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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So this evening I was asked for this evening as I was asked to talk about pain, physical pain to work with that, and meditation, mindfulness. And the context for the invitation is that twice now, a couple of Sangha members, Terry, Lester and Beatrice, have clicked on afternoon workshop, Sunday afternoon workshops, on yoga meditation for arthritis. And when they're planning for the second one, they thought it'd be nice if it was done in conjunction with some little laughter that's Sunday workshop, that I would give a talk on pain, with the idea that it would be kind of a continuation or supportive of those people who had arthritis would come to the workshop. So that's, today's the day talk about pain and I feel a little bit shy to talk about pain. In that context. However, someone who has chronic pain because it's I know it's a very challenging and difficult situation to be under. And I've had a lot of experience working with pain in meditation, that have I've had some experience working with strong pain in my life and here and there, but there's never been chronic, it's gone away, usually after some time. Sometimes it's lasted a few weeks. But what I had most experience with is in meditation, and using the principles of mindfulness and meditation, for working with pain. When I came back after I had, I had studied Zen for many years, a number of years. I remember going, going off to Asia, do practice intensively be passing the practice there, and then I came back to the same school center. And I was having lunch with some of the teachers there. And I remember talking to one of the teachers about what a wonderful support pain is for meditation practice, and how I learned that when I was in Asia, and how it helps so much to do off concentration and stillness. And I learned so much I found so incredibly, incredibly valuable to have pain as a as an aid as a support for my deepening meditation practice. I've heard it said, it hasn't exactly been my observation. But I've heard other teachers say that some of the people who get the most benefit from mindfulness meditation, they're some of the people who make the most progress in the sense are sometimes people who have chronic pain, for whom there is no other help. They haven't found can't find anything else to help them and give them that strong motivation. They have to find something that will provide relief for help. They come with tremendous motivation and to practice mindfulness and meditation. And, and because of that strong

motivation and we're looking for some really something really specific to help them a specific kind of specific kind of suffering. They can bring some great benefit.

Now one of the one of the questions probably some of you have is, why would in the world would anybody bother to sit and meditate on pain? When you when we pray, meditate meditation, just pain that arises in meditation, you could, perhaps you could just end the meditation stretch out, take a nap, take a shower, or maybe just take a pain medication if you need an aspirin or stronger medication if need be. And one of the things I hope that convey in the course of this evening is the best benefits that can come from hanging in there with pain, making it a meditation subject and focusing on it. But in talking about this, I think it's very important to distinguish between the objective cause of pain and the subjective subjective experience of pain. So for example, if you know there's a cause for your pain you should have generally there is I think, then say there's you know, say that you have a you know, a really big Thorn rusty nails stuck in your heel. And every time you walk, you know, it kind of, you know, that hurts because the nail gets bored further into your heel. And it'd be pretty stupid just as practice mindfulness of it and very mindful of this, you know, pain and where I feel it. And there is an objective cause and you want to pull it out, pull that thing out. And there are times when you know, we want to bring all our common sense and our wisdom and our strong motivation to really address the cause of pain. If there's a really clear objective cause that we can do something about. In contrast to the objective kind of cause of pain, there's a subjective experience of pain. And the domain, the primary domain of meditation is the subjective experience of pain. It's very important to say that, because what you'll hear me and often other Vipassana teachers say so say, we're trying to choose to open to the pain to accept the pain, to bring full presence to the pain, loving kindness to the pain, all kinds of kind of attitude towards the pain. It's a very different attitude than let's get rid of it. And in that, that approach, meditative approach of accepting the pain has to be understood that we're accepted. is a subjective experience. We're not necessarily accepting the objective cause for the pain. And that principle I think is very important in meditation in general, is to make that distinction when we're trying to do is to find a way for the mind or the heart, not to contract from whatever subjective experience it's having. And then from that, perhaps, you know, some as some wise approach objective causes of things. The objective cause doesn't have to be the reason for the mind to contract around pain in my mind contracts around the US Generally, the physical contraction will happen around the physical pain, the subjective experience, the distinction makes sense that the labor there's any more does that make sense to me see that difference? So what we're doing is learning how to work them with a subjective experience with it. So if you have no other choice, but to face your pain, because there's no pain medication that can help For no other cure for it, then meditation can be very powerful helper and helping you to kind of learn how to be with it the wise way. Meditation, the approach of meditation or bringing mindfulness to pain and learning how to do that is a very helpful skill to have in our lives. Because the general strategy A lot of people have around discomfort, pain suffering, we're one of the ones they have is to ignore it or deny it or escape from it. And their ways which that's very unhealthy is because other times it can be kind of a deadening can dead dead in our likeness didn't didn't, our feelings are our thinking capacity, all kinds of things can be dead and we kind of shut down and get some kind of pain that we have some kind of issue we don't look at other approaches to is to fight it, to

