

2005-08-01 Rahula Stories

Thu, 7/16 9:56PM • 42:51

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddha, meditation, mind, taught, ordained, develop, presence, son, monk, reflect, people, thought, unwholesome, novice monk, sat, inheritance, turned, physical form, story, form

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I'm still a bit feel with what I did the last four or five days. So it's kind of in the can kind of continue a momentum of last days that I give this talk. And that is last Wednesday I went to spirit rock meditation center for with my seven year old son to do Buddhist family camp saying Buddhist family camp songs and other things. And it was quite lovely and Ajahn Amaro, who's a wonderful theropod monk was there, teaching the kids other things and then Betsy Rose was singing and Reverend Hampshire, Chinese American digger day in the Chinese food Tradition came just briefly plays guitar and saying a lot of wonderful things. And when I went there, days before I went I remember that the Buddha had a son, his name was Rahula. And Rahula was ordained to be a novice monk when he was seven years old. And, and then there's some some teachings that survived of what the Buddha the Buddha taught his own son. And there was one tradition, they started teaching him particular teachings when he was seven. So I hadn't this back of my mind, oh, seven years old, maybe that's a good time to teach them something and I thought maybe one of the things I would do is read the discourse where the Buddha is teaching his seven year old son, because, you know, kind of thought to me, kind of work for my seven year old. But I didn't, we didn't get around to it. Somehow I don't think I didn't think he was ready. And though he did expresses interest in becoming a novice monk for a week, he found out during we were up there that you could do that for a week some places. And so he thought that was kind of interesting and expressed some interest in doing that. So I wanted to tell you about what the Buddha said into son since I believe you're old enough so it's a little bit hard to understand. To interpret the accounts of the survivor of how the Buddha related to his son. And so, you should be a little bit slow and kind of jumping to kind of conclusions that, you know, the Buddha was a dad living in the suburbs, you know, and that's the context for how to interpret what he did. But in any case, there's a story goes. Soon after Rahula was born. The Buddha left the family life, he left his household, he left his wife and his newborn child left the palace and went off and for about six years, wandering around India, as an ascetic as a spiritual seeker as a renunciant. And at the end of those six years, he attained his enlightenment and, and then provide a year. He taught the Little bit around, he wandered around and met people. And as the story goes, he met with quite a bit of success as a teacher. And

very quickly, people would come to him and receive his teachings and some of them got what he had to teach and some of them became ordained as monks during that first year. And during that first year, he made his way back to his hometown. And it's a bit of a journey, but he made it back. And so back to visit, you know, where he came from, and his family, his father, his stepmother, his, his wife was there and his son. So he finally saw a sign again when his son was seven years old. Now, it seems that the wife was little bit angry. And but when the Buddha came back to town She told Rahula go see him and get your inheritance and the inheritance of a, you know, way I think what she meant was that the Buddha was supposed to be a prince. His father was kinda like a king, tribal King tribal chieftain. And the inheritance I guess was to the kingdom was to kind of pass on that, that the royal line. That's probably what she meant, but she has had since sent him down to to get the inheritance. And so the Buddha apparently was sitting there, and Rahula went up to his father. And Rahula said to his father, your shadow is very pleasant. At which point the Buddha got up and walked away. Which, in other situations where the Buddha got up and walked away, it seems to When people became enamored with him, somehow in awe of him and merged with him, and it seems to be one of his pedagogical techniques, techniques was for them to walk away. And often if they were never they would follow him and then there'd be more to the story. And it seems that when Rahula said to him, you know, you, your shadow was pleasant. It might have been very, we don't know how to interpret that. But it might have been a very formal, polite way of saying something like, it's really pleasant. It's really wonderful to be in your presence, your aura is great. Being in being being like, you know, under your shadow is really great. So it's kind of like stating a positive is to be in the presence of the Buddha. And it was quite something to see at spirit rock this last week. How the so many of the children they're related to the two monks who were there Ajahn Amaro and venerable him circle. And, you know, they were so attentive, they were kind of there's something about the monastic form, in the presence of these two that really captured the attention of the kids. And, and my son, I, you know, kind of became enamored with Junior monk, he was there. The young man who was ordained for 10 months, my son would just kind of like he was really taken by him. So maybe something like that happened and the Buddha, whereas reasons I don't quite understand, he got up and walked away. And I'd like to interpret that in a positive way rather than he was cold, hadn't seen the sun set its sights on in seven years, and just got up and walked away. But anyway, so Rahula followed him. And then Rahula said, Give me my inheritance. And so the Buddha turns to Sariputra and Sariputra is kind of like the Buddha's right hand, man. Like, isn't quite as wisest, most senior important disciples. And he turns to Shai Cutrone says ordained so the answer to you know, the only inheritance they had to pass on, was not the wealth in the royal lineage, what was the Dharma that he had? And so, he said our data and so, with not too much, then very quickly Rahula was ordained by Sariputra as a novice monk. And probably, you know, the ruler was enamored by the Buddha and, and, you know, somehow was taken by what was there and kind of really went along to be ordained as a novice. And so then the Buddha's father, shock Yeah, I was his name Suddhodana came to the Buddha soon afterwards. Said basis unlike the bonds between a parent and a child are really deep. And the loss of a child is painful right down to them, you know, the marrow of the bones and so the Buddha says said, Okay, and then He instituted a new rule for ordaining people. He said, that you personally cannot be ordained without getting permission of his or her parents. And so as to make sure that the parents were on board, and the parents wouldn't be

