

2006-10-01 Appropriate Response

Fri, 7/17 9:57PM • 39:41

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

response, people, respond, felt, listen, deeply, world, situation, deep, person, close, story, teachers, life, chaplain, reaction, years, find, talk, hear

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Down. We are a person who just lives you know, this kind of art. And so as the fictions have found them out so they, so it's not just a matter of going up, it's also very important woman coming back down walking down the mountain. And in the Zen tradition they talk about, in a sense, coming down the mountain, and then returning to the marketplace with gifts, bestowing hands. Isn't that great gift for stone cancer, this kind of way you return. And this idea of, of withdrawal and return of climbing the mountain and coming back down is one that speaks to the idea of spiritual life being both something maybe inward or takes you out of society, but also brings you back into it at some point. And that movement can happen in in big cycles, it can even go away for 10 years, and practice in monastery and then come back in some way or other some form or other or it can happen in instance, we use take a moment Be mindful what's happening here before you respond to the situation. But I'd like to suggest that there are three movements in that involve this responding to the world mouth. And there's kind of three ways. And the first one is to borrow a phrase from that event center. He talks about getting close to nothing. And what he means by this is, be really present, be really attentive to whatever situation you're closest to beat up the crowd, people close. And then do remember, this is the first thing, this is not the last word, but rather start there. It's another way of talking about mindfulness. mindfulness can be understood as offering your presence offering your attention to something and then initially doing nothing, just to take it in, let it register to find out what's there to learn. From it See deeply. And for some people, it's a phenomenal training, very challenging training, to get close. And to do nothing, some people would rather not be present. And if they're present, they don't want to get close. And some people, you know, can be close to the present, can attend to what's going on. But the idea of being doing nothing is a foreign idea to revolting idea to frightening ideas. You know, because we have to engage, we have to do something or to fix it. We're responsible if we don't show that we care by worrying, then how people know that we care, we don't worry properly. Or if you know, or, you know, it's we are uncomfortable and so we try to fix our discomfort or trying to fix the situation. Or we judge or we criticize or we greed upwards. We want something different. There's a lot of habitual ways reactions that human beings can have when we encounter almost anything. And

the very important part of Buddhist practice is learning not to give in to the habitual reactivity. And so you might still have them they don't give into them, do nothing. Be still, here's a poem from or chant or something from the northwestern Native American Indian tradition, Native American tradition. Stand still the trees ahead and the bushes besides you are not lost. Wherever you are, is called here and you must treat it as a powerful stranger. must must ask permission to know it and be known. Listen, the forest breathes it whispers I have made this place around you. If you leave it, you may come back again saying here no two trees are the same two ravens, no two branches, the same terrain. If what a tree or a bush does is lost on you, then you are surely lost. Stem Still, the forest knows where you are. And you must let it find you so standstill, you must ask permission to know it and get to know you. So be still. To be still there's a way of being still which is deeply respectful. Certainly some people have the message they're supposed to be silent, and not count and kind of recede into the background. And this is not what we mean. But, but to be still maybe in the middle of situation as if you count as if you're you know, you're important he says but he's still And ask for permission to no permission for something to happen, what is it, what's going on here? What's happening to be still and do nothing to be attentive to be close and do nothing. Another way of saying is to be home be here part of this process of being still and doing nothing and also the process of settling. Because often what the reactivity the movements of reaction before against things or trying to make something happen and whatever, keeps us stirred up, keeps the mind stirred up and the heart stirred up. And when the mind the hardest stirred up, we can't really listen or see understand deeply what is here what is going on. So part of this process of being still the closest thing still is to allow a settling to happen, relaxing to happen, a calming to happen, and then allows us to be more deeply into touch with what is here, what, who we really are what's going on. So a story. Once upon a time, there was a young woman, who with her family, left her country and came to Japan. And they live down the street from a Buddhist monastery. And she would go, she started kind of visiting the monastery and talking to the monks and nuns who were there and got interested in meditation practice, and was just beginning a practice and felt valuable for her. When it was time for a family to return to her home country, where there was no Buddhists, you know, Buddhist people didn't know about meditation there. So she went to the abbot of the monastery and said, You know, I told her what story with her situation was like and, and how could you continue her meditation practice or get help with it with your back to her own country and the avocet to her Ask around in your country, among this among the people of your religion, spiritual people, otherwise people of your town or your country, ask around to find the person who's the best listener. And then go to that person and ask that person is to teach you to mentor you, and how to be a good listener. So that's different than going to that person saying, teach me your religion. That comes aside It's uh, you know, don't learn the religion from the person but learn a skill and ability from that person. Learn how to listen deeply. So be still and get close, and be still get close and listen. And then another story that I'm very fond of often feel apologetic repeat stories that some of you have heard me repeatedly, but In the folkways of the world, stories are often repeated. In my son's school, in kindergarten, they would teach him say the same story every day, for a week for a week or two to the kids. In the world of getting close to these still, we're all still in kindergarten. The in the Ramayana, the god Rama is going through the forest. And he hears a voice, very faint voice. And he asks his companions to hear that voice in the forest, and nobody hears the voice but him. So he has to get

