

2002-09-08: Learning To Love

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So good morning, everyone. So I heard a story, a very short story this week that I was quite taken by. And I wanted to share it to you with you. And I'm also aware that this is this week is a very, for some people a very intense week for the United States where a tremendous amount of reflection is going on around the meaning of 911 remembering it a lot of the discussion in the media about this, and probably in pulpits all across America, their ministers who are taught giving talks about this probably yesterday in synagogues and and there's, you know, seems like it's almost every angle is being taken some of it to be kind of people getting tired of maybe the amount of discussion about it and some people are quite inspired and still very gripping kind of soul searching going soul searching going on. about the meaning of this personally the meaning of this as a as a society. And so, I offer this story, perhaps in the spirit or the context of this a wider reflection of 911. And the and I kind of in thinking about presenting the story, I want to say as little as possible about it before I told you it, and just tell you a story. And and, and then what I would like you all to do, is to break into small groups of about four, four people per group, and have for maybe 10 minutes or so, in 15 minutes, a discussion amongst you of what to how you took the story and reflect on the story as you're sitting in the group and explore it and see what it means and what comes out of that. And then when we gather as a group, and then maybe we can have a few of you then Talking about what your, your particular group talked about or what came out of your reflection. And only then will I say my, you know, say what I have to say about it, perhaps if there's time for that still seems relevant. So, hopefully, that's agreeable with all of you. And if you're someone who's come to meditate here and, and prefer really just to sit and be quiet. And really, you know, the last thing you want to do is come to a place where it's meditative. And you're kind of getting away from a lot of excessive, maybe something or other. And it seems too much too much to be then talking with people in a group, you could join a group and just say that you'd rather just be quiet. And I think hopefully everybody here will understand. Or you can just sit here quietly in a chair or in your seat and just not not join a group. You're quite welcome to do that. The however, would like to say about that is that we periodically do this kind of thing. And it's very

common for people to say, Oh, you know, I don't want to do that. So the last thing I want to do when you know don't like to talk. And then these two people tell me this invariably, they tell me, it was so great, so wonderful. And so you might give it if you you know, if you have this kind of just mild aversion to the idea. It give it the benefit of the doubt that it's. And I think it's actually very important that periodically, we have a chance to meet as a community to talk with each other. It's rare in society, that people who do this kind of practice and contemplative practice, I think it's very important part of our scene to have some contact with each other. So I think it's very important. So but having said that, please feel comfortable. So if you feel it, where you where you're at, it's really, you want to just be quiet.

So the story with all that build up

is

is a conversation between us Zen student and Suzuki Roshi, probably back in the 60s or so, when she was here in America. And a, one of his students came to him and said, I've been practicing Zen now for five years. And I feel like I've made so little progress. And Suzuki Roshi, answer was, oh, it takes a really long time. It takes many years sometimes to learn to love some people. I feel like I'm not making any progress in my Buddhist practice. Oh, yes. Sometimes it takes many years to learn to love some people. So why don't you

Take it Take, take that, take that Zen come on and see what comes out of your conversation. So just kind of formula groups for so.

So what kind of perspectives that some of your groups some of you people have on that little story?

Yeah. smart group had quite

interesting.

One of the people spoke about housing quality leads.

Another member spoke about one parts in itself. Some are easier to love than others.

The third member of our group is the idea of other people, loving other people and how that can be draining and all consuming.

Maybe not to one's own benefit.

And fourth member of our product is setting boundaries with the other people

doing that

in a loving way. Our

wonderful, thank you.

Our group also

needs to love one cell We felt the story

really to that point.

And also, in terms of 911, especially to not only open our hearts to the victims or to

those penetrating

into look at where they're

coming from and what brought about their feeling of anger and feeling of being disjointed. And then also an interesting question whether or not it's necessary to take a long time to come to love others, whether or not it's always necessary to have this longer period or if someone can

achieve that rather quickly. So that was an interesting aspect. The teacher saying when I hear some

take longer Thanks was resolved

and the fact that it's going to take a long time to

allow any people that were affected?

And how do you reflect on that? Thank you.

