

2010-03-29 The Three Doors

Sat, 8/15 9:49AM • 44:16

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

desires, mind, people, meaning, person, assign, life, letting, deep, ideas, buddhism, peace, cling, long, arises, attachment, hold, experience, door, suffering

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

Thank you. It's nice to be back. Nice to be sitting here with all of you. And those of you don't don't know, I was away for one month teaching for a week retreat at spirit rock for a meditation retreat. And it's one of the most beautiful things that spirit rock teaches. There's a meditation center up in red County. And they do a whole series of different day long events and week long retreats, all kinds of teachings, but for the month of February, the month of March, they teach a long Silent Retreat. And there were about 25 people who set both retreats so they were sitting in silence meditating, all day, every day for two months. And then there were about 60 people who did just to February portion or just a large portion. So I just came back yesterday. I enjoyed it quite a bit. And one of the things that's so enjoyable about it is that it's quite impactful for someone to sit in, to be on retreat for a month. It's quite unusual in any lifetime to be able to step out of the step out of one's normal life, more good family or whatever was doing and, and take that kind of concentrated time to engage in a very deep encounter with oneself to meet oneself. That's one of the things that happens is that is that when you're not distracted by the normal activities of daily life, we meet ourselves in a very dramatic way. And what makes us run are motivations or concerns or beliefs or unresolved issues, all being it's showing itself in highlight and Sometimes that's not so pretty. And sometimes it is. But the process of encountering it the honesty, and, and being able to kind of stay and really grapple with oneself day after day, in this very deep way that happens in meditation is a really a lovely, beautiful thing to do. And I think that my guess is that for all the people who there it will have been as one of the most significant things that they've done for their life, and they will remember it for the rest of their lifetime. So I just came back and being there is still very much on my mind or in my heart. I feel a little bit like I'm here but I don't know if I was quite right to say that my part of my mind is still there or I'm here but that still lingers a little bit They experience. And so what I like to do this evening is to teach something that I taught during that month long retreat. And maybe as a way of maybe sharing a little bit of the retreats with you and hopefully something that's relevant for you in your lives. And it has to do with letting go and letting go is pretty important skill to have. If a person hasn't learned to let go, well, then by the time that they are nine months old, they'll start suffer.

There's a story about a mother who comes to see a Buddhist teacher. And the mother says, You know, I don't understand this Buddhism stuff, because I've heard some teachers, not you, but hear some teachers teach how important it is to really be in the present moment, like the present moment seems like the God of these Buddhists just be in the presence. But you know, had these kids and, you know, kindergarten and nursery school, and they're really in the present moment a lot. But they're in the present moment, the wrong times. You know, when I try to when it's time to get ready for school, they're really present for their games and their toys. I wouldn't be present for getting dressed and having breakfast. And then we start walking up to the, you know, to school or walking up to the car to go to school. And, you know, it's so beautiful to watch them. They're so excited by the butterfly that's flying

through the flowers and the snails and the ants and they're so acutely attentive to the present moment. It's just, you know, but it's that's not what it's about, but getting them to school. And, and so the teacher says to the mother, well, it's, you know, Buddhism, the point is not to be in the present moment. The the, was, you know, it was difference between a kid who's in the present moment, and someone who's spiritually mature and Buddhism is that the, the kids haven't learned to let go. They someone who's mature has learned to let go so that they can engage with what's appropriate. At any given time, if we keep holding on to resentments from long ago, we can't really see our current condition fresh. If we hold on to our expectations of what is supposed to happen, then we can't really meet this moment fresh and see what's really there. Perhaps, if we are caught up in our clinging to our self image, perhaps we'll kind of just be very disrespectful of someone else. get angry, get upset. There's all kinds of slew of things that people hold on to hold on to our pleasure, our security, or identity, or relationships. There's many, many things. And maybe you could say there's nothing, maybe it's okay to cling sometimes. But if you haven't learned to let go, your clinging will probably come back and bite you. And there's a sometimes an analogy that's given in our circles about getting a rope burn. It seems that there was someone who there was an article or someone someone read about this man who was holding on to like a helium balloon or something. And the helium balloon went up in the air, but he forgot to let go. And apparently he let go Finally, you know, maybe four or five feet above the ground. So he didn't hurt himself. But you know, he got this rope burn, because, as he as he didn't let go, he kind of got pulled down when the rope went up through his hands and burned his hands. So if you hold on too tightly into life, you'll get heartburn, mind burn. So sooner or later we have to learn to let go. And the full liberation experience of liberation enlightenment in Buddhism is a very dramatic experience of letting go but the teachings of Buddha are relevant also in small letting go. If you're driving on the freeway and someone pulls into your lane, do you hold on to your anger, your annoyance? Or do you let go of your annoyance? What's best served, you might feel that you have a right to be angry with someone who cuts you off, after all, and if you let go of your anger, you're letting them get away with it. So it's important to hold on to the anger even even though that person will never notice that person's gone on. So on to the next thing, but you are still lingering. What's the cost benefit analysis you know for you in the holding on to the anger the resentment. So on the freeway, is it useful sometimes to let go? Is it you know are the useful times in life small things that we can let go of appropriately helpfully.

