

2009-05-11 Emotions Fear Part 1

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SPEAKERS

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Evening, I want to now continue with a series that I started last week. And that is this series on emotions. Last week, I gave a kind of general introduction to the topic of emotions. That's something we address and look at the Buddhist practice. And to support that endeavor, then sorry tonight and then in a series of Monday's from here, I'm going to pick up particular emotions and give and talk about them explore particular ones. And today I'm going to explore fear. He's like a good one. There was seems like when, among popular Dharma talks, many years ago, I asked there was a they don't really have it anymore, but they had a service where they sold a CD back then was cassette tapes. I've done It talks organization called Dharma seed. And about 15 years ago, I asked them for the list of their top 10 selling Dharma talks. And so I got through a list from them. And what was interesting was of the top 10, best selling Dharma talks of 1995. Back then that top other top 10 for them has to do with fear, indicating that it was something of major concern for people. And then here at IMC a number of times, we've done a series of classes on mindfulness and depression. And a couple of years ago after doing one of these, someone came to me and said, Gil, that's fine for you to do mindfulness and depression here at IMC, but you have to realize that as big as depression big an issue is depression is in our culture. Anxiety is as big as a really big four and you should do a series on anxiety. So at least we'll do a date tonight. The thing on fear, anxiety, dread, angst, panic. Right? alarm. What else? It's It's enough loading off here and loading. You have to save your loading for that talk on anger. So when a person would come to the monastery to come and join and try to join as a monk or a nun, the abbot would always have an interview to see if they were suited for the monastic life suited to really take them practice seriously. And some people would be accepted in it, but some people would not. They said I'm sorry, this is not for you. And whenever someone came to the monastery to enter the monastery and request entry, and if in that interview, it turned out that the person had no fear. The average would not let them join. Do you think of that? So that's for you to reflect a little bit about why is it that without fear, they would not be allowed to join? So, so, fear is a very key emotion that people feel two key response to what goes on around us. And there are a whole series of different categories of fear, as I mentioned just now. A big one is anxiety. And anxiety is often differentiated with fear, because fear as a handout hard differentiation, but Fear is sometimes taken to be worry, concern, some fear around something that's particularly dangerous, something particular particular thing that happens that we can see we can recognize, and we're afraid of that thing. The anxiety is often said to be generalized agitation, worry, concern, fear over something which is much more vague. Something that's anticipated into the future. Something's not so clear. It's not it doesn't have a clear threat, and often has to do with acts of imagination. It's much more vague what's going on. But even with fear, one of the very interesting issues around fear is what is it that we're What is it that's being threatened?

What is being threatened, rather than looking at what you're afraid of what you're anxious of, you can ask, what is it that feels threatened? You get a very different answer, you get a very different approach

to fear, if you turn inward and to see what is it that's actually being threatened. And you might get very different answers. And you might have a very different response to what you're afraid of, if you can really discover what is it that's being threatened. Now in Buddhism, there's differentiation between healthy fear and unhealthy fear. A little bit, that's a clue to that story about the rabbit. All fear is not lumped together in the same category. All fear is not treated the same way as if it's bad or wrong, or unhealthy. There is healthy fear and there's one kind of fear which is the fear of ethical transgressions, the fear of causing harm. And that fear can involve fear of causing harm for someone else. And across involved fear of causing harm to yourself. So the fear of making a transgression, the fear of lying to someone or stealing to someone that fear is often considered healthy, if what's being threatened is your own. positive regard your own sense of integrity, your own sense of self worth in some way. And in Buddhism, this kind of fear of wrongdoing is called the guardian of the world. It protects the world, it's going to healthy thing. So if it should happen, that some person would occur to someone to steal something, or to lie something or, or manipulate someone in a bad way. If the person that thought arise that motivation arose, and the person had no feeling or something of fear or concern about that, they'll kind of help they kind of pulling back from that and saying, No, I'm not going to go there, then they're not protected from that and they're much more likely to, to go ahead and act on that. What's being threatened that situation is hopefully something beautiful inside of ourselves some sense of integrity. The Buddha, it was said was a warrior came was raised to be a word in the warrior caste. And there's a in the ancient noble tradition of being a warrior warrior has a certain kind of High self regard, certain kind of inner dignity. reputation is very important for the classic kind of warrior tradition. And you wouldn't do anything, like any kind of warrior that you would kind of demean yourself or that would kind of somehow undermine a high sense of integrity. So that in that sense, to do something wrong, to violate one's the precepts or to cause harm, would threaten that sense of inner integrity. So here, someone who has some sense of that there's an important quality of heart quality of mind, quality of inner life that's being safeguarded and maintained, could easily feel that's threatened and they want to safeguard it. And what I've seen in people Do a lot of Buddhist practice or meditation practice is that they're, they discover or they awaken or they develop inside of themselves, a sense of inner integrity beauty value. That becomes something to safeguarding. And until someone becomes completely liberated, that inner integrity can be threatened by some of the other impulses that arise from in us. And so to feel certain impulses arise, certain desires and motivations arise, saying I don't want to go there. To feel for example, the arising of anger and the wanting to express that anger by yelling at someone.

