here he was, you know, at least nowadays very famous religious teacher. And what he has a teacher's religious teacher interests people interest us still to this day.

And so he's going to summarize what it is he discovered what's unique about his spiritual discovery. spiritual teachings. And he said, If I can find it,

I'll summarize it. Then he said, that

what I have discovered and proclaimed, should be thoroughly learned by you practice developed and cultivated, so that this holy life may endure for a long time. It may be for the benefit and happiness of many people, and out of compassion for the world for the benefit and happiness of the gods and humans. And what are these matters that I discovered and proclaimed they are the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four roads to power, the five spiritual faculties, the five mental powers, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path. So that's a long list of things. So it's kind of maybe dizzying to hear all that. But these are a very famous list called the 37 wings of awakening. And what's unique about this is when he claims This is what I discovered, what I proclaimed, in summary, is not claiming a belief, a metaphysical claim. This is true, this is the true nature of reality. This is true nature of the self. This is true nature of God. This is it's not a belief system. I'm not saying this is what I you know, this is the true view. What he's pointing to saying what I discovered was unique to me and what I've been proclaiming all these years as a teacher, our particular practices and particular states of mind or qualities of mind that arise when Do these practices. So the four foundations of mindfulness is the practice of mindfulness that we do here. And the others are the either practices or qualities that get developed as you practice. So that's, that's, you know, those practices and inner qualities, inner states, that what the Buddha points at. Some people nowadays, like to distinguish between spirituality and religion. And a lot of people like to say I'm spiritual, not religious, and what seems to hold, what you seem to be saying is, they're not so much interested also in the belief systems, as they are the inner cultivation of certain states of compassion, of peace, of, of love of generosity of, you know, it's not about beliefs. It's about who you become how you are in the world. And so maybe the Buddha is saying something similar there. So he's not talking.

So the Buddha wasn't pointing towards a belief or creed. He's talking about a practice you engage in and this in cultivation engage so in the quote, it says, He tells me we should learn these things. So involve some learning of something. But the main thing he says, You should practice, develop and cultivate these things. So it's an activity that we engage in, not a belief system, we study and try to master and we cultivate ourselves in some way we change ourselves. However, in focusing on this, the Buddha, in his teachings, the Buddha also spent a fair amount of time addressing this issue of beliefs head on, and views. And sometimes he was very challenging to others, teachers and spiritual people of his times challenging them for how could you believe what you believe? What's the basis for that belief system? And, you know, maybe it was a little bit kind of rebellious kind of guy or contentious kind of guy or, you know, I don't know what you know how we want to think about the Buddha but he would go around The human encounter these different people he would challenge them, how could you know they're their challenge him and he'd responded back. So I wanted to read one of these accounts. And here's a man that came to the Buddha and he was little bit wanting to challenge the Buddha. And so, this is what he asked the Buddha, he said.

So this Brahman he was a student Brahman Brahman student. car, but deca came to the Buddha and said, mastered Gotama Gotama was the family name of the Buddha Master Gautama in regard to the ancient demonic hymns that have come down through oral transmission and in the scriptural collections, the Brahmins come to the definite conclusion. Only this is true. Anything else is wrong? What does the master Gautama say about this? So many religious traditions have books and scriptures and said, this is a true scripture and kind that's kind of one of the definitions of fundamentalism, when you really believe everything's little literary true in your particular scripture. And there's Buddhist fundamentalists and Hindu fundamentalists and there's Christian and you're everywhere every religion has the fundamentalists, who believe this only this is true. And so what does Buddha say about this? He asks. And the Buddha replies, how then, among the Brahmins, Is there even a single Brahman nowadays and that time who says the following I know this I see this only this is true anything else is wrong. So, a lot of Brahmins are saying this is true. And the Buddha is not asking, does anybody know this to be true for themselves? Have they seen this to be true for themselves? And the Brahmin students says, Oh, no, no, nobody no nowadays actually seen this and knows this for themselves. And then the Buddha asks, well, then, among the Brahmins, Is there even a single teacher or a single teachers teacher back to the seventh generation of teachers, who says this, I know this, I see this only this is true, anything else is wrong. And the Brahmin students says, No. No one actually says I seen this and know this for myself. How then Well, then, students, the ancient Brahmin seers, the creators of the hymns, the composers of the hymns, whose ancient hymns That were formally chanted, uttered and compiled. The Brahmins nowadays would still chant and repeat, repeating what was spoken, recited and reciting what was recited that even these ancient Brahmin seers, say we know this, we see this only this is true anything else is wrong. Brahman student says no. Maybe you can imagine maybe how Brahman students feeling at this point. So, with a continued, it seems that among the Brahmins, there is not even a single Brahman who says, I know this, I see this only this is true, anything else is wrong. And among them, he goes over these different categories and repeats all that. And then he says so Oh, yeah.

