

2004-11-03 The Five Hindrances (Part 1)

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So welcome. And so this is a three week series that is meant to continue the basic instructions that are given during a five week intro class, which ended last Wednesday. And I'm wondering how many of you have done the intro class that either I or another teacher here has taught? Most of you? How many have not? And those of you who have not have you had some instructions in meditation before or is this what kind of instructions are from where in mindfulness meditation or other forms of meditation? My instructions but not in the intro class. Okay. And other people. Sorry, Zen

various meetings here.

Stanford

at the hospital there with Mark Abramson.

I was I was I was Jonathan Marshall part of that. Okay. Yeah, I heard about it. And yeah.

So,

so little bit the class presupposes some basic introduction to mindfulness practice. So if you have ever Zen background, maybe some of this will make a lot of sense without that as a basis, but I think a lot of it also will make sense. And what I'm proposing to do is, is each of these three weeks to focus on different teaching around meditation that comes from the ancient tradition, that Buddhism teachings of the Buddha. And today, the focus will be on what's called the five hindrances. And these are the kind of the five things, five things that tend to hinder meditation quite a bit. And the teachings of the Buddha meditator needs to get a really good understanding of these five hindrances. So they no longer hinder the natural functioning of the mind the ability of the mind to pay attention. And so you can get go deeper into the present moment deeper into the practice. The next week, I want to talk about what's called the five faculties, which are five inner kind of psychological factors, qualities of mind that come into play with meditation, there are healthy qualities, and they are important qualities that we all have, and that these are developed in the process of meditation, and developing them and bring them into balance and tracking them a little bit, is also very helpful for learning how to become stabilized and concentrated in the present moment. And then the last week, I'll introduce you to the Four Noble Truths. This is considered to be one of the most refined, more profound aspects of the meditation practice taught by the Buddha is when the person can begin using this their stability, their concentration, their mindfulness, in order to understand their experience through the, through the vantage point of what's called the Four Noble Truths. And the Four Noble Truths. That vantage point of those four is what leads

to liberation is when you can really understand this well when you kind of not only understand it, but to utilize it in your life. So the five hindrances, the five faculties and the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha love lists, lots of lists. And, and in a sense, what these three weeks are about, is learning how to track your meditation track what's going on as you meditate. So you know, you're not just kind of a tourist in meditation or just sitting there like a you know, like, I'm remembering That was a teacher that said, the Thai monk, Jenson Meadow who once said, If just sitting was the point, then chickens would be enlightened. And, and the idea is that you use our intelligence while we sit and be able to kind of have some wise approach to learning how to work with the mind, work with the heart, work with our body with work with the situation. As we're engaging in the present moment, as we're developing a concentration, mindfulness. So requires the ability to track what's going on. Somehow, like being objective observer in a sense of your psychophysical experience as you're meditating, so you can know how to make the appropriate adjustments to keep you going in the present moment. So these are the, you know, five things, you know, three different lists of things to be tracked as you practice. For those of you who have never been here before, my name is Gil Fronsdaal. And I'm the primary teacher here at IMC we have other teachers are coming teacher also. And IMC is operates completely on a freely given basis donation basis. We just want to make the teachings and practice opportunities available to people as as freely freely freely as we can. Those of you who'd like to support us in doing that, because we have to pay you know, for our expenses and my livelihood and all that there is this box by the door, and you can make a donation there if you'd like. There's two places two slots one is for the center's called operations. Dāna, dāna means donation. And the other slot is for the teacher or the teacher is in this case it would be me. So let's begin with a A short period of meditation.

So one of the things you want to track when you're meditating, especially when you first sit down is the quality of your posture. And many people can spend a good part of their day and their life, not paying much attention to the quality of their posture that they're sitting in or standing in. And the couch potatoes are considered to be the prime example someone who doesn't, not tracking carefully their posture. There's a posture you can take that enhances alertness that enhances good inner qualities. I remember once many years ago, I was feeling depressed. And I noticed that I would become the I had probably reached the perfection in terms of being a couch potato, my shoulders were down in the, you know, between the back and the seat, you know, as we'll be He kind of just all the way down. And I was feeling kind of sad and lonely and depressed. And I my posture was so dramatic. That's such a such depths, my posture I had what happens if I sit up straight, and I sit sit up straight into my amazement, my depression went away. Now, who's probably pretty mild depression usually is not that easy. But sometimes posture can have a big impact on our psychophysical sense of well being. And so we want to utilize that to help us in meditation. Use a kind of posture that supports being alert so you can have more likely to be present in here. So as you take this meditation posture, be a little bit attentive to the quality and maybe take your spine especially when didn't fit to your spine have your spine be more energized or alert and energized spine makes make it possible to relax the shoulders and the muscles around the spine in the most optimal way. So taking an upright alert posture and then softly closing the eyes.