paid in some, you know, some way that was too painful, too difficult. And, and in fact, we find stories of people who did not get the permission of the parents, and then the difficulties that that caused so And then Rahula became a novice. And it seems that he remained a novice. And until he was about 20 or 20, at which point he was ordained as a full monk. So he spent, you know, most of his youth as a monastic life. And then you come to a story that's attributed to when Rahula was 11. And this is a very famous story, teaching. It's a Tennessee of Baker's seemingly favorite, teaching him he taught refers to so often talks about it, the monk who comes here a lot to talks, and it's not said explicitly in the story in the story, but it seems that this, the young novice Rahula had told a lie. So that's not so far fetched for a young boy and child to Maybe tell a lie. I didn't do it or something like that right. So Rahula went and sat down next to the Buddha and the Buddha. So, what happened was Rahula saw the Buddha coming from a distance, and so he made a seat ready, prepared to seat where you could sit down in the ground and sit on the water for washing the feet of the Buddha took Indian custom and at the time you'd wash the guests, a guest feet when they came to to your house, or because people weren't from barefoot or with sandals and they got dirty and washed off the dust. And so the water was set out and I guess he washed his feet. And then the Buddha sat down and then Rahula paid his respect. And then the Buddha had less a little bit of water in the pot, the water pot. And the Buddha said to Rahula Rahula do you see this little bit of water left in the water pot? Yes, says even so. Even so little Rahula is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie. You know, that, you know, like imagine a few drops of water left. That's all it's worth. The monastic life someone who tells us breadline. So I imagine that Rahula here now gulps and then the Buddha turn that pot with a little bit of water in it upside down. So the water kind of ran, a little bit of water was left ran out. And Rahula said, and so he said to Rahula Rahula do you see this water? Park turned upside down? Yes. Even so Rahula those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie have turned their monasticism the monkhood upside down, let it all the goodness of it turn drain away. Then the Buddha turned the water pot up again upside and asked the venerable Rahula Rahula do you see this hollow empty water vessel? Maybe He maybe kind of said it more Rahula you see this hollow, empty water vessel? And then I imagined the whole level kind of? Yes. Yes. Even so, even so hollow and empty is the monkhood of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie. So, it seems like he was being admonished. So then I am going to teach you a little bit and one of the things he does is he teaches the following. He says Rahula what it what is the purpose of a mirror for the purpose of reflection, venerable sir, so to Rahula an action with a bomb should be done after repeated reflection and action of speech should be done after repeated reflection. And action by mind should be done after repeated reflection. So, you should be before during and after you do something by by double instead yet but by, when you do something by your body, by your words or even in your mind, you should not do it until you reflect it about it for a while thought about it is this a wise thing to do is appropriate thing to do? There should be some power of reflection or consideration that's cultivated and developed. Rahula when you wish to do an action with the body, you should reflect on the same bodily action thus, with this action that I wish to do with the body, lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others, or to the affliction of both. Is it an unwholesome bodily action with painful consequences, with pains, painful results. When you reflect, if you know, this action that I wish to do with the body would lead to my own affliction, or to the flexion of others or to deflection or both. It is an unwholesome bodily

