

2009-12-13 Gratitude

Fri, 8/14 7:06PM • 34:51

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grateful, gratitude, gift, people, receiving, notice, expectation, feel, practice, feeling, understand, life, bit, person, aspirations, desires, obligation, complaining, part, christian upbringing

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Initially, with one of the difficulties of the definition is that at any given moment, there's a lot happening. And so we end up sometimes paying attention to what are the habits of our mind. Want us to pay attention to how we pay attention what we pay attention to what aspect of what's happening now that we pay attention to has a lot to do with our interests, our bias, our habits, learn different things. And so for example, if a person has a habit of complaining, then they might be an expert at scanning their environment and noticing what's happening. That's worth complaining about. And guess what? There's always something that's worth creating. As always, but not to complain. But complaining is overrated.

doesn't really do us much good. And if what we notice are the things that we are thankful for, then you will notice the gifts that are coming our way. And they're always gifts that we are receiving. As long as we're alive. We receive gifts, the gifts of life, all kinds of things. So and if we have a habit of noticing that our life is a gift, then it has a very different effect on us, than if we notice all the problems that exist in our life. So part of wise so part of the Buddhist path of practice at least, is not only to be mindful of what is and let what is be kind of speak for itself. But it's also in an appropriate way. Learning to attend to those things that are useful to attend to, to notice those things that are useful. And it's useful to notice the things that we're grateful for. The Buddha spoke said that a person a good person, or a virtuous person or person of integrity, is someone who has gratitude feels gratitude. In the most famous poem called the Mangala sutra, it's often chanted as kind of a blessings discourse. It says respect, utility, contentment and gratitude Dude, this is the highest good fortune. This is the highest blessing. To be grateful among these four is one of the qualities that's a blessing, that's a good fortune to have to experience. And I think that unless people are grateful, there's no hope for us, this world of ours, and really to be able to be grateful and to say thank you, to appreciate have a deep appreciation for others for a world that we live in, is really needed for some kind of healthy progress in this life of ours. If we don't see and appreciate what's to be appreciated, we don't see and appreciated all the good that comes our way all the benefits that come. Then how can we what point is enough progress? Where are we going to go? And then some people will say, well, gee, this sounds like a homework Dharma talk.

And there's a lot of suffering. Thought I thought Buddhism was about suffering. I thought it was supposed to kind of rousing Dharma talks and sickness, old age and death. Buddhism has a heightened attention to noticing sickness, old age and death. But his practice really points us to really recognize these as being teachers for us. But one of the things that sickness old age and death teaches us is to be grateful. Because remember, a Sam Dorsey, a wonderful Zen priest in San Cisco, red aids, died of AIDS. He said, a time when he had AIDS he said, to have AIDS is to be alive. Very interesting quote. So the poignancy of sickness, old age and death is the way that sickness age old age and death teaches us that this live life that we have now is unique and special. is valuable is something quite something and to just sit in bed and meditate and let the anxious activity of the mind settle down

the greedy activity the mind mind always wants more. Or the mind that's actively not liking what's here. There's so many activities of the mind that the mind spins around in and when the activity the mind quiets down. All the reasons for why things why we're afraid or why things are, why we think things are not right or all that theory quiets down. It's really amazing how what's left can feel like a gift. spiritual life in Buddhism is often felt as a gift. Because it's very hard in doing I think, once you kind of get into the kind of some of the depths of Buddhist practice, to it's hard to take credit for it. It's hard to feel like I did this. My attainment, I huffed and puffed, follow my breath and really kind of did this. We have our part to play in practice, but not really are doing. It's not someone else's doing either. But how does it How does this these things they come to us the sense of well being or He's love compassion. The sense that the feeling that just taking one breath is special. It's a gift to walk out into the rain, as I did today and feel the light appreciation the immediacy of a drizzle following my umbrella seeing the clouds, the greenness feeling alive.

So what is it that makes a mind makes a heart? Choose the different things it focuses on? What is it that prompts us to focus on? The things that are difficult or things that were hard for us in a way that burdens us even further? And what is it it gets a heart or a mind to appreciate what happens there even people who are grateful for their difficulties and ever been grateful for your difficulties, for your challenges.

