

2010-02-08 Buddhism And Non Violence Part 2

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

Oh, good evening. And so I thought I would, will try to continue the series last evening on this three part series on Buddhism and non violence or peace. And I thought I would tell you a few stories first. Some are kind of complete stories brief, with complete and some were going to tell you half of it and not the outcome, and then talk for a while and we'll get back to the outcome of the story. So the first time that I can remember that I, maybe the only time I can remember I really slugged someone. was when I was six. And I was in a new school and I was being chased by older boys in the playground. So I remember I stopped, I turned around, and I hit one of them in the face. And then I ran to one of the teachers and then I was left alone. And that was, you know, it kind of successful outcome. I'm still here to tell you the story. Then I tried again to slug someone when I was 14 there was somebody that was in boarding school, and there was an older boy who was being kind of mean to me, teasing me and stuff and it reached a point where it just seemed like this was not good. And so I remember in the hallway and the dormitory, turning around to him. And the next thing I knew I was on the floor. So that was a successful outcome for him. Maybe wasn't for me. And then when I was about to I was 21 I did the kind of thing that if you do it often another man will want to beat you up. So I was remember I was riding driving a tractor across a field I was I was mowing or plowing or something and this man came walking across the field. This angry it's clear that he was coming for me. So I got off the tractor and waited woke up to me And said, Okay, we're gonna fight. And then about must be now more than 15 years ago, 17 years ago I was living on the corner of hate and the Guna in San Francisco in the lower Haight. And a block away up the hill are these housing projects. A lot of violence there and stuff, drugs. And then this one day I was standing quite near the corner there. And this old car came down from the projects careening down Haight Street. So that's kind of squealing and careening. And this, you know, didn't seem like a good scene. So we're going to watch this about and it came into the middle of the intersection and kind of Made a sharp turn in the middle of the intersection and stopped in the middle that intersection and in the back door opened and this woman tumbled out and kind of walked out into the middle of the intersection and so and these than these two big tough looking football player size to me they look like dangerous guys got out of the car to to go get her. That's the story. And one more story. This is not from my life, but I read it this weekend in tricycle magazine. And it was quite impressed me the story and it concerns a man

who's talked here Sadness eat and thought. My name Vinnie Ferraro, he's one of the leaders of the Dharma punk Dharma scene in the San Francisco leads a sitting group up there, wonderful man full of tattoos and such things. And he grew up on the east coast. In America very poor neighborhood. His father was in jail for drugs. father taught him how to deal drugs when he was a little kid. grew up with gangs. He's 15 customers, if they found strangers in their turf, they would beat them up. And they found a homeless man in their neighborhood. And they went to beat him up. As a story said they started beating him up. And the man looked up at Vinnie and said, help me and Vinnie said Why should I

Would you say, if you're beating someone up? And they said, helped me? Or what would you say if you're being beat up? And they said, Why should I help you? Why would you do and all these circumstances?

I remember when I was about 20, 20 or so, I was a long haired hippie traveling across United States and naively went into a bar in the Florida Panhandle. And when I walked into the bar with my friend the tension in the room got pretty dramatic. I thought, Oh, am I going to get out of here in one piece? Because, I mean, the daggers in the eyes and the tension was pretty intense. So what do you do? I can go on with stories. Anyways, just things on my own stories. Number one son when I was about 15 or so being out at night in the streets of Italian city called Trista. And there was a I guess it was probably a Croatian young man, or just maybe a 17 or 18 was there and I was just leaning against the wall, doing nothing. When he came up to me and threw a fist at me, right in my face, what do you do? What do you do with these circumstances? What do you do when there's violence? What do you do when you're the recipient of violence? What do you do when there's threat to what do you do when you're the perpetrator of violence, when you're gonna hurt someone? What do you do and all these circumstances? And, you know, most of you, I think, look like very nice people. I don't worry too much about you. being violent to me tonight. But, you know, are you capable of violence?