really still and listen really carefully, to hear what the voice is saying. And again, this kind of ease still getting close and listening. And the voice is saying his name Rama. So he follows the voice to the voices coming from and it's coming out of a big boulder. And you gently put his hands on the Boulder. And when he does that the boulder breaks open, and a woman breaks out. And the woman explains that a long time ago she was bewitched, and imprisoned in this rock until someone like Rama Rama, Kaman, lovingly put hands on there and then she could be free. One of the very touching aspects of this story is that the woman's name is Elia and Elia in Sanskrit means home. Like Amalia means snow home, the home of the snow. And so her name is home. So that's symbolic. So your home the place of home, the place of deep rest of who you are, because listen very deeply to if something's very faint, maybe no one else can hear it but you maybe not maybe no one else can hear it for you. What is it that only you can hear? What is it only you can do? But no one else can do for you. What is it only you can hear? And so, and then how do you find it to me? So much of our life is petrified, or, you know, frozen in some way. So how do we get to something. And so this idea of listening deeply and following is very faint voice. And then the loving hands that get placed on something that's hard and solid, frozen or something without expectation, or almost expecting anything, or trying to break anything open, just know it's there. And then something that's called home has a chance to break free come out. So this idea of then listening deeply, or being very attentive, can happen both to the outer world but also to our inner world for ourselves to listen very deeply here. And this then leads to the next phase of this, you know, getting ready to come down the mountain. And that is listening very deeply, listening in some way to a response. within us, through being attentive to situation being present for a situation. And then there is allowing some deep response to well up from deep inside of ourselves. And are usually we're deep because to contrast it to two responses or reactions that come from our egotism, our self centeredness from our greed or from our hate, or from our fear. And often we have to listen to be quiet for a long time to be able to listen to something as much deeper, much deeper what's going on. And we often have to do that when to other people as well. A man went to a therapist and said he'd been living with his wife. We've been married for many, many years, but they had a lot of conflicts and a lot of struggles and he felt they needed some help. therapists heard for a while what was going on? He said, I think what you need to do is go home. I said, Have you ever tried listening to your wife? He said, No. So I think you should go home and try to listen to your wife. So he does that he comes back sometime later and said, I listened to my wife. It didn't really help. And then the therapist says, Oh, you need to go back again. And now listen to what's behind the words. What's behind the words? What else you notice between the words? And so where's that listening? Like, what else you know? So being still, and waiting, be still and being attentive, is allowing for some deeper response to happen. Something is not our first thought or first reaction or that and there's innumerable times where in my capacity of infinitely wise person I'm talking to someone and they tell me something about you know, themselves and, and it's obvious to me, you know, completely obviously, what they should do and what should he tell them and, and, and perhaps a little glimmer of real wisdom. To break through, and, and for whatever reason that I don't tell them by the way. And then, and we have the conversation if I ask questions or just give space this person to keep talking or something, and then because of that space because that time that's given something new is born, that is very different than what I thought should happen, I thought should be some new understanding some new, deeper

