

# 2008-11-30 Mindfulness of Speaking Gratitude

## Part 7

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### SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning, everyone. And so perhaps today can be the final talk and a series of talks I've given this fall on mindfulness and speaking. And it's one of the reasons why I stayed on this topic for so long, much more than usual, is I thought it was such an important topic to kind of seep into our community, to have people reflecting on it an ongoing basis, and not just kind of for one week and then forgetting about it, but somehow the continuity of the subject might allow for some deeper reflection, some deeper consideration, and can I start to seep in to you individually, but also to our community as a whole. And one of the things I tried to convey is that speech where we actually say, is very much a surface of what I think is really important. It's important when we say for sure, but it's really the surface of much deeper issue and deeper contact with ourselves and some of the deeper kind of issues that underlie what we say, include who we are. So, how maybe not who we are, but how we are. So paying attention to how we are, are we relaxed? Are we stressed out? Are we generous? Are we stingy and greedy? Are we angry or are we kind, how we are is very important. And by attending to how we are, we're more likely to speak in ways that we want to speak. If we only pay attention to the surface of what we're saying. It can be very difficult to figure out exactly what to say. How to say it. And to say it in the right way, if the underlying condition of how we are, is off, you know, if we're stressed out, it's so easy to say something very quickly, as later we regret. So how we are is very important. Also very important is what we're interested in. And depending on what we're interested in, we focus on different things in ourselves in the environment, and our interests. If they are continuous interest, they in shaping how we are shaping our disposition, how we see the world around us. So if what we're, if our interest is primarily being a consumer of electronic goods, then and we're always kind of going around and kind of looking at the best and the greatest and this and that, then, you know, it's fine to do it for a day or two. But if that becomes a way of living, that that interest then shapes us, and we're prevented. primarily focus on something external we want. And, and if we've spent too much time focusing what we want, then it's very easy to lose touch with some inner quality of what we have being some Inner Wealth, some inner kind of capacity. And, and so not just you know, like electronic things but some people want you know, just anything, you know anything out there, they want a better relationship or they want to fix a relationship or they want something out there. And that wanting constantly wanting my for some people limit some quality way of being that they could maybe relax into or feel if they had different interests. And so if your interest is in, for example, being content, that's a considered a great virtue in Buddhism. So if you're interested in that, that that's a value, then you might be thinking about contentment more often than you would otherwise. And so you might be kind of noticing time When it's reasonable to be content, and times, maybe you wouldn't have noticed otherwise. And that becomes kind of a conditioning for your disposition. So you're more likely to about to feel contented. And if you feel contented chances are what you say will be very different than you feel this content because you don't

have the latest and the greatest thing you don't get haven't gotten what you wanted out there because you're maybe kind of being more motivated maybe by your frustration or your greed.

So what you're interested in related to what you're interested in, it is a very closely connected is what are the what's the motivation, the intentions upon which you run your life that you lead your life, that your intentionality is very important to Buddhism, your intentionality is considered to be one of the primary shapers of who you are and what you become and all these things. And so much so that the club probably the closest thing to your essential That Buddhism will ever come to saying, which it doesn't want to say at all, would be that it's your intentionality, what motivates you? And so some focus on what is it that really you want your life to be about? What are the intentions that you want to, you know, be your life, you know? And so for example, do you want your life to be about service? Or would you like your your life to be about security? I mean, there's so many different options. But just those two options, if you're primarily motivated by security, you live a life and make choices and say things that will be different than if you're primarily motivated by being wanting to be of service. And so one of the important things, I think, to do for any human being, is to spend some quality time with themselves reflecting on the intentions upon which aspirations the motivations upon which you want to live your life. So there's speech and there's the underlying dispositions, how we are feelings, motivations that we have. It's quite common for many spiritual traditions to say that the, that there's an Inner Wealth that's available to us in how we are in our motivations, our dispositions, and the feelings we cultivate inside. And that's really a much better wealth than to have an external one. So we had just here a few weeks ago to Mr. abiko, gave a talk on inner well, and he very much chose to give the talk because of the economic economic collapse. Taking out here, you know, people there's a lot of people are struggling people have lost their jobs, people have lost their retirement money. I talk to people all kinds of financial struggles these days. And in that those kinds of struggles, it's sometimes easy to lose touch with that there's an Inner Wealth as well, and not to diminish the struggles that people have financially. But it puts it in different contexts. If we've cultivated this inner life and really feel that's valuable and wealthy. So, one of the wonderful topics in speech that that spans the inner dimension. And what we actually say, is gratitude. And that's the, how I'd like to end this series of talk on speech, talking about gratitude seems appropriate also because of the this, you know, Thanksgiving, but

