

# 2007-07-15 Meditation and Emotional Security

Fri, 7/31 7:26AM • 29:51

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, discursive, protecting, deep, mind, mindfulness, meditation, security, emotionally, secure, insecure, compassion, israeli jews, emotional, practice, loving, relax, buddha, words, kindness

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I'd like to tell you as a way of starting off a story from the ancient suttas of the Buddha. And it's a very famous story of two acrobats back or back in the acrobats apprentice, or assistant. And then we're going to do some kind of acrobatic show to raise money and, and they the Acrobat Master said to the apprentice, you know, why don't you climb up on my shoulders and we'll do a trick. And while you're up there, you protect me. Watch over me and I'll watch over you. And we will both be safe and people will like our show and give us lots of money. And the system said, Oh, no, no, no. will go up on your shoulders and we'll do our trick. But you watch over yourself, and I'll watch you myself. And that's where we'll be safe. And we'll do this trick. So there are differences of opinion. So they went to the Buddha, and related to him what they discussed among themselves. And then Buddha said, yeah, that's the way it should be that protect yourself first. And then you can watch others. And by protecting yourself, you protect others. And you kind of approved of what the assistant had said. And so many of you know little now it's almost a cliché. It's kind of like when you're in the airplane, you're supposed to put on the air mask on yourself first, and then you can help other people don't try to help others first. It's kind of that kind of maybe kind of spirit. And then the Buddha went on, and splint spontaneously produced a poem, which back then and was an oral culture and people would often produce verse spontaneously in a way they don't do so much anymore. And And he kind of elaborated even though he approved to the assistance statement, elaborated and actually presented both points of view. Protecting oneself. One protects others, protecting others, one protects oneself. So both are true. It's kind of interesting reciprocal relationship there. And how does one in protecting oneself protect others? By repeated and frequent practice of mindfulness. So somehow the practice of mindfulness as a way of protecting yourself, and by doing that you will end up protecting others. And how does one in protecting others protect oneself? By patience and forbearance by a non violent and harmless life by loving kindness and compassion. So somehow we protect the others by practice. Patience, forbearance non violence harmlessness and loving kindness and compassion. And in protecting others, we protect ourselves. So the logic of this is not so some of the logic is not so distant, too difficult to understand. If you know if you practice mindfulness, you'll know yourself. And if you know yourself well enough, you know your impulses and, and you have some control over your impulses, some of your activity, if suddenly feel like you want to punch out your neighbor. If you're practicing mindfulness, you can know yourself well enough you can see that coming in, you know how to handle it, how to hold it with awareness, and not be caught by your reactivity. Some people like to talk about learning to be an observer, so you're not so in being observer you're not caught up in whatever you're experiencing. There's going on, you're swept away by things. You don't really realize later or wish I had a presence of mine. Not have been caught up in what happened. And so mindfulness develops a kind of strength over time, we develop a strength and ability to be to see clearly what's going on. And seeing clearly also not being swept away swept up by what's going on. And that non swept awareness gives us a certain kind of protection from ourselves. We don't say things or do things that we later regret, but also in protecting

ourselves, then we also protect others, and we make it easier. You know, we certainly protect our neighbor when we don't punch them out. So we know that protection is primarily from our selling protect others from ourselves and what it's saying here. And also, if we can be a calm presence or mindful presence,

