

2003-03-13: Protection

Sun, 7/5 4:21PM • 40:25

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

peace, buddhism, buddha, world, protection, people, torment, protect, king, engaged, feel, life, timeless, dharma practice, important, talked, psyche, dangers, teacher, english

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So trying to think today, but what am I talking about this evening? In my thoughts kept coming back to wanting feeling kind of a need, perhaps, to say something that address the anxiety and the concern people have around potential war in Iraq. And it's so big in many people's awareness and thoughts and didn't quite know what to do.

And I've talked about such subjects in the past and I thought of talking about refuge, the idea of the going for refuge taking refuge and in times of difficulty, one of the resources that Buddhists have is to take refuge in the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha. And then I thought about the topic theme of protection, which I brought up yesterday in the morning in the talk. And you find in Indian Buddhism, classic Buddhism, big emphasis on protection. And I think it is a continuation of probably what was a very popular concern. At the time of the Buddha, people sought for protection. There was a lot of dangers in life. Certainly dangers of illness, sickness, old age, dangers of livelihood and losing your livelihood, dangers of robbers, dangerous of armies and war that came wandering through India at the time. And so people look for protection. And there are certainly lots of people offering protection protective devices as they're still listening. today. People are offered amulets, and you could wear amulets around your neck are a little different, or you learn mantras. You learn, you do particular rituals that will protect you.

And the Buddha came along. And his emphasis for protection was not to do things that will protect you externally from the world around you so much. But his emphasis was to protect you the importance of protecting yourself internally. And in fact, the idea of protection in Buddhism is that you're protecting yourself from yourself, because the source of your own, the word is very powerful in Pali, your own torment, the word clear sound among the fundamental things that classical Buddhism is trying to address is something called the classes clashes, which are translated to English sometimes it's the tournament's and that way in which we torment ourselves. So the inner critic is one way that people torment themselves. But there's many ways in which we turn ourselves. And the Buddha offered his

particular insights for a way of helping people deal with these inner torments the way in which we torment ourselves. And so the protection that Buddha offered is that protection which protects us from the inside.

The last week, I've talked to two friends who went and traveled in opposite directions. One went to New York and to Boston. And he commented how much anxiety people on the East Coast have compared to here in the West Coast. And I've heard other people say the same thing. The idea of terrorism the idea of war in Iraq and its consequences for America loomed much larger for people on the East Coast for a number of reasons you can imagine. And then my other friend spent six months Six months last six months living in Thailand. And she said what it was what a relief it was to live in Thai culture in Thai in Thailand, she lived in northern Thailand, place where there's virtually no or no foreigners living there. She was supposed to teach English at a university. And she had 100 students in US rural university to learn English she was to teach. I think she was teach Business English. The problem was, nobody spoken English. And she was a little bit perplexed about how to begin teaching people English, you didn't have any any place to begin, and especially a roomful of hundred people. But she had a lovely time there and she talked about how wonderful it was to be in a Buddhist culture. She spent a lot of time days off going to Buddhist temples and visiting Buddhist teachers and talked about how wonderful was to be in a society at least parsa she saw the corner she saw the monasteries, and that seemed not to have same consumer frenzy that she felt when she came back here. And she's a therapist, in which she commented repeatedly about how delighted she was in the country that had whole country is only apparently she claimed only 400 psychotherapists, psycho psychiatrist or something like that. But there are 40,000 monks. And she liked that ratio quite a bit. And here in America, she said, You know, there's probably 40,000, psychotherapists, and maybe for monks Buddhist monks. And but the thing that struck me most was a story of meeting one teacher that she said, changed her life. And she became a kind of very devoted disciple student of this teacher, and we'll go back and be with him some more. And she said that there were two things that struck her about this man are a few to every three things. One, she said was that he was a field of loving kindness, that you just kind of get close to him and you feel all this loving kindness kind of radiating from him. His love is kindness. And the other thing she felt from him was she said that he seemed to be empty. And in Buddhist talk about someone's being empty, it's one of the highest compliments you can give to a Buddhist. And though in popular English, maybe that person's empty doesn't work so well. But the teacher I had the teachers teacher, my teacher in Burma, Arjun, Masato, he was described to me as being someone for him. He was like a house in which all the lights were on. All the windows were open the doors all the doors are open. There was no one home. There all the faculties were very alive and vibrant and the person was very receptive and aware of the world around them and connected and everything. But there was no ego, there was no self definition, there was no self defense and protection trying to be something for anybody, that the kind of many things we, you know, that we tend to fill ourselves with torment ourselves with was it was missing in this person. So, my friend described her teacher in Thailand as being similar and kind of being empty. She said of him also that he, as far as she could tell, she never met the person whom she felt his work had been done. And that is an expression in, in classic Buddhism of someone who's attained full enlightenment. Their work