insight or something happens that either one of us in the conversation maybe could have anticipated beforehand, but because of making the space and the time not rushing to a solution, allowed something deeper to happen. So it could be as simple as taking, you know, pausing one moment in a conversation and seeing what will arise, give somebody a chance to arise. Or it could mean spending a year or two years thinking about some important decision waiting not making a decision. When in the early 1980s, when I was living at Tusla, Zen monastery called Tassajara, was in my 20s. and wondering what to do with my life and many big ways. And, and I spent a year, year and a half my time at Tassajara, doing this process of being still listening, reflecting, reflecting. And then as responses started coming up reactions, responses coming up what to do with my life, testing it, questioning it, looking listening behind those responses, exploring them, and just letting it all be for about a year and a half, until some clarity arose about what my life was going to be about. So I've known people who've gone on retreats for, you know, a week or three months or even much longer, in order to find themselves. They have to find how they want to respond to the world how they want to live their life, because it wasn't clear not only people from 27 I know people do that. But I've known people in their 40s and 60s who have stepped out, in a sense in order to be able to do that deep being still and listening to some deeper response about what wants to come out of them. And I've also known people who spend 30-40 years not listening to their, the responses. I've known people who have had very clear, very deep yearnings for spiritual life, in their 20s, for example, and then for some reason or other, the responsibilities of family and jobs and all kinds of stuff, putting it aside putting aside and having had this yearning almost fester. And then finally, at some point in their 50s, or 60s, and this really is mostly seen something that was like the boys about to break. And people I've known who I felt pretty convinced they had to continue the life they're living. They were going to die. Because it was that powerful, their sense of not being in touch with themselves. They had to do a radical kind of transformation that kind of dropping out of their life in order to listen to this very deep yearning they had that had been kind of put aside or repressed for so many years. So to give ourselves chance to hear what's here, in a very deep way to listen and to find kind of deep inside, what is our response? And, and some of this comes from not knowing, you know, just being still getting close and being still being close and doing nothing is also kind of not Is there a party taking the stance? I don't know. I don't know what here. I don't know what should be. And so in that not knowing space, maybe allowing something new to happen. That was partly inspired to give this talk by meeting with some chaplains and training on Friday. And one of the chaplains in training said that he came into a room in the hospital With an elderly woman who I think was quite sick, maybe, you know, in danger of dying. And she started telling a chaplain that a few months ago, her husband had died. And she'd met her husband when she was 16. And married him soon thereafter. And their husband was the first person that she'd ever kissed romantically and the only person and all those years and now he died some years, some some months earlier, and now she was very sick. And there was a little more to the story. But he listening to the story that this chaplain in training, started crying. and wondering, you know, what should I do? How should I help this person what you're saying I'm kind of confused. For to move by this he started crying. After a while, she said to him Oh, thank you so much. I feel so supported. Because I feel you understand me. So he didn't know. He has all ideas he specific champions was to know to do and do something wise, but he didn't know. But in that not knowing his response, his deep

response was through empathy was the cry with her. And that perhaps was the best response you could have gotten. So what allows us to have that kind of response. Another one is chaplains and training on Friday, had been spent many years living in a Buddhist retreat center, doing very intensive Buddhist practice and somewhat isolated practice kind of alone, and in the last year had felt that her compassion for others was getting dry. And what brought her to do this long retreat was her sense of strong compassion for the world in it. This was her response to it. But as her sense of compassion for others run dry, the motivation for doing the practice dried up a certain way. And she felt the what she needs to do was to re re re fresh or re enlivened or read, invigorated. That's the life of her compassionate vow, compassionate response to the world. So she left the retreat center, and is now being trained to be a chaplain thinking that somehow responding to people meeting people were actually conditions of suffering, which somehow touch her heart and reawaken this very, very deep, heartfelt way in which he wants to live in response to the world.

For me,

when we can get still, or the equivalent of that, and discover what our deepest response deepest intentions are, I think that's not coming from our ego or unwholesome states of mind. I think that the response is really beautiful. It's one of the one of the beautiful things about human life, not just simply that we have the capacity to be awake and to be free to be awake is to get close and do nothing. but to also have a response to the world to meet the world to step forward into the world to come down and I think is really beautiful. So there's so we listen deeply to hear response. It can be, you know, come relatively quick, in some situations, it might take a really long time to discover what that is in other situations. It has to do with our response to others, it has to do with our response to ourselves, whole area. And then we come to the third phase of coming down the mountain. And that is the enactment of that response to acting on that response. And the acting of the response is, you know, that Putting in is the details of how you do it, the details of how you engage in the world with it. And that is, takes a lot of skill takes a lot of understanding often. Because you might have a response like a big one, like I want to be like speaking compassionately, respond to the suffering of the world. You know, the, and I want to go off and become, you know, Buddhist monk, you know, what I really need to do is go off and sit there long, long retreat, you know, 10 years, and really kind of discover some tremendous font of wisdom and enlightenment and awakening freedom inside of me, so that I could really go back and be helpful to whole world. So that's what I'm going to do, regardless of the fact that I have 13 kids at home. And they have no means of supporting themselves. And, you know, they just don't take care of themselves and always go off and save the world. You know, that's not enacting the response, given the conditions we find ourselves in. It's kind of ignoring so everyone, everyone is in a particular condition, we have our own personal condition, our own particular background, our family, cultural, ethnic, background and personal experience of background given who we are. We have the particular circumstances we find ourselves in. Bethel Goldring somehow found ourselves in Cambodia. And so her response is particular to Cambodia and her situation there. Some people are here, living that you know, lives of families, some people don't have families, some people have all kinds of situations, or the response has to do you know, the details have to do with a particular

