

# 2004-09-06 Bottom Up View

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, person, difficulty, perspective, profundity, deep, meditation, problem, difficult, sense, deal, obstacles, profound, life, bottom, group, ways, mind, manager, reflect

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

Good evening. Labor Day. Good cool in here. A lot of people probably off on vacation or didn't want to come out in the heat to get here to the cool. So I thought I would say a few words about a topic. And then we would have some discussion about that topic. And the way we do discussion is we actually break into small groups and maybe four or five people. So everybody has a chance to kind of talk and participate in this topic and hear from each other. I think sometimes, being able to hear yourself and be able to hear other people directly makes the topic kind of sinking deeper into the psyche and kind of more contemplative when I went to Tassajara, two weeks ago, Zen monastery in Monterey County. I asked Leslie James how things were going to so far Leslie James is one of the most senior, probably the most senior teacher in residence at Tassajara. He's been there for 30 years or something and very wise, very mature practitioner. And as a senior teacher that she kind of has the overview of what's going on across the heart all the time, kind of many different levels. And so I asked her, you know, how's it going, it seems to me as I've been coming every year, every summer for a number of summers now, and my impressions is that the monastery Tassajara has gotten healthier over the years more functional, healthier, more mature place. And, and what's your perspective? And she said, Oh, yeah, I think that's the case. But we still have our difficulties or many difficulties that have come up came up during the summer Then she said, but you know, if we didn't have these difficulties would be no purpose for us to be here. Being a practice environment monastery, the point of the monastery is to people to encounter themselves and work with the places where there's attachment, or their sphere, to look at the places where there's restrictions or limitations in the heart and hit the practices to help go beyond those. And unless you address those things, how do you expect to be able to go beyond so these things arise and community is a very famous story, which is told a lot in our teaching community about I don't even know if it's true, but it's maybe it's maybe it's been made up but it has to do with gurdjieff in Paris in 1920s, I believe. He had a community outside of Paris in France, and gurdjieff was kind of a teacher's Teacher. And you described him, he talked to kind of mindfulness practice. And he had a community of people lived with him. And there was a person, that community was really difficult and difficult personality dramatically difficult. And so people didn't get along with this with this difficult person. And at some point it got because of the conflict of tension between the rest of the community and this person who so difficult. The person left the community. And when gurdjieff heard that, that he left the community, he went after him and found him someplace back in Paris or something, and said, Please come back. Would you please come back? And the guy said, No, I can't come back. People don't like me. They don't get along with me. I don't get along with them didn't seem to work. And I just said, What if I pay you when you come back then? And so he came back because he got paid, good job. Got a job to be difficult person. And that, you know, the rationale behind that is that the community needed someone difficult in order to relate to bounce off of, to, to refine themselves to understand themselves. And if you don't have a difficult person, how are you going to understand yourself? That was, some of us, of course, are our own difficult people. So we don't need to hire anybody else. We've

already had the job. Someone told me of a teaching that they attributed to Tibetan Buddhism. that teaching is that the world is made up of everybody in the world is fully enlightened. They're all Buddhists, except for one person. And that one person is you. And everybody's doing their darndest to get you enlightened. So whenever you encounter people who are difficulties or situations in life, which are difficult it's because there's really two To help you