action with painful consequences with painful results, then you should not do such an action with a body. But when you reflect the opposite that this leads, this is not does not lead to my own affliction, or to the affliction of others or the affliction of both. When you realize that it is a wholesome bodily action with pleasant consequences and pleasant results, then then you may do such an action with the body. So, this is how to be a mirror how to reflect you see is what I'm about to do. Does it cause harm to anybody? And it's what's interesting here is that it's both self and others and both. It isn't only consider within the impact on others. Don't only look at the impact on yourself, but include everyone take the big picture in, in what you're doing. Is this going to harm yourself or others. There's a tremendous emphasis in Buddhism on living a life of harmlessness of not causing harm. And I talked to someone this week who was a Dharma practitioner, very serious practitioner. And she has a very trying time with her mother. Very difficult history with a mother and your mother now is quite elderly and frail. And maybe in the last legs of her life, but she remains as difficult as ever. Maybe more so. And but now was friend of mine is the primary caretaker. Many years it kind of stayed more or less out of the way out of out of out of shooting range. But now she's with you know, within shooting range of her mom because she's taking care of her and her mother was very difficult. In such a particular situation, and she had to rely on her on her practice, to stay. Economists are not the kind of lash out to be difficult. And what she dedicated herself to doing besides just being you know, trying to stay, you know, present mindful economist, she dedicated herself to be as harmless as she could. And so she went into the kitchen and she was very careful to recycle all the plastic and you know, kind of go forget all the things she said like compost the food and, and so her idea of harmlessness was not just simply harmless towards her mother, but she was gonna try to live those that time in her life is dedicated to being harmless as she could and that was her refuge in this great difficulty with her mother. That was quite beautiful. Anyway, so reflect on on visit cause harm and what are the consequences for doing what you're going to do? Does it cause harm immediately to self or other Or what are the consequences down the line? Is it going to cause harm in the future? Then Rahul, then Buddha went on and said Rahula, while you are doing an action with a body walkthrough, so first says before you do it now he says while you do it, so while you're doing it, you should also reflect, reflect the same way is the action I'm doing now. I'm engaged in, is it causing harm to myself to others or to both? Is it unwholesome or is it wholesome? If you find that it's harmful, then the Buddha said, stop doing it. If you're in the process of doing it, then stop when you are reflecting Duke while you're doing it. Then he goes on to say, once you've done something, you should you should also reflect having finished doing it. You should then reflect also, is this this caused harm to myself to others or to both? Is this wholesome or unwholesome If you find that it was harmful to others, that was unwholesome, this is interesting, then then you should confess such a bodily action, reveal it and lay it open to the teacher, or to your wise companions in the holy life hadn't confessed it revealed it and laid it open, you should undertake restraint for the future. So here, you know, Rahula probably told a lie. So he was being told, even having done it, you should still use the analogy of a mirror and reflect on what you've done. And if you feel you've done something harmful, unwholesome it's not enough just to kind of in your own mind, kind of realize that and let it go or, or you can say I'll just try to do better later. What the Buddha is encouraging to our hula, encouraging Rahula, who's living a monastic life living without the monks saying you should go Find one of your good companions, one of your good, you know, friends in the