The last time that I really wanted to slug someone was when I was 30 must have been 31 I think that's, that's the history of my wanting to just slug someone you're getting the whole thing. And helpful confession. I can't think of any other times. I can remember with 6, 15, 31 or 31. But I tell you this story because it was I was a monk in a monastery, Zen monastery in Japan. Now that you don't think of monks wanting to slug someone, you know, and it happened when I was sitting, meditating. And I wanted to hit the man next to me, because he really didn't like me. And he would sit we'd sit there meditating, and he would poke me and pull on my robe. And you know he would do mean things here and there at some point I said, You know, I just I just saw one point number one moment I just felt like I just missed it and I didn't buckling that would not have been a good good scene. just plugged in there in the meditation hall later and say monastery I came across a monk being beat up by two of the other monks. What do I do? What do I do when I see that was by what's my What do I do? Remember, there was actually one more time where I kind of thought of wanting to slug someone. I guess I'm a dangerous guy. I was I think I was about 11 or 12. 11, maybe like 10 or 11, something like that. Maybe 11, 10. And I was in a train in Italy with my mother and my younger sister. And my mother was then at that point, I guess she was about 31, blonde and beautiful looking. And this Italian soldier got into the train compartment with us and started flirting with her. So I was sitting next to the soldier and I said to my mother in Norwegian, so he couldn't understand I said, you know, this to have my fist the size he couldn't see it next to me like this, you know, inside of my body. So he told you could see my mom could see it. And I said, you know, should I? She said, No.

So you know, violence. Seems like it comes off my, my history pretty easily like I could think of all these things that I've done and situations I've been in and how easy it is and you think that we're all kind of people like a monk setter all you think that the midst of their spiritual practice you think there'd be kind of like big well behaved. And even there I was capable of feeling these feelings. So is it something that we need to address and look at for ourselves is something we had to have the capacity within us? And if we do, then it's something we want to meet and face and address and deal with? And do we, if we do address it in some deep way in ourselves? Do we address it just for ourselves? Or do we also address it for the sake of others? Because if someone doesn't address these issues in their hearts and their minds, you know, who's how do we expect anybody else to do it? And there's certainly plenty of violence. There's a story from the time of the Buddha Seems like my impression is the Buddha was a

grand story maker storyteller. And you know depression is a made he made up stories. That's my impression. But anyway he tells a story of when a battle was raging between the debits and the assurance service demos are like gods and the zeros are sometimes called Titans or jealous Titans there is kind of like kind of like godlike beings and and they're a jealous of the gods the gods have a pretty good I don't know how the Titans have a decent service but they're the service all because fight trying to fight the gods so so

so that the each of the gods and the servers each have a ruler and they rulers confront each other and they say This time around, let's have a battle of words. So they're going to do a debate in other words, and so they agreed to this debate and, and a Surah dellis Titan says starts off by saying the foolish, grow ever more angry if there is no one to stop them. Therefore let a strong person restrain the fool with a firm and sharp reprove, foolish chrome ever more angry if there is no one to stop them. So perhaps they fool these people who are fooled into being violent for example. You have to stop them and you have to stop them firmly and strongly with your strength. Sharp reproof. Now the king of the Devas replies, it is my persuasion that the only way to curb a foolish person is for the alert minded to cultivate calm and stillness, when an other is filled with rage. So you get the debate you

and then the server says, I see a serious mistake in what you so patiently endure. When a fool thinks that person tolerates me out of fear, the fool will continue to attack. Let an ox that charges like an ox that charges as you flee. So I see serious mistake if you patiently endure the fool will continue To attack.

I want to tell you another story. They may tell stories, partial stories. I can add many years ago I was teaching a retreat and this woman came for an interview. And she told me that she had been a civil rights civil rights activist, I guess during the Civil Rights time, white woman from this North had gone down to the south. And she had stood on a street corner to protest. Discrimination at the time. And these angry rednecks came along and a pickup truck, jumped out his pickup truck and started beating her up. That's the part of the story. What would you do? That circumstances what would you do? So according to the surah, you would fight back and show that person, that peace of your mind because if you don't fight back if you patiently patiently endure the violence, then they'll just get more violent. Do you enter something? But the devil says, No, you should cultivate calm and stillness when another is filled with rage. So then the devil goes on and says, left, so the surah said, I see a serious mistake in what you so patiently endure. When a fool thinks that person tolerant tolerates me out of fear, the fool will continue to attack that an ox that charges like an ox that charges as you flee. In the dead, I said, Let the fool think whatever. in cultivating the highest goal, nothing compares to patience. And the highest form of patience is to tolerate the weakness and shortcomings of others. Whoever thinks that strength Fools is strength will claim a strong person to be a weakling for it will not occur to a strong person protected by virtue to exchange words of anger, we're worse off is the one who when reviled, prevails back but whoever does not reviled and reviled wins a two fold victory. The strong seek the best for themselves and for others, understanding and others anger they cultivate calm and stillness and those that and thus the heal both themselves and the others. Those who call this weakness do not understand the Dharma.

