

2003-04-28: Gratitude

Thu, 7/9 10:36PM • 39:33

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

gratitude, meditation, life, people, feel, gift, return, grateful, spiritual, meditation practice, sustain, psyche, practice, happen, support, appreciation, letting, utilitarian, sense, center

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

But what I wanted most to talk about today is the topic of gratitude. And something that, for me was somewhat of an acquired taste, in a sense that I didn't come to Buddhist practice wanting to be grateful. I didn't come thinking that gratitude was a very important quality to be developed or to had. But in the course of my, my spiritual practice, the gratitude is something that rose more and more became a quite a strong presence and, for me, very important part of my life. And perhaps it's, for me, there's some of you it's a kind of was or is kind of one of these. There's a wonderful expression that I'm now very familiar with. It's kind of a green eggs and ham experience. Where you No, no, I don't want it. And no, I don't want it. And then finally, oh, I do like it. And I was a little bit thinking about this thinking about this book that was sent to us. This book is a beautiful book of quotations called prayers, blessings and meditations from around the world. It's called the bridge of stars. And it was sent to us as a gift by Paula and, and Joanna and Vincent Edmondson who were the two ministers who sold us the church here. And they send this to us as a gift for we do here and they wrote this. Vinton I want to share this small contribution to your new library. It means so much to us to know that you and your community of insight meditation center of the mid peninsula are dedicated to peace, loving kindness and respect and respect for that spark of the highest and each person. It is comforting. At times like these, and we are hearing so much about the threats of war, that the awakened awareness of friends like you and your community, and others, like us, in many, many countries are knowing the parallel universe of exponential love, peace, harmony, forgiveness, transformation, that love is much greater force than revenge and impatience, your friends, Joanna had been sent. And I feel very grateful to the Evanescence, for their support for us, selling us, their church. That's a very supportive way. When the Buddha, there's a legend, that after the Buddha was enlightened, he spent about seven weeks to staying in the area where he was enlightened. And he spent supposedly, the first seven days after his enlightenment, just enjoying the bliss of being enlightened. And then he spent the next Seven days. He got up I guess you sat there for six, seven days he got up and even stood some paces away from that tree that he under which he got enlightened and stood It's been seven days, standing in looking at that tree in as an expression of gratitude for that tree for sheltering him and supporting him for his

enlightenment. And the idea that this idea of the idea that gratitude is so closely connected in the Buddhist heart, to his enlightenment, makes a lot of sense to me. That spiritual life and gratitude go very close at hand, that a lot of the wonderful gifts that come in a spiritual practice come off and often sense that they come as gifts. They come at you know, not something that we can make happen or demand happen or something like it's not like a commodity. It's not like a spiritual supermarket where you just go down and, you know, order up, you know, What you'd like as fast as you'd like, you know, how fast a fast food Meditation Center fast we started franchise, you know, fast meditation. And we could get it really down really fast and efficient and, and people wouldn't even come by liquid just drive by right. And we would be really, really good at what we do and just, you know, have it all packaged nicely and, and it just doesn't work that way. And in fact, it works that way so poorly, that if we're impatient for spiritual life to work, and to get to get to it and get something out of it. Sometimes that impatience stands in the way. And so often the unfolding of spiritual life goes very much counter to the way that people some people, at least, expect life to go in our modern

commodity culture. And sometimes you need a lot of time for spiritual heart to open up and to reveal itself. And so it's, you know, sometimes it's phenomenally inefficient timewise. And but it has to be, and there's no because if it wasn't, then it wouldn't work. It's because it's inefficient, that sense that you have to have it, give it give it enough time, that we learn how not to relate to our life into ourselves as a commodity, as something we can get and acquire and make for ourselves. And for some people, that takes a long time of kind of relaxing, letting go, renouncing, softening, kind of letting go of expectation and wants, because those they can if they're, in some ways, they're appropriate to have, in some ways, as probably most of you know, they get in the way. A lot, a lot of wonderful things happen. inside of our psyche, when we don't do anything when we take and we give ourselves a lot of time, and we don't fill it with our preoccupations with our concerns. A busy life is a beautiful thing can be a beautiful thing to have life doing a lot of things. But the danger of doing a lot of things is that it doesn't allow for some inner processing some inner movement to happen. That can happen only with a space of silence or stillness or just time that we give ourselves going for long walks, going, sitting in meditation, going on retreats, going spending an afternoon sitting at the beach and looking at the ocean. There's some kind of unwinding some kind of releasing kind of, percolating of things that can happen in that kind of context. Some years ago, I I was talking to a professor at Stanford who specializes in psychologists, I think he had he was a psychology psychology professor Stanford was accommodating commenting on other people who are doing research in lucid dreaming. And then the lucid dreaming is the idea that you can stay awake and aware during your dreams. I can do things. And this is a practice that's talking Tibetan Buddhism and certainly capacity people can develop. And he wasn't very approving of it, this thing, because he felt that it's really important for the psyche to have someplace where it's left alone. So I can just kind of move in its own way. And if you kind of bring awareness to that, also, if you have too much awareness, start manipulating that. Also. The poor psyche, you know, it's like, leave me alone. Sometimes Sometimes a psyche wants to be an introvert, left alone. So I don't know if that's theories, you know how good it is that theory. But the idea, at least my idea is that a spiritual life unfolds. Part of it can unfold when we give ourselves time, and then things unfold on their own, and it feels a little bit like a gift. So if you're doing that you're making you make the