have a version to it, to attack it. And that can be counterproductive also, if we're kind of dealing with objective cause. Then having a very strong, assertive, perhaps attitude, try to deal with that cause sometimes it's very appropriate. But if we were looking at is the subjective feeling of pain to be to be aggressive, attacking, fighting against the subjective experience you're having.

That's what you're doing. Then at the same time, you're you'll be fighting yourself. You're having resistance then or you're fighting some aspect of your own experience of who you are. Who you are that moment that you have that you have to subjective, it's subjective means it's within you. And when we don't want to have in meditative life is a conflict within ourselves towards ourselves. And part of what they are of meditation is to learn how to be present for our subjective experience a part of our psychophysical experience, and not to shut down around it or not to fight against it. So, so, one strategy is to ignore escape and other is to fight an experience. And the third is to be mindful of it, to watch it to be present for it. So, it certainly helps us in, you know, in not sure it helps us you know, prevent it helps me helps prevent us from these unhealthy approaches which can be deadening or add greater suffering to our life. Pain can also be a very concentrating experience, because it can it can be very compelling and attention it can be kept very tightly on the pain very closely on the pain. And the stronger the pain, the more compelling it can be. Also, physical pain is a wonderful place to learn about oneself. So many of the common reactions common approaches we react to life and discomfort and problems in our life will often play themselves out in a relationship to pain, and if it's safe to experience that pain or if you have no choice but to experience it, then you start seeing all this whole world of reactions that you have. And you'll develop a tremendous amount of familiarity to your own reactivity on tendencies to react reactive. And then familiarity will translate into greater familiarity outside of meditation, to know how wisely to respond different situations to see when you, you know, react in certain ways. In looking at pain, it might be useful to distinguish between three different aspects of pain. And there's the sensate aspect of it, the sensation of it the direct, immediate physical feeling of pain. There is the, what is called the affective experience of pain, which is how we feel about it, feeling very loose, loose terms, how we feel about the pain being there. And then there's the Cognitive aspect of the pain, which could be loosely said, how we think about it, how we understand it. And all all three of these are very important in understanding our pain, looking at pain, and they interact and affect each other understanding of pain, the cognitive kind of understanding of it, the beliefs we have around the pain can have a big bearing on how we experience that pain. I think many times we think of pain as something just given that pain is just pain. And the strength of the pain is I feel pain as strongly as I do, because it is that strong. It is that painful, physically, but there's a interplay, very strong interplay between the mind and our beliefs and understandings or attitudes with the pain itself and it can be stronger or weaker, depending on the feelings about it and our thoughts about it, our beliefs around it. So it has been commented on plenty of times, that people, for example, soldiers in war will have horrendous injury injuries. And they won't be bothered so much by the pain compared to someone in lay life who has the same kind of injury. And whenever I read these kinds of studies, the explanation that's usually given is that the context of a soldier is that they're kind of expecting to get hurt, and they're so grateful to be alive, that they'll, you know, it's just like, you know, some pain is, you know, pretty small issue compared to, to compare it to the fact that they're still alive,