that often can be very, very helpful in other kind of settings and situations. We was a member of our community here, who was invited back to a college where he has some doing with because the faculty or contention arguments, what to do. And he went all the way back to separate, you know, different country to be there. he emailed me said, Oh, all I had to do was to be a calm presence that encouraged people to listen to each other. And everything settled down. It didn't take a lot of skills and mediation, just calm presence encourages people to listen to each other. So it can be helpful to practice mindfulness. And then the logic of you know, practicing non violence harmlessness loving kindness and compassion is that if you treat people with kindness, and compassion, then they're much more likely to treat you nicely in return. There's no guarantee that's gonna happen, of course, but it's much more likely you're increase the chances dramatically, that if you treat people with basic kindness and compassion, and I've seen many times where just the kindness of being able to listen to someone and not be reactive, listen to this. threw them out, hear them out what's going on be curious interested in them has resulted in, in dissipating certain kind of 10 situation difficult situation and the people that are more disposed to be kind or at least not to be violent or threatening in return. So that's kind of the basic logic of it. And so the encouragement here, I think, is a Buddhist saying, practice both practice both mindfulness, and practice compassion and loving kindness. Both of them are helpful. And there's prosody going on here. There's mutuality. And this is one of the more I think one of the profound teachings of the Buddha is that it's a teaching of mutual benefit. That there's a way of practicing so we benefit ourselves to benefit ourselves and benefit others. There's a way of benefiting others and benefiting others we benefit ourselves. And there's no need to have a sharp line between those two worlds of self and other and only be altruistic and take care of us. Others are only be selfish and take care of oneself. You can be neither selfish nor altruistic. In fact, this is a wonderful thing where your compassion and care involves this mutual benefit that goes in both directions. So that was the that's the little discourse of the Buddha. Now I wanted to relate it to try to relate it to something a little more profound. That is, I think, profound enough. Over the last few weeks, I've read a number of studies about people who have, who have or do not have emotional security. That seems to be the word that the researchers have come up with emotional security. And what they found is that people who have emotional security have a lot more compassion than people who are emotionally insecure. And there's some reasons for that if a person feels anxious if you feel anxious about something Then you tend to be focusing on the problem focusing on protecting yourself taking care of the situation. There's not a lot of energy, your time or thoughts going into caring for others focusing on others. They also found that people who are emotionally secure are much more tolerant of others as well. And much greater tolerance. People emotionally insecure, tend to have a lot more judgments, critical judgment for wisdom of others as well. People have emotionally secure seems to have a much more higher ability to be comfortable with ambiguity, or comfortable or tend to also have a higher degree of curiosity interest. People are emotionally insecure, tend to be a little more dogmatic, tend to be not comfortable with ambiguity. Want to be right much more often. People are emotionally secure, don't need to be right. It's nice to be right. But there's some neurotic holding on to the right. People are emotionally insecure, tend to create a much stronger group. It's entity where there's the N people in the out people. And they did an experiment where they took in Israel, where they took some Israeli Jews and in different groups of control group in different groups. And the other group that they were facing was Israeli Arabs. And they chose this group because historically there's a lot of hostility between these groups. And then they did this subliminal messaging to the to the Israeli Jews, where they use words like love to slip it in somehow subliminally I don't know how love hugs