has been done because once you're fully enlightened, there's more work so it's much more spiritual work to be done. And

and she spent a lot of time Within and that was our impression, you know, she's very constant seems like his work has been done. She was very inspired by him. And he also talked about to her about how it hadn't been. It had not been easy for him to practice. His practice had been difficult. But he'd done it. He hung in there. And she thought he was relatively young. He was 49 years old. He was a student had been a student about Ajahn Chah, not many he those of you know him. And, and the advice he kept giving her, and this is the part that really resonated with me today that made me kind of happy hearing his advice to her was, his advice to her was repeatedly was plunged into Nirvana. As if you know, it's right here to plunge into and, you know, and plunged into Nirvana into Nirvana in Bali. And when I heard that I was reminded about peace. And many of us are concerned with, you know, international peace. But is there a kind of peace which is available for us to plunge into right here, as we sit here? Is there a kind of peace that's available in our own hearts and our psyches? That's not so far away, and something that's a refuge, something that is protection, and something's available to us that we can go to? And does it have value for us to find this kind of peace? Can there be is there some kind of peace that's available to you, even in times of strife, even in times of difficulty and conflict? I get a lot of lessons around this at home with my five year old who seems to be constantly exploring limit limits. And there are some days where it's very clear that I can be in a very conflicted situation at home and I can be completely at peace. There are other times where the whole situation is conflicted. And I'm being tormented. Not by him, of course. Unless I, you know, I get diluted, but the torments as we get towards the tournament's always come from ourselves. So the idea of peace finding peace and is it value for people to be at peace with themselves to find peace. And I find that sometimes I myself and certainly many people will sometimes feel that being at peace for themselves of plunging into peace, resting in peace, peaceful state, seems not justified, that feels wrong to do it, when there's strife and suffering and tension in the world around them, whether it's the family or community or the wider world. And I noticed there are a few people who grew up in families situations where the only way they showed love was by worrying, so it's very important to show you worry, because then you show you really cared. And if you didn't worry, then, you know, people thought something was wrong with you. You didn't, you didn't really care. But are there ways in which we feel that in order to be responsible for the situ our world around us to feel connected to doing something that we have to get hooked in and lose touch with a piece that's here always. And that's really the one of the great challenges I think, in a spiritual life is a challenge between that force that wants or that voice or that impulse. They wants us pull us away into the world and be hooked and attached and reactive to it. Even for seemingly good motives, and that force that potential within us to stay balanced economists at peace with ourselves. In the Buddha said that, you know, he wanted to he was teaching a path to pick where we protect ourselves part of the net message of the Buddha is that if you can, if you can protect yourself from yourself, you will never leave that place of peace. Even though you might go into conflictive situations and try to deal with them and respond to them and act on them, there's no need to leave that place of peace. There's a remarkable discourse on these books of the Buddha and it has

to do with a king or the kings and time of the Buddha he comes to visit the comes to visit the Buddha. And he says to the Buddha, just now, venerable Sir,

I had been engaged in those affairs of kingship, typical of great kings, great warrior kings, typical of those who are intoxicated with the intoxication. kingdom. Two were obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in their country, and who rule having conquered a great spirit of territory or on Earth. imagined him pointed Buddha admitting This is who he is. I was you know, my typical I was involved, engaged in typical activity of a king like myself I was intoxicated by my power and obsessed by greed. So, the Buddha says to him, what do you think great king. Here a person would come to you from the east. One who is trustworthy and reliable. And having approached the person would tell you, for sure, great king. You should know this. I am coming from the east. in there, I saw Great mountain, high as the clouds coming this way, crushing all living beings, do whatever you think should be done great king, then a second person would come to you from the west and say the same thing. And another person from the north, another person in the south, saying that this huge mountain as high as the clouds was barreling across the country crushing everything in its wake, all coming to converging right here where you are.

Do whatever you think should be done great king, they say to you, some say.