they made it through the battle, and it lay life, we have some big injury that comes out of the blue. And maybe maybe we're not so much grateful for being alive, perhaps as we are. We're still very frightened about what it means to have all this injury, and how is it gonna affect us? So we might have all kinds of beliefs about what the pain means. And our society helps us have beliefs about pain and some attitudes about pain is that pain shouldn't be there. Some attitude that some people have is it's a personal failing that physical pain as we get older, a lot of people's bodies get more and more pain. I seem to have noticed in my body

and, and I expect that it will just continue this way. I'll do the best I can to exercise and do other things that will help but pain just comes with the territory apparently. Right. And it's not a personal failing, is it mine. So you know, what's the belief we have around pain? What's the attitude we have around pain being there? Do we have a sense of the purpose of pain and one of the one of the changes that can happen in relationship to pain that can be very helpful is we have understanding of how to practice with pain with a pay no longer is simply a problem. But can also become a benefit also becomes something which which we see Oh, it has a benefit in my life I can, I can use it for my benefit. It's not saying that you shouldn't get rid of the pain or try to work on it. But if you understand Oh, pain also can have a benefits when it's there. And in Buddhism, the benefit of working with pain is usually defined as its purifying possibility. to focus on pain to pay attention to pain can be tremendously purifying. Because what we're trying to purify in Buddhism is any kind of contraction, any kind of clinging, any kind of resistance, we have to any experience. We're having it all subjective experience we're having in our life. And so if you learn that, oh, here comes pain. It has some value here, because this is my chance try to find that equanimity, to find that peaceful place where I've purified myself of all the reactivity that might have arise. So we so the context of how we understand the pain has changed from just being a hindrance and problem in our life, to having at least some benefit, in terms of happiness, what it can do for inner life or meditation or practice. So one of the aspects of this then mindfulness is to look at our belief set our understanding of what pain is, and how we relate to it, what our beliefs around it. The second thing we do in mindfulness is to look at our feelings around pain, which are our reactions to it much more and kind of feeling level is their aversion to it. Is there fear around it? What's the resistance around it? What's the reaction direct reaction we have towards it? And to explore that, now it can be very helpful sometimes, because sometimes physical pain is augmented or strengthened, by the way in which we react to it. If, if we feel I've had physical, I had, you know, tremendous pain in my knees meditating. And I've seen very clearly that my aversion to it gets my knees, my muscles around the knees to contract. And as they contract, I have greater pain. And so to look very carefully and very honestly, at the reactions that we have towards the pain is one way of helping us not feel as much pain because we want to augment the pain with the suffering and the tightening that can happen when we have unhealthy relationships to it. Some people might assume that aversion and fear and those contractions like that are automatic and natural and they should be there and Maybe they're automatic, relatively, but they don't have to be there. There isn't another way of living in a life. Besides always, you know, reacting in these kinds of ways. It can be very helpful to have equanimous attitude, relationship to pain. And amazingly enough, I think it's amazing, but I had this experience, it's possible to be filled with rapture, filled with joy, while you're

experiencing physical pain, while you're kind of focusing on your pain, even when it's gonna be very, very intense pain. physical pain does not preclude the possibility of feeling at peace does not preclude the possibility of actually feeling joy and happiness. So we should be very careful, any any automatic associations we have that physical pain means I have to then suffer psychologically. It's it's not necessarily so one of the experiences I've had of a lot of pain in meditation was kind of the first kind of one of the first places of great insight around pain for me was they have this ritual at in Zen monastery is called tongue Gharial, which, when you want to go, it's kind of like it kind of looks like a hazing. I think in the best