conditions, you kind of create the conditions for something and then something can happen. And often you don't know what to expect ahead of time or you don't see what's coming. I'm in are in my own practice. If I look back over the years of my practice, how often what I appreciated about what was happening to me initially was very different. When I reviewed what had happened 510 years 10 years later, oh, something else was really going on. When I was doing Zen practice in my early years, I thought I was cultivating wisdom, in a sense in freedom, liberation. And probably one of the most important things happening in my early Zen practice was I was being compassionate. I was being compassionate was kind of being born and being evoked and, and arising within me. So you know, what is it that's really happening sometimes isn't so obvious, even in the in the moment that it's happening? There are unseen ways in which the inner life matures and develops and it can feel like a gift. And in fact, the attitude of gratitude is phenomenally helpful in a spiritual life, it's phenomenally helpful in doing meditation practice. And that's one of the reasons why I felt this was a really good topic to talk about today is that in that we're all most of us are meditators and interested in using meditation as a way of developing our inner life. That bringing an attitude of gratitude to inner meditation will actually kind of many people accelerate that, you know, the maturation can happen that can happen in in meditation.

However, to be very careful that in looking for that acceleration, and we're not having kind of commodity attitude towards our meditation, you know, I'm going to go get what I can hear. Sometimes I distinguish between two different modes of relating to our life and one mode is

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utilitarian mode. I don't know if these are good words, but utilitarian mode is to do that which is helpful, useful to get what we want in life does use many things to get. So like, if you want to go shopping for your groceries, you know, you want to think about the most utilitarian way to do that. Usually when you go down, you know, quickest way to get to a store and whatever at home. Then there's another mode, besides the utilitarian and that's the appreciative mode. And too often, we spend a lot of our time in the utilitarian mode where we're looking, how can I manipulate work with life? How can I make it work better? How can I make it more efficient? How can I get what I want? and not enough time in the appreciative mode? Rather than appreciating what's here, rather than using it for our own purposes? How can I simply appreciate what's here? appreciate appreciation and gratitude are very closely together in Latin, the word Grace or gratitude and source has in the Latin root meaning of both thankfulness and also being pleasant, something is pleasant, something that arises the light within us do something that brings pleases us, is also something we feel grateful for. So I look in this book under under the topic of thanksgiving and of gratitude and there's a whole section on Thanksgivings. And here is a Iroquois song from the lesson from two centuries ago. We returned thanks to our mother, the earth, which sustains us. We return thanks to the rivers and streams which supply us with water. We return thanks to all herbs which furnish medicines for the cure of our diseases. We returned thanks to the corn and to her sisters, the beans and the squashes which gives Life. We returned

thanks to the bushes and trees, which provide us with fruit. We return thanks to the wind, which moving the air has vanished as diseases. We return thanks to the moon and the stars, which have given us their light when the sun has gone. We return thanks to our grandfather, he know who has protected us from witches and reptiles. We return thanks to the sun, that he has looked upon the earth with a beneficence eye. We return thanks to the Great Spirit, in whom is embodied all goodness, and who directs all things for the good of his children. There was really beautiful and they do have this all pervasive gratitude. We return gratitude. And we offer gratitude to all the different forces that sustain us in our lives. When traditionally in Buddhism, in monastic Buddhism, there's a lot of rituals and chanting as part of Life part of monastic life. The meals are always done with an expression of gratitude. In Zen center, they had a little one kind of like, innumerable innumerable labors brought us this food, we should know how it comes to us receiving this offering, we should consider whether our virtue and practice deserve it, designing the natural order of mind, we should be free from greed, hate and delusion. The work of many beings, how's it go? The offer nowadays they say it off. Anyway, you thought you all know your grace, you heard grace before. And the idea of expressing Grace is something we do at home. Not so much for my sake, but that should be for my sake. But I like it. I like very much idea that my son is doing that. And that we do it in an environment of my son that he kind of grows up with the idea that there can be gratitude for the forces of our life that support and nourish us. And we give thanks for he actually does it now he just insists on doing it. Sometimes it's a guest thing at our house, he asked the guests to do it.

