

2002-05-13: Love and Faith

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, so this month, as many of you know, I'm teaching this class on Wednesday evenings on concentration, Introduction to concentration to Samadhi. And, and I've talked a fair amount in different times this month about why. so forth about the Samadhi concentration class. And today and coming down here to speak and thinking what I might talk about thinking how you know, incense today, I also decided to devote the whole month around this Wednesday class. And then Mondays and Sunday talks that I give to be about concentration, as opposed to more mindfulness talks. And I wasn't expecting to come today. And so today was kind of free day. So here we have opportunities to talk about this. In a way I wouldn't have otherwise what would I talk about? And I'm not sure I could have some incoherent to say maybe I never do, but But because what I want to convey or talk about is maybe something very personal, or inspired by something personal for me. And that is that concentration practice is supported or inspired or fueled, can be fueled or inspired by love, and by faith. And the sense that when we sit down to meditate, sit down to practice concentration or mindfulness, that it can be seen as an act of love, or an experience of love or a connection with love and connection with faith, and his faith and faith and love separate from each other. Are they connected somehow? Are they are they somehow what what's what's the connection between faith and love? In my own life, I think of faith and love as being very much connected. Because what I have faith in is often what I love and where I There's some kind of relationship for me between those two. Classically, there are many teachings about meditation in the suttas and elsewhere in Buddhism made it some of the teachings or the teachings that support those factors as qualities of practices that support meditation practice. And one of these lists that support meditation practice is called the five faculties. And these five faculties are five, mental, mental aspects of the mind or the psyche, that can be developed get developed as we meditate. And I think of these five fact faculties as being the grammar of meditation, that is the organizing of these five faculties into a kind of a sentence into a syntax or into into a balance classically, that supports the meditation practice over time and lets it go, mature in a very deep way. And these five are faith effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom or

insight. And then it's sometimes said these five, exist in balance with each other. And part of the job of meditation practitioner and also the teacher is to somehow track these five, to see are they balanced with each other. Because many times people come in balanced and then the meditation doesn't proceed in a smooth way. So on either end, you imagine kind of, maybe a triangle with mindfulness in the top and then the base there would be, neither corner would be faith and wisdom. And faith and wisdom are said to be existing and balanced with each other in relationship to each other need to be balanced. You can't if you have too much faith or too much wisdom, things don't go well. And then a little bit further up the triangle closer to the peak than his efforts. And in concentration, and those two have to be balanced. If you're too calm get too concentrated, then the mind becomes dull or sleepy, he doesn't really become sharp enough to do the work. If it's too much energy in the practice, then it tends to lend itself to becoming agitated or restless. The imbalance balancing these things it isn't that you're supposed to kind of tune one of them down necessarily have less concentration or less energy supposed to tune up the one that's lacking. So we actually have a very high pitch a very vital energy as the meditation practices develops together with a very high pitch of, of calm, relaxed concentration. So the concentration practice concentration state or concentration factor is something which actually very vital and dynamic. It doesn't it's not something which is you know, just, you know, soporific

and the image I've been using, I hope you didn't use it. Last time. I talked to you here but I think it's Sunday and Wednesday class. is the image of a candle flame. And concentration is a balance of concentration and an energy is when the candle flame is on flickering. And if the candle flame is flickering around, it's unstable then, you know, it's not just on stilts that's peaceful in a concentrated but when it's really still the candle flame, you can't say the candle flame is lazy or dynamic. It's a very dynamic event the candle flame is burning and active and vital and it's still you know, within the within the flame itself as you know, probably a lot of movement have, but it's very dynamic. Same thing within meditation, the mind becomes very still a concentrated mind needs to be balanced with certain kind of vitality, where it's still very dynamic, very alert. So it's tremendous stillness and peace of tremendous concentration, together with a very dynamic quality and on top of the triangle is mindfulness and it said mindfulness never never needs you could ever have too much mindfulness. So it doesn't need to be balanced by anything. Just mindfulness, you can go all the way back to the base of this pyramid then would be faith and insight, faith and wisdom. If you have too much wisdom, too much understanding or too much insight, it can lend itself to being an intellectual approach to dharma. It's all about ideas and thoughts, and about understanding and getting the right understanding and holding the right understanding. And it can be kind of dry. If there's too much faith, then it can be blind faith, and a person does things foolishly. It can lend itself to being overly devotional, with a sense of devotion, it kind of so gushing, that the person never gets around to meditate, never gets around to understanding what's really life about but it's so things that you know, Buddhism or practice with a teacher, so wonderful, that they're discriminating powers of Intel. intends to reflect, understand what's going on for themselves falls away. You need to have the ability to be intelligent and involved in your practice using your powers of discrimination, clear seeing, together with a faith, kind of an active and perhaps a little more passive quality maybe. But the faith part is very important. And that's coming to kind of trying to narrow in to this topic I want to talk about tonight, faith and love and faith. Over and