descriptions I've heard about it. It's Zen monasteries are supposed to be really tough places. And they only want people who are there who are really serious about their practice really strongly motivated. So when you first show up, you have to show them that you're really motivated. Do you have the motivation it takes to survive in Zen monastery. So they put you in a room and they sit down and face you say, face the wall. And when I did, I did this in America and in Japan, Japan was tougher. Because in Japan, you're supposed to sit full lotus and they've come along with the sticks. This flat sticks and where you wear these robes and if you're sitting up in full lotus then the knees aren't what they used to be. But if you sit in full lotus like this then if you bring a stick underneath your your the person's but next to the cushion here, the stick will go right away all the way through and if you know you're cheating under your robes and have your one of your feet down and that stick a cue soko hits your heel and you've been caught red handed. So anyway supposed to sit in this room for anywhere from depends on where you are in one place. I sat that was five to 10 days. And in Japan it was seven to 14 days. And you have to sit there for three to four hours at a time. without moving, and then they come and serve you, then you have your meals and you give it half an hour break after the meals to do things, whatever you need to do. And then to come back and sit, and you do that all day, from four o'clock in the morning to 930 at night. And it was really painful. And the first time I went through this, the only way I could manage with the pain was I had because I was you know, I wasn't gonna leave I was motivated or you know, for afraid of leaving. Anyway, I wasn't gonna leave, I was gonna stay there with that. So it means I had to sit and so the pain was gonna go away. So I had to somehow and pain got more and more burning more more intense. So I had to somehow manage with that pain. And the only way I managed with the pain was just to stay with Pain moment by moment, not just the pain, but stay moment by moment with my thoughts and reactions to that pain. And if I let my mind slip, and not be mindful for a little while, it will start hurting terribly, because I start filled with thoughts of self pity and all these kinds of things and aversion, how terrible it is, or whatever. But if I could watch my thoughts so carefully that I could catch the first of all thoughts of aversion, resistance, impatience, all the kind of things in fear that might arise, catch you this first moment that arose and then let go of it, then the pain wasn't that bad, that it was manageable for them for that moment. And you know, what I did was string together a whole series of moments for a week and so I got to ride it, you know, that's a ride is very, very carefully. And so it's kind of like an forced mindfulness because like, yeah, you I couldn't, the cost of not being mindful, so great that I stayed present. So at the end of this seven days, oh, the thing is, you don't know when you don't you don't know when it ends. You know, it's like it's seven to 14 days or in order for five, they're spending where you were five to 10 days. So you don't

know, you know, it's the discretion of the one of the senior priests, monks to decide when it ends. So you don't know. So you're sitting there, you know, you great if you can kind of anticipate the end, right? Just hang in there for another couple hours or just one more day and it'll be it'll be over. You know, and then you're sitting there sitting there and they come and they tap someone else on the shoulder. Hey, so it's over for you now and they get up and leave because you do it usually do to get together with other people. So he gets to leave

But then finally, the first time I did this, but you remember the finally the lortab came my shoulder and I knew it was over. And I teared up, start crying little bit. And the reason that cried a little bit teared up, because I felt it was, it was going to be a tremendous loss. Because until that point in my life, I had never had that much constant intimacy with myself. As I had those seven days. I had to be right there with every thought every reaction every you know, I learned so much about myself in the process. It was so purifying It was so I felt so connected to myself because I couldn't afford not to be connected. And so I just was so precious, and it all I'm going to lose this now. And so since then I've learned you can have as many intimacy without pain. So I'm not recommending that you go out and I went to one of my Zen teachers early on and said, I noticed that I get much more concentrated in my my Zen practice, if I sit in full lotus and tackle her pain, and what should I do? Should I sit there with the pain, you know, and he said, Don't, cause don't do anything to cause yourself to have pain when you sit down to meditate. And we don't sit in full lotus order to have pains in your concentrated. But when pain visits you and pain comes then included as part of your practice, but don't go looking for trouble.