Buddha says, so suppose there were a file of blind men, each in touch with the next. The first one does not see the middle one does not see and the last one does not see. So to in regard to their statement, that Brahman seemed to be like a file of blind men. The first one does not see the middle one does not see and the last one does not see. What do you think that being so does not the faith of the Brahmins turn out to be groundless? Follow that. Boy, I mean, this is the guy who said you shouldn't dispute anything, you know, but he's, you know, some guy came in ask them so he's telling him, you know, challenging him. So, then this the Brahmin student says the Brahmins honor this not only out of faith, they honor it as oral tradition. They don't they don't have faith. This is true, but they honor it because it's the tradition for many generations. Then the Buddha says first You took your stand on faith. Now you speak of oral tradition, there are five things that may turn out in two different ways here now. So five things might turn out different in how you think they might be. What five, faith, approval, oral tradition, reasoned argument, and reflective acceptance of a view. These five things may turn out in two different ways. Now, something may be fully accepted out of faith, yet it may be empty, hollow and false. And something else may or may not be fully accepted out of faith. Yet it may be factual, true and unmistakable and he goes through the others. The same same thing can be true there. They can be either true or not true whether you believe in them or not believe in them, doesn't establish them as being true. Belief in itself doesn't establish something as being true.

Under these conditions, it is not proper for a wise person who preserves truth, to come to a definite conclusion. Only this is true, anything else is wrong. And the student asks, How does one preserve the truth? We asked the Buddha about the preservation of truth. So it's a reasonable question and he's really interested in knowing what's true. And how do you preserve the truth? How do you say what's true? How do you make a true statement? If things based on faith on approval on tradition can't be taken as being fundamentally true, how do you how do you know what is true? I can make a true statement. And the Buddha This is very interesting, what the Buddha says now and reply. If a person has faith, so the Buddha is not criticizing faith in and of itself, but he says, the person has faith. He or she preserves truth by saying my Faith is thus. But he does not yet come to the definite conclusion only this is true, anything else is wrong. In this way, there's the preservation of truth. In this way he or she preserves the truth. If a person approves of something, if he receives an oral tradition, if he or she reaches a conclusion based on reasoned argument, if he or she gains a reflective acceptance of a view, he or she preserves truth by saying, My reflective acceptance of the view is thus the oral tradition is thus my I approve of this as such a way so it doesn't say this is true that I approve this. I think it's a good idea. It feels right to me. But he doesn't say this is true by saying that the person preserves the truth. So then the Brahmin goes further. So it's interesting you reading all this and sometimes I don't know when I'm reading whether I have people's attention. Okay. Now all of you, you know, worry, you know, in this way the Brahman Brahman student says in this way there's the preservation of truth. In that way one preserves the truth. But in what way, Master Gautama. Is there the discovery of truth? In what way does one discover truth. So now that we've explained how you snake as true statement, and now, Brian wants to go further and just knowing how to make a true statement must say, How do I know what's really true? How do we discover the truth? And the Buddha

has replied, he says so a householder or household their son or daughter goes to a teacher, to a monk or nun, and investigates that monastic in regard to three kinds of states. So you go to a teacher and you check out the teacher, that's the first thing you should do. So it doesn't say, you know, go off in the forest by yourself and discover the truth by yourself. There is some feeling in Buddhism, that's really helpful to go find otherwise people and you can't really be sure whether they're wise first, but you, you know, they put out their shingle and say, you know, Insight Meditation Center and, and so, you know, you kind of think, well, I'll go there rather than going, you know, into Safeway or something, and, and, you know, probably a little better, you know, chances of my chances of finding someone who's wise a little bit better than baby maybe who knows. So you're gonna find out find a teacher. And you investigate that teacher in regard to three states, three states in regard to states based on greed and regard to states based on hate, in regard to states based on delusion are there in this venerable one, any states based on greed such that with his mind obsessed by those states, while not knowing he might say, I know, we're not seeing, he might say, I see, we might urge others to act in a way that would lead him to their harm and suffering for a long time. So he's check out the teacher and say that person can be influenced by greed, or by hate or by delusion, or what they're going to say going to become How might if you find the person's has filled with greed or hate, will, maybe their teachings will be tainted by that, or maybe they'll how their involvement with you be tainted by their greed, it might actually lead you to states of harm might be harmful for you. And we have lots of examples of spiritual teachers who have harmed their students because of their greed or their hate or whatever. So it's a reasonable thing to ask and so then,