And then beginning by taking a few long slow deep breaths, relax breaths. Really full breath. See, feel your chest your ribcage, expand your belly expand, like you're stretching and massaging yourself from the inside. And then as you exhale, maybe exhaling a little bit slower and fuller than usual. But as you do so, relaxing, letting go. Breathing in deeply. And then exhaling while you exhale, relax.

And then letting your breath slowly return to normal

in when your breath is more or less normal and notice what's happening in your body. Letting your attention move through your body freely. Perhaps a global awareness of the body

And if there's any places in your body that's easy to relax or muscles, you can soften. You might take this time to loosen up a little bit those muscles. If they don't relax, maybe it's kind of a softening around the tension especially as you exhale or softening around. Holding

feeling your body here, this time at this place?

In this sense, what we're trying to do in meditation is to harmonize the body in the mind. So the body and the mind are in the same place at the same time. If you're thinking about what happened earlier today or planning for tomorrow or fantasizing in your mind, in a sense is elsewhere. Are there times are there places and if you're going to harmonize the body and mind, you need to bring the mind into the place where your body is. To the living experience of being here in a body. It might feel quite wonderful to feel your body to be present here. It might feel quite mundane and ordinary, or it might feel uncomfortable. It doesn't matter how it is. Seating Be patient and tolerant of how it is. Just begin bringing your mind into your body. Feeling the breathing within your body.

Feeling exploring your breathing, getting familiar with what it's like for the body to breathe. As if you've never noticed your breathing before, like into new phenomena.

One of the reasons we focus on breathing and meditation is that breathing has a rhythmic quality. It has an alternation, there's change. There's movement. The experience of breathing in is different than experience of breathing out. There's variation, but the variation is almost predictable. More or less Same and it's easier for the mind to stay focused. If it's being focused on something which is very easy, always changing, alternating and if something is really fixed so see if you can kind of hang in there with the changing experience of breathing in and out.

Relaxing with your breathing

When the mind wanders away from the breathing then without any commentary judgments about that. Very simply, begin again with a breathing. Feeling the breath. I think the experience of breathing the sensations of breathing, move into your awareness, feeling your awareness. moving in and out through the awareness, massaging your attention

Letting go of thoughts engaging yourself with the breathing. experience of breathing may be pleasant or comforting. It may be mundane, ordinary or dull. It may be uncomfortable Doesn't matter. What matters is that you trustingly stay present for your breathing. Hang in there with it. being present for it, maybe in the same way you'd be present for a friend when you're really going to be present

Then continuing to be with your breathing, tracking your breath, feeling the breathing. When the mind gets taken away from the breath you'll lose track of the breath. Don't immediately go back to the breath but rather notice what it is that took you away. Notice what the concern was. Noticed maybe the emotional quality was it a movement toward Something because there's a word because there was desire for something. Was there movement of aversion or not wanting something? No, there's what it's like, What? Why didn't what it is that took you away from the breath. And then after a while, you can come back to the breathing. But then next time you leave the breath or lose the breath, notice what it is that caused that to what happened.

Notice, notice what it is it makes it difficult for you to be present that takes you away from presence.

And then in the last minute of the city, kind of review a little bit, if it was any common, the most common thing tend to make it difficult for you to be present. What kind of thoughts may be difficult for you? What kind of feelings

Many years ago, I read a story or someone told me I forget which some someone went down to someplace like Costa Rica, someone who lived in New York City, his whole life went to the jungles of Costa Rica or Central America. It was given a kind of tour of the jungles with some local who'd grown up there in the jungle. And the guide kind of pointed to things see that kind of bird up there, that over there and, and the guy from New York couldn't see anything. And he was amazed how much the guy could see the guy could see all those different different birds and insects and butterflies and all kinds of stuff and the guy from New York, you know, just saw a lot of leads and I suppose probably if the opposite happened if the guy from Costa Rica come to New York City, probably the guy in New York probably knew how to see all kinds of details that the guy from Costa Rica hadn't been trained to see. Often, you know, we don't see so clearly in new situations, we don't see all the terrain what's going on. So often a lot more detail than meets the eye. But if we become used to or custom or been trained to, to be familiar with certain things, we can see a lot of detail See, notice a lot of what's going on. Same thing goes on with the mind the mind sometimes can feel like a like a jungle thickets, like a wild maze. And, but the more you kind of see and understand what's really going on, the less, the more the more you can kind of work, work wisely with it, be free of it, the more it's kind of just a massive thicket of stuff. The more it's going to be at the mind of its own, the more it's going to kind of sabotage us or take us hostage or lead us astray. So part of what insight meditation involves, is beginning to learn to see some of the details of what's happening in the mind. So the element investigation or curiosity is a very important part of this meditation practice. What is this? kind of the basic question we always ask this in our practice is what is this? What is it? What's going on here? And so one of the first things to begin to studying is what? What is it that makes it difficult for us to be present? What is it that takes us away from the present moment? So what were some of the things you found out? Or some of the things that took you away from the present moments during class sitting?