monastic life, and you should actually talk about what you did lay it open. And something happens. I know that word confession is kind of a charged one for people, sometimes here in the West, especially if they come from a certain religious traditions. But there's something very powerful about vocalize stating out loud to someone, what you've done kind of this public public acknowledgement, a clear recognition, saying something out loud to someone else acknowledges our intention around it acknowledges the reality of it in a much more powerful way than just keeping it to ourselves and saying, Well, I hope no one noticed I'll try to do better later. If you really want to become free of something, a bad habit or, or something that you do, which is not that is harmful if you if you really want to try to stop doing that again in the future. One of the very powerful things to do is to actually find someone and you can tell them what you did. This is what I did. Let me make Barrett open to you. And in that stating as someone else made that helped me be more restrained in the future. So, nobody goes on and this is kind of a long way and goes through the same thing with speech. Before you speak, while you speak, and after you've spoken, you should reflect on the same way and then also with the mind, before you have mental activity, while you have mental activity and active mental activity, there should be some reflection going on some consideration is this harmful and harmful, skillful unskillful activity. So it goes on that way. And at the end, it says Rahula was satisfied and delighted in the Buddha's words May be so then there's a few other places it seems it seems that the Rahula spent a lot of time with his father and his father, after he was there both our day kind of spiritual life. And so even though the Buddha was present for him the first seven years, seemed like there was a lot of contact afterwards. And then one of the indications of this is another discourse that's called. It's called the Rahula Sutta. And the Buddha asks, Rahula do you not despise the wise man, by constantly living with him? Is the holder of the torch for humanity honored by you. So somebody said like, do you not despise the wise person or what the wise person that you constantly live with? And kind of testing a son, right? I know quite what's going on here. But one interpretation is that, you know, the Buddha encouraged you, not to us not to judge a teacher quickly. But to hang out with a teacher for a long time to kind of see the ins and outs of them and kind of test them find out whether they're really living an ethical life, that they're really learning what they say and things like that. And so, here, Rahul, I spent a long time living with the Buddha, watching him and all that. And sometimes when you live for a long time with someone, you kind of know their ins and outs, you know, they're kind of the way they're kind of crotchety, you know, and kind of, you know, out of the public eye, but kind of, you know, in your family and, you know, they pick their nose or something. So maybe he's asking, you know, you've been around me for a long time. And have you found any reason to fault me or be critical of me or despise me? And Rahula then says, No, I do not despise the wise person by constantly living with him. The holder of the torch of humanity is always honored by me. So he's saying he respects it. So that's one interpretation. I kind of imagined that Rahula is a young teenager in this little middle exchange. And I know my father thought I was angry with him when I was a teenager. And I found out when I was in my 20s, that he thought that and I had no idea that he thought that I wasn't angry with him. I was just oblivious of him. You know, I was busy. And then there's another story. There's two more stories. So okay tell you stories like this Rahula II two stories. Again, the context where this is not given in the original, but it's true the tradition, the commentary tradition, puts the context in this way that the Buddha and Rahula were off going off on alms rounds. And Rahula as they were setting off on

their own being ready for homes, started thinking reflecting suddenly, like, two possibilities that have heard us explain one is that the Buddha apparently was a quite a, quite a stunning, beautiful presence. And not only because he, you know, had his enlightenment but also because he had it differently even before he was enlightened. He had a quite a dignified royal presence that cause people to notice him and Rahula being related to him has had some of his looks. And so he was kind of going to follow in the arms in the footsteps as a Buddha can a little bit proud of his own looks. That's one version of a story. The other versions of story is that it was prophesized that the Buddha had two career choices, two avenues open to him as he grew up. One was that he was going to become a monk. And the other was that he was gonna become a great monarch, great ruler of India. And he chose to be a monk rather than the great ruler. And so Rahula was thinking, you know, if my dad had become a ruler instead, you know, where would I be then? Now, I wouldn't be out there begging for my food. You know, you had thoughts like that. So somehow, the Buddha understood what was on rollers mind. And so with that as a context, then They were looked back. So, here the being to walk down the road to do their alms, and the Buddha looks back at him and he says to him Rahula any kind of material form any kind of physical form, whatever, whether past future or present in turn internal or external course or subtle, inferior or superior far or near all physical form should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom. So, here sticking about is the beauty and who you know, the form and who we would be status and all these things. And the Buddha says, you know, whatever physical appearance we have a physical form a person has should be reflected on in the following way. This is not mine, this I am not, this is not myself and so, this is a very important teacher The Buddha did not take things too personally not see as myself as spirit rock. Betsey rose, saying kind of this beautiful song. It was turned into song. By What's his name? He wrote the Prophet was his name. Yeah. And he has a chapter on children. And he starts off by saying your children and not your children. So beautiful because that capella group, what's it called? Sweet, sweet honey in the rock, right? Put it to song and Betsy rose got it from them. It's really moving children and not your children. So that's a quite a powerful thing to think about. And I think about that a lot. When my son and my children I'm responsible in some ways and they're very, you know, some kind of strong connection there. Are they really mine My sons starts developing in ways that are not necessarily what I would have chosen for him. What is that about? Once I relate What relationship do I have to those, that growth, net development those changes? That is amazing mind to shape No. So here, Buddha says even yourself in some way, whatever shape or form or shape that you have, is not self is not yours is not. So, it is a very, very deep teaching in Buddhism, I'm not going to try to kind of convey it right now to you. But it points this teaching about not taking things personally identifying with them. Sitting in as some of you possess is one of the very deep insights that can come with realization. It's one of the insights that leads to realization or liberation or freedom. So, the Buddha turns around and probably in the context of going on alms round was probably unusual for the Buddha to speak during that time. And so turn around and actually tell us the boot to Rahula just starting his thinking about this No these thoughts, you know kind of got his attention. And, you know, and rather than, you know, ask the question, in return, he said, Is this only true for physical shapes, physical form physical appearances. And the Buddha said, No, this is also true for your feelings for your perceptions, for your internal mental activities and for your consciousness, all of that should be seen as not mine, this I am not, and this is