over again, is talked about as being a very important, very helpful quality for Buddhist practice from mindfulness practice, meditation practice, concentration practice. And I don't know if you know, every different people have different levels of faith, and different people have different relationships to faith. And some people are versiv to the word and some people are, you know, are you know, very strong Faith, disposition towards faith and so they're filled with faith, you know, drop a drop of a backdrop of a drop of a penny or whatever. They just, you know, filled with faith and ready to kind of do things blindly. Now, I want to start by saying of pointing out how useful faith is for meditation practice. Because if you sit down to meditate, or you do any spiritual practice, the way that you relate to that practice affects how you engage with it, how you throw yourself into it, how much effort you put into it. If you sit down with a certain amount of faith that this is you know, a lot of faith that this is really a great thing. Then you sit down you really happy to be there. And you really is the faith is really strong. If you are this is really known as it I'm happy to be here. This is really maybe the most important thing or very important thing for me to do right now. And so the mind then is is directed to be present to be here with a practice. If there is not a very, very a lot of faith in what you're doing a lot of doubt or a lot of hesitancy or just, you know, you've you've, you've read a book and the book says, it's a good thing for you to do. And your mother tells you, it's a good thing to do. And you know, but you don't really have any faith in it. Then you sit down to meditate, the mind is not going to be so interested in being devoted to the practice, and it's going to be, go in the directions of those things. It has much more faith than thinking about dinner or thinking about, you know, relationships are thinking about work or thinking about whatever it might be. And it's, it's very hard to get the mind concentrated. If there's no faith in the value of meditation or concentration practice what we're doing.

Faith is in part brings the emotional aspect interplay with a spiritual practice. And I think it's very important to think of it as a spiritual practice Buddhist practice, to have an emotional element to it. And the faith is the emotional element. The Wisdom is more than intellectual, perhaps, aspect. But then emotional aspect. And I know for me and for a number of people I've known over the years, there's a feeling that the emotional part of our emotional part of who we are, maybe it's not supposed to come play a part or be a support to the practice itself. But there's nothing wrong with it or emotion in principle about emotions in general. There's nothing inherently distracting about it. Certainly McKenzie says more carefully, emotions can be very, very helpful and perhaps a essential element of the Buddhist path. So we want to cultivate certain emotions and how those emotions portas in our life. Now, emotions, some emotions have the function of concentrating the mind. If we're afraid, there's a lot of fear, the mind tends to be concentrated very well on the tiger that's approaching or, you know, the impending taxes or whatever, you know, you, you know, the threat that's out there. So people you know, we'll select that and we're concentrated to select out of the environment, certain things, because that is mood or this emotion of fear that's operating. If you're angry anger also has a quality of concentrating the mind concentrating the focus of attention. And that kind of concentration both fear and anger tends to filter or color or be selective, but what gets picked up what you see. If you love also incense concentrates the incense Where you can only see that the good things the wonderful things about the person who are in love with it kind of you know, makes us put the rosy glasses on. Anger makes us put the kind of dark glasses over everything. But it's Alexa selects it was selected

concentrates the attention to some degree. I used to be very concentrated in I remember my French class in high school, very concentrated. For that for this woman who was across the across the way it mimics classroom use out of the classroom. I spent probably six months focused in French class on her and I didn't learn much French but certainly we you know, was focused. So when there's faith faith is an emotional aspect that helps concentrate the mind when it's doing. So when I went to this the story I've often told when you know when I went to Burma Practice there with other Westerners and Americans. One of the things we noticed was that the Burmese would get enlightened much faster than they were Americans. They really get into really deep practice. And the Burmese which comes into habit, they have a month that come into their busy lives, they do a monthly meditation practice and attain the first level of enlightenment in that tradition. And you know, we'd be there, one month, two months, three months, five months, you know, looking at these Burmese coming and going, you know, why just so easy for them, you know, we're still slugging away. And, and the difference, one of the differences it has to do with the element of faith that when the Burmese came to sit and meditate, it was like kind of it was really deeply embedded in their culture and their psyche and their whole growing up was to be a Buddhist and go to temples and practice. And for him to go sit and meditate in a temple was to come home and to feel really at home. When you feel really at home and settled someplace, it's a lot easier to be further settle to get concentrated and get to work.