So part of what we mindful of is the belief set that cognitive relationship we have to the pain and also the sense of purpose we have around it. And maybe they can find a sense of purpose that is useful to be with a pain. Another thing we look at is our reactions to the pain, the reactivity, the fear, the aversion, the resistance might be there. And then to look at that very honestly and very directly, feel carefully in your body where those feelings are, where those reactions are, where the contractions might be, and really be there very carefully with it, see it clearly for what it is. The third thing is that sensations itself of pain, the direct raw sensations independent in the sense of our reactions and our thoughts, and the physical pain, the sensations.

What I found over and over again, is that when I look at the pain directly the sensations of pain directly, it ends up being experienced differently than if I look at it, looking at it from a distance. kind of look at it from the side of my eyes are kind of kind of kind of had Some, you know through my thoughts and ideas for what it is our core concepts. But if I really feel it, it's becomes very different. And one of the ways that schools can be distraught described is that, from a distance pain will often look, unless it's throbbing will often look like somewhat solid, like a solid, massive pain of hardness. When you look at it very, very carefully bringing attention very intimately to the pain, the pain stops looking so solid becomes more of a flow or an impermanent, changing flux of sensations. And once it becomes a changing flux of sensations, and it's not so solid, it often helps loosen up attitudes we might have we based on it being solid and fixed. Often it doesn't, doesn't feel so intense, not so bad. When we get

really close to it and feel it changing and moving and part of it is To really get in there close. And what you'll find the closer you get, the more you'll find that actually pain isn't in one spot. And it's not constant. It might be, you know, within one square inch or one square centimeter, but within that little spot, it's moving around, it's sparking, it's arising and passing. It's very suddenly moving. And so to bring you in there and feel the flickering of it or feel the movement of it, and you get closer and closer and at some point, your concentration gets really intimate, really tight on the pain. It can just feel like vibration, very intense vibration. If you get even further into it, it can change. If you really get further absorbed in the pain or that stronger vibration. It can change the whole

understanding of who you are in relationship. To that pain, it's actually you can forget yourself, you can lose yourself all the self consciousness that we have in relationship to pain can disappear when we're completely absorbed in the pain. And when the self consciousness disappears, probably what you'll find is a lot of the optional extra suffering we add to the pain disappears also to really be there with the pain we explored.

So learning to be with pain helps us become familiar with ourselves. Learn about how we take and how we work, so that when we're challenged in other situations in our life, we'll have a familiarity will understand ourselves better know how to respond to the situation wiser. Working with pain can be placed to developing concentration and stillness. Working with pain can be a place freeing ourselves from the ways in which we contract the ways in which we cling. It can be tremendous purifying force. It's let go of so many things sometimes in order to find our peace with pain, working with our own pain, opening up to it and being with it can be a place of developing compassion. And most probably what was one of the very important aspects of pain is to develop compassion for oneself, and also compassion for others. I've had situation on retreat, for example, where, where I was a teacher, and someone was struggling with something sometimes physical pain, some things sometimes with other things. And they just mostly struggled through the retreat. And the retreat ended and they were glad they did the retreat, but I think seem to have changed or move around the pain and they didn't seem to develop any wisdom or any freedom around it or anything. It just was really uncovered. Trouble miserable for them. And then they go back home to their life. And they report come back and they spend weeks or months later they come and tell me Oh, because of that intimacy I had for that week with my suffering and my pain, my physical pain, how difficult was now I struggled with it and how I saw how much I struggle with it. And I couldn't do anything about my struggle. When I now that I encounter other people going through the same thing, I feel so much compassion for them. I really understand I have so much empathy. I really understand, you know how difficult it is for them. I don't think I would have had so much empathy and compassion, if I hadn't gone through it myself. And having compassion, the capacity for compassion, empathy, I think is one of the beautiful things that human beings can develop. It comes from opening to our life as it is. So there are benefits from focusing on pain. It can also help to the helps the pain isn't so bad. Pain also can teach us a lot about what needs to how we need to act objectively in the world to respond to pain becomes better. I like to think of pain as a signal that is trying to teach us something. If you'd numb yourself out or take pain medication, which sometimes isn't necessarily useful to do, but you might not learn how to