The Buddha goes on to say so imagine this situation. Then he would have says, If Great King, such a great parallel should arise such a terrible destruction of human life, the human state being so difficult to obtain what should be done. So the king said if, venerable sir, such a great peril should arise such a terrible destruction of life. What else should be done, but to live by the Dharma to live virtuously and to do wholesome and meritorious deeds? I inform you a great king I announced to you great king, aging and death are rolling in on you. When aging and death are rolling in on your grid King, what should be done? The King says as it is aging and death are rolling in on me, venerable Sir, what else should be done but to live by the Dharma, live virtuously and do wholesome and meritorious deeds There are a number of goes on there are a vendor. Bill, sir, no, the king goes on there are venerable sir. Elephant battles fought by head anointed warrior kings who are intoxicated with the intoxication of power, who are obsessed by greed for sensual pleasures, who have attained stable control in the country, and who rule hadn't conquered a great sphere of territory on Earth. But there is no place for those elephant battles, no scope for them when aging and death are rolling in. So it's kind of a powerful image. I think, these images great mountains rolling into Crusher, Saul, and the guy realizing Well, there's nothing else you can do at that point. What would you do? Would you kind of just lament or be afraid and it's pointless to be afraid if it's happening anyway. And he's arguing when, when things such great danger is coming, the best thing you can do is to live virtually to live the Dharma which means various things live virtually Do wholesome, wholesome deeds, certainly his way of creating conditions for a better rebirth, which is a classic Buddhist understanding what happens after you die after the mountains crushing mountains of old age and death, but also to live by the Dharma, and to live by the Dharma is to plunge into the piece is to find that place of in your mind and your heart and your psyche, where you

could be deeply apiece and liberated from all the fears and the hates and desires, which torment your psyche. Entering being engaged in that to find that place to plunge into that possibility. And there are some people for whom they don't plunge into those that possibility of peace until they come across a major catastrophe in their lives. When sickness and old age really hit someone. There are some times when that only then do they really let go in a very deep way. And they find that there's a kind of stillness, a timeless presence that's always here. But we're all usually so preoccupied and caught up in our thoughts and our activities and all things we should do. That the timeless present which is here, you know, is not something that we taste tune into, listen to feel. And perhaps we spent a day walking down the beach, on the coast here and at the end of the day, we lay down look at this sunset and then we kind of feel that restful place we feel this timeless presence which is always here. But we have to wait for special moments for that. To live by the Dharma to find that place of rest is one of the central tasks I think of Buddhist practice. So there's another time that this king came to visit the Buddha

and he said to the Buddha While I was at lone in seclusion, a reflection arose and in my mind thus, who now treat themselves as deer who cherishes, cherishes themselves, and who treats themselves as a foe.

Then, venerable sir, it occurred to me. Those who engage in misconduct of body speech in mind, treat themselves as a foe. Even though they may say we regard ourselves as deer. Still, they treat themselves as a foe, for what reason? Because of their own accord, they act toward themselves in the same way, that an enemy might act towards an enemy. Therefore, they treat themselves as an enemy. But those who engage in good conduct of body speech in mind, treat themselves as deer, even though they may say we regard ourselves as a foe still, they treat treat themselves as a deer. For what reason, because of their own accord, they act towards themselves in the same way that a cherished person, deer person might act towards those that share cherish, therefore, they treat themselves as deer. And then another time he came to the Buddha and he said, I was alone and I had the following thought, how not the Buddha, who know protects themselves and who leaves themselves unprotected. So this is the issue of protection. Then it occurred to me venerable sir, those who engage in misconduct of body speech and mind leave themselves unprotected. Even though a company of elephant troops may protect them, or a company of cavalry or company of chariot troops, or a company of infantry. Still, they leave themselves unprotected. For what reason? Because that protection is external All not internal, therefore they leave themselves unprotected. But those who engage in good conduct of body speech in mind protect themselves, even though no company of elephant troops protects them, nor a company of cavalry nor a company of Cheerio tears, nor company of infantry, still they protect themselves for what reason? Because that protection is internal, not external, therefore they protect themselves. It's considered to be a appropriate thing in the teachings of the Buddha, to cherish oneself. Certainly, selfishness is considered a problem, self obsession, but to have some basic, deep appreciation and cherishing of oneself is a beautiful thing. And to protect oneself is considered a healthy thing to do. The suggestion here is we protect ourselves. The reliable protection is a way we learn to protect ourselves from the inside. This is one of the reasons why awareness practice is so phenomenally important in Buddhism, to pay attention,

because by paying attention, that's how we can learn to look in and see where the choices are, where the activity, the impulses, the motivations are, the mental activities are that cause that internal dangerous to ourselves, the internal torments of ourselves, as we know, someone can do something terrible to you. And in doing something terrible to you, you have various ways of choosing how to respond if you're quite aware and balanced and present for that. And their ways of responding when we add torments to ourselves. Will we be filled with resentment or anger, even justified anger there's a kind of violence to ourselves but someone who stays President balanced he knows peace and knows how not to be stuck in their anger be stuck in the resentment is learned now how now to add how not to add torments on top of a difficult situation. So it kind of in the same mind was said here, it said in Buddhism, that when you get angry with an enemy, you're doing your enemy a favor because you're doing to yourself what your enemy actually couldn't do for yourself. So to be at peace, to find peace, to reflect on whereas peace found and to look at the voices inside of you. That argues against peace argues why it isn't justified in any situation Why shouldn't be Why? The voice inside of you they argue or tell you or insist to you, that other modes of being are better ways of being the being caught up in hate or anger or fear, or better modes of being. So as this country faces war in both directions,