not myself. Then Rahula thought, who, who would go to town for alms today, when personally admonished by the Buddha. So, he turned back and sat down at the root of a tree, folding his legs crosswise, sending his body erect and establishing mindfulness in front of him. So, he thought that monisha Being admonished he just didn't have the heart to go off and get his food for the day. So basically, the day became a fasting day for him and he went back to meditate. While he was meditating, sharpshooter saw him sitting there as What's going on? And he explained and then later in the day, he got, the Buddha came back. And the Buddha gave him some further teachings. And the Buddha said this to him to develop meditation somewhere else I've seen it develop the mind develop the mind or develop your meditation. Develop meditation that is like the earth. For when you develop meditation is like that is like the earth is agreeable and disagreeable things will not invade your mind and remain there. Just as people throw clean things and dirty things, excrement, urine spittle person blood on the earth. And the earth is not repelled, humiliated and disgusted because of that. So to Rahula developed meditation that is like the earth. When you develop meditation that is like the earth. Things that are agreeable or disagreeable will not invade your mind and stick there. You know, get hung up on them. So develop them. Sometimes you talk about meditation, you sit there as if you're a mountain. There's one image people use or imagine yourself like a still, you know, Mountain Lake, mine's like still nothing like and here is saying, It's when you meditate. Imagine yourself like the earth. You know, big large, unfazed by what happens to it. And then he gives him this following image, develop meditation, that is like water. For when you develop meditation, that is like water, agreeable and disagreeable things will not invade your mind and stick there. To speak. People wash, clean things and dirty things in the water. The water is not repelled, humiliated and disgusted because of that. So to develop a mind and meditation that is like water Rahula developed meditation is like fire. When you develop meditation that is like fire, agreeable and disagreeable things will not invade your mind remain there. Just as people burn clean and dirty things in a fire and the fire is not repelled, and so forth. So when you develop this meditation, agreeable and disagreeable things will not invade and stick in your mind. Develop your meditation like air, for when you develop meditation is like the air. Same thing repeats itself, developing meditation like space. remembers the same thing about space. Remember, Suzuki Roshi, I think who said, space is untroubled by your presence. Whether you're tall or short or large or teeny, or whatever you are in space just accommodates you untroubled to do that. The mind like space, the author in Buddhism, they also often have the image of letting your thoughts pass through your mind. Like a cloud drifting through the sky, the clouds, the sky is not troubled by the clouds, just holds the clouds and the clouds go by. So the same thing with your thoughts just let them drift through, like your mind being like a sky like space. And then he goes on and says, encourages the hula, to develop meditation on loving kindness. For when you develop an imitation loving kindness, it will will be abandoned, you'll lose your will develop meditation on compassion, for then cruelty will be abandoned, develop meditation on appreciative joy, for then, discontent will be abandoned. Develop meditation equanimity, for then aversion will be abandoned. And he goes through and gives him a variety of different meditations and he ends with giving a meditation On mindfulness of breathing. So he's giving his son a variety of tools to use in different situations and via variety of images, how to meditate, kind of giving some hint and how to kind of presence you need to have in meditation to develop this kind of a quantum mist presence that can allow things arise and not be