compensate or work with a pain to lessen it on your own. So I know I know one person has arthritis, and she says that what she learned from paying attention to your factor or paying careful attention was she learned how she needed to walk so that the pain wouldn't be there. So she wouldn't put it we're putting that kind of pressure on her joints. If she'd taken her pain medication the doctor wanted to take She would have continued to walk, she thought she would continue walking, the way she normally would have walked. And that still would have put pressure in the kind of way that was damaging. But she was able to find a way now to put that pressure on, by listening to the pain and working with it and around it. Sometimes it's not wise to to open up to pain in meditation, sometimes it's not a useful thing to do. And if the mind gets more and more contracted and tight, if the if you feel more more discouraged in the process and worn down in the process, then it's counter indicated. You shouldn't you shouldn't hang out there with pins, you find some other way of working with it. And one of the ways there's many ways than one is simply if you can break the meditation. There's other ways of working with pain rather than looking at it directly. One very pleasant way or can be pleasant is when the pain is very intense in some part of your body is to look elsewhere in your body for some experience. A pleasure. Something is pleasant and comfortable. And then see if you can develop concentration on that place. And then see if you can, as you get concentrated on the pleasure as an alternative to the pain, then let that that pleasure, grow and grow and grow. I've known people who have suffused their whole body with pleasure.

By taking us in there was one woman who had tremendous pleasure her meditation teacher came to her, in her came to her actually had a telephone interviews with her in the hospital. And she was wracked with pain and nothing in hospital that they could do to help her. And he had her find someplace of pleasure. And she described it to me as being a little square inch on her inner thigh. And so with a with a coaching of her meditation teacher, she stayed there on that little inch until she was really focused on it. And then she was instructed to let it expand that out into the rest of her body. And at some point after some time of doing this, that's filled her body with pleasure and delight that overrode the experience of pain that she was, you know, drowning under. So that's one little, you know, way of working with pain. So I could go on and on talking about pain I have so much experience about pain. But I don't know if sometimes I wonder until people are leaving. And, and another use case is kind of sober can't talk because you don't look very happy listening to this. So should I go on or should I stop? Yes. Is it painful to hear this? Very painful? Go ahead, Fisher, please.

I learned as a child that pain Something is wrong.

not healthy. And it's an important signal.

Yeah, always. So

I never understand why people will sit, you know, on a cushion, integrate you when they could chair or alleviate because if you're sitting in constant pain, let's say you're sitting alone, it's like you work for a week. It's not possible at paintings, you're damaging your knees.