I was thinking about what I was involved in today, and

Some future activity related to it now. So you're thinking about what happened today and planning the future about it. Then your mind kept going there. And now the emotional tone or the quality of your mind thinking about it, what was that? Like?

It wasn't emotionally charged. It was just a matter of fact. Yeah.

But energetically, it was a lot of strong impulse for it or was it it was weak and just floating off into it.

More floating not not a strong impulse now.

And when you do notice whether it was would you say was characterized by wanting something? Because it desires more trying to figure out the next step? Was my mind.

Just planning what to do about what I experienced today? No. Okay, great.

Someone else will be here for you. Maybe Head over, please.

Start talking stick.

What I experienced was tiredness. This is physically being tired, so it's hard to stay present. Okay. So that tiredness

kind of how does that operate, how to make it difficult for you to be present? I could

hear what you're saying. But there was this pole to just want to sleep.

He felt that pole and so the mind would wind up periodically kind of surface from that and notice, and then when you surfaced what what did it feel like a tendrils of sleepiness. What did that How did that feel like for you?

I didn't really know what was going on. So where it was it was discontinuous.

So you kind of woke up in a sense, but then you didn't know Were you were the feeling or Well, just right. I didn't know. I didn't, I couldn't easily remember the moment before. So it could have been a gap or short gap or a long gap.

Okay, we're gonna go

somewhere else

I can two things. One, I, for the last week or so I'm getting this lump in my throat. And it's problematic after the point where it's problematic. I'm trying to resist it. And it's kind of like being tickled where someone could tickle you, and you're just, you know, there's a point where you're not really resisting the tickling, you're just feeling tickling, as soon as you kind of clench a little bit then it really tickles. And that's kind of the feeling I get my throat although it's it's more like a kind of a gagging kind of feeling. I don't know. I assume you just watch it. I have no idea. Maybe just in general. So things like that any kind of sensation. You're just trying to track the sensation not to explain it not to find out what it's about just be present.

Just be present for it. And that doesn't have to be a distraction from the present moment. That is the present. That is Yeah. But then while you're tracking something's uncomfortable like that, is there some kind of thing that tends to pull your way? Some people would feel a lump, they start having doctor thoughts.

You know, because they're falling away is what makes it unpleasant that the pulling away just kind of there it's, I guess, unpleasant, but it's not there's it's not a problem. So start to pull away from it, then it's

so what prompts you to pull away? What kind of thoughts or what kind of reaction The feeling

is going to overwhelm me somehow there's a fear.

So fear then keeps me reappearing. And the fear pulls you out of the present moment being sensitive to something. And that's a pattern. Right. Great. Thank you so much.

Notice several things, but three of them seem to be related anxiety, comparisons, and judgments.

So three things that are related,

because while they're different, and may have had different incidents, that is one or the other, I noticed one thing that sort of all three of them in some kind of Nexus, it's like, I'm never going to learn how to do this. I'm not as good at this as other people. I'm hopeless. Will I ever learn to do this? So there's doubt I my mind keeps wandering? Why can't I just pay attention?

So suffering takes me away from a friend.

So a lot of doubt and a lot of anxiety and a lot of judgment, not a comparisons. And do you have so how does that function? How can you talk a little more in detail about how it functions to take you away from the present moment, doesn't have to be completely away. Sometimes what it does is, it kind of makes a film over the past A moment. So we're not really I've

left the bread. And I'm now

in these other places. So you leave the breath and you didn't show their places. But can you see how it pulls you out of the breath? Or it happens just like that?

No, I just, I just become aware that I'm not with the breadth.

And the right in those places,

among others, is really most interesting.

Does any of you have the experience Sometimes, though, of different quality of presence, like you're kind of there, but there's kind of a film of something. So it's also keeps you from being fully present. You're not to be completely checked out. You can just be kind of half there. So if some more reports be nice to have me a couple of more before I talk,

a little bit higher, please.