I think all of you have some experience of letting go. I don't think you arrive to I think all of you are adults, right? You don't arrive to adulthood without having let go of something. And sometimes you're consciously letting go. And sometimes you're letting go is just kind of continues to slough off, he's hardly even noticed you've let go. Because the consumer concerns interests, your priorities change as you as you age, and you are not interested in something and like, for example, I know that I was very concerned and very attached negatively to when I was 1314, to pimples and, and it was quite consequential idea of going to school with a temple, you know, had major consequences to my well being, success in life, happiness. And now I can quite confidently tell you that if I showed up here to teach with a big pimple on my cheek that everyone could see. I couldn't care less. Somehow or other over the last 40 years I have managed let go of my concern about my pimples. quite an accomplishment. So it wasn't a dramatic moment, but something, you know, slowly changed over time. But what and some people are kind of I've met, don't they hear the teachings about letting go? And they don't know how to What do you mean? Let go how you supposed to let go. They don't have that. You know, that doesn't make sense to them. What do you do? What does that mean? And so there is a teaching in Buddhism, called the three doors of liberation. And perhaps we can also for the purposes of tonight, call them the three doors of letting go Three ways of letting go. And there's two sides that helped letting go. One has to do with really understanding that what we're holding on to, is not worth holding on to. And so we should release the grip we have around those thoughts, those ideas, those feelings. The other is to see the benefits we get from letting go. Because sometimes we're it's useful,

it's beneficial to let go of things which are nice, which may be you know, our wholesome minute in life, nothing wrong inherently in them. But holding on to them, limits us. And so, in order to overcome that limitation, we have to let go.