And so I don't want to go there, not because some abstract idea of ethics, but rather I'm going to go there, because it would violate or harm Something that I know that's quite beautiful inside of myself here. And also I don't want to do it because I don't want to harm the other person. There's something beautiful about being a protector of the well being of others, even if they've been a jerk. So there's a sort of have to come up against the possibility of transgression transgressing in this way. One of the things we're protected by is fear, a healthy fear that perhaps is no different than the fear that arises if you know if you can put your hand close to a fire, you pull it back so it doesn't you don't burn yourself. That's a healthy fear to pull back. There's also unhealthy fear and unhealthy fear can have a great cost.

It's quite

interesting to go through the cost of The fear has some people live quite limited lives because of their fear. They don't venture forth they don't do things because their fear of failing or fear of making a fool of themselves or fear of succeeding, whatever it might be. There's some people live isolated lives because of their fear. They're held back from connecting to other people or talking to people, making friends or new friends. There's fear of fear and unhealthy awake and motivate us to sometimes can motivate us to lie or to manipulate or to do things which later we would regret. There's a whole series of

things that fear can motivate us to do which has a negative cost in our lives. And unfortunately, it's all too pervasive. The unhealthy fear in people's lives, I don't know if it's true or not. But it's often been said that modern Western culture, fears is much greater. The pervasiveness of fear is greater than it has ever been in human history. We live in the age of anxiety, they say. And here last week, we had the h1 and one. Panic. And there was something about that flu virus that made people quite anxious. And perhaps it was reasons to be careful, the reasons to be concerned. But you don't have to analyze very much or look very much to realize how quickly society people in society get aroused to fear by what the media says what politicians say. In fact, stimulating fear in society is used as a political strategy. Because you can get people to change their minds and understand new things and go in different directions if you get them afraid. So it's well worth kind of taking some care and looking at fear and how it operates. People who are statisticians, looks at the risk analysis point out, oftentimes, or often enough, people can be afraid of things with a very low risk that it happening and they cannot be afraid of things which are much more risk more more likely to happen. So the fear of flying they say that you're much more likely to be killed in a car than you are flying, but people tend to be much more afraid of flying and they are driving cars, some not always but sometimes For the fear of