in some way and for you to figure out how, what you're supposed to do, how are you supposed to grow and mature and, and work with this thing is difficulty it has arisen. So it kind of turns the table upside down the sense or whatever expression is of how do we relate to difficulties in your life Do we look at as being an obstacle to our growth? Or we see it as an opportunity? And do we see it that we have to fix the world out there? Or do we understand how we need to refine work, transform ourselves in any situation at all? So how do we relate to obstacles? How do we relate to the difficulties we have the suffering that we have? And it's been said that all religions in some way or other trying to address the suffering, challenges of being a human being that people encounter? As and Buddhism is one of those religions that's very directly tries to relate to our suffering, the challenges the obstacles, the hindrances to the poisons. There's many words for the kind of problem that Buddhism is trying to address. And Buddhism posits that there's a solution to something the other side of the problem. And what I want to offer you tonight is to is to perspective of two different approaches to dealing with the problems of our life, the obstacles, the hindrances that we might have. And it's not meant to be exhaustive, but just too interesting, I think, different perspectives. And what I'd like to suggest, in this picture I'm going to draw for you to start for you is that as a person matures, in their spirituality, that they go deep, profound spiritual realms, you know, they did, as opposed to spiritual highs. We don't look for spiritual lows, we look for spiritual depth. And so my metaphor is depth rather than heights, right. So that's it that's arbitrary which one you use Right, but I like that. I think it's depths, you know, highs kind of, in my mind at least, it lends itself to kind of disembodied spirituality, kind of like high up in the sky, ethereal, whatever. But for me, when I hear the word profound or depths, I feel this feeling of good feeling my body, like I go in deep down in this great stillness, kind of the stillness of an ocean, get into the surface of the ocean, it's still, you know, what, you know, quiet and calm. It's really great down there, you know, very different from what's going on the surface might be a big storm. So I like the word depth. So. So, you know, the course of practices, practices to go deep is to go to London to or being or profundity of life in some way. And within these obstacles, these difficulties to stand in the way of getting profound and deep. And so how do we relate to that? One way of relating is as we're kind of near the surface and we're looking down heading down to the profundity and we'll encounter some difficulty. And then we have to kind of work with that difficulty from the top down. The other way of working with difficulty is a some way or other bypass of difficulty and reach down into the profundity to profound levels. And from that, you know, the floor of the ocean, you look up and then you still see this obstacle still there, the hindrance is still there. But you see it now from below. And it's a very different perspective than if you see it from above. So it's it's a offers you a different perspective how to address it. If you only know the difficulty from above. Then, in a sense, the foundation support here for you is the difficulty as you go down and it's difficult sometimes To use a difficulty as a support to hang out there to rest there. But sometimes that's what's needed, we have to do that. But if your support is the foundation of the ocean, is the profundity. Then you're being supported by something really beautiful and wonderful, not by something that's kind of difficult. And then it's a lot easier and much more trustworthy or relaxing or, or safer or more easier to look at the difficulty.

So, a change of perspective. One of the functions of developing strong concentration in meditation is to provide kind of a bypass around some of the difficulties we have, and then provide a sense of well being a sense of joy delight well being in our mind in their body. So then what when we when we turn away From the object of concentration, turn away from the state of concentration, and look at the