And perhaps, to defend myself a little bit from a hallmark Dharma talk. My feeling is that the gratitude is a very subversive attitude to have. It's countercultural because much of popular culture runs on acquisition, on consumer of wanting, demanding, expecting It's phenomenal to me. You know if you have the if you have the privilege of, of living in different countries, including this one United States it's quite something to watch someone get angry in this country for not receiving some kind of service from someone else in a timely way. What do you mean I had to wait here three minutes? What do you mean the telephone company can come for three hours and fix my telephone. The plumber can come for all our the traffic on Brewster and El Camino here and abroad when El Camino is a traffic jam for how long has it been now? What a nuisance and then to go in a different country. There are plenty of countries in the world where the plumber will come next week. The telephone Well, we have a telephone repair person but we don't have any parts for you have to wait a while Ajahn Amaro Buddhist monk went to India. And he was someplace in the foothills of Himalayas, who's going to get him going to get on a plane. He came a little bit early to the airport to get his plane. And he had no idea sometimes in India, things are often late. So he showed up, and I just stopped playing for you. Because it was pre lb.

It was prepared. It's already left left early.

You never know what to expect. So what does it take to be grateful? And why bother? And all this research these days on positive emotions, they're announced, you know, psychological research pointing out that gratitude is healthy. Like taking your vitamins, dose of gratitude every day. So gratitude has been one of the emotions that certainly took me by surprise in my Buddhist practice. I didn't come to the Buddhist practice to be grateful. There's a whole series of emotions which I didn't come to have any had no interest in. Growing up, and certainly gratitude was one of them. And it was a real surprise for me when I started feeling very strong feelings, attitude, states of gratitude. And the reason generally the reason I like to bow at the end of the sitting, is to express that gratitude. Because I think when there's a feeling of gratitude, appreciation, it's good to give expression to it, expressing it, lets it grow. And so we say thank you to someone else. We don't just say thank you for their sake. But I think we also say it for our sake for ourselves. Because again, expressing it allows it to kind of flower bear fruit inside of us in a way that doesn't if we kind of keep it to ourselves or don't express it to be grateful for. There's a lot of things to be grateful for. And I can go through a list I'm sure If you can go through a list

of things to be grateful for, but even bigger surprise for me, is to have the experience of gratitude for no reason. And that's something that I discovered through meditation practice. To have a sense of somehow openness, somehow sense of being gifted, that things are a gift things are just precious and wonderful. That is not my doing that something very simple is kind of, I'm receiving something. I'm receiving a blessing, I'm receiving a benefit, I'm receiving life I'm receiving awareness. Awareness is not even my own. And it kind of the more we kind of the less we take things so personally, the more space I think there is to be grateful because if we don't take it personally, then things arrive, things that are good, beneficial, feel more like a gift. And I think that's this there are two things They kind of come together that gratitude and being gifted. That something, to feel gratitude is to feel appreciation at receiving something to receive something that we appreciate. Whether it's appreciate the rain or depreciate friends kindness, or to receive some benefit from someone. We receive something as a gift. We feel it's a gift, something like a gift. And then the flipside of feeling that gift giftedness is to feel gratitude, to feel thankfulness and to live a life of gratitude is to live a life I think that supports not being egotistical, not being caught up in sense of self not being caught up in desires and fear. I want things to be the way I want them to be. But what about just relaxing letting things be as they are. And noticing that part of our environment, that part of our experience, which feels like a gift. What does it take to do that? And what needs to relax inside of us so that we can take time to experience the gift that's here? And does something need to relax inside of us? When we relax, we're more likely to experience the gifts that's here. Or if you're relaxed, are you more likely to experience what's worthy of complaining? I suspect that the more relaxed open settled we are, the less we are demanding things to be a certain way. The more we'll notice, here. So as I'm here sitting with you, here, I'm aware of all of you

and I'm grateful to be able to come to a place like this, of people who are interested in meditation practice and mindfulness, who had the ability to sit quiet. Seemingly the ability to sit quiet this way and support each other. I think it's really precious. And I feel very fortunate to be able to come to a place like this and I feel very grateful for all of you for this opportunity. I feel grateful for the many people who make our community our life here possible. Yesterday, I felt gratitude towards roto roter because they came within within an hour. And we had 50 people here so less yesterday and with a sewage backing up onto a parking lot. Was that nice? I think it's pretty, pretty amazing that we came Have sewers. That's amazing. They work as much as they do. So they don't work occasionally. Well, you know, they should be allowed to work sometimes it's just pretty amazing. They were worth to begin with. And so when we called roto roter Saturday, they came out promptly and within a few minutes, they had a fixed and we were happy poopers

some people were more grateful than others.