So I'm curious, you know, I'm not asking you at the moment, but I'm just by myself at the moment curious how you're reacting to this theme of gratitude. And some of you probably like the theme, and some of you may be skeptical about it. I know watching my own life, my own mind, how it's I'm struck by how easy it is to lose touch with a sense of gratitude, gratitude to the world around me. And it doesn't take much reflection, however, to realize how much what sustains My life is a gift. I know that you know if something goes wrong with my telephone and the telephone people don't come to repair it, you know, the next day or that, you know, and then they're late, you know, like, an hour or something. And, you know, I can feel kind of irritated and annoyed, you know, you know, they should come when they say they're going to come and you know, and you expect things to work, you know, and things are working and then you go to a country like India. And you asked him to come and fix the telephone, or get a telephone and they put you in an nine month waiting list. And then you're lucky to get it after nine months and, you know, you expect the Caltrans to come on time and, and then you go to India and train on time. You know, you know, and you feel really grateful that it comes. So I'm struck sometimes How easy it is for me sometimes to not be, you know, grateful for the tremendous abundance of tremendous, you know, gifts, the tremendous things that sustain and run my life luxuries that I have in my life. Caltrans is a luxury, you know, and all these things, and I just take it for granted not worse than for granted. It's like, hopefully doesn't come exactly on time. It's like, well, what's wrong here? And you don't 99.9 999-999-9999 9% of what sustains Your life is none of your doing. You know, and we're kind of caught up in that little point. 0000000 1% but we think we're in control and can do things. It just blows you know, just blows me away, you know, how much has to work for us to get you know, I mean, our body always to me, if we had to kind of regulate the chemistry in our body by

ourselves. You'd never get up in the morning and you know he's so busy in so much as so much works you know in the fact that we have this tremendous you know, economic system here in this country with you know, transportation and communication between people and internet and, and so much happens so smoothly and so easily as it does. You know, why don't we just kind of like, why don't we always kind of like bowing down, you know when you see the male male deliver coming on. Wait, wait, wait, let me bow down to this. There was a monk in India so a legendary monk named I think his name was ever weeping. But I don't think he was weeping because of being sad. But he was being he was chastised a lot and beat up by people it says because he would anybody, anybody he encountered, he went back to them, no matter who it was. It's always bound to people. And people. What's going on here with this guy? Yeah. You know, he's always Boeing. They kind of you know, treated him badly and But do you know why don't why aren't we more grateful? I think gratitude is not an emotion. So it's not something you know, as long as you know it's connected to your emotionality at times. But gratitude comes from a particular way in which we reflect or understand our life. The word for gratitude in Pali, I'm not sure the exact pronunciation was, but it's cut on you. And it means the meaning of it is something like to be aware of what it comes to us. So instead of being aware of the kind of reflective awareness to know and I've read and I don't know if this is a true at the mythological connection, that they weren't thinking, think, in English are closely connected. And, and it's been argued, and they need to think certain ways to hesitant to reflect in a certain way about our life is what gives birth to gratitude and sometimes things happens so dramatically on top of it to us that we just feel so grateful, you know, because it kind of forces a new reflection for ourselves, you know, if you haven't, you know, if you have some, you know, amazing life threatening illness.

Friend of mine had it and he was basically told he was going to die and, but then he had a surgery and they didn't think was going to work and it worked. And then and then because it, but then it worked. And then, but then, for a while, he had to have this bag on his side, what's it called these bags we poop into? Yeah. And that's not necessarily a comfortable thing to have a go around with. And, but he was, you know, going along with that as well. And not only did he his cancer was taken care of, but then eventually were able to disconnect that bag and connect up his intestines. And he felt you know, in such awe and gratitude for his life, and it was really great to be around him descent, you know, the first few weeks And now it's been three years or four years or something. And now I see him I don't get any hits from him at all. There's a story of a blind beggar who's standing on a street corner with a tin can. And then maybe he had a he had a sign that says, you know, you know, blind, please, you know, anything you can share is appreciated. And, and some man walked by and so he didn't wasn't really getting much money. He asked him, how's it going in the environment at all? Not really receiving much. It's pretty dismal here today. And so the fellow said to the blind man, oh, give me your, your plaque there and I'll write something on it. And so he took the plaque and he wrote something on the backside turning around into the backside of the new writing was facing out. And then he left and he came back into the day and asked the blind person How's it going now? Oh, it's great that my tent is filling up really great by what would you write and what I wrote was today is a beautiful spring day and I'm blind.