difficulties we've had, then we see them from a very different perspective. And sometimes when we do the top down approach, it can feel claustrophobic you can feel like, that's the whole name of the game. It's just our difficulty. That's the whole world is our difficulty. And sometimes the top down approach we see our difficulty in relating to it is as if that's colored glasses we put on and we see everything through the filter of those difficulties. But when you when you can get below it in and look up, then in some ways the mind has been cleansed of the filters. So that's one of the functions of concentration is to connect to some deeper sense of well being. Now what some people do who do concentration practice is they avoid the difficulty once they have that sense of well being. I just ignore it. I just kind of like hang out there. It's really nice here. And they get little hints of well being and they go back there to that well being. But I think what's healthy is you have to do With obstacles or hindrances or suffering some realistic way, so once you have a sense of well being you turn around and look up and look at it, but then it's a whole different game. isn't our identity perhaps not so tied to it? It's not so consequential. It's not, you know, it's, you know, it's like, you know, we just, it just, you know, one problem, it's not problems that the whole world has this problem, just one thing that's there. There's other ways of having a change of perspective. When I was ordained as a Zen priest in 1982, I became kind of in some ways a public figure, because before that, I was just this kind of like, you know, grimy hippie. And then I became this guy, you know, nice, you know, robes and shaved head and, you know, people I was noticed, you know, so became public person represented Buddhism ever present represented the Zen center, and I went through this decision. rite of passage, this ritual of being ordained. And one of the things I noticed was that after my ordination was I was much more aware of what I called my shortcomings than I had been before. At the same time, I was, in a sense more okay to have those shortcomings. Because now having been ordained, I was now a child of the Buddha. We kind of enter the lineage of the Buddha. And somehow that juxtaposition of being more aware of my shortcomings, and being more okay with having them was very helpful for me. I didn't feel like I just go along and kind of bulldoze the world, my shortcomings. I felt like I had to work with them and look at them and deal with them, but had this very different perspective. I didn't take it to a sign of a personal failing. I didn't identify with the difficulty of some terrible way. I didn't. You know, I didn't feel like I was such a terrible person for having it. I was basically had been accepted, very broad. Accepting attitude about who I was in re going through that rite of passage. So sometimes we have that sometimes when we encounter another person another person can do that for us. You know the person can sometimes accept us so deeply that it's contagious. Oh that person is not seeing me through this my anger or my my fear my hangups this person seeing me through very different eyes, and you know, we relax Oh, okay, maybe I can see myself that way. Sometimes there's very deep experiences people can have sometimes seemingly bad accidents, things happen. You go to the beach, you lay there and look at the sunset and just everything relaxes and everything falls away. And we feel a deep sense of well being deep sense of clarity or deep sense of oneness with the nature around us. Sometimes meditation practice and go deep to not just sense simply sound sense of well being put to a very different seeing, of life of ourselves of what this life is very different seeing of ourselves, perhaps we see through many of the social conventions or social constructs of who we think we are. And we see Oh really, I'm really something much more profound than my profession, much more profound than my relationships I happen to be in or not in a much more profound and normal ways in which I construct my sense of self.

And having having a shift of identity like that, then gives a person a chance to look at the other difficulties still might be there. And they have a much different perspective to how you know, to how they are they're easier to deal with sometimes when we're not oppressed by them or caught by them or they don't really stand in the way anymore the difficulties but then obstacles their sufferings without standing in the way of some profundity. So am I making myself clear enough is this understandable what I'm saying. Any questions? Let's make it clear this idea of these two different approaches, top down and bottom up, make some sense. No, not at all. Well, you're in luck, then. You see everybody

else here understands. So a few minutes, we're going to all go for middle groups. And so your groups can explain to you because I have failed. And no such thing is that I think that in some situations in life, we can will ourselves to have one of one of the one perspective or the other certain, certain things just happen because of our history, what's happened to us in life and who knows why some people have to deal with the top down perspective and that's how they have to work work their practice, and sometimes people have to do the bottom can do the bottom up. What they can do, and sometimes it's kind of mixed a little bit of both going at the same time. And certain problems we have certain issues, we can more see from the bottom up. And certain issues, we can never see it that way, you're always kind of see it from the top down. So it's not black and white to one way or the other. It's kind of like, we're all doing it two different ways at different times. But what I'd like to ask you to discuss in your group is, What experience do you think you've had, of being able to look from the bottom up to look at your difficulty of your life, your suffering, and you've had a shift perspective, that's allowed you to see it in an easier way, in a lighter way, seeing in a bigger field is more spacious, more liberated, more free, more loving, more compassionate, kind of in a bigger context, than perhaps sometimes you do when you're your top down, and just seem so like this is the whole name of the game. The difficulty that's standing in the way of your happiness We experience Have you had, or what perspective, you know about, that gives you a chance to look from the, from the bottom up. And it doesn't have to be so dramatic. It can, it could just be a hint, or intuition you have of how that's done. You know, I have an intuition that the bottom of it would be like this. And if you're like, Louis, and you don't have a clue, that's okay. That's just you know, but you might, maybe people like Lewis will, maybe something will resonate when you hear other people what they have to say. And if not, that's okay, too. I don't expect everyone to have this bottom that bottom up perspective. And I don't want to imply that everyone should have to have that as it away. So then people will just have, we don't have that perspective and maybe have missed mudita because it wants to do Because it makes sense. Yes.