Anyway, so they wonder, the debate because their their logic or their beauty of their versus that is done in poetry. So there's, you know, arguments one side, the other for The value of violence, the importance of it, protecting your family, protecting yourself. Certainly getting your way, curbing someone else in some way, and used to be curbed. And those arguments The other way that that there's value in developing calmness and stillness, maybe another approach. So I wanted to complete some of these stories now. So, my friend who was going to came to fight me for good cause I've done something

came storming across the field. I got off my tractor and as he approached to said, you know, as he approached, I don't know the instinct took over, I suppose. And I, I bent down on one knee and he said, Let's fight and I opened up my arms to myself. My hands like this and said I can't. on my knees. He turned around in disgust and marched off. That was successful for me. It worked out well. I thought I wasn't gonna find him. When you come with me I knew I couldn't. The story of Vinnie the homeless man's being made up beat up and says help me and Ben says Why should I? And the homeless man as the story goes, especially as many accounted in the bicycle this this issue of bicycle. He looks up at Vinnie, and he says when I look into your eyes, I see more compassion there than any woman I've ever met that was the end of the beating. And that changed vinnies life. Perhaps because the man saw something in Vinny, they never seen him himself. He says in the article that his father kind of drummed out his feelings like he wasn't supposed to feel and be aware of feelings. Let's be tough, I guess. And that kind of got him

ended. So that was successful. ending of the beating. Very successful changed his life for the better. Now he's a Dharma teacher. And what other unfinished stories that I tell you forget all these stories. Yeah. The car or the car going down hate. So this woman's there in the middle of hate and Laguna so I walked up there to the middle of the intersection and stood between her these big guys. And kind of kind of protect her. I didn't know what the story was going on. And she wasn't running away. But it was clear she didn't want to go back in the car. What do you want to do with these guys, but guys, we're big. So they kind of said South Africa, but he said to me, but they really did. They said, they're what she's with us. And they will take a couple of steps towards me. So I took out a couple steps back. They take a couple of steps towards me and I take couple steps back so that was the dance. It wasn't that successful, I thought, but then this other man came along and walked up to the middle the intersection and he said to the two guys You know,

if I was in a situation this woman I wish someone would come and stand up for me. Or I wish that you would come and stand up for me and that call the whole thing down. And the whole thing, mellowed. So I didn't I wasn't the one who said that I was the one who was just doing this dance backing up.

So that was nice. So violence wasn't needed. Because somehow empathy or common common kind of care for each other was, was evoked in a way that was meaningful for these two guys.

The bar in the south Well, it turned out my A friend that I was with was a natural comedian. And within, I don't know, five or 10 minutes he had everyone in the bar laughing. And so we had we got out there safely. I didn't have the ability to be a comedian but but humor was used to defuse situation. You know, that was quite something. So I told us there about the bar because there's there's so many different ways of meeting and addressing violence and the threat of violence. And some of them are quite creative. Remember, a friend of mine was going it was being mugged by some teenage boys up there by the projects in San Francisco. And he, he just they weren't they wanted his money or something. I don't know if they had a knife what they had, but they wanted they wanted his money and turned to them and said your mother would be ashamed to

say they left them alone.

Oh, the activists in the Civil Rights time. So she was standing there in the corner she tells me and she was these guys jumped out the pickup truck and started beating her up and the other people protesting whether beat her pick them up some. Then they left. So the next day this civil rights protesters went to the same corners to the same corner and do the same protest. Same guys came along, jumped out of their pickup truck and beat them up again. They went back a third day, to the same place and stood

