

2002-06-23: Not Taking it Personally

Fri, 6/26 5:45PM • 27:16

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

personally, thoughts, people, insight, define, life, happened, suffering, personal, teacher, dharma teacher, die, thinking, friends, sitting, day, insight meditation, universal, wedding, grow

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

One. And I have a couple. One announcement i think is that so I'm will be away for most of the month of July for now in the month of July. I'll be back I think the last Sunday of July. And then the other Sundays, Tara Nia Gloria Ambrosia, who's a marvelous Dharma teacher is going to come and be kind of in some ways our first resident teacher, I didn't syndrome maybe was the first to see her for 10 days, but Terranea will be in for a whole month. And she will do all the teachings except for last Sunday in July, she'll do all the Monday's and all the Sundays and all the Thursdays and a one day sitting and a half day sitting and she's also going to make herself available for interviews to talk about meditation practice or your practice. And I think it'd be wonderful to to meet with her and probably 15 minute interviews of some sort, as I guess and Judith is the primary, right? Sorry. Right. So Judith and Audrey are the are the official hosts for IMC kind of taking care of her and hosting her and being the connection between her and her, whatever it needs to be taken care of. So, but next Sunday, it'll be Blanche Hartman who will come and speak and Blanche is the Abbess of San Francisco Zen Center. And she was here for our opening and, you know, friend and their woman and next week is the children's program we have at 915 or so until the potluck time and Nothing gets it. The usual mic we have here which sits kind of unobtrusively on my shirt is the guest needs to be repaired. And so we have this imposing thing in front of me here. And it worked out really well yesterday during the one day sitting because the afternoon I got a little bit sleepy. And so we're sitting here and it was because it was so close. You know, I couldn't you know, I couldn't go very far. I don't think I fall asleep on you talking. There was a koban Chino, who is a Dharma teacher who taught in Los Altos around this area since the late 60s. Wonderful Japanese Zen teacher. When he first came to America from Japan. He was practicing and teaching at Tassajara and 6768 and He gave a Dharma talk where he fell asleep in his own Dharma talk. And I've always taken that to be a very good sign. The, you know that he was so detached is so relaxed about his own Dharma talk, you know what people would think and what their concern is that he could even fall asleep in his own talk. It's partly his English is not wasn't so good. And so I think there were long pauses while he was waiting for the next thing, which words to come. He also spent the day using a chainsaw. So I think he was probably pretty exhausted. So I was struck

during the sitting here how, you know, certainly how nice it is to sit. And I was kind of very conscious of silence and the stillness and in the noise in my mind And, you know, in their layers and you know, activity thoughts, my mind and how at some point it seemed like it was noise, you know, compared to the silence that was there. And so it is it it helps us to enter the silence more quick completely or to be more at peace with this world that we live in. The insight meditation tradition puts a lot of emphasis on the value of insight and the surname insight meditation center. People often want to know what is insight mean?

And some people assume that it means a psychoanalytic insights or, you know, psychological insights into, you know, how we personally work. You know, he finally understood you know, why, why I always say those kinds of things, because when I was 20 years old, someone said something to me, and it was, you know, and so for now, I understand, and it tends to be kind of those sometimes we refer to insights as being kind of insights into our personal biography and History and how that makes us be who we are in the Buddhist tradition that would incite it goes beyond that to include or dispense actually be more specific to include insight into that which is universal, the universal aspects of our experience. And in particular, there are three characteristics of our experience which the tradition puts tremendous emphasis on. And that is, and these are the three primary insights and they are, that everything is impermanent, all experience are impermanent. Everything we experience is characterized in some way or other by being dukkha by being unsatisfactory but by suffering. And the third insight is that is that most of the things we take to be our experience are all the things that are we can experience don't qualify as being a self as being the self. So impermanence, not self and suffering. Now in in kind of popular English, sometimes this is translated into kind of a little bit off hand kind of way, as life will put you through changes, it hurts, but don't take it personally. And this idea of not taking it personally is kind of what I want to focus on today. And not taking things personally is one of the ways to help us be more at peace in ourselves in our minds to, to align ourselves more fully with a great silence or stillness which is so satisfied can be so satisfying. And I was sitting recently, and meditating and I was kind of narrowly not meditating. I was lost in my thoughts and kind of consumed or preoccupied with my thinking for a while during them sitting. And then at some point, I woke up to that and it was aware that that was what was going on. And there was a very interesting shift that happened once I became Awake, awake to that. That's what was going on, was that I no longer saw my thoughts, those thoughts, his train of thinking, as being me. I was somehow I wouldn't know what to say I was the I was the observer watching that, but that'd be okay to say, you know, I was the observation the observer was kind of watching this train of thoughts. And those three thoughts, we no longer tied into my self definition. I wasn't taking them personally, and also wasn't entangled with them. Until then, when I was lost in those thoughts preoccupied who I was, and those thoughts were inseparable. Not that I was thinking that way. It's just that that's kind of my whole sense of self was tied or connected to thinking because thinking was what was going on was and often we define ourselves through our thoughts, maybe not consciously, but we think we are what we think and And so, you know, we think certain things we believe certainly what I think must be true. The way I perceive or think about the world must be the true way of seeing the world. And so because what else could be truer than my own thoughts? Thoughts tell us stories about who we are, or who we shouldn't be. And