so are there in this event in this venerable teacher, any states based on greed or hate. So that while while not knowing that he says, I know that he's a claim something he doesn't know, or she doesn't know, influenced by greed or hate

as he investigates

and he was also supposed to check out the bodily behavior and the verbal behavior of this teacher, so he supposed to see are the interstates of greater hate. And then he's put a check. This is the speech and the behavior of that teacher conform. also influenced by hate to delusion or greed. Check out today They call in the Buddhist party is supposed to check out the teacher, investigate the teacher, find out what's going on. And no different sutra says you should hang out for a long time. Because you don't really know the state of a teacher until you hang out for a long time with that person. Check it out. So of course now This is making me very uncomfortable as I read this, you can imagine. But that's what it says when he was investigating when he or she was investigating that teacher and has seen that he or she is purified from states based on greed. The student next investigates the teacher in regard to states based on data that's basically the same to then based on delusion. So you really investigate these things. Body speech in mind. When the student is thoroughly investigated the teacher then the student places faith in the teacher so this is there is a role for faith in Buddhism. But it's not, not a blind faith, there has to be some checking out of the system, the situation, some faith or

some confidence or some trust in the teacher. And I think all of you to some degree, have some confidence and trust and faith. Otherwise you wouldn't be sitting here you wouldn't have come today to listen to me you would have left early or something or left in the middle or something. Or maybe you're very polite. And, but you know, some modicum of faith, faith in our society is built on that kind of faith you don't go to you don't take a you know, you take a University Extension class at Stanford or somewhere, you have some faith that Stanford has chosen a worthwhile teacher to be your instructor. And then before the class starts, the instructions are to go out and buy this textbook for \$150. And, you know, you realize that's kind of a lot but you have some faith, this teacher knows what he or she is doing because, you know, and you might find out your faith was misplaced, but but hopefully not then. You know, unless you have some faith, you wouldn't be able to operate and get along with things. So you have to have, you know, some initial faith in order to make any efforts at all. So, but you know, in terms of a spiritual teacher, you place faith in the teacher once you've checked them out. But faith is an important quality once. So you play. So the student places faith in the teacher, filled with faith, the student visits him or her and pays respect. That's interesting. They pay respect first. So an act of respect that's kind of doesn't normally in English culture with American culture, we don't think of offering a lot of respect. And they certainly not in the way that they do in India. I know we've had a few Indian people from India Come and sit with us. And they feel very uncomfortable, I guess kind of, you know, they see me as kind of, you know, the teacher and they see all of you and the way you relate to me. And this is not how it's supposed to be done in roughly the middle of us, interrupt me in the middle of talk, or some people sit here and they point their feet towards me. And, you know, they call me Gil. And you know, it just I like it that way. You know, if you cheat, you know, I don't want you to, you know, do differently. But, but it's a very different sense of respect, but they have some kind of respect is necessary, not for the sake of the teacher. But I think the suggestion is certain level respect is necessary, so that you're willing to take in the teachings you were willing to hear and listen, some kind of respect. Then having offered some respect, the student gives ear listens and those hears the Dharma, then you heard the Dharma. Listen to this, the person memorizes the teaching memorizes the Dharma. Now this was composed or spoken at a time when people didn't have books. It was an oral culture and if you wanted to engage and hold the Reflect on the teachings you had to memorize it. It's very powerful and effective thing to do to memorize the teachings. And for the people in this concentration class on Wednesdays, there are some more of the methods on the table by the donut basket. You're supposed to memorize this. And those of you not in the class, you might want to memorize it. Also, it's a really good thing to very helpful part of Dharma practice to do a little bit of memorization, just do it to your ability at least. So memorizes maybe in our days, that you know you by the teachers book.