people on the East Coast feel that threat mostly of things happening in Iraq, and people in California now beginning to get some little itchy feeling about missiles from Korea. They're supposed to be able to reach California. There's all kinds of things hopefully we do, respond and act. But one of the contributions of Dharma practice is no matter how we respond and act no matter what we do, that we one of our tasks as Dharma students, is to be very, very conscientious about how we protect ourselves. How we how we don't add protects us from ourselves. So we don't meet hate with hate. We don't meet anger with anger. Because it isn't so much because that creates bad conditions in the world we should often does. But we're actually going very much very much against the grain of what is the greatest safety, the greatest happiness and peace, the greatest well welfare that's possible for any individual person. I was so inspired when my friend came back and talking about our tie teacher. Individuals who found how to be at peace with themselves in the world. Our life is a bright light in the world. And I think it's a great gift we give to the world around us. If we can respond to the world and act in the world, engage in it, you know, in a responsible way in all different ways. livelihood wise, politically, all kinds of ways, in ways that we're being careful with our hearts careful with our psyche. With our, with our inner life, so that we are protecting ourselves from our own torments. And by protecting ourselves from our own torments, protecting our own quality of mind, or quality of your own peace, we actually also then protect others. It's a tremendous gift we give to others, if they can encounter us when we're at peace with ourselves.

So the plunge into Nirvana, to plunge into the timeless that's here is it here for you What's here for Now what is it? in you? That is coloring your present moment experience? What happens if there's nothing inside of you? which colors are influences or judges or criticizes or holds on to your present moment experience? Is there some plunging, leaping leap of faith into some timeless dimension, which is here now.

So those are my comments for the evening. And now it's your turn if you have any comments or questions or reflections Yes, please.

I just came back from three weeks in India. Before I left the arrest, everybody was afraid for me as far as traveling, going crazy. And it was the same sort of projected fear that I got 10 years ago. Because there was turmoil there with the Muslims fighting the Hindus, I was fighting right in the midst. Of course, I wasn't touched by them. And when I came back from this wonderful obviously, things were just about the same. But I was in the complete news back in there and shut down there was no TV. We lived on a 40 acre campus. So we're looking for nine of the days of the three weeks that I was there and I back. And it was almost like, things just didn't change. It was the same chair and the same people worrying about the world events. And so, for me, what was really obvious is the form of self protection is to just take the complete news facts. I mean, we don't need to be inundated. Constantly. I don't have a health club and they have a big TV in a man's locker room. And I have to bypass it quickly because everyone gravitates around this horrid news. And then everybody has to repeat what they're saying, of course.

So that

was fine. I felt no danger of being there. Everybody said that I didn't get smears and this and that. So

to me, that would be a form of self protection is the job

Sure, you think it could be or it can be a wise thing in the context of this talk, the I think that would be considered an external protection, because it's doing something about the external world, if what is open and attentive with although, you know, we wouldn't intentionally shut anything out at all. You don't have to go potentially look for trouble either. But the internal doesn't require that we shut off. Anything the internal protection works, even if we're watching television,

as well as getting home was to continue the same level of practice, which was meditation yoga in this particular case, and I took 23 hours to get home. It was a week ago Friday. And you like really nice family and dispense some gifts. Thank them for giving me the space to take this three weeks, which I try to do once a year. And I was back at yoga class that same Friday after this 23 hour flight and just continued my same you know, inner inner a program of trying to keep the peace from the inside. Beautiful, beautiful. So it's not one sort of compliment against the other. And anything coming here, I mean, I was still having a little bit of jet lag comes in waves.

work for me to

continue to practice.