our thoughts create a kind of world of self, world of others. And it's not that often that we step outside of the flow of those those thoughts to see, you know, actually, maybe I'm more than that, or I'm not that much more satisfying for some people to think I'm more than that. Because then you're not, you know, but we're more than that. We're not that there's another part of our who we are the part of who we are, which is not the flow of thoughts, not who we think even the hidden the most horrible thoughts are the most noble thoughts about yourself or about others, and to realize that that doesn't define who you are, or define who others are, it's always gonna be any kind of self definition is going to be limited. Because there's always more to that. There's always something which is beyond in terms of the self, I would think.

And, and many of us know what it's like to be defined in some fixed way by others. We've done something in the past, and they've defined you know, and they hold us to that definition, you know, you you've been angry with someone once, and they always see you that way. Or they see you as someone spouse, and they always see you in that category. Don't see you as who you are, actually are. Or they see you as a certain, you know, nationality or certain ethnic group or certain gender or certain whatever. And people see you in that kind of category. You say, wait a minute, hey, I'm not that, you know, please, please don't limit me like that. Well, we see it that people do it for themselves. And we say people get off it, you know, you're not you're more than that, or don't, don't believe you're so limited or, you know, you keep sending I can't do it. I can't do it. I can't do it. You know, don't limit yourself that way. You're more than that. Same way. And of course, I think it's much harder to see how we do that for ourselves limit ourselves by self definition. And taking things personally, and limiting ourselves by some self definition, I think are very closely connected phenomena. And part of the insight of insight meditation is begin seeing things as being not taking things. So personally. Sometimes I take it as a personal failure when we see our shortcomings. Not taking it as a personal aggrandizement to see you know, when we have some great quality or some great achievement, not to take it so personally. And it's a very common expression in English, don't take things personally. And you know, you might say, you might, you might probably use that expression sometimes in your own life. I don't think I didn't take it so personally, someone said something really awful to me. And you seem to be laid into me and tell me what a terrible person I was. But I know knew the person hadn't slept for two days and hadn't eaten, and was just really stressed in her life. And, and so I didn't take it personally was nothing about me didn't do it by me, because I knew it was really a person who's really having a hard time. So I didn't take it personally. And it's such a relief to say that or feel that way because then you don't have to kind of hang it on as an affront or as a criticism. If you take it personally or you don't have to take it. Maybe it's true and what a terrible person I am. I didn't take it personally. Or you. Same thing could happen to us when we do something. Sometimes if you're stressed out or, you know, really tired or hungry and you say something. Sometimes people say, Well, I didn't you know, I realized why I said it. This because of these conditions. I didn't take it so personally that I said it. I didn't take it on as big baggage to carry around with me. It has to do with this particular situation. You know, my wife expressed this beautifully when she went through a three month period of medically induced menopause. Temporary menopause. For a procedure she had to get ready for. And, and so she had all these thoughts that that she'd never had before. You know, this is really weird, you

know, these are not my thoughts, you know, who's having these thoughts means I'm having them. Of course, it wasn't like she was saying that she was, you know, tuning into somebody else's thoughts, you know, like a radio and change the channel and you know, suddenly she's tuned into the neighbor's thoughts. You know, wasn't wasn't like when that happened to her, but she didn't recognize yourself in those thoughts. There was bizarre thoughts. And she said, Oh, these are the hormones that are causing me to think this way. And she saw that she didn't take them personally. No, you know, this is, you know, the drugs are making me you know, causing this kind of thinking in a certain way. And she didn't take it personally. And because of that she wasn't troubled by it was a story which I've told maybe too many times in my father when I was about 13 or so 14 pulled me aside and said, as you grew up, you're going to have a lot of bizarre thoughts. And happens to everyone. And don't worry about it, see what happens. And, and I had never had was our thought until then. Or hadn't occurred or hadn't occurred to me to, you know, to consider it without quite that label. And but, you know, eventually I, you know, I'd had some bizarre thoughts and I had been warned, oh, this is a bizarre thought. I've been told people have that. And I found that having it, I didn't take it so personally. And if I take it personally, I might have believed it, or I might have reacted to it and said, Oh, my God, this defines who I am and I have to hide myself or I'm embarrassed and whatever. But by not taking it personally is a lot more ease and space and kind of, you know, it's a lot easier with things. And thinking about what we take personally. The kind of thought exercise that came to my mind is, how old would you have to be where you wouldn't have to take death personally. Like, that makes sense. I mean, if you died when you're 132 you know, it's like isn't you know, is that a personal failing that you die? You know?