Gentlemen header. Just a great analogy. He's saying is that the DMV with a day, had to stand in line for an hour and looking around

at all the other people and sort of

judging them, you know, the way

we do on a daily basis, and so it's really about a day to day minute to minute thing where No, that characterizes

instead of judging people and making up

stories about them, they have stories about yourself you have to constantly work against

this kind of stories all the time to really

try to understand people

individually

the path into know to love them. And we also

talked a bit about loving yourself and that as a path to

something

else came up

because we're talking together

which has been on my mind for one About the idea of us United States being the greatest country in the world. Somehow, it seems like so much gets pushed into the shadows by presenting ourselves to ourselves to the rest of the world, in that light as the greatest country in the world. And I think in some ways for me, it's, it's been a source of difficulty trying to love being somebody from the United States because I feel like there's a lot that just isn't acknowledged.

So

I struggle

to love myself as an American Okay. I think

group kind of talked about the intermingle intermingling of like, there is no separation of love, self love.

And

in terms of what you were saying that we keep trying to identify with something as being an American group and you know that anytime wait that if I was as simple group, my family, my business my dad, but that creates that separation and that not intermingling between love self love and and there's so the moment we create a mind this there's fear you know this well this is mine I have to protect it so fear becomes like a pervasive pervasive thing that creates a lot of this problem of this issue that one one and we don't like to feel free or fiercer than we can angry you know And so that's one of the things in the media there dissolves anger.

So, you

know, one of the one of the things that was kind of interesting, you know, it's, you know, first someone posts, you know, but how do we love the terrorists? And then, you know, as we talk to us more submissive, well, how do you love the media?

Loving self loving

others, and the question of evil came up

the evil

I think it was a sense of having a spiritual practice is about trying to

balance or into awareness, all of

that which is

dark in the shadows.

But also to continue to work towards this sense of

I don't want to say the good, but the sense of love and sense of light and compassion.

And that's where much of the work can take place.

If you're thinking

he was practicing the story five years, and I think Howard was saying that often we don't see in five years they change with the people around

and that it's happening within there is something that's happening on the outside as well.

So helpful

in the process,

under the things that that we talked about kind of fits with what other people have said, but more specifically I try to be aware of myself of, of what plugs me in about other people, there's a part of me something that I may not be even vaguely aware of aware of, otherwise, you probably wouldn't pass by. So I kind of ponder that and contemplative way when it seems something quite alien to how I would identify myself and I suppose that helmet, the shadow manifest in terms of

understanding

so as we look at the terrorist or response or other people, responses

sort of hard to know how to put

all that together. We've

talked about here but one of the things that hasn't been said as we touched on things, it's somewhat separated out perhaps deeds for the person. And when we were talking about

was not so incensed about, about terrorist actions through the events that happened. Somebody mentioned we all have the capacity perhaps for good deeds that are both

more noble and much less known.

Two other comments about that story.

Several weeks ago when

I say

I thought it might be worth mentioning the contents and he presented it which was Talking about how Suzuki Roshi in her experience

and that of others that she knew

that everyone who encountered him feel loved, and how her kind of assumption about that had been that that was just kind of his nature or his heart or something. And that when she heard that story, it struck her that no, this was his practice that didn't come naturally to him any more than they do to all of us.

But it was sort

of an encouraging story. Because if you need to practice, to love everyone, including yourself,

take a long time to love that it is possible for people as this person said to

experience that, that to experience being loved just by

being in someone's presence, because

that's been cultivated over the years.

Maybe there wasn't a grocery practice that's explained today. So who heard From asleep as much, that's what I heard from this week was Blanche. And the, you know, as perhaps it was a question practice and the, but it was, you know, what, what people didn't write and realize many people didn't realize about Suzuki Roshi was a tremendous amount of pain or suffering that he had in Japan before coming here. So you know, wasn't that some of that maybe that capacity to crack to love came out of the cauldron of his own suffering. For example, you know, his wife was murdered, for example, in his temple. Yeah. So

there's a connection that following up your interpretation that I began to think about, between the student and Suzuki Roshi if he was religious strongly identifying students and essentially saying they need to work to love them.