like that. But what they wanted to do was to use words, that somehow would that the researchers thought would remind people or reference the people to some sense of emotional security that they have idea being that most people have some kind of reference, not everyone, but some kind of reference from childhood or something of some situation where they felt emotionally secure. And so some words that kind of elicit that sense of emotional security. And they and then they also had words that were happy words so subliminally a group of people had some subliminal happy words like, like happiness. Happy, then they had emotionally neutral words, they're subliminally that to people like office is that is that neutral? very neutral. But our tables in other words, they used to, and, and then they then they, and then they said in progress, because exactly what they did, but then they had to had to face so then the Israeli Jews had to evaluate the Israeli Arabs. And what they found was when they when the Israeli Jews were these subliminal words that had to do with encouraged emotional security, feeling of security within them, well being like love and hugs or whatever, that when they evaluated the Israeli Arabs I guess he evaluated Israeli Arabs and Israeli Jews both. And when they had the most secure, kind of prompting, they evaluated him the same way. They didn't see they didn't value that different. There's two groups, Israeli Jews, native Arabs, they would see the same way. But when they use the happiness words, or use the neutral words, then there was a difference between how they judge the is these really Arabs, they weren't as tolerant of them, as they were with the emotionally secure words you follow that? So these researchers feel that issues of tolerance of compassion of caring for others and a feeling of behind kind of excluding people from Your group, for example, are all things which can be adjusted to be changed. You're not hardwired The point is we're not hardwired here. And they can be changed. It was interesting with this research was that apparently they can trace some of this thing to neurology. Some of these neural pathways we discuss, put in place very deeply in childhood. And they used to be there thought that there wasn't much neuroplasticity plasticity, but now they think there is, we see these things can be changed. And when you have these emotionally secure kind of words or situations, you're not just simply changing the software of the mind. But you're actually changing somehow the hardware of the mind as well. Very deep conditioning goes on. And what strikes me one thing that strikes me about this, this kind of research is that they were just feeding individual words like love and hugs, deep Association symbolic value for people. They weren't giving them the logic. They weren't giving them a treatise about how important it is. treat people as equals or whatever. And when it's useful to be compassionate, they were actually just feeling this very deep stuff. And this is what Buddhism teaches as well, is that it's much more difficult to reach down into our effect than it is to reach into our cognitive understanding that in that there is a, in, in Theravada, an understanding of spiritual maturity, that it's actually easier to attain a certain level of spiritual maturity, which is a cognitive shift, a shift of understanding than it is to have an effect of shift where there's a shift of your emotional or emotional transformation as well. That you need to have a much deeper level of concentration or stillness in the mind to reach down and touch the effect the kind of basic way in which we are motivated by perhaps by greed, or lust or hate or ill will. Things like that. So the question is how do we get down below the logic of the mind below the kind of the way we talk to ourselves in the mind. And some people will spend a lot of time kind of trying to work out discursively you know, their understanding of life, try to get a better understanding of life and all that. And this kind of research points and also Buddhism points to that. There's something deeper in us than our logic, the kind of cognitive understanding we have. They can be cognitive shifts, but how do we drop down into a deeper place? And how do we drop down and touch a place if there isn't a place within us, where we feel emotionally insecure?

And what these researchers who are doing this to studying emotional security and security are also saying is that the degree to which someone feels emotionally secure, has a lot to do with how they were parented. And if, if they had because as a child you feel emotionally Secure when when there's

some problem in your immediate life in the world, and you can turn towards a parent and a parent is there to offer you secured, make you safe. If you have that association growing up that Oh yes, there is a secure place to go there is a place of being at home or being cared for, then as an adult to carry that with you, in a sense. And so you have a greater sense of emotional security as an adult. But close to the researchers say close to 50%, just slightly less than a majority of the population do not have emotional security. That's a pretty high percentage. And because somehow something went awry, as they suggest as a childhood, perhaps a parent wasn't there to provide that security. Or if a parent was required this security intermittent way, it wasn't reliable, then that created a certain kind of conditioning as well. And, and I've known people who've tried to remedy or deal with some of their deep suffering. They're suffering too much at a cognitive level, trying to understand something cognitively. And, and I think with this kind of research points to is that maybe there's a different way of touching places of emotional security, that's fear, anxiety. And working with working with it is not necessarily so cognitive. And I think that meditation can be one of those ways. And when when the mind starts getting when you first what happens in meditation, you should begin, hopefully some point, starting to become honest and interested in the places where we feel emotionally insecure or feel afraid or anxious or feel a bit off. And it's a big, it's a big step in maturation to be interested in this to be secure enough that it's okay to admit you're insecure. And some people are so insecure that the You know, it's so frightening to even admit that. So the first step is to kind of in sometimes it takes a long time, people who meditate, to sit down, be still, and really be recognized what's going on in a deep way. We're talking about something really deep here. That's deeper than what what you tell yourself. Right? Please be careful. That's one of the reasons in meditation, where we're very interested in putting aside the best we can to just discursive thinking. Now, it's hard to put it aside, but what we're trying to do meditation is not be swept away and discursive thoughts keep coming by and letting go of discursively thinking about something that needs to be solved or figured out or engaged in. And it's a big trading meditation to let go discursive thinking, whether it's planning tomorrow or if it's thinking about today or whatever. The thought you don't think thoughts keep coming back, but not to kind of get a ride away and discursive thought will begin letting us at access or Touch into something that's deeper within us than discursive thinking, for people that have a sense of emotional security. You can touch it to a felt sense of that sense of well being sense of being at home. For people who don't have it, the touch into the sense of emotional insecurity. Now, if you haven't security, it's very valuable to touch into it. Because it's by touching it that you begin to relearn a new way of being with it. It's kind of like as a child, you'll learn to be the most secure by being somehow insecure. And these turn around and your parent is right nearby ready to help to reassure you will take care of things. As an adult, we don't have our parents usually do that. And maybe not even healthy to rely on our parents anymore. But, but we have to kind of learn how to do it for ourselves. So how is it that we can be present for emotional security and then in that presence, feel that there is some kind of security or some well being or something, some kind of protection Reddit discourse server talks about mindfulness being a protection. And one of the ways to do that is when we, when we start doing mindfulness, we step away from being swept away, being carried away by these thoughts or the feelings. And we have with time we learn a place of mindfulness of awareness, observation, that is not the anxiety. And you realize, oh, there's a safe place within me, that can hold it and see it. There's a place inside of me that keeps me from making poor choices. Based on my own feeling, I can just hold it and be present for it. The only thing that can happen is as we learn to be present for it,