this, I read once that the chances of dying in a terrorist attack is lower than being struck by lightning at least here in the United States. And I know that there are people who after 911 would scan the sky every time they heard a plane. The next I'm sense after this kind of big shock of 911, to have that kind of fear, but just mystically, the chances that the plane flying above you was going to be you know, a bomb was not so likely. The The, the way that the human mind evaluates the what's risky what's worthy of it. is not always reliable. So it's it warrants us to look more carefully at fear. And this is I think, the call of Buddhist practice. And what what is pragmatic Buddhist practice has to offer in this regard. That Buddhist practice is not afraid of fear. Buddhist practice encourages us to stop and look at fear and looking at fear changes the fear. I read recently that study and on our report about a study about how the Nicholas vincula nyg klia gets activated with fear I guess it's a fear center. Right magdala It's a fear center. And that when the part of the brain that is used to observe to watch what's going on, watch this fear that maybe comes down in other words, the variable Act of looking at fear and watching it can change the fear and settles it comes a little bit doesn't make it go away. But it makes it less active. But how is it that we can look at fear? So that it's it's, it becomes less threatening, less active rather than spinning out because certainly panic attacks sometimes happen. When we're afraid of something, we notice we're afraid and it stimulates more fear and it becomes a cycle we spin out more and more. So part of what we do in Buddhist practices is learn how to look how to notice. And then we learn to use our capacity to notice to look more carefully at what's going on. So we learn to look at fear and we want to look at it in a healthy way. And we like to look at it carefully so we can learn from the fear and I I think it's useful to take emotions, all emotions, but emotions like fear and think of it as a messenger, rather than thinking of it is as a mistake. And even if we can differentiate through unhealthy fear and unhealthy fear, even if it's unhealthy fear, I think it's helpful to take it as a messenger that is calling on us to pay attention to something more carefully, we're being asked to look more carefully. What is this fear? And because it says something, it says either something about the world, that there's some danger out there that we need to address or it says something about us that we there's something within us that needs to be addressed and looked at. Either way, if fear has arisen both direct both areas can be very, very To help with look at, if fear has arisen, something important needs to be looked at. If it's something if it's the if it's the mountain lion about to attack, that's useful to know. If there's a real fear real, something to be afraid of, but if it's anxiety,

about

feeling uncomfortable, if you're afraid of feeling uncomfortable, or you're afraid about what people will think about you, or if you're afraid about public speaking, or you're afraid about a whole series of fears, fear of spiders, afraid of heights afraid of driving, it might be more productive to turn within and look at that fear and learn about yourself. It is to learn about the details of spiders. So the point I'm trying to make here is that in Buddhist practice, we take these emotions like fear, as an as a call to bring more careful attention to them. And that's different than how most people I think can relate to fear. Because often people are afraid of fear, either afraid of fear, and they pull away or they react out of the fear without really understanding the fear or looking at it. They act in unhealthy ways. So we stopped to look at it. Now how we look at is important, and one of the encouragements that Buddhism gives is we try to look at it as without using without defining ourselves by the fear. So have a fear if we notice a fear there. We try to recognize it as fear with respect to here's fear but with out, saying I am a fearful person. I am, I am afraid. And the difference is that when we add when there's fear and we add the element, this is who I am, it gets we get tend to be much more entanglement much more caught up in the fear becomes much more real, it becomes much more difficult to see clearly what it is. So we try Buddhism to see the fear respectfully, but not to take it personally. And to say, Oh, this is who I am. That allows us to the sense to step back from the fear and really see what it is. If you are the fear, how can you step back, it'll just go with you. So it's not when fear arises, it's not all of who you are. It's part of who you are or who you are, it might be very important. So how can you step back up to see it for what it is? Sometimes, people can do it by just arousing stronger mindfulness of seeing it. Oh, and naming it and here's fear. And sometimes people you have to change kind of how you're aware. Some people find it helpful to step back in their mind's eye. So they kind of look at the fear from a distance. Like, be as far away from it as you can be, without being caught up in it. So that active imagination, they can step back and back and back. Like, imagine that you're sitting in the chair behind you, and looking at somebody afraid, or imagine that your awareness is as big as the room that you're in, or as big as the house you're in, or as big as the state you're in. How big do you have to make your awareness so you're not so caught by it. So be aware so that fear sort of fears, they're not being denied. But it's not kind of grabbing you are pushing you around or holding you or you're not reacting to it. Some people when they hear the instructions to be mindful of fear, think that they're supposed to go right up into it and be attentive to it. And sometimes it's better not to get too close to it, just ride the edges of it. And one, one way to ride the edges of fear is to bring mindfulness to your fear of the fear. If there is fear of the fear, and sometimes it's much more useful to hang out in the edge, just notice how anxious you are about having fear. And it might be a lot easier to be present for the fear of the fear, such as you notice a big deal. So you sit there, work with that work through that. And if that settles away, and you're no longer afraid of your fear, then you extend take a step a little bit closer To the fear itself, and then you don't have the agitation of the secondary fear that makes it difficult to see. In other words, it helps to feel experienced the fear respectfully, without taking it personally, is to feel the fear in your body.