so gratitude is gratitude is something that we're interested in. Is gratitude is something that we want to be motivated by. Because if if we have interest in gratitude will have will shape ourselves very differently than if we're interested in consumption in what we want. And it's often pointed out that gratitude has a lot to do with feeling grateful for what you have Whereas wanting is wanting something often is wanting something different than what you have. So if you're motivated by gratitude, there's a focus on here. And now, if you focusing on your desires, more often than not, it has to do with something it's not here. And so focusing in the result of that often and discontent of what's here. So to be interested in gratitude, what can we be grateful for? And one of the terrible things I could say here, and they're terrible, exactly the right word, but I feel reluctant to say it somehow. is they will anyway. is, you know, in a society like ours, there's a lot of Miss content. There's a lot of suffering for sure. There's a lot of inequity in equities. For sure, a lot of difficult All these people struggle dramatically. And it's, you know, one of the even with all the financial collapse, that what most the wealthiest country in the world and the services we have things that are available to us. Even people who are relatively poor in our country, they have more options and possibilities than most people in the world have. And so, for people who do live a fortunate life, how often is gratitude part of that life. And I know just looking at my own life, I could go spend I could spend easily spend days and days and days without any real quality connection to really thing great feeling grateful for this life that I have. And then I a small turn, can I can just kind of be blown away by how amazingly fortunate I am. Many people have supported me in my life throughout my life and brought me to where I am now and some of the great fortune that I have in my

life depart To practice meditation as well as I've had the inner development cultivation of that's so valuable for me. I feel that it was really the result of so many people who supported me for so many decades. And I'm, you know, incredibly grateful for that. Or it can be something as simple as this morning, because I was thinking about gratitude coming down here from my home, I live about a mile away. I just felt so fortunate, so grateful that I live in a situation where I could walk to work. That's not great. That's so good. So glad for that. And so I know I just looking at myself, you know that I don't know they have myself to the possibility of gratitude as often that. I could. And I think that certainly whenever I do, take time for gratitude, my life feels a lot richer. They say that for someone who That, well has a lot to do, not with how much you have, but how content and grateful you have your buck what you do have. And so I know that one of the wealthiest people, one of the wealthiest people I know happens to be one of the financially poorest people. And he but he's wealthy in the sense that he just has a sense of abundance and gratitude and generosity and, and, and happiness about his life. That you know, it really inspires me even though he was quite poor. And then there are people who you know, who are relatively well off in life, who do not feel the blessings of that well off life. I met a man many years ago, who defined himself as it was a psychotherapist and he's job title or something. His description was a psycho economist. And, and what his specialty was, or is was, is to be a therapist, for people who are phenomenally wealthy, but feel like they don't have enough. And there was one client who had \$10 million. And it was worth \$10 million. And, and this is about 15 years ago, I think. And, and the client knew that he was in trouble when he felt lucky, you know, anxious about not having enough. So he went to see this therapist for help.

So to be grateful. So it's so it's also it's an inner disposition. It's a way of being, it's a how we are to go through life with increased sense of gratitude. Not as an obligation, but something that often can come, I think, quite naturally, if we're relaxed, if we're calm enough, we're settled enough We take the time to be present. And that's one of the reasons why mindfulness is so important. Because in mindfulness practice, hopefully we're cultivating a calm ability to stay present for what is. And in that common ability to be present. It's like a door has opened to what's really the best in us, more often than not, and, or if it's not the best in us, at least, the doors open to let us kind of try to work through what's the worst in us, so that perhaps something else has a chance to show through. I've been very grateful sometimes, in retrospect, looking back for some of the greatest struggles I've had in my spiritual life, things that were not easy, but I just felt so lucky that I had the chance to struggle with those things. Because to not struggle with them, I knew allowed them to fester in the background, allow them to kind of shape how I live and what I did and what I said in ways that I, I wouldn't want to have lived that way. But rather rather than living That way you know, it's an odd thing that sometimes for some people living their bad habits living out their bad habits is the easy thing to do. It's, you know, if you're lazy, it's better just just go along with your bad habits and to let your good habits are good habits but let your goodness or your your deeper values to live your deeper values sometimes takes a lot more work than to live out your bad habits. And then some people rather be lazy they don't want to make the work. But in retrospect, I love engagement, I've loved effort, and to have a chance to make effort has been one of the things I've been very grateful for. The and then you know, so you know, disposition how we are an interest. We have to be interested in gratitude. There's been variety of studies, you know, that they've done, people who are grateful And to show that there's a lot of benefits, health benefits to being grateful. One interesting study I thought was one where they had people, variety of different subjects groups. And one group of people was supposed to keep requests to keep a diary, a log of the various things that they that they that they were resentful for. And over the day, you know, over, you know, you know, over, I think was over, I don't know, six weeks or something. And they're just the daily log of things that bugged them. And another group was end of the day was supposed to write down five things they were grateful for, for the day. And then they compare the two groups at the end of the study period, to see which group was the happiest group. Now, which you think was happiest? And I think the idea was that

