

# 2005-04-10 Problems

Thu, 7/16 5:30PM • 37:17

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

problem, people, fix, mindfulness, attention, meditation, compassion, life, solve, happen, situation, solution, beliefs, present moment, turn, opportunity, arise, dish, anger, suggestion

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I gave a talk, little short short talk on Wednesday morning. And someone there asked me if I would give it again. And so I thought I would give it a try to give it again. Since I don't have any notes, it's a little bit hard. But I'd like to give it again. And it has to do with problems. I imagine that a few of you have problems. And those of you don't go home now. It's pretty common for human beings have problems and of all kinds, and they can be the most mundane problems imaginable. They can be have a problem with most mundane, but you can have a problem with your plumbing in your house. And so you have to solve a problem. When something's a problem. It means it requires someone to solve the situation to engage in to repair to fix, to make amends to do something about situation, our problem is something it asks for attention and wants some kind of care. So it could be the plumbing. And so it could be the, we have a problem with the water dripping into our living room floor. And so that has to be tended attended to. So we call a plumber, we fix that ourselves. We have problems with our cars. And so we have to get, you know, it can be as simple as needing the oil change, I have this problem, you know, I have to find a time to get my oil change, where am I going to find that time? So you have to think about and solve that problem. there can be problems with interpersonal relationships. I had this problem with this person, that person has a problem with me, we say. And so we might feel like we have to somehow come to terms with that. either talk to the person and work it out, change ourselves. Or maybe their solution to the problem is just to ignore the problem. And that's a certainly solution. That Some people think my favorite little one of my cartoon favorite the penis cartoons is Linus is talking to Charlie Brown. And Charlie's talking to Linus. And Charlie says, Oh, so you think my father doesn't know how to take care of things? Well, just the other day, we were driving in our car, and he started making this terrible noise. And so Linus says, Oh, don't tell me. He pulled over stopped and fix the problem. And Charlie says, Oh, no, he just turned the radio up louder. So that's kind of a solution, I suppose. But normally, that's not very healthy solution. But it's some kind of way of addressing the problem. Then some people have problems with the world. And what's happening out there with politics or wars or all kinds of things, and it's a problem and so we feel we have to address it, and we have to get involved in so people do get involved in many ways. And then there's problems with

ourselves. And some people have just teeny problems with themselves. And some problem people have big problems with themselves. And, and so people feel that have to fix myself, I have to somehow address and solve the problem I have with myself. I have a temper, or I'm depressed or I'm just not very kind or I don't have right speech or I'm just too intimidated to do anything. I'm always afraid. And so some people go to therapy. Some people will do workshops, some people will have other ways of working on themselves. Some people come to meditation, meditation as a solution to their personal problems. And so they feel somehow what's going on meditation will help them and it can be said perhaps that human life is one continual problem is you know, it's still the problems all the time, always kind of dressing problems and I'm kind of amazed at home, how ongoing my problems are. I mean, when before I had children, we would do laundry, you know, once a week or once every couple of weeks and we would almost never sweep the kitchen floor. And now I'm sweeping a few times a day and laundry every day now I understand where it's just about understand what's happened. And dishes I mean, the amount of time I spent in front of the sink, washing dishes is just phenomenal. And are picking up a ticket cleaning the rooms, clean living room, all these toys and cleaning you know, and the idea that you're going to do something to finish it, that you're going to have his cleaning project and you're going to finish it once and for all finish the problems can be done with at least done for 24 hours. I mean, that idea of that kind of problems. You know, I've discovered a new kind of problem. problems that go on and now they don't stop, you know, so you some point you have to stop because if you don't stop, you know, you'll get exhausted. So you say, okay, I've done enough dealt with enough dishes now enough laundry enough whatever for now, and I'll come back to it later. So part of life wise life is learning how to relate to our problems. And one way of relating to problems is to realize that everyone has problems of some sort problems and sense of something that needs our attention, something needs to be solved, and that there's wise ways and unwise ways of engaging with our problems. When I wash, endless dishes, I just problem with cleaning the house and all that. I could be upset about it and frustrated and be neurotic, but trying to get it all done. Or I could just do one toy at a time or one dish at a time and enter that world of that dish. Me in the dish. We're just kind of buddies. For that time, and just enter into it as if there doesn't need to be an end, and not to measure the activity by trying to finish it or get it or accomplish something, get anywhere. And just to do it, do it, do it, write that in there. And that's one approach that can be quite helpful. And other approaches to there's many things and many of you have probably figured out how to work with your problems. To some degree, you wouldn't have arrived here today if you hadn't had some success in working with your problems and managing get here. But the point of the talk today is not about the problems you can fix. The point about today's talk I want to make is what about those problems that you can't fix? That you can't do anything about? What about you come to situations come in our life or something happens? That doesn't seem to be right. Doesn't feel appropriate? feels like it's a problem. It's a mistake, and it cannot be fixed. What then? And so, what are some of those things that can happen that are like that the that can be health problems, and some health problems can be fixed and worked with, and then some health problems cannot be fixed. That's it. And