If you're not settled, so if you put away for us Westerners Who are you know who most of us are probably none of us back then were raised as Buddhists. It was going to a foreign culture, foreign practice, foreign religion, foreign temple, foreign language, and our parents didn't want us to be there. And so we were sit down to meditate, and we've had these conversations with our parents, you know, justifying why we're there. And then we would have these conversations with a teacher, but you know, well, you know, I'm not sure what you're teaching is a good idea. You know, I think I like to do a different way and you telling me to follow the breath, but really what I like to do is to have my mantra, and, and you're telling me to do walking meditation, I really like to jog and, you know, and then who are you to tell me what to do? You know, I'm gonna find out for myself and I don't know, I don't I know. I don't believe in blind faith and I'm individual, and I'll do it my way and, and there's all these, all these things that goes on in the mind, that makes it difficult for the mind to finally rest and be settled. And that you know, here I am, this is what I'm going to do, to feel at home, in this present moment in this practice. Faith is that want that element that helps us feel at home, when we sit down and inspired. to do with this, this is, this is what we want to do. And that inspiration or that faith lends itself to a feeling of love. So when we sit down to meditate, we're entering into a realm of, of love, of joy of satisfaction of feeling at home. Now I know that we often don't feel that when we sit down to meditate, even people a lot of faith don't have that. But when I sit down to meditate, I'm off or I'm suffering a lot. I have a lot of faith anyway and that's faith then becomes a context for holding my suffering. So that I have a lot of faith in the practice itself. In the practice of being present for what's happening, I have a lot of faith that that's a valuable thing to do. As opposed to having faith, I have to figure it out. To solve the problem, I have to run away from it, I have to deny it, I have to ignore it. I have to, you know, find just, you know, the perfect solution to, I don't know, always all these things I start doing and doubting. Because of the practice, I say that it's really powerful, to offer my sense of presence to what's

happening, and to hold what's happening with a very powerful presence to really see clearly what it is. And even though it might be very uncomfortable, there's a kind of a joy, a kind of a kind of love that I feel, oh, I get to do this. Now I'm gonna I'm gonna hold this with my awareness with my, my knowing with my attention. And that's really helpful for me when I sit down and meditate so how is it when you all each of you sits down to meditate? Do you sit down? You know, when you sit down to meditate, what's the context that you sit down into? You know, what's the attitude that you have about what you're doing? Look at that attitude. Is it pragmatic? Is it utilitarian? You know, you've heard that following your breath and being mindful, helps reduce stress, and you really tired having all this stress and you'd like to be eliminate stress. That's a great motivation, to fantastically wonderful motivation. That motivation probably has very little faith in it. It might have some confidence in it, or some benefit of the doubt. Or it doesn't have that kind of faith that's filled with with love or devotion or joy. And that's a possibility is to sit down and have an attitude of fit. Oh, just kind of deep, heartfelt faith. Love Joy, delight, feeling at home this we sit down. So when you sit down what's the attitude you have? And I'm not saying all this to say that you should have it be different than how you are. But if you don't have some some sense of joy or delight or inspiration with a practice that you sit down, then I think it's very valuable to look at what is going on. Why is that? lacking? Could it is are some ways in which you can infuse your practice with those qualities? Do you want to Would you rather not? Are you afraid of those qualities? Do you feel that too sentimental and Buddhist practice shouldn't be sentimental love should be part of it. And they were my teacher in Burma Pandita he was the last person probably on the planet. You think it was being sentimental? And very tough, stern kind of teacher. Like a Rins I general. You'd raise his eyebrows, good weather and And so you know, you have to be serious when you practice with him.

And, and there was a period of my practice where I was just I would sit down to meditate. And I would just be bathed in love. And every time I brought my attention to something in my body, anything in my physical world whipping my attention to it's like, awareness was like a spotlight. I bring my attention to it, it would disappear. And so the part of my body disappeared through my attention somewhere else in that part of the body disappear. And sometimes I felt like I was a gang, like had an eraser and just erase, you know, erase the cartoon. You don't, it wasn't, there was no one there anymore. I was kind of fun. But I had this attitude that I was just I was just loving everything away. Because my attention was imbued with this tremendous sense of love and delight. And I remember telling a friend of mine at the time there that's, you know, I can't tell my teacher this that I'm loving everything away. You know, he was just an eyebrow would go up. And so where am I? Now I never told him there wasn't any need. I, you know, he was children and teachers you choose and then you choose your battles.