So for example, you know, it's you hold holding on to your health Now, normally being healthy is considered a very useful and helpful and important thing for any human being. And certainly I wish health and everybody but there are people then who cling to their health and such a way that it actually limits their life. Sometimes they're so preoccupied with their health, they obsess on it, that it's very clear that they are missing out in love other things, they're exercising all the time eating all the time. They're annoying everybody. And, you know, it's it's, you know, if they're really kind of a fanatic about it, and that's what life is all about. And life kind of passes them by perhaps sometimes, perhaps person has an appropriate interest in their own health and attached to being healthy, but their health starts to go away. And with that, their ability to maintain their health perhaps goes away. We get old we get some credit That something. And if we still cling to health or cling to the self image of being a healthy person, we're going to get roadburn. But if, you know sometimes, you know, if you don't want that rope burn, you better let go. Or if you don't want to be limited by that attachment, and maybe enter into a state of unhealth in a way that has more freedom, more lightness, more joy in it, we're better off dealing with the illness, without clinging than we are with clinging. In Buddhism, we say that if you cling, you add more illness to the system. If you don't cling, then you take some illness away. So sometimes we see the problems of what we cling to, and sometimes we see the benefits of letting go. And that helps. So the three doors of liberation kind of involved these two sides. Sometimes we see the nature of what we're letting go of and Sometimes we see the nature of what we can let go into what we can get from it. And so the three doors in terms of liberation experience in Buddhism, they say that different people are triggered or to the experience of realization through one of these three doors maybe depending on the kind of personality you have or tendencies or particular qualities that are strong at any given time. So the first door, the three doors, so it has quite strange names. I'll tell you what they are, and then you can later I'll explain them. There's the door of the signless signless like sign without a sign signless there's a door of the wish lists without wish and there's a door of the emptiness store. So the signless store has to do with With with having the mind stop us, putting an end temporarily, to assigning meaning to our experience, we have kind of meaning making minds. And you see the footprints on the ground. And you're hunting for a mammoth, woolly mammoth, you see those footprints, see. So, if you follow those footprints, that footprints, that means that in that forest over there, probably you find that mammoth. So it's good to kind of make an association to assign something to it. If you had no assigning, you probably be very bad Hunter. And that's your thing. So it's useful we have meaning making minds. But one of the causes of attachment is we cling to those meanings we make. So meaning we can make meaning we have concepts, we have ideas, interpretations that we assign To our life to our experience, we assign meaning to ourselves, sometimes negatively, sometimes positively. We assign meaning to other people, we assign meanings to our experience. One of the ways we do it is we assign concepts labels to our experience. And as the saying goes, the map is not the territory, the label we have for a person, friend, mother, partner, Father, you know, can be very limiting. If any of you have ever been on the receiving end of someone's putting you into a category. Sometimes you want to say, Hey, wait a minute, and more than that. You've limited me by putting me in that category. So it's very helpful for human beings, to assign meaning labels and concepts to our experience. It's how we organize our life and kind of find our way. And we're not asking Buddhism to give it up once and for all.

But sometimes it's useful to take a vacation from it. To end to have the mind experienced the possibility of stopping that. So we can do it in small ways. If I'm on the freeway, and someone cuts me off, I might assign meaning to that person who cut me off on the freeway. But it also might assign meaning to

myself. I'm a lousy driver. I'm not aggressive enough. my manhood has been challenged, my personhood has been challenged. My driving acumen has been challenged. My you know, and so I kind of get in that I might get involved in a whole complicated world of meaning assignment. The fact that my great skill as a driver has now been challenged, and probably all the other all the other drivers who I've never, never seen before. never see again, that cert surely this means that they are now looking at me and judging me and that I'm not a good driver. Therefore, I should probably buy myself a better car but Because a different kind of car, a bigger car would mean and so that goes on and on. So, to get a handle on this meaning making activity and be able to not see our, to to put aside that tendency, so we can see something fresh. So we can see our life without that going on is to go through the door of the signless. And what does it take to go through the door of the Silas in so I don't know there might be other ways but the Buddhist teaching about this is that involves seeing that things are impermanent, to seeing that things arise and they pass. If you see that clearly that the things have a beginning and an end. Then the assigning of meaning is seen as being contingent on it. Something being there. It's not it's not inherent in the thing that arises and passes not something permanent, something like these platonic ideals that are always around. But because when we actually see what we're talking about, we see something arises and see something pass. So I know that I've had the great capacity of doing something like having someone cut me off in the freeway in some thoughtless way. The person drives off leaves me in the dust, purse is long gone. And I'm still thinking about it. It's happened, it's arisen, it's past, and it's long gone. It doesn't exist in the universe anymore, that that particular situation, but I'm still lingering with those concepts and ideas around that one experience or a person. A person is constantly people are constantly all of us are constantly changing beings are always in flux as human beings and if I CCC someone say a friend of mine says something hurtful to me. And I think that my friend is a mean person. And so for the next 10 times I see my friend I carry with me this idea. He's a mean guy. I don't know Do Is that true? Once one number one that person needs constant change and flux. And perhaps the next day I see my friend, a whole new life situation has come into play. And it's a very different situation. Remember once having working with someone or colleague and who usually we had kind of a fun joking relationship and kind of joked around a lot. And the person came to work. I was already at work and he walked through the door and I immediately got into some kind of joking banter. Without taking the time to see what was going on for him who he was how he was. And what had happened was just very that day or the day before one of his close friends had died. And he was not in a mood to be joking Actually, it was kind of actually kind of painful for him to come to work and have me kind of joking the old way. And so, here I was, I was, you know, I was holding on to the old idea, and not not seeing the newness, the rising and passing of this person to be fresh and notice what was appropriate in this time. So there's something about seeing how things arise and they pass that is very helpful for loosening up the grip of the labels, the interpretations the assigning a meaning that the mind tends to make.