It can be definitely. And I've noticed, I don't know if this is true, true statement about different meditation traditions. But I've noticed that a lot more Zen students damaged their knees in meditation than Vipassana students. And the reason is that, I think the reason is that classically in zen, you weren't actually told taught to be mindful as carefully as you are in the public. If you were told, just focus on your breath and kind of tough it out. And so there wasn't a careful attentiveness. they would they would, they would see a difference between pain which is damaging and pain, which is not, in my experience is that I almost always know the difference. And I've been wracked in pain. I've broken up in sweat, because there's so much pain, but I knew I wasn't damaging myself, because I didn't think I was. I mean, I'm not I don't know about all the modern research about how the stress hormones get developed, and inflammation to develop and all these things. So, you know, I'm kind of actually ignorant a lot about medicine of it. But it seemed to me that I could see the difference between most damaging and not damaging, and I would always try to err on the side of if I was unsure Aaron sided being careful. But what, so it's not always more damaging. But is it beneficial to hang in there with pain? When is it when it's there? And, and if it's not damaging, there are times when it's actually beneficial. Because if you want to develop freedom, you want to be freedom and freedom only real freedom only counts if you learn how to be free in all circumstances. And in meditation, it's a very interesting place because meditation, sometimes if you have meditation pain, like a knee or back or something you have you do have the option to break the meditation. So you have some choice there. And so you have to decide what's the wise thing to do. But there might come a time in your life where you don't have a choice and are you prepared in meditation is the place to prepare yourself and you can always break it when you feel is getting too much you kind of push the edge and see you know, how much more can I learn here how much more kind of developed myself so that sometime in the future when it's not interesting when it's when it's, you know, I don't have any other choice. The other thing is that some pain some pain comes from structural problems, they illnesses or structural problems or injuries or something like that. But there's also a category of physical pain that has more of a psychological source, tension holding patterns. And in those kinds of pain, it's actually often very valuable to bring our attention to them. Because that leads the attention to them, which will help them unravel is the attention to them will help bring us into the psychological realm which is their, their source, if we simply have every time we have, you know, if you have 10 shoulders and see one of the one of the paradoxes in meditation is that or is that you can start relaxing and meditation is great, this is great, this is relaxing. I got it made. And then you you relax the surface muscles. And then what's hidden behind the surface muscles is much deeper chronic kind of tension, which has got you know, tension is chronic and the muscles and muscles tentacle numb apparently. And so as the surface muscles kind of relax as we Or awaken ourselves or sematic self, that deeper attention shows itself and it could be intensely burning. I've had, you know, boy, it was a taut, painful, and it's not it wasn't it was an injury, it wasn't sick, we just said, you know, it was 20 years of fear. You know, it was it was there and that shoulder blade and so part of the healing process of that kind of pain is to is to stay

there and let it to open up and let it relax. There seems to be in addition to awareness itself, seems to have it seems sometimes to have a quality of bringing a loving presence or relaxing presence to places of pain. So sometimes awareness itself can be very healing to a place of pain. I don't know exactly how this works. Just it's very reassuring kind of, you know, especially if the mindfulness is kind of loving or calm. Gentle,

but it but sometimes I would imagine is that as we relax with meditation is that the we have a different set of hormones or molecule endorphins or something going through our bodies, we want to relax around pain, as we learn to bring attention to it and it is greater blood flow to the area, which sometimes can help relax it sometimes maybe makes it worse. So there are some tough times we're actually bringing attention to help heal the place of pain. So it's so disappointing to run away from it. You don't get the healing benefits when that's the case. And so, while you still have a choice, I encourage you to push the envelope with your pain and learn how to be at peace with that. Other questions?

Two questions. One is, is there some intermediary space where,

you know, there's there's, there's no pain, there's pain, and there's sort of what you're describing, like, Oh, it's like, transcended or realized some ask, you know,

experience pain and I still it's just a nuisance, you know. It's possible

but that's, that's that's an attitude we have towards it. And so, you know, maybe you can take it, see if you can change that attitude and see is there some benefit to working with a pain is in purpose, a classic Buddhist purposes it's purifying. It helps us to purify the inner life. And it's not just a nuisance. Some teachers will say that all physical pain in your body is needs to be worked through. Because in order to purify the psyche, we passed the classically called the path of purification of purifying all these different aspects of ourselves.

So that any pain experience is

Yeah, yeah, the Buddhists will say that any pain at all karma, you know, and no pleasure in anything they'll say everything's karma. I don't know how useful it is to say that. However, there There is. There is something that very mean that this is not this is not a technical term. But there's also there's pain that comes from injury or structural problems, illnesses. There's psychological pain in our body body, which inner pain which comes from psychological holding patterns. And then there's a third kind of pain, which is not a technical terms or as I know, but it's sometimes called Dharma pain. And that's seems to be a label that some people put on physical pain in the body, which seems to be there for no discernible reason at all. There's no psycho psychological reason for it being there. You know, you can't discern anything you've been focusing on for years. And just and there's no structural problem, it