is that some of these stuff these complexes we have inside of us don't want to be there. And if we can learn to be present for them, some of them will begin dissolving themselves unraveling themselves, if we're always reactive to them, or believing them or swept away in them. We actually can be enforced them, if we step out of their orbit in a sense, but stay present and aware for that mindful of them, they begin to unravel and dissolve. And so some people who do mindfulness meditation will find, feeling a

feeling of feeling at home or relax or peaceful in meditation. They leave meditation, the anxieties come back. But having that reference point of that piece is very, very important. It's part of the real learning that happens to this very deep level, somatic level and neurologic neurological level or something. And slowly with time, that reference point becomes a stronger, stronger reference point. So that when you come into some situation of conflict, some situation that usually produces an anxiety, it might just be a simple reminder, to remind you to come back to that place of peace reminds you that you have an ability, maybe not hearing now, but you have an ability of relaxing, letting go and coming to a place of peace. And that knowing that there is a place can take the pressure off that extra situation. Oh, there is an alternative here. Oh, I know, maybe later in the day I can relax and meditate or I know there's another place. There's another way of dealing with this stuff. If you don't know, there's another way of dealing with it, then of course, you'll get more anxious because it's all the only game in town is the anxiety game. So what we're trying to do, one of the things we can do meditation is to learn how to become emotionally secure. Before people are emotionally insecure. By working through it first takes a lot of honesty about its presence. It takes a willingness to be present for it. It takes a willingness to put aside discursive thinking. And, and that means connecting with them more fully. And then a willingness to begin relaxing more deeply into and relaxing with it, boxing into another value of meditation practice. Is that when we can drop below the discursive level of thought, then the system, the mind the Heart, Body is receptive for input in a much deeper way than it is if you're thinking about stuff or reading something, something. So for example, in Buddhism we say that a concentrated mind is said this way, the power of intention, the way in which intention can powerfully recondition us powerfully influence our heart is much more. intention is much more powerfully condition conditions us when the mind is concentrated. So if if you have for example, intentions now of loving kindness Then the intention of loving kinds of kindness will have a much bigger beneficial impact on you if the mind is concentrated, and if it's not, you know, but also, conversely, if your mind is concentrated, and you have unhealthy intentions, I just can't, I'm going to be planning how you're going to punch up your neighbor. Then watch out because the karmic consequences they the way in which our conditions or the way in which it sets tracks in our minds, is much more powerful. If we're concentrated. It's like, you know, there's no no static anymore. And so it can, it can sink in deeper, there's a lot of static, a lot of distraction and all that it can't go very deep. So when the mind in meditation, goes deeper than discursive thinking, then it's possible to choose a little bit how you want to condition yourself. Or maybe conditions I know that's a favorable word and not for your minds, but how you can kind of relearn. Your system, be educated. So one of the things you can do is you could practice loving kindness meditation. It's one thing to practice loving kindness meditation in the realm of discursive thinking. It's another to do with when the mind and the body is still concentrated. And you can say, just a few simple words, may I be happy? May I be peaceful, and kind of like, biggest can spreads fuse into the muscles into the bones, simple decision by saying to the cells, this kind of reeducation process goes on. Because that intentionality that