there. And they jumped. Same thing happened the guys jumped out the pickup truck. And she tells the story to me, she said so I was there and this guy had his fist Ready to hit me? He looked into my eyes. And he said, What in the world are you doing? And then we had a conversation. That was the end of the violence. They had a conversation. I don't know what the outcome of the conversation but in that conversation of these two opposing, you know, people in a sense opposing wouldn't have happened if you'd fought back or wouldn't have happened if she'd run away. So I would like that story because, you know, you know, some of you have been the recipients of violence. on the receiving end, probably it's big enough for me, I'm sure some of you. I mean, that might have been horrific. Some of you experienced. I don't want to be a little bit at all. I'd like to end it kind of violence. But are there some situations where The wisest, most otherwise wisest, but a fantastic appropriate response is to sit there and just receive it. And perhaps in that situation, civil rights, there's lots of examples. That's what the civil rights protesters were trained to do, was to receive violence passively, not because they're supposed to be passive, you know, and just, you know, but rather because they were kind of soldiers who were courageously and fiercely trying to change a nation. And in that context, they're standing then receiving a tattoo was very powerful thing to do. And they were trained, some of them are trained to understand that. So Martin Luther King said, the ultimate weakness of violence is that it is a descending spiral. beginning the very thing it seeks to destroy Instead of diminishing evil, it multiplies it. through violence, you may murder the liar and you cannot murder the lie, nor establish the truth. through violence. You may murder the hater, but you do not murder hate. In fact, violence merely increases hate. So it goes, returning for violence multiple returning violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Light can do that. Hate can never drive out hate. Only love can do that.

And then the last kind of little teaching from the Buddha that I want to share a couple of things here for me, one is just a very unique for me very Significant teaching reverse from the Buddha victory gives birth to hate, the defeated, sleeps tormented giving up both victory and defeat the peaceful sleep delighted. And that verse with the to the gods gods in the Osiris it says, The strong seek the best for themselves and for others. So how in the in how in the situation of violence or anger or conflict do we not see it as a win lose situation? How do we not see it as a only as a negative thing as something is terrible and bad? How do we see conflict as something where maybe, you know, how do we look at conflict conflict situation and have our concern be What's good what's the best for everyone concerned here? What's the way forward here for everyone that works as opposed just for me, I can be safe or whatever. And but the contact here it says, in cultivating the highest goal, nothing compares with patience. The highest goal is called Buddhism is liberation. And for the people who are interested in liberation, the Buddha, the monks and nuns that the Buddha was training. He had something very dramatic to say to them, and neighborhood maybe this is kind of kind of anybody should read it. He's talking to his, his disciples, monks and nuns, even if hoodlums were to cut off your limbs if you become hateful toward them, You would not be carrying out my teachings. Rather you should practice our hearts will remain unaffected. We will say nothing evil. We will maintain compassion for that beings well being. We will maintain loving kindness and a heart free of hate. We shall practice a few seeing the person with our heart filled with loving kindness. After doing so, to this person, we will practice Suffusing the entire world with our heart filled with immeasurable loving kindness. This is how you should practice. That's pretty dramatic. Fantastic, isn't it? Someone's cutting off your arms. He's supposed to have kindness towards them. It can seem extreme, perhaps too extreme to make a point. Some people read this nerd horrified. You mean you're supposed to not defend ourselves if someone's attacked me in this way. It doesn't say no defense. What it says is no hate. And monks are in fact allowed Do a very mild forms of defense as mentioned last week, where they can, they can do simple forms of pushing away or striking out against someone in order to escape from danger. But the rule is that they cannot do it, if there's any anger or ill will, if they have So, if you're able to fend off an attacker

without any ill will, then a monk or nun is not breaking the rules by just kind of dramatic so but this is the context of people going for the highest good, the highest liberation, the highest peace, if that's what you want. Then I think the demand or demand but the need for living a non violent life becomes much higher. Because it's not impossible. It's impossible to go for the highest goal of liberation of freedom, of peace in the heart, and still be motivated or still act in violent ways or out of anger in your heart. possible. So for the people interested in that goal, I think that it makes sense to look at what is the heart? How can I enter the conflict? Whether it's ordinary conflict with others or more violent conflict? How can I enter it? How can you be with it in a way that makes it into a path of practice that makes it so the wisest, most compassionate part of me comes out. And part of that has to do with how we prepare ourselves. And Buddhism has made a big, big issue over the centuries, that we need to prepare ourselves by cultivating a really clear intention that what we want our life to be about. And so that that intention is ready to support us in times of difficulty. If the intention is one of being