some,

some people have problems with aging. And people will spend a lot of time a lot of money, a lot of effort to try to somehow avoid the problems that come with aging. But can aging be, you know, you know, it's, it's not going to go away. You know, as long as you're alive. So it's one of those kind of problems that just kind of, for most people kind of, you know, if it's seen as a problem, it gets worse and worse. And then there's problem with dying. You know, sooner or later. I believe most of us are going to die and As it was very variety of ways of dying, but sooner or later, and some people will have a problem with it. And some people, it's a wonderful moment in some people's dying process, when they no longer see it as a problem. And I've known people who've been present for them as they're going through the process. And it's tremendous level of peace. And love can arise when they kind of, in a sense, surrender or accept or give up and really accept this is what's happening. They're no longer fighting it or afraid of it, not seeing it as a problem. A friend of mine was a hospice nurse. And she said, sometimes and caring for people in hospice, she would tell the family members a certain point, she'd say, from this point on, there are no more crisis. And that would help the family often not to get anxious when things happen. It's no longer crisis, not something to rush around and call 911 have tried to do something about From now on, it's just, you know, it's not a problem anymore. It's just what's going to happen, just what's happening. Some people have problems with their personalities, and, or their character or anything that just doesn't seem to go away. You know, some people have done 20 years of therapy, spent a small fortune trying to fix themselves and self improve themselves. And it seems like certain kind of character traits just stay there and stay there, stay there. It doesn't seem to go away. And at some point, you know, just come to the conclusion. I don't think I can fix this. This is what what's what's what's happening. When people come to meditation with a problem, and that's using meditation, Buddhist practice or spiritual practice as an attempt to try to solve something, some problem, and they realize after a while, it's not gonna work. They can't fix it, they can't solve it. So what happens when there's a problem that cannot be fixed? And the suggestion here today is that there's an opportunity there. That is never that's often not there, when we can fix something and solve a problem. And that opportunity is very didn't a lot of opportunities. One opportunity is to discover a capacity for acceptance, or peace, or not being in conflict, or a sense of equanimity, about how things are, as long as we think we can fix things, or we can fix things, and we often should fix things. But sometimes when we can't fix something, it challenges us to look where is the clinging, where's the resistance, where the belief systems we have that somehow make us anxious in having this problem there. And can we kind of turn or turn the attention around from the problem in a sense To our inner life and find out what is it what has changed in here, so that I'm at peace with the situation. What is it what changes what has to happen here. And sometimes we're not willing to turn the attention around and look at ourselves, as long as the world out there can be fixed and changed. And so there's a tremendous teaching in having problems that can't be fixed. And for some people, they're not going to look at themselves in a very deep, engaging, serious way until they come up against the wall, where it's hopeless. There's no possibility of doing anything about this situation. And I've known people maybe you don't maybe you are some of those people who have had some kind of problem that no one would ever wish on your on you and sometimes health situations. Some people To become invalid in some way or disabled in some way. And, and I've had people tell me that they've been very grateful for the disability, the hated it, it was caused tremendous anguish and problems initially. But they realize