It said that anyway, so. So in Buddhist meditation practice in the past them they practice that we do here. One of the things that when meditation practice gets strong, is that people start seeing the arising and passing of experience very fast. I mean, it's not like it's not like, it's not that, you know, you sit down and have a meal, and the meal disappears, you know, rising passes in a second. But you look, you look at the food. And you see something about the nature of the whole Gestalt of how we, the food is there, I'm here there's a perception of the food. And that whole experience, of perception of experience of me in relationship with food, that whole thing is in constant flux, that arise in the passes by the second and to see at that level of detail, kind of begins to become because it because the mind is so still and so concentrated to be able to see at that level touches something very deep in the recesses of the mind back in the where the kind of the source of meaning making source of holding on to ideas exists in some of the deeper seated kind of attachments we hold on to ideas we hold on to begin to soften, relax, and, and let go of. So by seeing impermanence there's something about seeing how things change that

can loosen up our tendency to assign meaning. And if you see that the limitations that meaning is meaning making has made me be willing to give it our best. Or if you see the benefits of seeing things fresh and new, I'd be willing to give it a rest. So that's the door of the signless. The door of the wishlist is for has to do with giving up our desires. And wishes for anything at all. So also has to do with giving up our desire for control. Some people, it's also a big part of the human mind, the mind is also a desire making machine. I mean, that's part of its function, too. So we can find our way through life, we have to have certain desires. There's nothing wrong with desires in and of themselves, actually want you to have desires. Those of you who know if you need to pee, we don't want you to pee on our carpet. We would like you to have the desire to go to use our bathrooms. That's a good desire, please. And to the whole slew of desires, but it's the attachment to desire, which is the problem that clinging to them. desires themselves might not be a problem, but it's the attachment to them. And some people live their lives swimming in a sea of not only desires, but attachments to desire. One of the things you can see, unlike a meditation retreat is not only the frequency of desire, but how strongly they drive our concerns our preoccupations, our mind our interests. So much so that some people see that they're constantly trying to control and manipulate and fix what's going on a video being addressed and allowing something to be as it is, for some people is a foreign idea. Because there's always a way of improving it, there's always something better, the grass is always greener somewhere else. There's always something. And so the idea of, of letting go, at least temporarily, of the mind's tendencies to always be in control of the situation. To always want things to be a certain way or not to be in suffering the way is one of the doors of liberation. If you step, if you step through that door, you will experience a mind at peace. You then could take your desires back up again, if they're useful. But it's very different to pick up your desires. When your mind is at peace. Then having desires in your mind is not at peace, the mindset piece, you're much less you don't really need to hold on to your desires to cling to them because you and your peace not dependent on your desires. If you're unhappy, then you might think that your peace and well being is going to come from having your desires fulfilled. But if you realize a peace which is not dependent on your desires, then maybe not, you know, that's also kind of likely to grasp on again.

So it said then the door of the wish list is experienced. Well, first I'll tell you, by people or by situations where tranquility is quite strong. In seeing impermanence, concentration has to be strong ability to clearly see what's here. For seeing the door, the wish lists there has the mind has to be very tranquil. So it's not agitated by desires, it has to be settled enough. But it's not just simply being tranquil that helps us see it. But it's an insight into suffering. And so the way to through the door of the wish list is to have a penetrating insight into the aspect of our experience which is unsatisfactory, which is unsatisfying. Or just realize how much suffering there is. So if I'm angry with someone, and I want to get my way in the world, if I turn my attention back to myself, and feel the cost of that anger, how it hurts me then Perhaps I can realize it's not worth holding on to my desire for revenge. If I'm if I'm burning up in hate inside, I said, I'm doing my enemies, my enemy a favor. Even better, they say, if I'm burning with hate inside, I'm harming myself in a way that my enemy could never do by him or herself. Because your enemy can't really get into your heart. Only you can get in there. And so by burning up in anger, you know, so if you really see that, Oh, I'm suffering, then it can be a call, I think maybe my desire for revenge. Maybe I can soften let go of, but also other desires, you know, the desire for it can be very quite subtle. If you're very sensitive, you might see that you had you having a meal. It was a nice meal. You're basically feel content. But there's a desire for more pleasure. So you'd like to go have seconds. Now it could be innocent of seconds, maybe you have a big belly. There's space in there. And maybe you can even do it without getting indigestion. So maybe it's fine. However, if you're very, very sensitive, you'll see that the desire for pleasure of eating more food, when you're already content, that desire has in it in it, it's kind of in a structure, a quality of suffering, or dissatisfaction or unease. And if you're sensitive to sensitive enough to feel that, this ease in that desire, then your mind will be much more willing to let go have that desire. And so there's something But seeing how things are unpleasant things