And

here you are talking to me, after five years of practice

stead of expressing love to yourself which radiates out to others, you're being hard on yourself.

Just a slightly different point of view, a

sense Have you been with it for five years? Love it. Well then radiate out and then that's what I'm doing. Five years is really, the story is a very, very much more narrow dimension without that students could come in and say, I think Five years are really just

great.

A little bit about

even how hard it is sometimes to love someone like the man across the street on Thursday and Friday mornings who is an anti abortion activist and

stands there and

he's there every morning and how angry it could make us knowing that he's there and fighting this and yet, who does that anger really hurt. It hurts us by holding

that. angry,

doesn't do anything to him. So it was interesting to look at that, that part about loving takes a long time to love someone. And then finally when you do, how you can

tolerate them.

So there's sort of a toleration factor

is really

the

one of the reasons that many reasons I like the story, but one of them was in my in my own practices that times and many people come and talk to me kind of safe, somewhat similar, somewhat similar things, you know, not making enough progress. Things are not going the way I would want them to go. And often it's enough as a context of my concentration is not deepening strong enough or I'm not having insight yet or I'm still suffering under my attachments or into the definition of practice is very personal, and also very focused on technique and developing the mind certain way. And Suzuki Roshi,

in my view of the story kind of changed the context of how students understand practice, and said, Oh, and your practice is not about developing your concentration. It's about how you love and love and loving is difficult. And of course, it's of course, you mean that you you're going slow for you because some people it's really hard to love them. And, and maybe it's yourself or maybe it's other people and probably some people it's easy to love and some people it's hard to love and the practice is expanding the field of love. So we can include everyone oneself and everyone so that no one is left out of the heart and Probably because my guess is because the student had one thing in mind and was told something so different. It kind of woke a student up to seeing the situation in a new way, himself or herself in a new way. When I was when I was a Zen student at San Francisco Zen Center after Suzuki Roshi was there. Remember that? I wasn't her I certainly wasn't there to love, to learn to love and the teachers there didn't talk about it. And it was only many years later, since I never knew security. So many years later, I started hearing the older students tell stories about Suzuki Roshi and talk about him that way. But I never had most of the teachers there when I was there. They didn't report it somehow that wasn't the teaching I got. And the I was there for many years and I was it's very simplistically I was there too, I was thinking I was there to develop wisdom or insight or develop my concentration or something. And, and, in retrospect, some 10 1215 years later, looking back at my first five years of Zen center, what I realized what was happening was that I don't know how much wisdom I was developing. But what was happening without knowing was, I was developing compassion. And before I came to Zen center, compassion wasn't part of my vocabulary. Probably those first five years, it wasn't important, you know, I don't think I used the word much. It wasn't really part of my vocabulary. And but somehow the context of that Zen training, and part of it was to see his living. Because meditation practice kind of puts you up against yourself in a very real way. It's hard to kind of run away from oneself, was seeing my own suffering so clearly, and living with it in that and sometimes very difficult to practice. And without difficulty, I thought, you know, this is I discounted the difficulty I didn't think it was very important. I thought it was it was it was a means to get beyond it. And realize that, in retrospect, that that difficulty was what was kind of fermenting or developing, cultivating capacity to develop to have compassion. And that probably, you know, the developing of compassion was the most important part of what happened in my early years of Zen practice, not the development of wisdom. And, and I think, and one of the interesting tensions in the Buddhist tradition is between wisdom and compassion, if we see them as being separate. The two say it in a different way. There's a tension kind of between. This is all very simplistic, but just for the sake of talking, making a point between a personal emphasis on practice and cultivating cultivation of non attachment, not being attached and kind of letting go of one's attachments and one's fears and one's aversions and just kind of that internal focus on doing that kind of work and attention in the opposite It's his intention with the cultivation of compassion, cultivation of action being involved in doing living one's life for the benefit of others, and being involved there. And different times in a person's life, they focus on different aspects of that polarity. But sometimes there's also a tension where some people because all it's really about this, no, no, it's really about this. And it's one or the other. And those people don't they don't really understand what Buddhism is because they're just kind of the sentimental compassion types. And, and then, and then the compassion types of well, you know, those people are just so selfish.