that they realized that they kind of let go of a certain level of self image that they were living by, that wasn't really serving them very well. But as long as they stayed healthy, they can live in this kind of fiction or live in a superficial way. But once the disability set in, that wasn't available anymore, and they had to kind of find a very different way place for us a different way of feeling of well being feeling peace, there wasn't dependent on status, wasn't dependent on money wasn't dependent on being competent in certain way or, you know, all kinds of things, wasn't comfortable, wasn't dependent on good looks. Wasn't depended on. You know, all the things that we think our well being is dependent on so When when, when the rug gets pulled out from underneath us. We could either get depressed or fight against the impossible or take that turn around 180 degree turn. And look, what does it happen has to happen here inside of me to find peace with a situation. One of the opportunities in problems which cannot be solved is that we can discover compassion. And I think compassion is in is a good attitude or good approach to life. Do they assume that compassion is in short supply. And whatever we can do to cultivate compassion in ourselves, is really needed for the world that we live in. And one of the one of the ways of discovering compassion is to be up against our own limitations. And then you see our On limitations as a Wellspring for feeling compassion, this is what it's like to be a human being. To be joy, join the club, of people who have personal problems, join the club of people who have failings, join the club of people who suffer, and, and to feel that, Oh, this is what it's like to be human being. And rather than be burdened by that, to let this sense of empathy, of sympathy, of compassion, of care of kindness, arise out of that, not to hold ourselves by some kind of unrealistic standard of how we should be, rather, oh, there's suffering here, and can I that this suffering deserves kindness, care, attention. Part of the opportunity of an unsolvable problem is to look at our beliefs, our assumptions about life, what a successful life is what necessarily life is his beliefs about what it means to be human being, and to have those challenged. And it's very hard for us to get our beliefs challenged deeply enough. Many beliefs we carry around with us, we don't even know we have them. And sometimes it takes a huge problem to really be up against. You know, to have a mirror that looks back and looks at the very root of our beliefs, what we think is really important so it's sometimes said that spiritual life I don't know if I agree with the statement, but I'm gonna say it anyway. But as spiritual spiritual life begins, when we have a problem that can't be solved and many of you probably know something about recovery in a, where there's a kind of very strong sentiment like that, that you realize that you cannot take care of your problems by yourself. And you have to kind of turn yourself over to a higher power. In Buddhism, perhaps we talked about turning yourself over to truth. Let the truth take care of this. I can't take care of this anymore. But let's see if the truth can take care of it. Let me trust the truth. And there are many situations I find myself in where I don't know the answer the solution. Sometimes as a teacher, I meet people with tremendous difficulties and problems. And I don't know really how to counsel them how to be with them, in terms of solving the problem, but in a situation where I don't know what the solution is. My faith is to trust the truth. Trust, the mindfulness, the presence that's there, and then try to meet what's happening with as much honesty and truth as possible. And that truth is kind of like the higher power The other power that supports it lets something else happen and move through. And choose is kind of like, you know, kind of like water going downhill finding the, the route. Sometimes the truth requires the water of attention to go back into us that mirror that turning 180 degrees around. Oh, that's where the resistance is. That's where the issue is, is here.

So when when one of the ways of one of the ways that mindfulness meditation is taught, there's many there's many ways many context of ways of teaching mindfulness meditation. And some are more directed and sense of using mindfulness to get something to do something to solve a problem. And other way another way is you don't use mindfulness to try to solve anything Even if you can, but rather use mindfulness to just simply notice what is. And as you try to notice what it is, you might feel the inner rebellion, the inner motivations to try to fix the difficulties going on situation, or trying to improve and what's going on. But when you don't try to when you when you when you use mindful when it's standard for mindfulness is not trying to fix anything. Then you can find yourself in that same place when the point where you have a problem, which can't be fixed, but you've chosen not to fix it, to receive some of the advantages that takes of looking more deeply at what's going on, and looking at the opportunity of finding a piece regardless of what is happening. But if we always think they were about that meditation is about solving and fixing and getting something huffing and puffing and getting concentrated. It's possibly a concentrated, but there's also a lost opportunity. And I've known people who've had relatively good success in getting into meditative states. And it hasn't always served them very well. And it's only when, you know, they'll go a certain length in their meditation. But sooner or later in meditation practice, you've come to situation where you realize that your efforts are not going to work. Not going to help anymore. And some people have to wait a long time before they get to that point. And some people it starts the first day. And, but Oh, I can't do anything here anymore, except just be present. Just show up. Just notice what's happening. I can't fix the situation. Let me turn it over to truth. Let me turn it over to mindfulness. And just be present. See what happens. So one way of doing mindfulness is just sit, upright, stable, present, as mindful as we can and no Try to accomplish anything beyond just noticing what is in the process of doing that finding a new way of being present for what it is that maybe is very different than you were in the kind of technique oriented way of fixing things and making something happen. So as sooner or later, I believe most people will have a problem that can't be fixed. And then how do we relate to that problem? And one of the things that's I suggest is that a problem is by definition, something that requires to be solved. If it cannot be solved, you no longer have a problem. So I hope that many of you don't have any problems. I hope you have the kind of kind of non non problems that can enlighten you can free you. And you see it as a possibility of the possibility of freedom and the possibility of compassion and having his mark on problems. So, those are my thoughts for this morning. You have any thoughts, no comments or questions or testimonials about the benefits of having problems. Over here, please just please the mic so that people who have hearing doses Fixing devices can hear

so often when we first find out that this isn't working, okay, so often when you first realize that you have a problem that can't be solved, the initial reaction is despair. And you talked about moving 180 degrees to acceptance. Can you talk a little bit about that process and how you do it?