in and of themselves, but some of the unpleasant, the unsatisfactory, the dis ease full aspect of experience can be very beneficial sometimes in helping the mind back up, back off and leave things alone. And if you do that really well, you have to stick around all the time this way. But if you have some experiences where you can see this really well, it can help them out, put to rest. The minds tendency to live on desire, unwanted things, controlling things, fixing things. And when that goes to put to put the rest thoroughly enough, will experience the same piece as as what happened if you put meaning making to rest completely the profound experience of peace even if you don't do it thoroughly if you do stupid little bit, you get a little bit of peace. Which is good. So then the third door is a door of emptiness. And door the emptiness arises when a person has a very clear insight into what's called Buddhism itself. It seems that the one of the core functionings, of core activities of the human mind is to construct a self identity, a sense of self. It's a reasonable thing and a helpful thing to do.

Because we get it, we know that it's part one of that one of those ways human beings have managed to survive and thrive on this planet, is by separating from each other and coming clear since I'm here and you're there, and we're going to cooperate or fight or do something, but that both fighting and cooperating depends on a sense that I'm here and you're there. If we were confused about that, then if I had an itch, maybe I might be waiting for you to scratch me. You know, but there's certain things we could only take care of and do for ourselves. So the peeing thing, for example, you know, you can't be sitting here, I think I need to go to the bathroom, but maybe I can ask the person next to me to go for me. You know, you know, you, you want to have a clear sense of self, and who you know who is in who's responsible for this thing, in order to kind of find your way. But it's very interesting that the researchers have found that if it's possible, if you look at your hand, there's a apparently a function of the certain part of the brain that can see this is my hand. But if that part of the brain is damaged, a person can look at their own hand and not see it as their hand and it's a little bit of problem right? But What it means is that the hope you believe me is your hand is not inherently your hand until your mind has constructed the idea, this is my hand. And it's a useful concept. But it's still an activity that the mind does. And in many, many ways, the mind is constantly orienting itself to the world and to ourselves around self, what we call in Buddhism selfing. Sometimes it's useful, and for modern people like us, I suspect that something like 98% of the selfing activity that we do is probably not beneficial. Probably not helpful. It probably doesn't help us. All that we do. A lot of it is comparative thinking large People compare themselves to other people, but favorably or unfavorably, I'm better, I'm worse. I am a good person and a bad person does all these kinds of ways we build whole universes of self in a way that can cause tremendous amount of pain for ourselves and for others. A lot of human suffering arises out of this selfing thing. So it's really useful to be able to put it to rest sometimes to have a vacation. And, and so to really see in some deep way that certain things are not really my true self. That really myself so for example, I now know that my who I really am is not my zits. I didn't know that when I was 14. So I've let go of that then I have a certain level of peace around zits. So there's probably A variety of identities that you've had in your life that you no longer hold on to. And you're now at peace in relationship to those. Perhaps some of you was it's as well I remember when I was also when I was in my teens hair was a really important thing and I spent a lot of time focusing on my hair and now he's spent a lot of time in class pulling on it because back then we will hit these you know, and my hair wasn't long enough so I thought if I pulled it maybe it'll grow faster. And then at some point, my hair was long enough, there was a whole you know, issue around split ends. And I assign meaning to having split ends and concerned that and the suffering of having split ends. And so I hate the whole hair thing. And, but I don't care so much about it. I've had my I've had a shaved head. had long hair, I've had this and that. Now I have gray hair, which apparently is occupational requirement. That's good. And so the whole hair thing, right? I don't care anymore about here. So I have a certain level of peace around the sense of identity and selfing that goes on around here, which I didn't when I was younger. So I can

imagine all of you have stories, wonderful war stories to be told, of things that ideas of self that you have, have now let go of and are at peace around.