For some people, this is very helpful because the body is not the story of what we're afraid of afraid of. So the mind wants to spin out is easily into the story. If we feel the physical manifestation in the body, so that you know you could be sweating. You could be a lot of energy and different parts of your body might tense up in different places might be around the eyes, it might be the shoulders, it might be in the belly might be just many places where they might tighten up and feel tension connected to Fear might be a lot of vibrating energy, some places that going on with a fear drop into the body and feel the physical manifestation in the body. It's a way of grounding the attention if something is more concrete and immediate. And for some people find that it's harder for the mind to spin out, and it's concerned. Now, if it's something that is, so then it's possible to be more present for you to see it. One of the reasons why it's important to see it respectfully, without taking it too personally, is it we can evaluate how real it is to reflect a little bit Am I What am I afraid of here? Really? Something that's frightening is really some risk here, some danger here. And what's the nature of that danger? What is being

threatened? What do we think? is being threatened inside of us. If it's the mountain line, or if it's a real danger, and we see it's a real danger, then hopefully we act on that and do the appropriate thing take care of ourselves. But what if it What if what's being threatened is your self image? And what if your self image is not a useful self image to have? It's not even the self image you would like to have. Perhaps the self image you have is is that you want to be the smartest person on the block. So everyone knows how wonderfully smart and clever you are. And so you are invited to a dinner party of Nobel laureates and you're afraid to go, because you're gonna appear stupid. So you look at that fear. Is that a fear? Now in contrast to those Nobel laureates, perhaps you won't seem as smart. But who cares? Do you want to live your life concerned about self image? Or how other people see you around something that's something like this? Aren't there better things to do? 100 better things to safeguard inside yourself. Aren't there better qualities of heart and mind that concern about self image and concerned about what other people think about you in this kind of way? What about kindness? For example, maybe actually what these Nobel laureates really value at the party dinner party, is if someone would come and be kind to them, they don't care how smart you are. This is probably not, you know, wasn't a good example. But I was trying to just choose some example to point out, if we look and see what is it being is being threatened. And the whole idea of self image, how we represent ourselves to ourselves and to others is one of the areas that's very fruitful to look at, in terms of what is being threatened. And then to question it. Do I really want to live that way? Is this something that's useful? There are also people who have fear that is of no nothing of particular nothing really happening now. But it's a leftover legacy of trauma from before. And this kind of fear we need to be extremely respectful for, because it kind of almost like embedded deep down in our muscles in our bones and ourselves deep in our psyche. And it as it comes up

and because you know, especially if we do mindfulness practice in a very attentive and not inhibiting things, not inhibiting or blocking the inner life, some of these earlier, unfinished promise can resurface. It is very, very important to be very caring, and compassionate about this. And, again, not take it personally as a personal failure or that it's wrong to have this, these things be here, but rather, it's something to make space for and allow to somehow settle, to somehow unwind itself to disengage. ankle itself somehow for those muscles to begin to soften around it. So those signups is to begin kind of relaxing a little bit from having, you know, firing all this time. So that's why again, that's one of the ways to do that is to hold the fear in the body, let the body be the holder of it. Sometimes the mind is not a very useful holder, for fear, but the body for some people can be much more useful. And so we drop into our body and feel the actual manifestation, an expression of the fear in the body itself. And then, let it kind of unwind, unfold, evolve, move through us as it needs to move through in present moment, time. And the present moment time is a very important part of this how to pay attention because sometimes with fear, it can very quickly Very easily stimulate stories and thoughts, ideas about the future ideas about the past that are not helpful for that respectful caring of the fear that he bubble up. How much of your fear is anticipatory fear? How much fear? Do we have many people have this not about something that's immediate, but about a projection into the future? And what happens when we're really here and see what's going on here now? How does that change the experience of fear?