So that's you know, suddenly people feeling very different about let's go go buy that and how often you should really stop so dramatically appreciate what you have the gift you have and the fact you can see I've been kind of expect I got these expensive, these are my old glasses. I got these new glasses recently because my eyes are beginning to go more. And then I got these new glasses and if you don't know glasses that got progressive glasses, because you know, sometimes I read like this now. I got these progressive glasses, and I don't like them. You know, they don't quite work because there are various reasons. They don't I'd work as well, but they say you have to get x four weeks to get used to them. And

they didn't tell me that.

But, but because of kind of dealing with these glass things, I'm feeling so appreciative these days of how much I can see. And even that I can see it all. I just like wow, you know, I can imagine not being able to see as good as I do now. And I believe, you know, the kind of I kind of suspect My theory is that the American kind of philosophy of individualism, the popular kind of way in which it distorts the soul, the psyche, lends itself to kind of inability to really be grateful. It's a deep, pervasive way, because it's all about me in mind and But I'm going to get my freedom, my ability to pursue my desires and any kind of preoccupation with desires. You know that greed, greed and misery are closely connected. The word you know, miser, but also that's what the first noble truth is. All right. So it says, but I step back. I was talking to someone today about what one of the ways I've been changed by my spiritual practice by Buddhist practice. And one way, one way I can talk about the change is by talking about foreground and background of the mind.

And

the foreground of the mind, in a sense, is kind of what the mind is concerned about. It's thinking about wanting what it's focusing on. Before I practice, I had no idea there was a background to the mind. So, the mind was basically what I was concerned about. And the background is this background place in the mind, of equanimity, of calm, of spaciousness of ease of expression, expansive kind of feeling. And practice has showed me that that background part of the mind, and so I find myself sometimes negotiating back and forth between this foreground and background. And it isn't, and it is to hold them both, you know, that I find unhappiest life works easiest, when there's a sense of working with a foreground the things of the world, in the context of the background of a great kind of ease or spaciousness or calm or equanimity. And I believe that's things like gratitude, the reflections that bring up gratitude, the way we think about the world remind ourselves of how wonderful our The gifts that we receive in this witness in this life, how these are connected, they kind of feed and sustain that background ability and to kind of go into the world with his background support, background support of gratitude of appreciation of this life, to be in the appreciative mode of life rather than utilitarian mode. The utilitarian mode is more like power mode, often, the appreciative mode is more than mode of nurturing, supporting and sustaining

to,

to take the time to actually reflect about the gifts of our life, there's tremendous amount of them. It's, like I said, 99.999999, etc. Part of our life is really a gift that supports us. And why don't we appreciate it more in meditation practice, having a sense of appreciation and gratitude as built into the meditation itself to the attitude Bring to maybe the beginning of the sitting or whatever, actually makes meditation a lot easier, I believe, because met that what they unfolding and meditation is to a great degree kind of a gift, in the sense that a lot, a lot of the deepening of meditation comes from letting go of control. Letting go of our attempts to be utilitarian mode. There is a place for applying ourselves and working in meditation, and is equally a place of learning to let go of control and surrendering, yielding allowing something else to happen. So plunging in to our experience of meditation, recklessly plunging in with abandon, abandoning ourselves, and some of the deepest states of concentration that can arise and meditation do require a kind of abandonment, that kind of a Letting go a kind of a, of a surrendering, certainly of a lot of the ways we try to control things. And some people actually practice a meditation practice of just all they do in the practice is letting go of control. Anytime they're trying to do something in meditation, they let go, they attempt to do something. And so it means also you let go of all the instructions you've been given in meditation, since you tried to follow my breath, to doing like, oh, that and it can be really disconcerting. So I'm going to give up all they're doing and meditation. But if it done carefully, the doing of non doing, can really clear away all the extra activity of the mind. And let the mind the heart settle very, very deeply, and enter into very deep states of stillness. So there's a reciprocal relationship between gratitude and stillness, the deepening of meditation, spirits For Life and gratitude that has my sense my experience has been as deeper the minute the spiritual life goes, the more gratitude there is. Gratitude and all kinds of ways to reflections brings gratitude about life. It brings gratitude towards the Dharma to meditation practice gratitude towards ourselves, for ourselves, grows towards our teachers, gratitude towards our community, gratitude towards all kinds of places. The deepening of the practice brings gratitude and gratitude deepens the practice, which is great. So that's my thoughts for today. Now, it's your turn. Yes.