troubled by it. Good and bad things you're not going to react to it. And then it said Rahula was satisfied and delighted by the Buddha's words, it's very nice, right? So and then there's one more story, and that's told in the sutras around Rahula. So, when Rahula was about 19, or 20, he became ordained as a monk, because that's what that's the rule in Buddhism, you have to can't be a full monk until you reach about 19 or 20. And, and at some point, the Buddha understood that is so was now ready to receive the deepest teachings he had to offer. His mind was kind of right. We've been training now for how long 13 years or so. And in the monastic life, so I taught this maybe here a few weeks ago, few months ago, but this this, this particular story, but then he, the Buddha said, Come with me. And the Buddha took Rahula, deep into the woods, to a place that was called blind man's Grove. And there he was over there already living in the woods, kind of at the edge of edge of town. But he took the sun deeper into the woods, in a place where there are these solid trees which are very huge, huge majestic trees with big kind of these tapering kind of trunks that form these roots. You can sit in the crevice of the corner of the of the roots, and as a grove of these trees, and I imagine it was quite majestic, very still quite beautiful. And maybe some of you have been when I sat in some of the great Redwood groves, and by yourself and felt the presence of those trees and what it's like to be a person, a human being, in the presence of these huge, huge, majestic sequoia trees and the stillness there kind of puts your life into a different context, when you think the history has been here for 1000 years, or 2000 years or however long and so, he took his son to such a place and, and then he taught the Buddha, he talked for hula, something similar they talked to you taught him earlier. He taught him the teachings on not self taught his son, how not to identify or get attached or use as a reference for self, his body, his appearances his feelings. He is perceptions, he his thoughts, mental activities, his intentions, dispositions, his personality, or his consciousness, the whole kind of psychophysical package of who we are, he taught his son Don't, don't attach to any of this as this is who I really am. And by this time after 13 years as a novice monk, he was kind of ready for that to hear that. Because when you stop doing that, and if you really can learn to let go of the tendency to identify the person, I take things personally to hold on to things as this is who I am. Then the mind begins to release itself the heart begins to release, because of the identification with things with something as a self. It comes as a form of grasping, holding, and when there's no holding no reference like that. Then the mind kind of becomes free like space, just open. Things rise, they pass But there's no kind of holding on to it or categorizing it or fixing it or trying to make it permanent this way, this is who I really am. And there's something about that realization of non not self, of releasing the mind my tendency to grip onto self, which opens the door to a phenomenal piece, two great piece. Some people would say it's kind of like our birthright, the inheritance that Rahula was supposed to get was that piece that the Buddha had tasted for himself. And now he was passing that piece on in a sense to his son, and I can't think of a better thing to pass on to your children. The kind of very wonderful happiness and peace that comes with spiritual, deep spiritual practice. I know a lot of a lot of parents who will say something like, you know, I don't really want for my children, it's for him to be happy. And it doesn't really matter what they do in their life so much as But they find their happiness. And in the Buddha was able to touch a certain depth of happiness. That is not the kind of conventional happiness. So if you know, success in your career, things like that, and the minds that capacity to be at peace with itself without any conflict with itself with the world around with the mind as in a sense come to rest settled on itself. So, that's what

was on my mind this last week and wondering about my son and wondering If and when and how, you know, I could take him into the woods and tell him something. But this week, I can tell with myself that it wasn't the time for me to do it. But he did tell me that he was interested in becoming a novice monk for a week. So maybe one one way one of these years the two of us will go to a monastery and maybe get ordained together for a week. That's like so I hope that was okay to give that talk. And thank you very much. Good evening.