

2008-06-08 Five Efforts On The Path

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

And I want to talk about a story of pseudo time of the Buddha that I think is kind of delightful. And it has to do with a young monk is new to being a monk who has the good fortune of becoming the attended to the Buddha. And his name is Morgan McGee. And then one morning he says to the Buddha, can I go into town for the alms round to collect the food for the day? Certainly, you can. So he goes to town, collects alms like way Buddhist monks do. On his way back. He walked by a beautiful grove of mango trees and in plain sight every river for a peaceful quiet place and he thought For someone who's gone forth into the monastic life, to be engaged in the spiritual practice of liberation, this is an ideal place to come and meditate, like my efforts. So it goes back to the Buddha. And he says, I found this great place to meditate, can I be excused to go off and, and meditate, they're on retreat there. And the Buddha said, This is not the time. So I guess a second time. The Buddha says, it's not the times but it's better to wait until someone else can come to Buddha's attendance, because the Buddha does not alone. And third time, IKEA says, Can I go on this great place? He's really eager. Imagine this young kind of Judaism. You know, like when I remember when I was Sahara. Tell the story recently. It wasn't here last Sunday. I came with great enthusiasm to be a Zen practitioner meditate and all that. And after a few months, they signed me to a kitchen where you don't meditate much in the kitchen. And so what? So hearing from monk he was ready to meditate the British No, don't go. So there's a custom that if you ask the Buddha three times, he has to allow it. Go ahead. So, McGee goes to his beautiful mango grove. And entering the mango grove, he sat down at the foot of a certain tree for the rest period during the middle of the day to meditate. Now, while the Venerable Meghiya was staying in that mango grove, there kept occurring to him three unwholesome kinds of thoughts, sensual thoughts, malevolent thoughts and cruel thoughts. The venom loggia Then reflected. It is indeed remarkable. I like that rather than oh shoot. You know, it's indeed remarkable. Although I have gone forth out of faith from the home to the homeless state, yet I am overwhelmed by these three unwholesome kinds of thoughts, sensual thoughts, malevolent thoughts and cruel thoughts. And some of you probably have had that kind of experience, sit down to meditate, try to be really present. And you're amazed that the power your thinking has carries you away. And then if you look at what you're thinking about, some of you might want occasionally just barely had central thoughts, you know, kind of, or malevolent thoughts or cruel thoughts, fantasies and all kinds and you can't get can't stop them so easily. So then maggia went back to the Buddha. And he said, explain what happened. The Buddha said, when the mind of awakening is still immature, and developed, there are five things that leads to maturity. It's kind of nice. The Buddha doesn't recommend, as I told you, so you shouldn't have gone. You know, he says he just kind of here's the remarkable story. And he said, Oh, if your mind is not prepared for it, not ready for not not mature enough or ready for awakening, there are five things that make it ready. So the first one here in here in a monk has good friends, good associates, good companions. The word good is Pollyanna. Sometimes it's translated as good spiritual friends.

So, have you have good good spiritual friends Good spiritual companions, good spiritual associates, good spiritual friends are sometimes taken to mean teachers. And in our tradition, teachers are usually called good spiritual friends as opposed to a guru. Kind of kind of different way of understanding teachers. Partly because in the, in our tradition, it says all teachers can do is point the way for you. It's up to you to do the work. Whereas sometimes not always, sometimes in guru kind of thing. The Guru does more than just point the way they have other kinds of roles for you. And then good spiritual companions, you know, to associates people you practice with, you know, so, sometimes in a streak of individually, individualism, people think it's just up to me, I can do it on my own. I don't need all these people. I'll go find my mango grove. And it's really important to have some kind of associations companionship, friendships, a variety of different types when you want to develop and mature and this variety of reasons for that one is for inspiration. No, there is for shared understanding my impression when I went to the monasteries, this country Indonesia, you know, the teachers would give great Dharma talks. But a lot of the learning didn't happen from the Dharma talk, I say, during a Dharma talk.