particular people were encountering a meeting? Do we really understand and know who it is that we're trying to help or respond to? what's appropriate and what's not appropriate. So the enactment part requires us using our intelligence to the best of our ability, not assume that we have some natural intuitive, kind of wise kind of bubbling up, they just knows what to do easily, effortlessly. It's just gonna be so nice. The response, the deep sense of response might be effortless to help. It's effortless. I hope it feels natural or, you know, whole, complete or something. But then how to live that response is one that requires our intelligence in our care and our sensitivity to others into ourselves into the situation and discover what the appropriate responses famous story of an old Zen monk, he'd been a Zen teacher for being Zen monk for decades and decades. And the teacher for many years, and the young with first snapper comes to a monk comes along and says, you know, basically says, you know, to all these years of Zen practice teaching, what is the know your teaching of a lifetime? What's the core teaching that you have, you know, in a summary can give me Curl. And so the Zen Master says, as an appropriate response. So it all boils down to the appropriate response. And so you know that behind that appropriate response, I hope there's a sense of the getting close and doing nothing. damage will listen deeply for deep response. And then being able to enact that response in the appropriate way, given causes and conditions. And perhaps a great master is not someone who has woken up. A great master is not someone who has some deep, heartfelt response. A great master is someone who has come to the stage where they have the ability to respond appropriately in different situations. Some people say it's relatively easy to wake up. What's hard is coming down the mountain. So I think of those two as being inseparable, going up and coming down, and that it's not just a matter of retiring to some paradise of bliss and peace, but it's also a matter of responding to this world that we live in. And our world the world we live in, needs people to respond.

needs it.

Favorite God story, I think these three some person dies and goes up to to the heaven and sees God and starts complaining and seems reasonable to me.

If there's a God, you know,

and, and says, you know, you could see the mess down there just to see what people are doing to each other, and it just seems like it's getting worse and worse and you should do something. And God looks at this person and says, I did do something I made you. So the world needs us to respond. We don't look elsewhere for the response. Don't don't assign responsibility elsewhere. I think it's, you know, here in this place here, in this forest, be still listen and hear in this corner of the world. It's up to you to respond.

So

that's my thoughts for today. We have some time if anybody has any questions you'd like to ask or comments, stories of your own Thank you I recently come up against both East Indian and some of my other teachers and other centers. And it seems to be wrapped in more in the West about the end goal being happiness or bliss.

And so

appreciate a comment because why other teachers don't see it. There was always the last part my other teachers do not see it that you're saying some teachers say the end goal is happiness and bliss and other teachers don't see it that way. The other teachers see what's the goal? What's the end goal? Still grasping but more like just awareness, just being aware. And then some teachers and third type say, just awareness and bliss are the same thing. Yes. Yes, but it seems in some of the translations in the writings that there's a very real difference in that type of maybe it's just my condition reaction to blasts or ss, like being the ad and that's great. So given the kind of talk I just gave today, if I instead of giving give an answer to you, the right answer, take you straight. If you had to answer that question for yourself, if you if you were to do the kind of deep listening that resources are what ability what place? Would you go inside of yourself? To find the answer to your concern? Today is more an awareness that we're removing their levels of condition. So I get preoccupied. I don't stay

close,

long enough. So today's quick tip. So the answers for today, in this particular situation, what's important? what's important for you is somehow removing layers of conditioning that keep you from being able to be still or be close. So would you say? Yes, or just seeing that? They're inhibiting my awareness. They're they're giving the false answer like your talk was saying it firsthand. reaction. Sorry, I love I loved your answer because it was particular to this situation and where you are today. And rather than getting kind of blinded by some, some, you know, mountain peak, you know, you're actually saying, this is what's happening here today, and this is what my path is, is what we needed right now. For me. And, and then if you do that work that's very, very profound. Then at some point, the other side of those obstacles, something else would show itself. The so I think that to me, is very respectful of where you're at. And, and then you'll maybe for some point, find yours find out for yourself. The answer that bigger question you ask, you know, tension if you're between different teachers. Or it could be that they're all right. The, in their own in their own situation, their appropriate responses in different situations. The In the Zen tradition, you know, in Buddhism we often have this teaching about not self, which in simplistic and often misunderstood way people say it means no self, there is no self. In, in the Zen tradition, they'll say that you only discover who you are. In your response. You don't know who you are until you act in the world. So if you sit quietly and kind of like, reflect, you know, and thinking, Oh, who am I really, there's n people, you'll find that where you'll find a thing that who you are. But if, if someone comes along and is thirsty, you are the person who offers them water, you find on that situation, who you are. So who you discover who you are in the response.