I do. So Calvin says Calvin's, looking at the stars with Hobbs I guess. And, and it just seems so beautiful right stars are so great. And he says something like, with great enthusiasm and kind of sense of grandeur, I am significant. And then you go see a couple panels and he's looking at kind of like really small looking up with the stars. And he says, says the dust flowed to the stars. And back and forth, two sides, so two sides swing back and forth. So we'll give you about maybe 10 minutes or so, to discuss this as a group. Typical groups are four or five circles. And then after that, then we'll regroup. hear a little bit from your groups about how that discussion went. And then I have some more to say about this topic that hopefully is enlightening. So and it's also okay if you don't want to do this. Okay, just sit in silence and wait for the discussion to pass.

More interesting, more interesting.

So thank you. Yes. Am I on my case? Oh, thank you. So Would anybody like to say a little bit what that conversation was like? You have new perspectives and new understandings or something came up. That was interesting.

Or a little bit for your group discussion?

I guess not much happened, right? Yes. Can you hear me? Wait, wait, wait, wait a moment till we get the mic. Thank you. How do you the bottom

how to how to oops. How do you get from looking at from the top to looking at it from the bottom, which is just suggestions sitting.

Sometimes it just happens. It's you know, you're lucky. Sometimes meditation can help by concentrating deeply. Sometimes through insight practice. It happens in the mindfulness. I think meditation does it almost any moment Meditation forms do it if you go deep enough. Meditation is not for most people. It's not a linear process, but more of a spiral process or process that goes down and up and down enough so that you can go quite deep sometimes in meditation, and it's really wonderful. And then you come out of that, and then you back into normal life normal committee and the same concerns you had before. But now you have the perspective of having gone deep. So meditation is one way to do that. I think probably any kind of spiritual discipline will take you to some depth which will give you a new perspective. As I said earlier, sometimes another person can do for you, that person sees you in certain kind of way. Sometimes another person can point something out to you that you hadn't seen before. Something about this more profound or some depth spiritual depth. So it is pointing out instructions, some teachers, teachers, giving, you understand a new way. So there's a few few ideas Let's meet the head if you don't mind passing that over to Smith.

I just wanted to share two people in my group very actively and consciously flipped it around flip the situation around. One had difficulty with a co worker who was at a very difficult person for everybody in the group and bothered her as well. But because of her Buddhist training and reading, she decided to deliberately decided to take a different perspective. And imagine why that person would be that way. And try to look at it from sympathetic point of view put herself in In the person's situation, and came to a realization that the behavior was coming from noticed me. And I have something to contribute. I'm not really trying to be a difficult person, but just in not having enough skill to be able to do it in a effective way. And mentioned how her whole attitude towards this person changed completely on life became much, much more relaxed at work and became even a friend with this person. Another person mentioned in how she felt that the manager her manager was ignoring her. And again, deciding to not finding that a very comfortable conclusion to come to to decide to take a twist on it and see, maybe the manager thinks that I am able to take care of myself and I don't need any hand holding. And when she needed and she went to the manager she found the manager was busy but when she actually approached the manager for problem solution, the role manager did help her. So validating innocence that new perspective that the manager considered very careful and third person sort of having. It's not necessarily flipping off the situation but sitting with a very difficult emotional problem in meditation, sort of changing the perspective from oneself to outside. Heard the crickets are outside the door, and really felt as if the crickets are supporting her in that and always found that nowadays with summer he whenever she goes up, she always tries to listen to the for the crickets and feels that she has the support and a couple of ways people will judge. So nature is one way to change your perspective. Spending time in nature can change things very quickly for people

crises can also change things quickly. You know, get a terminal diagnosis from your doctor and suddenly serve some things will not seem so important anymore.

And that's the best example.

Two things one thing that I find

can change the perspective

is when I start to talk about those problems with friends and we start to laugh about them, and that laughter really can make a pretty quick shift from looking down on them, to looking up at them as

I'm using phenomenon.