A lot of a lot of learning happens in conversations with other practitioners, you know, oh, did you hear so and so, you know, so and so you know, that you know, this and that, or this is what I discovered, this is what I found out. And all this all this kind of conversation goes on. So having is having people to be in conversation with and learn from is very important, and you will be inspired from is important. And then there's the unpleasant aspect of it, which is really important that people you rub up against your rug, rough edges, and to be with people you normally wouldn't choose to be with. So that Do your rough edges are exposed and seen and challenged. If you used to have wonderfully comfortable people to practice with all the time, then you're comfortable. But you don't necessarily see your attachments, your clinging your versions or judgments or criticism, your fears, all those other things that come into play. So, you know, to have good, good spiritual friends and companions is considered to be this is the first thing that leads to maturity. It doesn't necessarily mean you have to be intimate, really good friends. And if it means that you're associated with people involved, connected. The second one, and this is it's worded as appropriate for monks. But it says Furthermore, MC abiku is virtuous lives restrained by the restraint of the monastic rules. In the ad with conduct and resort, seeing danger, it's a nice seeing danger in the smallest faults. So being virtuous, the second thing is there to have a virtuous life. So lay people don't follow all the monastic rules. But there are basic guidelines for what it means to be virtuous and kind. And what it means to be attentive to one's own faults, transgressions, and take those into account being very sensitive to it. And I've been very inspired by people sometimes that you know, on retreats, that be outside of retreats to but the whole interviews with teachers are kind of for some people's kind of charged people kind of nervous and scared about it. Such things and, and so you know, seemingly lost a stake and people will sometimes want to put their best and make the best impression on the teacher. And so they sometimes people will say things that are a little bit kind of not quite accurate. You know, how many breaths we're able to follow? Oh, I was able to follow 11 or 12. Anyway, admit them just three, you know, or whatever, you know. So little, little small things. And it's really inspires me when someone comes to me the next day or the next interview and says, I need to apologize. I said 11, which should have been three. It's a small fault. It's a small thing, but, but to be kind of really careful with your faults or transgressions, and try to keep it really clean, I think is a very important part of this process of maturity. It makes some sense because to become matures to become clean. And so if you're, I don't wanna use I don't wanna use the word dirty but if you're not clean, then you know how can you get clean. So the third one obtains that will, with no trouble And difficulty talk. In other words, Dharma talks, discussions. So all you have to do is come to a good city Sunday morning. without, you know, easy, and people said people come sometimes here from out of state or out of the country. And they're amazed of how much Dharma there is here in the Bay Area, how much the Buddhism there is. And some people have to travel hundreds of miles to even find the community of people to practice with. So we have one of the conditions here and it's easy to do in Bay Area. So at will

with no trouble, themes or Dharma talk, then it'd be interesting. It says what kind of Dharma talk Dharma talk that is a help in opening up the mind, which conduces to complete. disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, peace, direct knowledge, enlightenment, and Ivana daddy so here's going to hear he's going to describe the kind of Dharma talks that are conducive to opening the mind to peace and to awakening. So if you'd be on the edge of your seats now,

that is, talk about fewness of wishes, talk about contentment, talk about seclusion, talk about being non gregarious, talk about putting forth energy, talk about virtue, talk about concentration, talking about wisdom, talking about deliverance, talk about the knowledge and vision of deliverance. When mind deliverance is as yet immature, this is a third thing that leads to maturity. So, this is a wonderful list. So rather than some profound teaching about emptiness, or you know, too lofty philosophy, it is in a very basic kind of virtues, a basic kind of qualities, that women are encouraged to develop fewness of wishes nice, but very lofty. Is it insignificant because it's not lofty talk about contentment. seclusion, talks about being non gregarious, talking about putting forth energy, talk about virtue. So these are qualities and activities, ways of being, as opposed to beliefs or tenants or creeds. And there's a famous sutta where the Buddha's foster mother comes to the Buddha and asks him for to teach the Dharma, the Dharma in brief. And he says basically the same list here he says, the Dharma and brief is, is the practice of fewness of wishes contentment, seclusion, non gregariousness. putting forth energy virtue. So you know, you think, Dharma and brief you know, it's going to talk about some really deep metaphysical teaching or something. But rather, the simple things that you probably your parents told you about. Be nice, wouldn't it? So then the fourth one, Vic, who lives with energy, instigating instigated for the abandoning of unwholesome states and acquiring wholesome states, when is vigorous, energetic and persevering with regard to wholesome states? So, in other words to have some be able to differentiate between those states of mind those trains of thought those activity of the mind which are helpful and those which are unhelpful, those which are harmful, and those are harmful, and then be able to arouse effort to abandon or put aside or not pick up or not engage in Those which are unhelpful and to engage in and pick up and support and put energy into those which are helpful those states, those activities, those mental ways of thinking. And this implies that people have an element of choice. And part of what mindfulness practices have they doing for us, is showing us where we have choice in our lives. So we can begin choosing that which is helpful and putting aside after as harmful. As mindfulness gets stronger, there's a greater field of choice that becomes available to people. When mindfulness is weak, there's much narrow, window of choice available. And as and when we don't see the place of choice, then we don't have choice. And so it can feel like our life's out of control or I don't know why I keep thinking this way or keep acting this way or doing this this way. But as we slow down, look more carefully, we see we have choice and, and then when we use you the choice Then it can be very simple thing to choose what's helpful. It supports us, it's beneficial for us and put effort into that regard.