both both people both both groups basically live this Same lives, big same kind of lives externally or internally or something that more or less, you know, similar kinds of people. And so but the variable was what you focus on what are you interested in. And if you focus on what bugs you versus be focused on what you're grateful for, the results over time are different. And it's a portrait while being there are some therapists to point out that a certain percentage of depression in people also comes from what people are focused on the interest people have and so if we're interested in being on our day focusing on our resentments, our suffering or pains and all that we have a different result over time that we focus on what we're grateful for. There was an interesting study in the Chronicle many years ago of silica tatus spouses. I guess you know, it's a Sunday they studied people who had some kind of very crop or some kind of chronic health condition, difficult health condition. And they studied how their spouses related to them. And the ones who had solicitations, spouses, that's the word they use. Am I pronouncing it right? solicit this yes my English solicitous you know it kind of kind of sucked also sorry for them and right there helping them doing things and you know poor you take it easy and I'll bring you tea or something those kinds of spouses. So if that was the kind of spouse you have seems like a good thing, right? But actually the people who are chronically sick, different subject groups

the ones who suffered the most are the ones who had the most solace. So let this a slip this. Yeah, I can thank you. There are some words that I only know from reading it not, not from speaking so it's not in my spoken vocabulary. And so There was another interesting. No, it was kind of it was not what I thought was kind of intuitive to me. I thought it was really there be compassion and caring that that would be the best. And so, you know, maybe it's best for the person who's caring, but maybe for the person being cared for it reinforces, and that's why I'm saying it here reinforces certain interests in the way of being. So what's reinforced, shaped who we become so to be interested in what we're what we are grateful for. So that's the inner side, and then the outer side is has to do with speech, and to express from time to time, or thanks. I think it's a really profound thing to say thank you and really mean it. Especially when maybe it's not expected. I grew up, I'm Norwegian. And in Norway, you say thank you in a drop of a dime. It's almost like you know, it becomes almost like a ritual that you'll say. If you if you spend time with someone you say, as you leave you say thanks for now. The next time you see them you say, Thanks for last time.

Talk facist and then I've read this study where it said that if you express people who express thanks, thanks, tend to be healthier. Isn't that nice? Take your vitamin every day. And make sure you get your proper dosage of thank you and start your day saying thank you get it over with But I don't think it works that way. And so, and thanks, I think is, you know, is I think it's really good to say thanks for the person saying thank you. But also I think it creates a wonderful environment to community among people. I think it helps other people feel good about themselves. Other people who feel connected to you, other people feel appreciated. It creates wonderful social bonding or connect connectivity that I think in our society, in our people, everyone kind of needs more of rather than less of such a simple way of doing it, just thank you.

So

to look for opportunities to be interested in gratitude and being grateful and to look for opportunities to express gratitude and I certainly I came here to IMC today, feeling very grateful. And coming in here and, and walking down the street here and seeing are all the renovation and landscaping we've done. I haven't seen the landscaping for a few days and I just felt really grateful that we have this wonderful community and support people who've made this possible and the renovation and care that goes into this community here. To me, I'm very, very grateful for the many, many people for all of you to come together here and to practice to come here Sunday morning and meditate with a group of people. You

know, I just I feel for myself that it's qualitatively different to meditate and a group of people than to meditate alone. Both have they're both both are beautiful, both are quite of their own value. But be able to come here and just share this with all of you. I feel really fortunate to be around people who are interested in dedicated and trying and engaged in it. And, and I mean, all of you not, not just the ones have you had good meditation. And, you know, it's, some of you say, Oh, he's not talking about me because in my mind was all over the place might be one or two of you like that. And what those those, those two people are here today. And it's not so much you know, the result of meditation that counts, but really the effort, the intention, the effort to be present and do the best we can, with often with a unwilling, difficult mind. I think it's really beautiful to show up and do this work. So I'm very grateful for all of you to come here and to share this.

So

so I thought it was nice punctuation mark for the series of talks and speech to talk about particular acts of speech that are things of saying thanks. And I hope that you will kind of think of that as a capping kind of cream on top of the cake. This these talks. So now we have a few minutes and it would be wonderful for me to hear from you a little bit, especially those who have been coming for these weeks. What reflections or results or benefits. You've might or questions you might have from this series of talks on speaking with you might have here today. So it reflects reflections or testimonials. This

first, thank you, Gil. I've gotten a lot out of these talks, and

they helped me understand after the

fact how much better

I could have said Something check a

few weeks ago, the beginning of things that

I would control at home, six year old twins

ran up came here.

And then you launched another thing about rights speech.