You know, that's so personal anymore. But if you die when you're 92 is it then you know, or 62 or 42? Or, you know, what point do you not take it personally. There was kind of a interest as there's 10 tennis Rubik with Tanja who was here is a great you know, Buddhist Abbot and monk and practitioner and teacher. He introduced me too, magazine called the onion that I'd never heard before. That's a satire magazine put out I guess, by college students, originally, maybe in Wisconsin, maybe or someplace. And so I was looking through this magazine and they had engraved kind of a national enquirer kind Have headlines, you know, the miracle has happened, the miracle of birth, someone been born and it's in the name of some person, you know, Josephine Adeline has been born and it's the miracle, you know. And the miracles and Tao happened 13 billion times. You know, I guess maybe the history of humankind Smith 13 billion successful births. I don't know what it is. But, you know, at some point, you know, you call it a miracle hasn't happened 13 billion times. You know, it's a pretty common occurrence. So, life and death, you know, are they a personal occurrence? They happen to you personally, in a sense, but what does it mean to not take it personally? Sometimes teachers will say that the, the common elements or the structure of what happens to most of us in our lives, is common to most people. We were born People we most love the most care for eventually die unless we die before them. We grow up and growing up, it's really a struggle to grow up. There's a lot of difficulties that people have growing up and different ages and different cultures may be a different difficulties. But for us in the West, often it's the teenage years are often difficult for people and not always but often and, and, but it starts in early age. I mean, you know, my see my son's friends when they're

three or four years old. They suddenly say, I don't like you, and I never want to play with you again. You know, and I'm not going to talk with you again. And, and you're not you're not my friend. You know, they've been best friends, you know, until two minutes ago. You know, you're not my friend. And, or, you know, he has these best friends he plays with these works really, because he's in it. He's involved in a triangle, you see, there's Anya and Ruben and our son Turin. And they're all best friends with each other separately. But then when they play together, it's like, you know, they don't quite sometimes they work really well together. But when they get hungry or tired, then it doesn't work so well together and then you know, the one on them exclude what the other one is, you know? And so is this a personal thing? Or is it common for kids when they grew up there kind of sorting out their social lives and try to make sense of it. And we feel very lucky. We have, you know, I think we've trained are very good situations for helping socialize our son, but this stuff still happens. Isn't universal to some degree. It is what happens when we grow up and struggles we have with dating, you know, or relationships. And I read today, this morning's paper by Anne Lender. I don't know anything about Atlanta hardly at all. And, you know, but I just opened the newspaper and just kind of my eyes fell into one paragraph in the middle of the article that I Lender and it said that she was engaged to get married. And she went into a department store in 1938 or so and to buy part of her wedding gown. And you know story, right? It's crazy. And the clerk said something like, I'm like, I've met a lot of women in my life and you're the first woman I met, who like who I feel like I could marry and just my luck that you're coming in here to buy your wedding clothes. But that got her attention and well enough that she changed grooms and, and the wedding proceeded to happen on the date they're supposed to happen, but it was just new, the new guy right to endline there's for advice, please.

And so you know, we have these you know, difficulties and interpersonal things happen is To grow up, and then, you know, struggles with work and livelihood and, and then friends die and move away and disappear. And then we get old, if we're lucky, I suppose. And we get sick. And you know, and then we die. And kind of a basic kind of structure, in many ways, is universal. And then we fill it in with particular details, like and Lender's detail of her particular circumstance for her wedding that's particular to her, you know, or particular times, you know, when our parents die, and they die, you know, and we're 62 and they're 92, or they die when we're 22. When they're 42, or, you know, all kinds of you know, details vary a little bit, but the basic structures pretty much the same. There's a kind of a universal story to being a human being, at what point and what aspect of that universal in looking at what's universal. Do we stop taking what happened? To us completely personally. Is it possible? I have known people I've seen who have died or they while they were dying? Who thought it was a personal failing to die? Is it? Is it a personal failing to die? in this culture? No. And so this idea of taking things personally, our feelings personally, our, you know, our feelings personal. They are me I take responsibility for them. We don't be aloof from them in depth or separate from them and not recognize them. But what does it mean to take something personally, in a way that is a burden and a problem? That's I think one of the great challenges of the mindfulness practice is to challenge us in this question is how do we take things personally? And is it really necessary is it inherent in the structure of reality, in the structure of human life, to take things so personally, in this way that causes suffering, we cling to it, we belong to it. And we do with many ways, you know, our belief system. And we're self righteous