And then the next one is, that's the fourth and the fifth one. Last one has to do with more like meditation practice, endowed with a noble one's penetrative understanding of the rise and fall of things during a penetrating understanding of the rise and disappearance, leading to the complete ending of suffering. So the complete ending of suffering is the goal of Buddhism. And there's something about seeing the rising and falling of things arising and passing things, the impermanence of things. It's a key insight that helps with the release from suffering. Sometimes when people want to be released from suffering, they're looking for some some, you know, how am I What am I holding on to what am i believing? What am I what's my thing that I'm doing and that can be helpful sometimes, but Hear for the Buddha he says, to really be free of suffering, you have to have the mind stable enough. So you can watch to how things in the present moment arise in the past, arising and passing things, something about that insight that leads to release of suffering. And then it goes on the whole thing it says, it's expected that if a

person has good friends, good associates, good companions in spiritual life, the person will be virtuous, expected if the person has good spiritual friends, good companions, expected that they will see danger, the smallest, all these all these other things will apply energy when we'll be able to hear good talks and these various things. So in other words, having good spiritual friends is seeing that precursor that condition for the others as well. So in which see over and over again in the shooters is a good emphasize the usefulness the importance of having good spiritual friends to have that.

Okay, so then I want to read the final data into the poem. Read a different translation from Taan, Geoff little thoughts, subtle thoughts. When followed, stir up the heart, not comprehending the thoughts of the heart, when runs here and there, the mind out of control, but comprehending the thoughts of the heart when he was ardent, mindful restrains them. When followed, they stir up the heart when he was awakened, let's go without a trace. Even the smallest thoughts and followed will stir up the heart. So, what happens is what hopefully what goes on in meditation is that we are alert to how the mind follows the smallest dots. And this was one of the great gifts that I felt I received from the Pastner practice when I was introduced to it was the ability or the practice that pointed to the possibility of tracking the very subtle movements of the mind and to see how the mind followed after even subtle thoughts I could see before that I meditate a lot I could see how to get into the gross thoughts and but I got still learned still there I got to see it in smaller more subtle and so they said you finding finding peace by letting go the subtle became you know something stood out stronger and stronger through this Vipassana practice. So In case any of you are thinking of going off to an NGO growth, you might consider whether you have these five conditions in place. Do you have spiritual friends, companions associates? Do you have a set of established virtue? Are you concerned about your slightest faults? Have you heard talks taken in talks or teachings on? contentment fewness of wishes of making effort? Do you know the difference between what is helpful or not helpful in your mind? And can you have some some ability to choose what direction you go? What do you pick up? So that's the thought for today. And now's your turn. Do you have any comments or questions you'd like to make about this or anything else? Peters

in your in your list of x

under gay sness and

what was the other one seclusion? I think there would appear to be some contradiction between that and spiritual friends and Sangha. Could you comment on that please?

in contradiction in the sense that if you're with spiritual friends then you you tend to be gregarious. That's a clue just meant attention between the two. Oh, seclusion aggregate. The good guys mean people are usually not good garius around here. It's a it's safe to come it's safe to come here you know often in dermatomes I dominate the gregariousness you know give you a chance I don't know who's going to look up a different translation see what the word was? I don't know the Pāli so Taan Geoff translates it as non entanglement apparently that's what he says. Chrissy it's

it's the one that's right after

yeah right after seclusion so he it's a Taan Geoff hasn't done entanglement. So certainly seclusion having good spiritual friends can seem contradictory and seclusion has three different meanings What is physical seclusion? And so, you know, going off of, you know, some some place where we're not caught up in our daily life is usually is because sometimes, you know, in the middle of our daily life, it's kind of hard to meditate or it's hard to kind of see ourselves. People go on vacation sometimes to get a better perspective. So, stepping out of stepping out of life as normally lived is important part of getting a