So I think that's one of the most The main thing I wanted to convey and talk about fear, mindfulness and fear is that when you do when, when we're devoted or committed to mindful Practice.

We take fear

as something that's important. We respect it. And it's something we stopped for, in order to look at more carefully rather than acting on the fear or recoiling from the fear, it's something that we investigate and look at. And sometimes in all fears, whether it's mild and subtle, or whether it's really big. Sometimes

the subtle fears are more productive to go into and some of the big fears as we look at the fear it's helpful to ask at some point or other, what is it that's being threatened? Is it something that is really important for you? valuable to protect

if it is protected

if it's something which is not valuable for you or maybe it's not valuable for

what is most important for you You know, I can be afraid of losing the California Lottery. Oh, I chose the wrong number. I don't even know how it works. But guys, you choose numbers right? And you know that doesn't really represent something very important for me. So anyway to the part of fears to value working with fear is to evaluate what is being threatened. And is it really something that we deserve our protection can we learn Have something or egotistical sense of self. The fear of insecurity might seem like a, you know, look, oh, my sense of security is at risk. You might think, Oh, it's important to protect my sense of security might seem that way. But actually, to hold on and clinked into security is one of the one of the sources of ongoing suffering and distress. It's fine to try to create some security. But we live in a world where security is never guaranteed. And a mature spiritual life is one that learns to be at ease with insecurity If we cling to security, we will be afraid. So, to turn around and look what is being threatened, and then begin questioning that, evaluating that reflecting on that, it's a lot easier, easier to do that. If first you do the mindfulness practice of learning how to hold it to fear respectfully, without taking it personally, to hold it respectfully, without being for it or against it, hold it respectfully, without resisting it, or being afraid of it, just to hold it, see it there for what it is. And once it's there, then it could be very interesting, then to evaluate and reflect what's really going on here. The word integrity I looked it up in the dictionary with etymology. It seems to mean that which cannot be touched. I was a little bit surprised when I first looked that up. Because integrity seems like such a precious and wonderful thing. Like tangible in the same kind of Route can't be touched. And after a while, I thought this is a great word. Because what is that precious place a piece of liberation, love compassion. That's within us. That can be not be touched. By the conditions in the world cannot be touched by our self definitions cannot be touched by how other people think about us cannot be touched by how other people treat us

to have some sense of This inner peace inner well being, and how well it can be there, independent of the conditions of the world can give us a very different relationship to fear and how we evaluate it. Because you realize there's something precious here that's more precious, more valuable than what we're trying to protect. Your integrity needs no protection. It just needs you to leave it alone. make space for it. So those are my thoughts about fear. Or you feel a little apologetic for having talked so long as afraid that would happen? Because I wanted to hear if there's any questions or concerns from you on this important topic. We have about five minutes. So maybe one or two of you have something you want to raise. I'm happy to try to respond. Yes. I just wondering when you were two questions when you're going to give a talk on anger well after week after?

And would generally would you say the same kind

of application would apply with anger? stepping back from it, seeing it see was so forth.

I think it's very it's very similar. Anger should be respected angers very, it's a signal that something important is going on, and that it warrants our attention. And, and then we look at it and see whether the source of it the what the catalyst for it is, you know, what's that about? Is it arising out of our ignorance and delusion? or greed, hate and delusion? Or is it arising out of something else? So yes, a little bit similar, it stop and look at it and hold it respected. Don't take it personally. Don't be pushed around by it.

So yeah, so I was wondering what I talked about next week. And, you know, I didn't know whether we should alternate between so called negative emotion and so called so called positive emotions, but back and forth, so that people don't get too overwhelmed, over their wishes to wholesale, you know, just get into it. And there's this idea that there are four primary emotions that humans have kind of baseline emotion, basic emotions, there's anger, sadness, fear, and joy. So, you know, if I followed those for that collective and talks about you know, Then we can't alternate three to one. But what's really true to anchor next week, or should we do something? Yeah. Then no one's saying no. I once gave a talk. Many years ago, I showed up in the sitting group. And I said, I'm going to give a talk today about enlightenment. But before I do is anything that you know, want to ask or say, we spent the whole evening talking about anger. People are more interested in that than they were enlightenment. You had a question, Robert.