But there's probably still areas of selfing that you do. And so there's still learning to be done. And probably in 10 years, you'll let go of some things that you cherish to think is so important now. 10 years from now you think, what was I thinking? So, to start seeing all my hair is not myself. Mike, I have friend who had a very dramatic wake up realization experience when he was sitting on retreat and the teacher said you are not your face. And that somehow shifted something kind of short circuited something. Maybe because he was had a lot of ideas around to sell for saw the world through having a you know, my special face or whatever. And something like go for him in a very, very deep way. So to see that our thoughts are not our self, our emotions are not a self, our wishes in ourself. All the meanings we make are not self. Our body is not self. Our house is not ourself. Our clothes are noticeable self. The world does not herself to To release the mind from the assigning of selfhood unexperienced is one of the ways to help the mind experience a very deep level of peace. It doesn't mean that you come out of that peace or from that peace that you don't realize that you're the one who has to go to the bathroom. Or you know, it's you know, that is your shoes. You know, you know how it we hope we all would like you if you left in the shoes you came with. It just saves a lot of chaos. So it's good to have that identity, my shoes, but you hold it lightly. If someone does leave with your shoes, which has happened here, happen to happen to me, that's okay. I don't have a lot of self doubt. You know, my sense of self is not built on my shoes. So it is so it's a little bit annoying not annoying, but it's a little bit you know, it makes my life a little more complicated not to have shoes to go home in for to have somebody else's shoes. But you know, that's okay.

So to put to be able to let go of put to rest didn't commit the tendency the mind to make a self to assign yourself to hold on to a sense of self is another doorway into letting the mind discover a deep level of peace on long retreats, silent retreats, the opportunity there at times some people Occasionally, is to be able to see how amazingly subtle and deep the self making activity is in the mind. In fact, it's so subtle aside, it's hard to see in regular kind of street consciousness, everyday kind of consciousness, it's actually very hard to see. You can see certain things you can like, you know, self thing going on. But how deep it is almost subconscious, it is in the mind and the clinging to it, it's really hard to see unless the mind is very still very concentrated, and very happy. And in order to in usually the easiest way, or the easiest way, to let go of some of the deepest attachments to self that happens in deep meditation happens in the context of The mind having a very, very deep sense of well being. So it's not so much a matter of being diminished, but letting go of self attachment. But it just, it just so obvious. There's such a profound sense of well being, why would you want to hold on to anymore? Why would you want to add that extra amount of effort and work to your life, when there's already such peace and well being? That's here.

So, part of this practice of insight meditation is to develop the kind of clear, stable, still mind that is able to see deeply into The nature of what the inner experiences like with the inner operating system is like. And part of that operating system that we have. One of them is the operating system of assigning meaning. One is the operating system of wishing for things. And one is the operating system of creating a self around things. And to be able to see in some very clear way how this operates, can give a person the opportunity to have a new relationship to those three activities, the three operating system and perhaps to let go of it. And realizing that the operating system is software, it's not the hardware and then be able to kind of, maybe reboot with better software Because the software you, you were, that you came out of the factory with. Turns out not to have been the most ideal software. If what you want to do is to live a life that's deeply peaceful and deeply compassionate.

If you want to have deep peace and deep compassion, being caught in meaning, being caught in desires and being caught in self or an obstacle, stand in the way of those two beautiful qualities. So I hope that you will step through those three doors, one, at least one of those doors. You don't have to do all three they say, one's good enough. And maybe some of you are the signless kind of person. Some of you are the wish list kind of person and some You are the emptiness kind of person. And so let me know which door you stepped through.

Thank you