So, so we're hoping I've conveyed so far as in the faith makes a difference. And the question is, is are there ways that can make a difference for you? And what is your relationship to this issue of faith? And do you have a faith relationship to what you're doing? You sit down is just a pragmatic utilitarian thing, your utilitarian thing that you're doing or do some deeper sense of devotion Love that goes with how you sit down to be in the present moment to be here. Is the present moment a place of feeling at home or feeling delight or feeling love? If not, why not? investigation of why not is a very valuable aspect of

mindfulness practice. Maybe what you'll find if you investigate why not? The reasons for why not don't have a very solid basis and maybe the fall away. And one of the things gives me a lot of faith is that my experience over and over again, is when I don't base my life on anything. Or any understanding any, it don't hold on to anything when we're willing to let go of everything. Any idea of the future and idea of a goal any idea of becoming make someone feel you have right understanding and indeed wrong understanding. When I let go, that in that space of letting go there seems to buckle up a deep sense of at home this deep sense of love and delight. I found over and over again that in that presence that found it presence presents pure presence, not based on anything that I can trust, how things unfold. So, when I sit down to meditate, I come with this this is history of my experience with lends itself to feeling a lot of trust in the process. And I have kind of a knowledge that's happened over and over again, that if I do this well then that in itself, strengthens the love brings it stronger. So when I sit down to meditate, it's not just simply a Bring something along with me. Or I sit down and there's an environment that this is my, this is my temple. My body is my temple, the Burmese go to their temple and they feel at home in their temple, I suppose a devout Catholic, Catholic might feel very home going to their, you know, the church sitting there. And for me the tent, my temple is my body, body mind when I sit down. And so I feel good when I sit down, it's like this really happy place to go and be. It's a really delightful thing to be here, even when my mind is totally scattered in conflict with people in the world around me. I feel stressed. There's a lot of you know, times I feel really terrible inside, but it's my tempo. And when I sit down to be in that tempo, I can bring all that along, and it's held in a very different way. And because it's held in different way, it's a lot easier for me then to be full undoing the practice that I want to do, whether it's mindfulness or concentration, to be engaged. So what do we have faith in? There's a whole wide range of things that person can f8 have a faith in. And that's, you know, each of you will answer that question very differently. But do you have something you have faith in?

That's that you feel maybe is reliable. That doesn't give you a sense of certainty, in terms of, you know, you really understand the truth but rather gives you a sense of feeling at ease or feeling at home or feeling in love or feeling joy, about sitting down and paying attention. Is that a possibility for you? If you can find that, then the practice I think will proceed much more easily, easily. You'd be much less interested in the other things that we have, implicitly a lot of faith in. If you're trying to work out the relationship with your mother, or with your boss or with your child, and you're over and over and over again, reviewing that, and viewing that and viewing that in your meditation, there's a tremendous amount of faith you have, that somehow your powers of rumination are going to provide the solution. Maybe you wouldn't think of that way. And maybe you wouldn't think of that way, you know, explicitly, but implicitly as a lot of faith in that thinking mind. Can we have faith in something different? And the last thing I'll say that, for those of you who are a little bit aversive to the notion of faith, that my friend for me, the most powerful thing that I think I have faith in is faith and nothing so it isn't so much a matter of having faith in something, but faith and nothing, not in the sense of the faith in that the faith that life can be lived for life is trustable or life is fulfilled. We're not we don't depend on anything. We don't need to depend on anything.

And the path of practice is to learn how to let go of all the things that we think we need to depend on to discover that experience of grace, that experience of freedom, the experience of luminosity of vitality, that is there in the present, not dependent on anything. So those are my thoughts. It's We have about six, seven minutes before nine. Your captive audience I presented you something a little bit something it's heartfelt for me. So you know all I want to touch it Mark dimension that part of what faith is. Faith is what allows you to put your heart and what you're doing. Hey, can you put your heart into the practice? So I kind of a little bit offer you kind of heartfelt I hope feeling of wisdom is very important for me. I don't want to enable you to get too personal. You know you can do it. You can take it just as far as you feel comfortable. But I'd like to ask each of you in return. What I've done here is if you would turn to someone next to you and talk about something for about five minutes. That somehow is a reaction to this talk I've given That's pretty broad. You hopefully you can find something safe to talk about. And to five minutes you do that just turn quietly talk a little bit quietly because otherwise it'd be like cocktail party here. And then a ring a bell with a five minutes, and then we'll sit quietly for a minute and then end in the evening. Please.

Let's sit quietly for 60 seconds.

If you feel that faith is an important element of prayer, to life, then you might give some consideration to how you can strengthen that faith. What are the healthy ways useful ways of strengthening, intensifying or developing your faith. So that becomes a more use more helpful source of inspiration. delight in helps you feel at home. When you sit down to do the practice. Each of you find a way to deepen your faith in such a way you find the place where you no longer need to depend on anything, including faith. So now all of you be happy. Thank you