And then having memorized it, one examines the meaning of the teachings. I mean, you're supposed to engage in the teachings, think about them, reflect on them, talk to other people have discussion groups, and really, you know, really don't just take it on faith or blindly, but really engage yourself in an intelligent way with what you've read and what you've heard what you've memorized and reflect on it. Think about it. Once you've examined it, then the person obtains reflective acceptance, reflective acceptance, I understand to mean, you kind of take it on faith that these teachings might be useful or

valid. So you don't take it automatically as being true. But after thinking about oh, this makes some sense to me. I think I'll accept this provisionally.

When he has gained reflective acceptance, provisional acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up, the word is chunda. For those of you who were here yesterday, enthusiasm for the practice desire to act desire to put it into practice arises, and without some desire to put the teachings into practice, there is no path. So after the reflective acceptance, then zeal or enthusiasm for putting into practice arises. Let's do this. Let's try it out Wednesday. has sprung up, the student applies his or her will. Applying his or her His Will he scrutinizes i think is scrutinized is not a good translation. I think it means embed investigates when it applies investigation, to one's practice into the teachings and to what what one was doing. Having applied investigation, one strives when applied themselves really thoroughly. By striving, the person realizes with the body with one's own body, the ultimate truth and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom. So, the whole sequence here, you know, you don't have to follow necessarily a sequence this way rituals are quite wise and beautiful kind of idea of how a person engages as a starting off as a raw beginner to becoming an adept to penetrating the truth and realize the truth for themselves. whole sequence of how to find your way. And listen reading this, it seems to me like a very wise way very safe way. It doesn't require believing something on blind faith. This is this is true. You take something's being provisionally true. At first you say, I have faith that this is true. That's a true statement. You don't know whether it's true yet. But then you put it into practice, you practice and through the practice, at some point, you penetrate the truth with your own body with your own eyes and your own mind, and you can experience yourself. In this way, there is a discovery of truth in that way, in that way, when discovers the truth. Now, what is the truth in this Buddhist tradition? is it then that you understand the true nature of reality, the true nature of the self, the true nature of the cosmos, true nature of God for the environment, my understanding of what the Buddha had to teach Excuse me. The, again what he's pointing to as being the ultimate truth is not a truth like a philosophical belief, but the truth of a possibility of being released from our suffering, being released from our clinging, we hold on to what we will we will we hold fast to what we resist with that the core is the core freedom. The core truth of the Buddhist tradition, is the sheer release of the heart, the heart which is totally unbound and unrestricted. That is not limited by the shackles of fear of hate of greed, of clinging to identity, needing to be someone for somebody. It's a truth is an experience of release. The hearts release. It's not the truth that now I know this to be true. once and for all. It's been You know, you know for sure is I know there's been released. It isn't that you know a philosophy about the philosophy. And that is a little bit disorienting for some people who feel the need to have a particular philosophy or a particular view about the nature of life, the meaning of life, the purpose of life, in order to feel secure in life to be happy and peaceful. And the Buddha suggesting that there's another path to peace, and that is not through understanding nature of reality, but rather it's through releasing the holding and clinging inside of us. So I'll end with this quote, by Thomas Merton. He visited Sri Lanka and he wrote this in his journal. The path dips down to the Buddhist temple a while Quiet hollow surrounded with trees, a low out a low outcrop of rock with a cave cut into it. And beside the cave, a big seated Buddha. On the left, a reclining Buddha on the right. I'm able to approach the Buddha's barefoot and undisturbed my feet in wet grass wet sand.

Then the silence of the extraordinary faces, the great smiles, huge and yet subtle, filled with every possibility, questioning nothing, knowing everything, rejecting nothing to peace, not of emotional resignation, but of emptiness that has seen through every question without trying to discredit anyone or anything Without refutation without establishing some other argument. For the doctrinaire, the minded needs well established positions, such peace, such silence can be frightening. I was knocked over with a rush of relief and thankfulness at the obvious clarity of the figures, that clarity and fluidity of shape and line the design of the monumental bodies composed into the rock, shape and landscape, figure, rock and tree. So may each of you discover the truth of the Buddha and the possibility of being a peace without any reputation. Thank you