One of those sensations that I had was, as I was trying to focus on a breath, I actually was focusing on the fact that my belt was tighter than it probably should be. To be Breathe in and breathe out. So I was kind of thinking about my breath, but at the same time, very acutely aware of the tightness around my waist. So that's it

that's a new one. Sometimes it is beautiful, you know musical melodies. If you at least have a ring you should have to kind of be more pleasant. Mechanical voice first time for everything.

So,

so so it is there you go. That's better. So, but the discomfort in your belly, the type belt, for example. And that in itself is not responsible for making it difficult for you to be present. That's just making it uncomfortable. Um, I think difficult for me with a breath because it's pulling Your attention, but then you can be very present for that. Unless you have judgments about that or aversion to it or reactions to it. Not being present means you're pulled away from it, you're lost from the present moment in some way.

And this is an important point in point because it's very common for people to have a judgement, oh, something uncomfortable is happening. And therefore that uncomfortable thing is not really supposed to happen in meditation. So I'm not really present where I'm supposed to be present for. But it but uncomfortable phenomena arising in the present moment is just as much something to be present for as anything else. It was making some sense. You're saying anything more now or? Well,

I was trying to focus on my breath. But yeah, I realized that was the present moment, but I had a lot of other things going through my motherboard. A lot of other things going through my mind. This is working.

It's working okay.

But I recently see in a new job and certain perceptions, I don't know if they're reality or just perceptions that I brought with me from experience elsewhere. And so I noticed that

you know, apparently have a lot of fear going through my mind right now.

So anxiety perhaps

or xiety, and fear about, you know, our main perceptions real or not.

And is that pull you out of the present moment, you can see how that operates to pull you out.

Well, it made it impossible for me to focus on breathing in and out. So in that sense, I was, I guess, in some ways, it's like being in the present moment, but I wasn't focusing on what I wanted to focus on. Okay.

Okay. Great. Good. Maybe one more we can have in the back there. Directly behind you.

Can you hear me

Yeah. Hold close to your mouth. You'll hear it.

Yeah. Okay.

Well, I, you know, I experienced pain which I could be present with, but then it would loom really large, you know? Which, I guess I'm I would prefer not too

but the largest of the pain make it difficult to be present for it.

Well, it's nothing but it you know, that's that's that's all that's, that's there.

That's all it's there. There's no problem

feels like a problem.

Something else is there. So then the question is What else is there that's making it a problem. I've had tremendous pain I've entered into with meditation and felt joy in the process of feeling it

okay.

Perhaps

So, so that so the investigation for you, I think would be

I can get the pain into sensations

you know,

throbbing icy, you know, that sort of thing. But it doesn't. It just

I don't know what else to do with it.

And you're saying don't do anything but it's, it's, I do feel a lot of aversion toward it.

Okay. So and you have any sense how the aversion pulls you out the present moment pulls you out of being present for it or if you somehow know how does how does the version relate, relate to your belief be present for for stay there?

Well,

there's a color your perception of the pain or does it hinder it in any way

I don't know if something makes it get bigger.

So perhaps a version does, but

it's also related to,

to following my breath. So when I'm, when I'm doing that when I'm breathing in when I'm breathing out, that increases it. So it makes me want to not breathe, which is counterintuitive.

Well, the pain you're describing maybe needs a lot more investigation to understand and when it gives some kind of simple reply to it. But what I'm trying to get to here today is is the mechanism of the ways that the things of the mind do does, it makes it difficult to stay present. And aversion is one of the things that often makes it difficult to stay present. A version can trigger the mind to go into thoughts, ideas, and reactions in the past, you're staying right there up against it, we pull away we're pushing away. And so you can sometimes see the way in which our version kind of puts a film over the directness of it or we get caught up in thoughts of aversion or

it's say you think it would be better just to stay with with the experience?

And to not resist it?

If you haven't, haven't tried that yet, I would strongly recommend you try that.

So you want to say something?

So

so what I'm trying to point to here by asking you these questions, and having you speak, is that there's a range of things a huge range of things that can happen as you're meditating, that pull you out of the present moment or kind of put a cloud over your experience of the present moment. One of the things we've been To do meditation is to really understand how this works well. Now it's very common for meditators to have some idea that either they're supposed to be fully present, enlightened, Li, present, gloriously present, completely present. And if they're not that way, they're a failure is something terrible is going on in the meditation, they're not a good meditator. And, you know, in fact that they have something that gets in the way that makes difficulty present. Well, they're just in meditative anomaly. Everyone else in the hall I'm sure is half the way to Samadhi. You know, but you're just stumbling along. And the things that make it difficult to be present. Sometimes people will reject it, they'll be angry towards it, they'll push it away, they'll deny it. They'll judge themselves negatively because of it. It's a relatively common phenomenon or something like that.