So for you, you discover your answer to your question or your answer, and where you're at right Now, and that to me, that's, that's quite significant.

I have a question related to me reading books about making choices that are for long term good versus short term. And sort of complicated questions it in in terms of that responding correctly. My question is about kind of the gap between what you know or you think you know about the correct response and habitual conditioning. For instance, the, if I read Buddhist texts and meditate and consider myself a person who tries to be mindful and present or compassionate or kind, but then a lot of my life is free. dealt with sort of knee jerk reactions that have been there a long time. Now I'm very different than maybe it was 10 years ago in terms of changes. But there seems like this, this gap that's almost sometimes impenetrable between what you think you know what response you think is his response? And what you sort of compulsively go to each time.

You're saying that sometimes the compulsive response overrides whatever wiser understanding you seem to have,

right? You fall into distraction or judgment or something that you know,

you weren't No,

that's true that can be that way, often for many of us. And so that's why we call it a practice even we practice. And, and there's a variety of things in practice that can help certainly it helps to, the calmer you can get, the more likely you are to respond from your wisdom rather than you activity If you're stressed, stressed and harried, you're more likely to respond from your reactivity. cultivating habits, good habits, like a good habit of pausing, even just having the inner knowing that no one else might notice, but you have an inner pause. So that you can come out Check, check out what's going on little bit, is often helpful. And developing a habit of being in your body, knowing what's going on with your body is a great support to this process of noticing when you're reactive when you're not. And another thing that is very helpful is is to use a dramatic word, his confession or putting everything on the table. So if you have a certain habit of reacting to the unwholesome way, rather than keeping it private, make it relatively public, in the sense of saying, you don't have this difficulty. Let me tell you, you know, you know Tell someone tell the first meeting Oh, there I did it again, I apologize. Or if you sometimes you can make circles kind of inner difficulties or shortcomings public freeway, an easy way to the appropriate times and places to appropriate people. It can sometimes take the sting out of it, or it can take the you know, you kind of feel you're in a bigger, accountable, you're accountable, it's more shared. It makes it more conscious, more acknowledged, so that it's less likely to catch you. If you're always trying to keep it your your your unwholesome things private, and no one can know. There's a way in which that also kind of keeps it to yourself.

So sometimes

making it public, to the right people. Not everyone While

this is not really a question but I wanted to share a wonderful experience I had yesterday up at spirit rock, there was some mindfulness for educators workshop given by diamond Winston, some other teachers and particularly moving experience was to see a video by put on by a group called inner kids, and it's done in Los Angeles public schools, so we got to see some kindergarten kids learning how to pay attention to their breathing. Five, they were lying down for under these little Beanie Baby teddy bears on their belly. So they were learning soft belly breathing. And they were learning about breathing by by blowing into pinwheels and looking at it look like a chart with three colored areas and they could move this blinking magnet around to say, where were their bodies with your bodies. Last Friday, where their minds relaxed or excited or something in between. And it was it was fine moving on, because it was done in public schools. It was very secular. This no mention of Buddhism. It was called the new ABCs, which is where attention these were balanced. And C is for compassionate clarity. It was very moving to see how this is happening down in LA.

Beautiful, so nice to hear this. So I have a few things to say in response to that. I guess against my better judgment. I think I think hopefully, it's wise. Just as the intention I've checked it out already. But one of them can seem very self serving can seem that way. And but that's not the intention. The This is a wonderful way in which things come back and go in circles. You know, good things often come back bring happiness in ways. So I feel very happy listening to that. And it was my idea to have that day at spirit rock. I just wanted to set it up. And so I raged for it. And so then, you know, you know, I didn't go and but then you know, I didn't get it back. Isn't it beautiful? I felt really happy to hear this, you know? And I kind of assumed I'd never hear about it again. And then it was fourth grade. So thank you. And the other thing is

your teacher.

Anyway, I think teachers are some of the great heroes in our society. Here teachers are just the best. Thank you.