sense of loving kindness, begins spreading and sinking into the way they can if you're in discursive world. So one of the things I like to do is, before I go to sleep at night, sometimes when I'm laying there, getting ready to go to sleep, I like doing a little bit of loving kindness meditation because I feel that just to have the kinds of intentions and wishes of myself, I can feel the muscles of my shoulders, my arms, different parts of my body begin to relax and deepen, in a very, very wonderful way. And I think it's a really good conditioning is really good education is really a good reminder of something very different way of being just before going to sleep. Now, sometimes I don't do it, and I seem to fall asleep anyway. But it's, I think it's a lost opportunity. Because some of the ways in which my mind my mind works is not exactly so no, so noble. And I can fall asleep with a less noble mind. You know, I can be a little bit anxious or concerned about something and what am I gonna talk about tomorrow and I give this talk, you know, and so that's, you know, I can fall asleep that way. But I think that falling asleep is one of those points, where it may be the discursive mind thinking to quiet down a little bit in how what we're

thinking about what our intentions or concerns are, have a deep impact on us. We enforce certain things. So you go along with the old habits of your mind? Or do you try to just change the habits to different directions more helpful. So I recommend to some of you and all of you. If you haven't done any kind of practice as you're falling asleep, you might try something as you're falling asleep tonight, for the next few nights. It doesn't take much time for people to say, Oh, I don't have any time for meditation. Do you have time to go sleep most people attend to go to sleep. So there's no excuse in terms of time, and you might just lay there a little bit and try doing a little bit two minutes of loving kindness meditation can be directed to yourself or directed to serve someone else and see what effect it has on your sleep and see what effect it has on you waking up and see if anything the other effect in your life. So to become emotionally secure, I think is a wonderful endeavor. To be emotionally secure as an adult means you have some ability to not be caught by your reactivity. So you're protected from yourself. I can't underscore how it doesn't make you sound very profound, but how significant it is to learn how to be safe from yourself. And actually, Buddhism says, if you were to be safe from yourself, then you're basically safe. I mean, things unfortunate things might happen to you. With the greatest misfortune that we can create for ourselves, is our own doing. It might be terribly unfortunate things that happened to you. But even so in order to diminish the how terrible those things are, but when the mind gets filled with hate, despair, grief, all these things, those things are our our minds doing in response to the terrible things that happen to us. And instead it was responsive to spare of hate and all those things, which will cause the greatest harm to ourselves. So the greatest protection is from ourselves. So city of emotional security isn't perfect, protecting ourselves from ourselves, and then giving us the resource, the ability to go out into the world, and hopefully, then meet the world with greater tolerance with greater kindness and compassion, and with greater sense of inclusion, not not getting caught up in the kind of group group thinking where's my group is better than other group, but actually being quite relaxed and quite open. And we're all just one group. So I hope that those of you who are practicing mindfulness will consider the degree to might be interesting for this week, consider the degree to which you have emotional security or insecurity degree to which you have that Not just on the surface but deep down inside. If you drop below what you believe who you are, but feel who you are, you have operate more from a sense of being secure or a place of being insecure. And this place of insecurity, then can you kind of explore how you could use mindfulness practice and loving kindness practice to work with that and begin finding a somatic embodied sense of greater well being and security. And if you have that, how does that influence how you relate to others and the world around you?

protecting ourselves, we protect others, protecting others, we protect ourselves. So thank you very much.