And we have a lot of people here in our community who volunteer and I feel very grateful for people like Linda who's so long now has been managing Sundays and caring for it so well. And Mark sits there and takes care of so well the console and the recording Victor and submitted topic I can go through a whole list of people sitting here who do so much to support us, support me and many people. And it feels very nice. Now one of the things that I hear some Buddhist teachers say when they give talks on gratitude is they talk about the debt, debt, debt of gratitude that we're indebted. We're indebted. When we feel grateful, some people will do something good. We have a debt to pay back. We have debt to pay back to our parents, to our teachers to whatever. And now perhaps there's some wisdom to this kind of approach, but I never found it very valuable this idea. As soon as there's a feeling of depth depth, then I think it stopped being a gift. If it's really offered as a gift, nothing's expected in return. So there is no debt. There is no requirement, no obligation. But there might be motivation. There might be an inspiration to say thank you to offer something back to move it on. Further variety of things that can happen. But I don't think there's any obligation because as soon as we have a sense of obligation, it

gets kind of heavy. And I think the sense of obligation precludes or puts a veil over that very part of us that can experience the gifts that come our way. And so it's kind of a mixed thing you feel the gift. And it's beautiful to have the capacity to feel something is coming to us as a gift. It's a beautiful thing to receive it that way. I have given things to people and they weren't received as a gift. Sometimes they were just received with big no Can't do that. And it feels very you know, it feels a little bit sad that there's this and there's a genuine desire to offer and it's meant with the know the or sometimes you give something and it's just taken for granted I can't remember the last time my kids said thank you for making waffles Sunday morning. Maybe it'll come in 20 years.

But I think that to to receive something then feel an obligation closes that part of the heart that needs to be open, to be able to experience things as a gift. It also I think closes that part of the heart that's able then in a beautiful way to offer something further as a gift Besides my experience, maybe other people have different ways of understanding this theory of being in debt. But to allow that part of our hearts are the most beautiful to have a chance to be in the sun.

Sitting, sit quiet, it's one of the reasons we sit quiet meditate is so that equity is beautiful inside of us as a chance to show itself that which is sensitive that was kept has capacity for empathy, for caring and as the in the discourse here, that part of our beautiful part of us that's capable of respect humility, contentment, and gratitude. I don't think it's for the faint hearted to be grateful. Sometimes it might take a lot of courage, and a lot of strength and dedication, to be willing to understand and to look and take in what we're grateful for. Even especially when things are difficult, because there's plenty of reasons, plenty of difficulties people have. But what happens if you look for what you're grateful for, in the midst of the times that are most challenging?

When it becomes your turn, to be sick, to be old, and to die? Are you ready to be grateful? Do you have a capacity to look and see what's to be grateful for? In those times of so called crisis you're ready. Great. If you're not Prepare yourself. And you can prepare yourself by beginning to exercise that muscle of gratitude, that muscle that tunes in and notices. What is a gift. And if you're too busy wanting what you want, getting what you want to get, you might not give yourself the chance to allow yourself to receive the many gifts. They're being offered you offered to you moment by moment.

So that's all I have to say. And I really didn't know if I had anything to say. But I felt so grateful. So that's what I want to talk about. We have some time If we could take five minutes if some of you would like to make a comment or a question or protest complaint those are welcome. I'll take it as a gift to last month I was reading Euston Smith's autobiography. And the 50s he went to practice Musa Shinji. And it was very difficult meditating and sitting like that. And then afterwards he went to speak to the habit of him to say goodbye and he had a very different personality. And in essence, what he told him was all of Zen practices, just gratitude. Don't make any comment on that. What kind of comment would you like?

Your opinion

I was very moved by what he said. Actually.

I would like to believe that at the heart of all spiritual traditions, is an understanding of an all mystical traditions. All religious practice spiritual practice traditions is a one of the things that we all have in common is recognition of how central gratitude is.

That's my comment.

Then students can answer

thank you for your

thank you for your words this morning and

being a fairly goal directed person they hit home so I often have difficulty with this idea of if one is grateful for just the way things are. One is abandoning what may have been fairly mindfully chosen to pursue or to achieve or to succeed at. And so I go back and forth between that and I'd like to hear your ideas about setting goals or setting.