new perspective. And there's something about being quiet, without a lot of social activity that helps the mind settle even further. And so one of the things we do in our tradition of you do silent meditation retreats, we're not secluded, exactly, you know, in terms of physically secluded, we're not off in a cave or you know, someplace, but it has verbose but not the same qualities that we will, you know, because of silence, we don't talk. If somebody has done a lot of retreats, you know, we've got the people residential treatment of other people. Sometimes I'll encourage them to go off and do a solitary retreat glorify themselves. Find a cabin someplace or someplace. Because sometimes it's really useful to be completely separated from any kind of social contact. There can be very subtle things that go on, in, even in silence with our concerns about how we relate to others what's going on how people see us how people are impacting us, and have a chance to sometimes you can see those things much more clearly if you're alone. And yet, sometimes you have to face something about yourself that's hard to face if you're always with people. So for some people, so I recommend that sometimes. But I think it's meant to be, you know, temporary strategy. You know, as opposed to something not supposed to live secluded. It's just a useful thing to do. You know, there's probably come up with lots of examples of situations in our life where we think it's very good to be secluded for a little bit. It's helpful and nice. Most people, you know, are secluded when they take showers. You know, not just for reasons of modesty, maybe there's other reasons just nice to kind of in that kind of way just to be alone. And or if you're a parent, your kids like I know sometimes I've lingered in the toilet longer than they needed to. I'm not going to get out I'm not going out. I'm secluded here nicely. Say and an anon entanglement Dong Nanga. garius I, you know, if we're overly entangled over gregarious over, overly kind of involved in social activity, it's, it's gonna be beautiful, it'd be wonderful thing to do a lot of pleasure enjoyment in that. And if you want to settle the mind, in a deep way, it's hard to do it that way. So the analogy I like to give for that is even even when, you know, really wonderful social activities, aren't there. Best, the wonderful thing. If you go and attend a retreat, which I think you've done right is I'm going to retreat. And imagine, you know, the middle of the retreat, you're as quiet as peaceful as you possibly can get and retreat, as is really nice, peaceful. And someone says, Peter, come with me, there's a party down the street. This is not the time for it. And because you know that if you do that, or maybe you say, Oh, great, a party, I love parties. And then you go to the party, you come back two hours later, what was I thinking? because now you're all stirred up and agitated in the way and now it's gonna take me two days to get back to that level of where I was. So is that replied to your concern adequately. Thank you. So in front of you.

Also, right?

What basis should I answer your question? Since I'm not fully enlightened, So just open the book and give you an answer, you know the book answer. Okay. Where do I think there was a we had a teacher meeting at spirit rock some years ago and we had stage two was prepared. It was a debate between two teachers and Guy Armstrong who was teaching here for us last weekend was took one one side of the debate one position, and Stephen Batchelor took the other side. And the position was is The Awakened state Kind of what you said it's the awakened state one that has eradicated attachment or unwholesome states unskillful states that do not arise at all, or is the United States one where they might arise, but the enlightened person doesn't pick them up and get involved just doesn't, doesn't engage them at all this rise and float away. And someone called that this the second one second approach, the accommodation approach. They're waking, you kind of accommodate you're allowed to be there. And so both of them Marshal dividends from the suttas to justify that different position. And Stephen bachelor. He, the variety of representative kind of evidence he had, is that their story is that after the Buddha was enlightened, Mara came to visit the Buddha still, and Morrow is generally seen, to be not always in the tradition but There's a very strong sense of nutrition Sigmar as the personification personification of inter psychic psychological forces of greed, hate delusion of these unskillful things. So