about I believe this thing and I hold on to it. This is who because this defines who I am in relationship to other people. And I, now I'm going to just very thing I'm going to say, Listen carefully. Now the very thing I'm going to say now, is the thing I'm going to criticize, I can't seem to get out of it, except by not saying it. That I'm troubled by those spiritual people, Buddhist practitioners, and I've done this who define themselves in opposition to who other people are. just did it right. In some ways, those people who define themselves and but So, so, the way people define themselves is by the other, who's someone else's, and people do it, you know, not just in religions all over. And so and sometimes It's really horrible because you start with these great big category, you know, all, you know, all those Mahayana Buddhists, you know, they got it all wrong. Only the Theravada Buddhist got it right. And then well, isn't it just, it's just just, you know, the Burmese Buddhists got it right, not the Thai Buddhists. And while it's not, you know, all the Burmese Buddhists, our particular sector, Burmese Buddhism got it right. Not the other sector, Rumi's Buddhism. Well, it's not just, you know, then you know, it's not just you know, our sect but, but it's these teachers in my sector hybrid, right. And those people have it wrong. It's not just those teachers, but it's just you know, my teacher has it right. And, in fact, even so sure about my teacher but I have it right. And so it goes you know, history of religion school. We take you know, our beliefs very personally, we use it to define ourselves and we hold on to it. It causes a lot of suffering.

So now that I want to turn it over to you and ask you, what have you How? What wisdom? What understandings Have you come to in your life that helps you not to take things personally in a way that take me personally is a burden is a suffering is kind of wind drag because you go through your life. What is what has helped you understand not to take things personally

reminds me that, for me, I noticed that becoming a parent meant that I didn't take things personally the same way I did before. And just you know that somebody's taking care of someone else became more important than being preoccupied or defining myself certain way. Beautiful, thank you. I think that's a very good point to be bringing up. And then I've known plenty of people who have taken this insight into, you know, things aren't personal and applied it in a, in an artificial way to their life rather than real insight and understanding, use it as a way of escaping or withdrawing, not taking responsibility, and being aloof or separate or something. And certainly we don't want to do that. I think that we don't want to use that insight to hold back. We just want to use that insight. So we don't burden weighed down by what happens to us in our life. But then you want it you want to respond in healthy, healthy ways. And, and if someone if there's a wrong if there's a transgression or conflict, it's a lot easier to take care of it if you don't take it personally. But you want to take care of it and talk about it. You don't want to walk away from it say, well, that has nothing to do with me. That's very good. You know that taking things Personally is something we add to the situation. And so is it necessary to it's not inherent in the situation, it's always something we add. So it is something that necessary to add anything with Ken's pointing out is that if he just stays right in the moment, that he's fees himself from adding a lot of extra stuff to what's happening, and then it's easier to take things not not take it personally. Or to not take things personally, is already maybe can be another thing to do. Right? I'm not going to take this personally, you know, kind of, but that could also be the absence of taking things personally. You just

see the difference is really in the present moment, and really see clearly there can be an absence of taking things personally, and there can be a lot of peace. Yeah. It all points to how we make a bigger story out of things. You know, don't make a big story out of things can be almost the same as Don't take it personally. Yes. So I hope all of you will investigate a little bit this issue of taking things personally and see how you can use this investigation. So to be a little bit freer and more peaceful and, and more helpful for the world around you. The beautiful thing about whether about the Buddhist teachings and kind of not take things personally, is that it goes side by side with a tremendous emphasis on personal responsibility or self responsibility. So, how do you negotiate in a way that brings peace, the balance between not taking things personally, but also taking personal responsibility for things? Where's that balance? Where's the how do you how do you take personal responsibility without taking it personally? So May the investigation help all of us be happier and more peaceful and, and, and be more trusting in the great silence. Great stillness Which is so nurturing and, in the end be more helpful to our fellow humans. So, I'll see you all in about a month and I wish you all well. Bye bye