seems to be going on just there is they called Dharma pain is just that's pain of life, you know, it's there. And once when I was sitting with Joseph Goldstein, and three month retreat, middle of the retreat, I had this tremendous burning pain in my shoulder blade and left shoulder blade, and it was really bad. And I'd go for interviews, and he'd give me really good advice, try this. And now try it and just got worse. And he said, to cultivate equanimity around it. So I tried to cultivate equanimity. It just got worse you know, says horrible thing and And finally, I went to interview with Joseph. And he said, I told him one more time, you know, what I tried to do with it and how it didn't work. And it was so much so much pain. And this time, he didn't give me any more advice. He just looked at me and said, Oh, probably in a past life, you stab someone in the shoulder. And, and, you know, I don't know about this Buddhist thing about rebirth, all that I don't really know, something I really know much about. But so it's that belief of that wasn't so important for me. But somehow, when he when he said that, what it what it kind of said to me was, Oh, it's there for a reason. And I don't have to know the reason. It was when that cognitive change happened within me. That's when I finally had was able to accept it, and found that I couldn't find the equanimity that he kept it He asked me to find. So it was a cognitive change that allowed me to kind of just relax my hold on it. So that can be changed. And that's part of the reason I wanted to give this talk today is to say, we can have a different attitude to our pain than we'd often have, untrained or otherwise know weren't told, we have different attitude. So you might experiment. Next time you have some pain, experiment with the with it. Yeah. And find out for yourself if there are benefits, who will be from being with pain hanging out there with paying attention to the whole Gestalt and what happens when you're in pain?

Quick, the second question is I had once been instructed that if the pain is becoming more powerful, more common than your intended object of meditation, then you should sort of do something. So you can go back here say okay, for this hour, But the pain is getting so much you can't focus on the breath, or at least you think is getting so much that just take the two minutes to relax it and then go back to your intended object. And wait, there's some sort of, you know, maybe this is for weaker meditators. noise in the room is so constant and then you could go turn it off, because it's distracting you from your intended object. You just go turn it off and

come back. Hmm. I mean, that's certainly one strategy person can do. And I think particularly with persons trying to develop concentration on an attended object. Mindfulness is the way we the way we teach mindfulness meditation is that whatever is the predominant experience becomes the meditation. So whenever we don't, we give some emphasis to an intended object, like the breath. It gives an emphasis in priority to it, but we don't hold on to it, and we're ready to go of it. If there's a sound or a pain We make that the meditation. So pain in other words, in that sense, pain doesn't become a distraction from meditation, it becomes the meditation

is last one,

I was gonna tell the story of this 10 year old that has spinal cancer, and he's had, I don't know how many trips to the hospital in the last three years, he's never had any sort of formal meditation training, or it's just, I wanted to share the story because he says that wants to die. So here's a kid who's not being able to play like everybody else. He can't get up and jump around, like people who can't do most of the things that most of us do. And he's had to sort of figure out, like, some way to sort of, you know, continue his life. And he says, you know, he's laughing when he says that he wants to have this kind of, but I think But it does. So since is to have the, the presence over that pain, he's had a tremendous amount of pain.

And I just,

you know, to sort of have that strategy, you know, this is

also very humbling to be with pain. And I think most of us, I just picked myself maybe most of us, being humble from time to time is very helpful. And also to realize to be up against something that's really painful, and meet some someone some of the valuable experiences I've had with pain in meditation was when I was just so nothing worked. Meditation Didn't work, you know, nothing, nothing helped make it better just, you know, I just I was just so humbled by just this is really bad you know and to realize that I, you know, bring a certain kind of conceit that oh I can I can, I can find my way with it, I can practice with it, I can do something with it, but let go of that too

well, so now you got a pep talk around pain, I hope that you find this encouraging and, and hope you have some some appreciation that the capacity to open to pain and difficulty is a set is the same capacity to open to joy and freedom. And if you avoid the pain, the difficulty, there probably you'll end up avoiding before capacity to feel joy and freedom as well. So maybe all of you learn The Art of opening to life as it is. Thank you