And that tension plays itself out in the grand scale, in the Buddhist tradition in the in the tension between the Theravada tradition, and the Mahayana tradition, where there's two big traditions like the Protestant tradition in the Catholic tradition, European Christianity, and with the kind of the cartoon image of each of them is it the each one is in one camp and wants the other camp I think it's best to think of these two as being completely intertwined inseparable, that we cultivate non attachment. So that we can love greater a greater degree. And we love and bring compassion to such a degree to help with greater, nothing in conflict, nothing an attachment in the world around us, the two go together, one is the expression of the other the expression of non attachment is love, compassion, loving kindness, and the manifestation of real love comes together with the feeling of with with an attitude of non attachment to non clinging to, not clinging. So to or completely, I think entangled intertwined. And

it's kind of like,

light, you know, light you can, depending on your perspective, you can say light is a particle or a wave. And depending on your perspective, you can see spiritual practices being one or the other, but it's both You have to understand both. And what I like also about this practice little story is both people are focusing on the importance of spiritual practice. And it's really beautiful at the both Suzuki Roshi and this student, they had that in common, even though they may have had different perspective and security was teaching him they both had in common was they were practicing and the power of the security state statement. The reason was powerful was that this student was sincerely dedicated to this practice to practice. And so when we have situation like 911 people who have a spiritual practice, it becomes an intensely personal reflection on this event. And there's political reflections and views and them in us and what we should do and what we shouldn't do and let's go home and buy gas masks and you know, whatever. You know, we you know, feel we kind of want to do, but the spiritual side is, you know, people have spiritual practice. Then it becomes a call, I hope for an intense internal reflection on where our heart is at, and understanding what the nature and to bring our practice to bear on this situation. So it's not just our political views that come to bear but our heart and how we're working on our heart and how we want to purify or to cultivate a heart to be to be one that is generous, loving for the world, and when it's free of fear and free of hate. And so what does it take to be free of fear and free of hate in the context of 911? And that becomes the drive one of the driving questions. I think of someone I hope someone who's a spiritual practice, someone who has, it doesn't have one, then there's their fear and their hate might be translated translated into political views or action in ways that are not so skillful. So I don't know what to say about what should be done. But, but I do feel for people involved in the spiritual practice, it becomes an intense focus internally and bring them Practice to bear on this in these issues with a hope to, to move in the direction of the statement that Ajahn Chah said, which is, he said, Everything occurs within the heart. And we kind of think it doesn't. And so, to discover how everything happens within the heart, and when it happens within the heart, then how do we relate to it?

There was in the same discussion that the blind said the story, another person or another, the seniors and students, as the teachers attend center said one of the most efficient Zen teachings for him is a two lines by Zen master Dogen in his classical in his essay called again Joe Cohen. And these two lines go something like this.

When we think that we are complete, when we think that everything is perfect, then the Dharma does not fill. You does not fill that person. And the Dharma doesn't fill us, then we think that things might be perfect. Or is it because the other way we think things are coming we think we have complete and we're not filled with the Dharma. When we're filled with the Dharma, we realize that something is always incomplete. Something's always lacking. And so I like that story a lot. I don't know whether it's true. I don't know. I don't know if that statement is true. But I like it because inspiring, inspiring the saying for me, because the emphasis then becomes always been dedicated to practice. And not ever feeling that there's an endpoint to practice. Because the endpoint in a sense is to realize there is no endpoint. And things are always incomplete. And so, there's always in this movement or keep practicing, keep looking, keep being honest. Keep not not resting on your laurels, but always seeing how do I meet the next moment with compassion, with peace with kindness, with freedom. And so then I'll end with a security story that I wish I'd heard when I first came to Zen center and another one of the stories I heard many years later is very simple thing. Maybe you've heard me be blindsided. When she was here Suzuki Roshi said you are perfect just the way you are. But there's room for improvement.

So you may you happily remember book. Thank you all.