Well, there's there's a variety of ways. So I don't know if there's one way. One way that I've encountered it is just being being so exhausted from trying to bite and just like finally give up. And, and sometimes you know, the only way up is down. The only way is to reach rock bottom. And, and I know sometimes in my own meditation, practice, in some retreats, I've only been able to go forward in a

sense when I reach rock bottom And I've wondered about that as a teacher because people come to me on retreat and ask to come with their problems or difficulties and expecting me to give them solutions and help them and guide them. And it seemed like the right thing to do, I want to help them so I tried to offer suggestions and ideas, but some occasion I look at the you know, I think maybe doing this person disservice, giving them things to do and suggestions, I think this person needs needs to rock bottom out. And only when they bought them out and give up that's when they're gonna give up completely. And that's when the practice is really going to begin that's one way getting exhausted or just pushing it to the limit right? And, and that's not so pretty Another way is it's her turn the attention around and then studying what is it's always studying what is so rather than thinking that you have to kind of force yourself into acceptance, I suppose to be a quantum is here, you know? It's a lot of Just turn around and study. What is this despair about? What am I despairing? What's that? What's the source of the despair? What are the feelings? What's like emotionally? What's like physically? What's it like cognitively? What are the beliefs around despair? Is there fear? Is there anger? Is there a belief that certain things have to be a certain way? Is there a belief that if this doesn't, if this continues one more day than tomorrow is gonna be impossible? You know, what's it? What's the beliefs around that? And then also, when turning the attention around and looking at ourselves, it's, sometimes it's useful to ask, you know, do I have resources, other resources, other things I can trust and rely on? Rather than what I'm relying on when I'm in despair. The Spirit has a syndicate supports it, we find a different support. Perhaps it's your good heart. I think you know, my mind can't figure this out. My mind is, you know, screaming, but maybe I can drop into my heart. What happens if I encounter this situation through my heart run through my mind Mind or perhaps its notion of being inspired by the truth or by mindfulness or by Buddha nature? Or perhaps we have some kind of other spiritual source of inspiration. And what is it like to kind of fall back and rely on that. And sometimes just a matter of remembering you have another resource. And sometimes you can call on that sometimes works. person can relax. So, those are some ideas, your questions really good. Maybe some people here would like to offer some other ideas Adri

many years ago and as training, which some of us may have had,

but that's why you don't get the P right. You know, you have this problem. And they keep the doors locked. You don't see you don't drink anything. So we don't do that here.

One of the solutions to what we're talking about in problems was to choose it and that Interesting opening to either accepting or looking at it, but without all the resistance to it

and nicer choosing the problem. And so I've noticed that for myself at different times, and also in other people, there are a lot of different attitudes we have about having a problem. And sometimes it's useful to look at are the common default attitudes that arise about our problems. Some people are burdened by problems and some people are inspired by them. There's a woman I've been told about, who teaches conflict resolution. And people have been around her say they're so inspired by her, because



whenever she hears about a conflict, she gets happy. Oh, great. There's such a great opportunity here in Chicago, throw yourself in, and most people are, you know, and so, you know, to choose or to feel like you're choosing a great, there's an opportunity opportunity, rather than seeing as a burden. Right behind you, Bill.

When I was a

relatively young man just out of high school,

I would have a problem of some kinds. And I'd go into an absolute panic. If I didn't have a solution, I'd go into an absolute panic. And somehow, fairly early on, I figured out that the only solution to most things was time. If you just said, Okay, I can't deal with this and took a deep breath and went on with your life that almost, well, crap so far, at every point in my life, I've come up against any of these problems. There is they're just dissolved. It's like, they're vacuous and they just go away.

Yeah, many times. That's the case. It was I think it was Mark Twain who said, someone said to my man, I've had many problems in my life, most of which never existed. What Churchill, Churchill Hall, had a lot of problems. It's Mark Twain.

Who knows anyway, it's true

for most people. A lot is that there's a certain percentage of our problems which are imaginary. Or there's an imaginary component part

of the problems. Well, that's how I found it to be

even true, the ones which are real, if there's a real problem, and you can't deal with it, if you just give it time and space, it becomes it ceases to exist in the, you know, at in it at least in the intensity that you were feeling in the moment that it was there, that real hard issue problems dissolved without.

Thank you, Andre.