And I could think of 12

better ways, but at least what I did was I went home and said, Honey, I'm sorry, I could think

of the things I could have said and then I

barrage them with 12 other ways to say, sweetly, don't yell at me. So it's helping. It's helping us need to get in front of my mouth.

Great. Thank you very much. And, you know, I like to think of Buddhist ethics as being forward looking and not backward looking. And that means that of course we look back sometimes the things we've done that we regret having done We we learn, we don't dismiss it, we don't ignore it. It's very important



to learn from it. So we are, but rather than being fixated on what happened in the past and rate ourselves, the idea is to look at the past in order to be inspired to do better in the future. So ethics is forward looking, how can I do better in the future? So that's what you did. You spent came here a couple hours back and did it again.

Thank you. Hi, um, the gratitude thing, and how that can be the background for communication and the way we are with others. work environments can sometimes be so difficult, and I have just found that my days are so much easier when they're when I take the time for some gratitude about something. It seems to paint a happier day at work, then when I'm really focused on a night being grateful. So that's interesting, and I think maybe a year or a year and a half ago, you did something on noticing the small moments in life when you can be grateful for something that you wouldn't ordinarily take time to notice. I remember driving down a road on skyline actually, in the early morning, and the sun coming through in different places between the trees and just seeing and noticing how beautiful the sunlight was. And then just as you had talked about it, and you just stop and think, for a minute, how beautiful it is, instead of just driving by ignoring it.

So there's little little cues in life, I think.

Beautiful, thank you. And taking time for the little gratitudes supports the possibility of gratitude for the bigger things. And when a work environment was very, very difficult. We could be grateful for the challenge

your talk on silence whisper Healy resonant for me, I found myself having a lot of opportunities to just sort of step back and reflect, can I improve on silence in this specific situation, and it's really helped. It's helped when people have when it's been a tense situation. Also, when it's not been a tense situation, it's helped me sort of look back, or look inside at my intentions. So really, what am I trying to accomplish? And sort of also to see a lot of times when I'm calculating, I could say this, I could say that because maybe Now's not the time to say anything. And it really has it really struck pretty strongly actually. And it's, it's made a profound difference in a lot of ways. Thank you for that. Thank you. Well, I've been coming here for almost 11 years. So I have heard many, many talks on read many suttas on mindfulness of speech. And it worked really well with most situations except for the ones such as important like home

and I've been married for 23 years.

My This is my blog for meditation practice in the on the cushion. Nothing Nothing helped until my practice deepened and deepened and deepened and deepened. And only after many years and many long retreats only in the last three months or so, I can really feel the difference at home Finally, and for some of it is realization that I should have had living with the same people for so many years, but I didn't like weekends would be stressful in the morning and I realize if I just clean up the living area, the man my husband gets up, he will be happy. Or he likes to play loud music in the morning and I don't like it that much and synchronize it so that when he comes in and wants to play his music and have his make his tea, then I can escape and do my meditation and

so

many many areas of life, I would say great intentions, all the wisdom that you can get from Gil or from the Buddha. Nothing really sinks in until deep long, hard painful.

20 years has finally

Great, thank you. So home The Final Frontier.

So I hand over here

less. Last week I had to go back home because my mom was very sick. And she has recurring cancer and we I'd be struggling with it for a long time. And so I was, you know, I've been coming here for so long and I I bought a book about the Buddha and I was trying as I flew back to France to learn and practice everything that I've learned with you and through the books. And so she went through surgery that lasted all day. And then the surgeon comes back and say, well, we couldn't remove everything. And my sister and I, we looked at one another, and we started crying. And then I remember how we went through. And my sister and I looked at one another five hours later, and we realized, we were thankful that she was alive. That was the first thing. And then what I realized that each time we always try to portray to worry about the future, you know, she's going to have to go through chemo and she might not survive and things like that. And I realized, oh, wait a minute. I have to be present. And, and I'm just thankful that I can talk to her right now. And since then I came back and everyday I can speak with her and I'm so thankful and grateful and I likey No, I'm going to worry about the future. When it comes as ice down now I'm just thankful to have her in my life. Beautiful.

Thank you.

Well, I will say that both of my parents have been deceased for quite some time. And, of course, right after they died, there was tremendous amount of grief. But also over time, came a real thankfulness that I had them as parents, and a real recognition of what they tried to pass along to me and how successful they were in being wonderful models for me. So that's part of the process of life and death, too, I think.

autiful Thank you.

Okay, so

thank you all. Thank you for coming today. And, and if you came for the first time today, you're welcome. Please stay for the potluck if you'd like and meet some of the other people here. And those of you who have been coming for a long time, might be nice if you reach out a little bit to people who you don't recognize or just be available to say hello, and sometimes being a new person can feel a little bit intimidating when everyone knows each other and a lot of people know each other. And so and so enjoy your rest of your day and enjoy your potluck and