nonviolent intention is one of being peaceful. The intention is to look for the highest good for everyone concerned. That's cultivating develop, not an abstract kind of pollyannish kind of way, but really, it's kind of like a The foundation of what we want our life to be about, then it then it becomes ready for us, hopefully ready to be activated and used when it's most needed. But if we haven't prepared ourselves and cultivated that intention, then it'll slip away when we're under stress and other forces inside of us will take over. We prepare ourselves by practicing mindfulness. I think one of the very best trainings for being in conflict in a way that is useful for everyone concerned is to have the capacity to stay mindful in conflict, to be really attentive to what's happening attentive to ourselves and attentive to others, to learn how to listen. They were the default in conflict is not to attack not to run away, but the default is pay attention. Slow down if you can see what's going on here. And I've been in many situations where I was at angry and wanting to say something. But I waited and paid attention. And it made a, you know, huge, huge radical difference, to listen, to wait to pay attention to pay attention to myself, what's going on inside my feelings, my reactions, my beliefs, and pay attention to what's out there. And sometimes paying attention, I've learned has to take the form of asking questions. And asking questions and conflict is one of the best things. I think it slows it down. What do you mean? You're gonna punch me? What do you mean? Well, how's that? What's that about? Anything at all? But But, but one of the I think one of the things that people need the most when they're in conflict is they need to be heard, and needs to be heard and need to be understood. Even when you have the right and the other person has the wrong let the other person who's wrong. Let them be heard and understood, that's probably what they need the most. One of the most dangerous things I think are very terrible things like, like putting match to gasoline is to be self righteous. And right.

So listen, listen by asking questions. And then part of what we listen to is what's going on in us. Are we reactive? Or meaning are these impulses habits of lashing out or closing down operating? And then to see that to watch how that the mind does that and then having learned how not to get into those forces. So you might find yourself closing down and conflict some people have the closing down in stuck To see that know that really well. And in spite of that feeling you want it to close down, to stay open to stay connected. Stay with find out what's going on, or you want to run away. Everything in you says run away, but you stay or you want to hit or lash out, or say something that kind of hurts someone. But you can see that reaction coming. And you see you don't you don't get into it. You hold your tongue. It's in times of crisis, very dramatic situations. It's not an easy thing to do. And so my understanding is that my belief is it's very important to prepare yourself. Sooner or later there'll be conflict. And one of the best preparations I know of is mindfulness. practice mindfulness, like in meditation, and learn all about your reactions and how you react. They all come visit you as you sit and meditate. Sooner or later, it's all going to come through. Maybe it's pretty mild. But you'll learn the territory. You're learning how you react and respond and what goes on. And so you should look when you meditate. You should look for

days you should, you should meditate. Definitely meditate the days when you're in conflict with people and angry or afraid. It's so important. You only meditate when you feel good. You know, you're not preparing yourself. You're not learning who you are and learning how to work with their reactions and responses, and learning how to keep yourself calm or centered. In situations that can be difficult. So look at yourself. So practice mindfulness, look at your intention. And then finally, If you want to be peaceful or force of peace, not just not just peaceful but a force for peace in the world.

I think it's important not to have just a belief in peace, an idea that it's useful, but to have cultivated a sensitivity for peace where the motivation the impulse for creating peace or being peaceful in situation is not logical. But it comes as a as part of the wish of your heart in a sense, the inner wish the inner kind of sensitivity, this is the right thing. This is appropriate because if it just an idea, it probably won't radiate very far what kind of and it won't be very creative. And I think to be able to meet conflict And be present for it and find what is find the solution for everyone. So there's not a winner, winner or losers. It takes a lot of creativity and creativity I think rides best on the instinct for it to be peaceful or the feeling of being peaceful is kind of like what you most want, or the compassion that wants peace doesn't work, it doesn't ride very well on logic or it's a good idea to be peaceful, I should be peaceful. That's, you know. So and that instinct or that sensitivity for peace and compassion, I think comes when we are practice something like mindfulness and meditation and have an had an experience of letting the preoccupied mind the distracted mind fall away, when the crusts and the resistance of our hearts kind of fall away. And then sensitivity and softness of the heart is what can feel and experience the world. And then the task is not to just be soft and sensitive, but to be soft, sensitive and strong. And the story of the woman who was civil rights protester, I would say that she was, I don't know how soft and sensitive she was, but she certainly was strong. You have to be very strong, she probably was stronger than the people beating her up. That's why it worked. So, in some, as I said, the first evening of this series, there's an ancient Buddhist saying that the characteristic of the Dharma, the characteristic quality of the Dharma is is non violence, non harming. The Dharma and non harming are intimately connected. And if you're interested in Dharma practice, you should also be interested in and non harming.

So that's what I'd say tonight. Thank you very much for listening.

That's what I had to say tonight. Thank you very much for listening.