One of the things he's one of the things you said was, you were gone for three weeks and if things didn't seem to change, at least in terms of the I guess The war Iraq and all these things in three years you missed anything in those three weeks in some ways, and, and immediately reminded me that struck me that you know, you could you could be gone for three years or 30 years, 300 years and you'd come back and there's a chance you come back, but they're still talking about the same kind of thing. It would be different countries and different players and different, you know, particular issues. But if you go back in time, human history, you know, this is like, all those humans are doing it again, can you believe? And so with that kind of perspective, it isn't to minimize how important it isn't how tragic it is. But in that, you know, this kind of thing rolls through human history constantly over and over again, the expectation that it should be different, might be part of the part as adds the suffering Yes, I wonder

what the Buddha will do about something like this. And pero feels a little iffy when I hear you speak about the earpieces just that I feel like we live in a different time. Now, because I am present with what's happening on the other side of the world, which we may always have been on some level, but not in the way that we are now. And I feel like there's two camps. Now there's the people that are completely sucked into that reality. And there's people that are just turned off, and I feel myself somehow being part of both worlds. And so if I look at what I see the mobs doing in the old traditional ways, they really have permission to turn the world off, right and they're sitting in their cave. They're not just making fun like, mine, or anybody else's. And it's their job to, to the whole. So I see that as a very, very secret work. And then there's the other side of the people that are feeding those months. And I wonder today, more and more people not really doing both, and how to do both. How to be involved fully and full heartedly in an effort to be at peace, but peace was the willingness to live truly, in my torment every day.

Yeah. So you've started off by asking what with the Buddha do I don't know what the Buddha would do, but the Buddha's example of Buddha's life as someone who did not live in a cave, but somebody who was actually wandered around India and was in you know, in the presence of kings and beggars and the whole realms of everyone there was very much engaged in the world There was engaging conversation and debates and went to visit two kings a time to talk about war. And she was a very, very, very someone who's very much engaged and right in the middle of it. And do we live in a time now where there's some kind of split between, you know, only doing inner work and shutting off the outer world is not sustainable. I would hope I would kind of imagine or at least hope that that split never has been sustainable. You know, our life isn't you know, stuck, like we're in a special time now, even though we know each other around the world more. I think it's unhealthy to have that split in a radical way. Probably anytime. more to be said about that. One of the, one of the important teachings that I got was that Teacher Teacher mindset that the contribution Mahatma Gandhi made to Buddhism was that Buddhism teaches that it's very important to sit to meditate and Mothma Gandhi's his contribution to Buddhism was, it depends. It's important where you sit. So, and that means many

things. But, you know, you, maybe you know, if you've meditate every day, it's very important. Maybe you maybe you might as well meditate maybe on the, you know, down the dock yards, we're loading up the tanks, and you know, blocking that parking, the tanks going off to war, you know, where you sit is important to what communities you sit in. The San Francisco Zen Center, you know, was built somewhat intentionally and built but they bought a building somewhat intentionally, in the dangerous poor part of the town, because they felt it was very important where you sat to sit in the midst of that kind of environment rather than off in the suburb somewhere we was wealthy and wealthy do people where you sit is a very important. So that's one way of healing that divide, I think. But then sitting is both literal and metaphoric. Yeah, and I no way imply that want to imply that, that focusing on your inner safety, your inner peace is a is meant as an alternative to being engaged in the world in the world. But I think that the strength of Buddhism, the strong point of Buddhism is not that, you know, doesn't have all the answers for how we should live our life. But the strength of what Buddhism has to offer is it offers practices and offers teachings and offers a kind of understanding of the human mind, that helps us in that particular area, to protect ourselves from ourselves to find that inner peace here. And it's really one of the great systems for doing that in the world. And that's a strong point. It doesn't mean that's the only thing we should be doing. So like, you know, we have one minute Yes.

Some of the types of states of mind arise view pretty clearly things a lot to diminish with increasing equanimity and peace shouldn't feel anger and agitation, hatred, but how about just a sense of sadness? Is that something we should not be part of

production?

The

so how upon what authority what basis do I answer your question? So certainly the in the sutras you know, the classic answer to that question is that certain kinds of sorrow, lamentation and grief are dispelled through Dharma practice. That's the whole one of the points of Dharma practice is to finish that Is there sadness? When the Buddha's main disciple sharpshooter died? The Buddha was supposed to said it's as if something like something like, it's as if the sunlight or the sun has been darkened. You know, imagine that, you know that, to feel sense of loss to feel sadness to feel, to feel, you know, I don't think someone's you know, being killed in front of you. I don't think you supposed to be going whistling down the streets, you know, whistling Dixie Dixie or something or, you know, feeling happy. I think the feel the series seven isn't about the sadness of it. The intensity of that, I think is part of my take has been not talking personally, is expected part of life. But then, you know, there's, there's also, you know, Charlie Brown talks a lot about Good grief. You know, and then there's the opposite of that there's bad grief. And so good grief is that which moves through us. So that there was a kind of, you know, rough answer, but I think there is a place there's appropriate form of sadness or feeling that things are off.

Okay, so thank you very much