Yes. You mentioned that we could please know everybody to realize where is the fear and try to understand that, how can I actually do that, like, that kind of process we should follow to loosen our body?

Uh huh. So how are we noticed in the body a big part of mindfulness practice. Is is the training of learning to pay attention to what goes on your body, the feelings, the sensations, the movements, how we hold the body, how we move through space, and all those things relate back to our emotional and our motivational life to what goes on inside of us. So it's a wonderful window to our life and it's such a body such an important window that I for myself reworded I think it was Young's saying he said that the dreams are the royal road to the unconscious. And I think a better road the world road, they're really railroad is the body if you really because the body kind of opens up deep way. So how do you do it? You do it by starting to paying attention, noticing what goes on your body. If you're not so much in touch with your body, some people find it helpful to start doing a systematic training to actually start looking at the body at various times in the or meditation, maybe scan through the body systematically starting with the head, the face, the neck, the shoulders, the chest, the belly, the back, the arms, the legs, and just kind of noticing what is there. And maybe at first not as much as there feels kind of numb or neutral or something. But just keep doing and keep doing it until you start noticing that you know what the sensations are there with a tightness are there with the looseness are there with the energy agitation that might be there, and all emotions will have some kind of physical manifestation in your body. And in fact, if you had no physical manifestation to the emotion, you probably wouldn't know what emotion it was. So just a matter of turning and doing and spending time to do it. So hopefully it was okay answer. Yes, last one.

I find that if I have a very strong emotion That, I will either tend to phase out and lose track of time. Or I will jump into a story. And, you know, I'll go through the, Hey, leave it alone, you know, forget the story, concentrate on my body. And when I do that I'll often kind of phase out after a while and then I'll go back to the story or something. And this it's like there are different scenes in the play that just keep going and going going, and then the meditations over.

So what triggers the fading away just before you start fading off, what happens to you?

I think if you know that there's a lack of awareness when that happens. So for me, I think it's because I'm focusing on my body and it has played out. It is what it is, you know, the sensations that I'm going through. Have dissipated. And I'm sort of settling down into a relaxing state.

So the lower the emotion that has also faded away too. Yeah. Oh, so then. So that. So if it's like that, then it's a very common phenomena meditation, that as people get calm and settled, the mind starts to

drift into drifting and fading away is usually pleasant at this point. Yeah. So it's usually a pleasant kind of dreamlike state that happens. And anybody who meditates for a long time, sooner or later will encounter that and has to learn how to work with that. And generally gentle instruction is you have to bring up more energy, more alertness. So when you start feeling that kind of nice fading feeling, sit up straighter, maybe open your eyes arouse more mental alertness, if you use mental noting, which is very good to use in this circumstance. Started noting a little bit more often but faster perhaps, or a little bit more adamantly in the mind, just as the energy behind it so that you're matching the calm that's you have with more energy and more more more alertness. And then then you'll keep going. But you have to your responsibilities are very important for you as a meditator to notice the drifting mind and then compensate by bringing a little bit more alertness or energy in. Now, many people when they meditate, they associate meditation with calm and be soothed and comforted. And so if that association is too strong, some people fall into those kinds of states and they feel like this is right this is good finally. And they just kind of like bask in it and just drift off and it's fine to to basket it for a while, but it's not meditation anymore.

Okay, so I hope this was useful for some of you. And, and I hope that maybe during this week that you'll pick up fear, anxiety, dread, worry, all those things as an interesting subject of exploration, and look for opportunities during this week to not to make yourself afraid but but look for opportunities for when you are afraid to look at it and explore it in new ways. And if you do this, exploration and for your fear and all this this week, I would strongly encourage you if you have someone you can go find, to talk to about what you've discovered. And it might be a friend might be a therapist, it might be better for it would be a total stranger. But to have a chance to talk to someone about this very important part of your life might actually help You in the process of kind of getting a better handle on it. Thank you