that's the case then the question is what is Mara doing visiting the Buddha after his enlightenment? Now what's what's interesting is that what the Buddha does, the Buddha just simply doesn't doesn't react doesn't invite more effort. He doesn't chase Morrow way, the Buddha just says, Mara, I see you. So that's that kind of that kind of description is Steven was perceiving bachelor's supporting evidence. And, and then Guy Armstrong's his supporting evidence was all the passages that say something like, you know that the greed, hate and delusion is eradicated, abandon relinquished, you know, destroy. It says all these concepts here a series of synonyms that really make players gone once and for all and And it seems to me in my reading of the sutras, is it Guy Armstrong probably, you know, better represents the way most of those texts are represented. But it's hard to know. You know, it's hard to know, if you have different evidence to hold them side by side, what do you do with them? So, but you know, it's marvelous. Both are pretty fantastic. If someone may maybe, you know, you know, if you can really sit present, be Have you have your mind open, alert, present, and watch an unskillful thought arise, or a motivation or intention to rise and just not pick it up the minds like Teflon, just kind of goes right off. That's pretty awesome. It's not enlightenment. I still thought to that person. So, I know it's maybe an unsatisfying answer, but that's the answer. You

very satisfying, it actually ties back to other times when you talked about where thoughts arise. And whether or not unwholesome thoughts are a result of our own kind of habitual patterns or they just come and go as

that exists in the universe. Maybe

if I make a little bit take off from what you said, you know, there's a great story. I think it's in the video of this monk who is considered is known to be fully enlightened and are hot. And he's out wandering around the countryside with the monks and they come to a river, they're gonna afford the river. And so he Jacks up his skirt and he's ready as well to pull them up. I think partly cuz Close exposing himself in the process and prance across the river, the most unmarked, like, undignified way. So not everyone was so you know, enlightened back then. So the other monks went back to the Buddha tell

know what's going on with these guys. You know this guy you know you're supposed to be enlightened, you know and just see how we cross the river. And the Buddha said, Oh, in fact he's fully enlightened. But for 500 lifetimes he was a monkey

and his and his monkey nature's still comes through sometimes. So I don't know about rebirth but all these lifetimes but you know there are other forces operating within us. Besides Besides, I guess wood evolutionary of monkeys is pretty good. But the but, you know, the, you know, there are other forces within us that maybe are not having to do 3d illusion which is not necessarily that which we're responsible for just our personality or some deep way. And so, you know, some of you find yourself acting like monkey sometimes when people complain, like a monkey say, Well, you know, I might have been for a long time. So one more, one more so with that if the answer is short, you can answer ask it in a way in the back.

About to start to start over again, please, you Talking about the Buddha and the state of suffering that came in went and Mara, which is like dukkha or the monkey state, even though he's

reached 1000 pedals of enlightenment

and more, he recognizes the state of energy perhaps, and in that concentrated awareness of that energy in the in the cosmos and all around them and through them and out of them, like in the monk

who is enlightened, who is the monkey. I read somewhere by Trungpa the different states of enlightenment and levels of enlightenment like Mahayana Hana Yana Vajrayana, an utter and then Maha t, which is like the Dalai Lama, who recognizes everything around him that say that doesn't exist even though he is enlightened. And, but yet that state of seclusion Passionate the same time from it.

Is that what you're saying?

would you would you would you tell him what you're saying reminds me that I was going to talk about the three kinds of seclusion. And I only mentioned the first physical conclusion. And so the second kind of seclusion is the seclusion where we seclude ourselves from unwholesome states, so by destroying meditation, you can temporarily seclude yourself for those unwholesome states don't arise. And then the third kind of seclusion is occlusion that comes when the unwholesome states are advocated, done away with no longer they're so liberated from those things. And the, I think that, you know, one one understanding is that an awakened state, someone who's highly realized, has a mind that can accommodate or be open to whatever's going on in the world. With clinging or contracting around it? The question is at stake here is, does that mind itself have tendencies towards greed, hate and delusion does it within it and any of these different camps, different solutions people say, but I think one of the ways to understand this is that if the mind is able to accommodate or hold an accepting way, whatever rises it has this approach. And it is anger arises, then I'll just hold that and accept that. That's a beautiful practice. It's a profound thing to be able to do. However, a we have to recognize that that northa anger to arise. The anger itself is a symptom of non acceptance. So, to say that to say that, oh that I'm completely realized, broad open mind Did non you know open minded accepting awareness? You can't really say that if anger arises, you've done it maybe 99%. And if if we see that anger itself is a form of non acceptance, or clinging. So, in any case, so always more work to do. And that's why we have to rouse energy, enthusiasm, and have lots of good spiritual friends who can support us on the path. And today we have a group of good spiritual friends in the form of Dharma teens, who are now in the back room. And, and they looks like they bake their baked goods. So maybe support the people in Burma. Thank you.