To spend today,

getting ready for a presentation on Friday.

All the research is clearly the healthiest thing you can do from your heart from the immune system is appreciation. Appreciate

Literally, yeah. good for your health. And appreciation day keeps the doctor away.

Thank you.

Yes. I'm not sure that

loss of gratitude I feel expressed in different ways. But one of the things I really relate to

and I find that people are uncomfortable, often when you express gratitude, and they say, Oh, don't worry about it. Oh.

First of all, I'm not sure that they believe that I think they like the expression of gratitude, but there seems to be something in our culture, that

if you express gratitude,

people seem comfortable with it. I don't really understand that.

That's interesting other people have that experience have a sense that our culture there's a discomfort with expressions of gratitude. dismiss it what else it's very hard to reset hard to receive

express gratitude.

in Norwegian Norwegian culture, you say thanks all the time for anything and everything. If you If in doubt, you say things you say you know you say thanks for last time. Thanks for now. Thanks for the food. Thanks for you know, you still always saying thanks. But I think it's very interesting what David just said. So if anybody else wants to follow up on that

viriya feel like

that place for people can be really bad It complements

both places.

And strangely enough, it is sort of I grew up in in various very Christian oriented cultures, as are still the dominant culture in this country. And so they often are worried about getting a big head.

So they actually don't

get so people often in those systems

if someone gives them a compliment

humble

Yes, I think some

of the two is just general shyness. I have

a friend that I brought I brought to the center here to listen to what, Mr. presentation you had an egg which is fabulous. And it was only this second time at the center. And he didn't think he could ever even sit for meditation. He reads a lot of spiritual books but begins to sit down.

He brought this little lamp thing Buddha for people with a beautiful note

as just a

lovely gesture. And when they can do that, I noticed he was kind of turning his eyes down. It's almost like there's an embarrassment of opening up your heart and I think especially with men and

It was it was just a beautiful

thing. And I emailed him and told him how much that meant to me. But

I think some of it is just general

shyness.

And then also want to mention,

sometimes gratitude

seems to be conditional, you know, on things if they turn out, you're grateful and they know. And what I've been working on over the years is to have this sense of unconditional gratitude. Because so many times things that appear negative at one timeframe. Turns out the best thing that could have happened to in my own case, years ago, 1989 I developed a pinched nerve in my wrist and had to go to all these specialists at Stanford, and it pretty much put an end to my surgical career and was only 39 years old. But it just opened up so much more of a richer life for me, in the area of arts and reading is a yoga meditation that I haven't really looked back. So. So now when something that appears negative, I just kind of have to take it up.

But we'll see.

So it can, can can gratitude be such a powerful attitude, that it's kind of there in the background holding whatever the successes and failures, you know, the problems and difficult difficulties and the beauty and kind of just, oh, there's something there's a larger gratitude for. Jim

recently had an experience that

supported what you said about the notion of independence. When I broke my leg became very apparent to me just how vulnerable independent I am Particularly at that time, I couldn't even get up off the ground and get into one place. And I found the sense of gratitude became very strong, that I realized, as I, as I really allowed myself to see just how dependent how vulnerable

a human being is

that gratitude really does become much stronger, much and much easier to, to just allow Express. And I found that people seem to receive it quite well. Maybe.

I don't know why, but it is.

So it's been a really

interesting experience to really have that physical vulnerability.

express itself so dramatically. Thank you. Yes,

I've had a number of different managers working. And the last one, I'm really grateful for

two things. He said when he took over the job. And so I'm here to see the new people who know what you're doing. It's easy to do. And so there's kind of an appreciation there. But then every time he would write a memo, to say, No, I'd like you to do this. And this and this, at the end of every memo was Thank you. And it makes such a difference. It just is an entirely different feeling to a command.

Sometimes even impatient, I think to myself, there's nowhere I'd rather be. And it's real stretch, but it always changes Sangha

look for the positive things

sometimes

from this

but his life is rich

with respect sometimes I think

so,

heart belting

hardness, tightness

I think that can get

feels like

a world where spirit.

Learning how to be safe, feel safe or feel secure. When we're very open is part of the art of spiritual life. I think I'll end with this quote from this wonderful book that the ever since centers

Giving thanks for the moment is the only way to glimpse eternity.

So I offer you my deep thanks, gratitude, which is very big, huge to all of you and for being here tonight and also being part of our community here and I'll see you in a few weeks. Thank you