So I had a situation early in my practice, really how I got into the practice very much where it was one of those problems that could would be solved. And over time and working with us over years of actually working with it, what I discovered for myself was that when this the problem would arise very much as a manifestation of it was anger. And as the anger arose, what happened is I just got pulled into it, I got completely sucked into it, the thoughts started running around, and I realized that it was not so easy to actually be present for the anger. The problem itself was not easy to turn the attention to. And what I discovered for myself actually was not ignoring it. I mean, it was it was ignoring it, but it wasn't repressing it, but instead, turning my attention to something really neutral. So when the anger

arose, if I was sitting at my desk, I would turn my attention to the button, my butt on the chair. If I was walking, I would turn my attention to the sensations of my feet on the ground. Just Something else that was happening in the present moment that was far away from the kind of physical manifestation in the body, you know, the feeling in the, in the core of the body. And to me that was really, really helpful. And it had, it had to be a really skillful way of saying, not now to the anger, you know, it couldn't be I hate you anger go away, I'm not going to pay attention to you. It really had to be a recognition. Oh, the mindfulness isn't strong enough to deal with this to meet this anger. So not now, someday, when Michael is stronger, I will look directly at the anger. But now I'm not able to do that. So I'm going to take my attention to something else. And that was extremely powerful to me.

I'd like to add to that a little bit. Because the same type of approach worked for me, dealing with physical pain, I had chronic pain most of my life and, you know, using mindfulness with their attention to the pain and describe and just hang out with it until it exhausted and, you know, have this really grim sitting meditation, you know, focus on pain. And And finally, you know, I, a teacher gave me the suggestion to set that isn't the only thing happening in the present moment. There are other sensations note that one was really strong, and I start focusing on certain small sensation in the body. And that really transformed my practice. You know, it went from this thing that you know I was doing which is good for me to something where I could really pay attention to what's really going on inside me. And it just gives me a lot of spaciousness and other things. And I still feel the same and pay attention when I need it lets me know when I should move and when I'm doing something unskillful.

And there are times when, when it's still very useful.

But I definitely have a lot more options.

I've had problems, which are the problems, we have problems where I get kind of pulled into the world of the problem. And I don't know notice the world that I'm in. And then to wake up from that and realize, wait a minute, right now here and now. There's no problem. You know, the trees are there, the beautiful green or the tree, the blue sky, you know, the room, everything's actually actually pretty good in the moment right now. And that kind of shift shifts the perspective sometimes, right now. So my problem is in it might be a real problem, but it's not present. It's living in the present moment, through my thoughts, my ideas, my imagination. And that kind of lightens it up can lighten up quite a bit for me sometimes. And then, you know, maybe later you take care of it, or maybe it doesn't happen later. Whatever. I remember a Calvin Hobbes cartoon where Calvin is up climbing a tree, telling Hobbes about the wonderful merits of being in the present moment. Just how wonderful is being the present moment and just living here and now. And just, you know, no problems and, and then ob says yes, but at this moment, you're supposed to be at school. So if you have a problem with your taxes next week it's probably not the time to just kind of live in the present moment you know as if you know taxes are some something, you know, conceptual distance we can do that after the 15th. So anyway, oh, yes, please. Last Bus one.



A couple of things.

So I've been in my problem I've been in NA since the middle of December, and a couple things that are really pertinent to this which is one of the things how do you get patients

your wait for it.

The other thing that I It was really helpful for me early on is of the 12 steps you only have to perfect the first step, which is the surrender step and the admitting that there is a problem. And

I think for me, I have tried to

during the years that led me up to, to that I was still trying to, I fancied myself as one of those drunken Buddhas, you know, and that everything was tying together and there's there's no self and you know, there's no need to be disciplined either. That was fun, you know, college and a decade after we're all that was all good time. But it really wasn't. But it's no coincidence at once. I finally did hit rock bottom and

when surrendered and asked For help,

that suddenly, you know, I was sitting regularly again, and I found this place and my life has really turned around in so many ways the problems not gone, except that it's not a problem. It's

the Simpsons, when they said

that research tells Homer Yo, yo, dad, there's the Chinese have the same word for crisis and as opportunities and oh, yeah, crazy tunity.

So think about Christ's eternity.

Think about what they have when you have milestones in a program. It's referred to as a birthday and, you know, kind of every day is a birthday and that's sort of how it is felt once. Once I became Grateful, grateful in recovery, the problem is actually the increased teacher.

Beautiful, thank you. Very nice way of ending. Thank you very much for listening so attentively, maybe this was relevant for a few of you