Setting

sort of like importance of things to pursue and then also achieving that idea of just being happy with the way things are

No, I don't have Buddhism has ever said you're supposed to be happy the way things are grateful. The way things are, we're happy for particular things, but they give reality a blanket. You know, to get all of reality of blankets. blank check to be okay. Then there's no practice. Practice involves some discernment, that there's something which is useful to do, as opposed to something which is not useful to do, and to choose between those. So even though I started the talk by saying that we're rich, you can choose there's so much to pay attention to and things the way they are, and, and simply to choose. Pay attention to those things which are gifts, as opposed to those things which are wrong. That's making a choice, one or the one or the other. It can be now naively and stupidly, that choice. You don't want to do so strongly. You don't notice what's Wrong are problematic. But we don't want to drown in the problems, problems. We don't want to notice the gifts so much that we're just kind of becoming giddy. And it's silly, you know, but there's a way of doing it that it really beneficial. So how did the whole these things wisely and find your way but to be present for how things are? Already means you're changing how things are. You're changing it by being present. Because how things are until that point how things are is you're, they're there, if you're mindless than how things are is the word the whole reality with you being mindless in the middle of it. So already, you're changing something. And so in part of how things are, is that we have desires, wishes, aspirations, and preferences and understandings many different things. So, to say that this part of reality is acceptable, but departure reality has to do with my desires are not about the future is not is to bifurcate reality in a way it's not useful. What we need to do is to understand the nature of our desires, our aspirations are goal oriented, and understand when they're useful. And when they're problematic when they cause difficulties. You can be people can be so focused on a goal and getting things that, that they lose their lives almost. But if we don't have we don't honor and respect that we do have aspirations and things we want to accomplish, and sometimes they're difficult to two, it takes a lot of effort to accomplish those things. That also we lose our life, we kind of cut something out. So we don't want to say that. You know, so if you want to, if you want to accept the way things are, you have to be very careful to also accept motivations, aspirations, that's part of it too. As it makes sense.

Way, Way in the back.

You might have to wait to the mic gets all the way back there. The words I wrote here,

I have a slightly tangential question, which is the expectation of gratitude. So when you do something kindly towards someone or make an effort, I find intellectually, that I can justify saying while I'm doing

this, and I shouldn't expect gratitude, because I'm just doing is good. But I find that I am enslaved a little bit to the fact that I do expect that gratitude. So if you have any tricks to be able to do, to do without expectation of gratitude, that'd be helpful. Thanks.

It's a good it's a good comment. And I don't know if I have any tricks. I think mindfulness is so important. So to get to stay mindful of, of, of your, what your motivations are, your inner landscape, what's going on, so that you can see What's happening within you and know what to what to act on and what to let go of. So you might notice that you have some expectation or something, some expectation, it's really good to see that, because if you see it, then you cannot believe it. Or you can let go of it or kind of, you know, just, you know, not take it so seriously, if you have an expectation that gets me back and you don't see that expectation that's going to fester and cause problems. Now, you know, it's good to be able to give something without an expectation with something in return. However, how a person responds when you give something to them does have an impact regardless and even if you don't have an expectation or something in return if they give their the offering is treated with tremendous disrespect. You know, it has an effect, and I think it appropriate effect. And I think that oh, you know, okay, I think that now maybe this is an article person to do that tour again. So the idea of expectation and his little bit, there's a gray zone where we don't have an erotic expectation. But you know, there has to be some decent some decency or some some basic human and not just with the most basic kind of human goodness being expressed. So you give someone a gift, and they say, yuck

you know,

you didn't have any expectation, but, but, you know, it just doesn't know. So I don't know if that may make some sense there, but Okay, we have time for another question. If you think it's a quick answer. Might not be I was gonna actually inject a little controversy. Where are you in the back This is God speaking all the way in the back.

Okay, well, the concept of appreciation I can get, but I always have a little trouble with gratitude. And that seems to always imply a dualism, you know that there's some external, higher power that you're subordinate to and that need to be grateful to and maybe it's because of my Christian upbringing, but I was find that notion a little disempowering. I say, No, you're always a kind of childhood dependency position. Yeah, we think so. Yeah. I don't have a Christian upbringing, so I don't have to struggle with that. I'm just grateful.

So, So may I be May I be a testimonial to the fact that That it is possible to feel like there's lots of gifts without having to resort to the idea that there's a deity out there providing it to us. It's just, it's just, it's just good. So hope that's satisfying enough. So, the last thing I want to say is we do have tea today. And since it's only 1043 I have two more minutes of your time allowed, right? I would like to ask you to say hello to someone signior you say hello. And if you want to linger at all, you could even say something about your thoughts on gratitude. But you say hello to someone because especially people are new. It's nice to make contact. Thank you.