As opposed to life and death realities,

we also talked in our group about getting to know kind of this kind of a, almost a biological cycle of, for me, when I wake up in the morning, I usually wake up in fear, and I'm almost all it's almost always looking down. And by the end of the day in the evening, more often than not, it's looking up. And other people in the group have just the opposite cycle of the day, but there is kind of kind of seeing that that can change in Canada, semi predictable way. And kind of knowing that when you're McDonald's looking cycle, it's going to change in 12 hours.

So being really familiar with impermanence, how things change is really helpful. Because you realize that Oh, now it's like this, but it'll be different tomorrow or the next day or some points, you know, in an hour. And so we don't Take things so seriously.

I just wanted to

talk about in our group, we all kind of talked about things

where

once we're kind of away from the problem and can, you know, be more objective about it, it wasn't so difficult, I guess. cultivating the skill of you know, dealing with problems that way as they arise and you're there. I guess that that seems to be the real skill and I guess, kind of so Is that how you say your name Enos, I see you probably have a better perspective on that dealing with pain is that's kind of you know, real and physical.

Can't really

run away from it.

Talk about it at a distance.

So developing skills is very important to developing a repertoire of repertoire of skillful ways of relating to difficulties. So when the difficulties come up, we have some confidence in situation Oh, I can handle this, I can deal with it. I don't have to be snowed under by my doubt or my fears or my projections of what this means. I could bring mindfulness I could bring different things to it.

Anybody else would like to share one less person. Great. It's very nice to hear from you. I'm so sitting up here quietly, just you know, not being able to participate.

Well as I listened to the others, And those in our group share the common denominator of the need for approval, whether it be from coworkers, or step family members, or from someone who thinks that you might be arriving too late for your appointment. And I am reflecting on that lovely saying that tick not Han had when dealing with anger, and Kate said, he says, Hello, little anger, I will take care of you. And as I reflect on our need for approval, I should think some turn of phrase, a similar turn of phrase might be helpful to me.

So thank you all for the sharing and for doing exercise talking with each other. I hope it was useful for all of you to think about I want to say as we end, try to be brief. One is that in the Theravada monastic tradition when monastics are given a series of instructions when they're first ordained, and one of the instructions is to reflect on them the mind that is released the mind that is liberated and perhaps they have no experience yet of that, but to begin intuiting has some sense of what it might be like on the other side of a mind which is contracted or afraid or, or filled with attachments and clinging that the get a sense get to reflect on or having that mind which is free, I think is one of the ways that helps begin loosening up some of the claustrophobia. We might have some tightness constriction we have around being in a mind which is not free. So I don't know if that's helpful, but that was kind of what prompted the theme for today was thinking about reflection that the monastics have. The second point is,

it was alluded to a little bit in some of the discussion is, it's also interesting to spend some time when you when you think about reflecting on or looking at other people, to try to see that profundity in them. Try to see the beauty in them. And even if someone is really difficult, they're having a hard time with someone, do the exercise and spend some time maybe do it privately so they don't know. So you don't have to be you know, I don't know. But just think what is it about a person is beautiful. Can you find something you know, maybe it's again, a small hint, but try to find the beauty in someone and don't settle for a perception of a person that's only made up of ugliness. That person's terrible and bad and wrong. And you know, and I'm justified in being angry at that person, but spend some time looking For it don't don't wash over that if the person is really genuinely difficult causing problems in your life, don't ignore that. I mean, be wise to that. But spend some times with anybody looking Can you see or something that's beautiful in that person, some profundity, some, some something to be, again, to be respectful of or referential towards make meeting sacred. There's that which is particular to individuals, some people have kindness, some people have kind of dedication to truth, and some people have compassion. Some people have a level of calm or peace or it's like many things you might find that are maybe particular to individuals. And then there's just universal. And everyone has something in their core, which is really beautiful and luminous and wonderful. And to begin appreciating the beauty in other people is one way of beginning to change the perspective and many things including on yourself. And they've been one way of having a little bit more of a from the bottom up perspective. On our lives, So may you all see your own beauty and may you see it in the people around you. Thank you