

2010-11-08 Being A Good Student

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

So Good evening, everyone, and welcome to IMC. And I think last week we didn't we do break up into discussion groups. Well, I thought of doing that again. It's kind of unusual to do it, but but I think it's important. And it's a topic that's been on my mind today. And this is a topic which is, should be very important to all of you who come to someplace like this. And it's a topic that maybe I shouldn't sit up here and expound on the and that is what does it take to be a good student so we have a distinction in our tradition. In Buddhism in general, there's a distinction between teachers and their students, teachers and students, teachers and practitioners. And sometimes that distinction is very strong, tremendous hierarchy difference between the teacher, the guru, and student. And sometimes it's not much difference is made, and so almost like, you know, they're kind of not much of a hierarchy at all. And our tradition, that Theravada tradition, especially when it comes to the west here, we tend more towards the end of the spectrum where we're more were called good spiritual friends. That's the kind of teachers we are so that more kind of in the you know, less hierarchy kind of role. And, and so we're not supposed to sit high up on pedestals whenever and I really didn't want Sit up on this platform. And I used to sit on the foot used to sit, they used to sit in the floor. And I thought that was the right place to be. And some of you, maybe some of you are here now, today, many years ago, because you were there probably, is insisted that I had to get up so people can see me. And so I knew so what we ended up with this platform, against my, against, against my wit whatever wisdom I have, because because this point that we're kind of more or less hierarchy and in our tradition, but still that distinction exists. And, and sometimes the teacher is a student, sometimes the student is the teacher. It's a fluid role. It goes back and forth in various ways. And, but one thing we all share myself included is that at times, we're all Students in this tradition, we study we learn from other teachers or learn from the Buddha we learn from texts. And if a teacher like myself just sits up here and expounds for 45 minutes or for three hours, however long there's a kind of passivity on the part of the recipient. And maybe some of you are very actively engaged in material, but still it's kind of being being given to you. And I think it's really important to engage as a student as a practitioner and not to be a passive recipients with incense be the producer of the teachings in yourself, it has to be that way to really come come alive for you. And so very interesting topic, I think are the qualities of being a good student. And, and one of the reasons I like this topic is it one of the qualities of a good student is taking responsibility for what happened Not just again, not just leaving it in the hands of the teacher, your teacher is the one who's supposed to somehow zap you. And I'll just sit here long enough and eventually I get that zap or whatever. And the responsibility that is the teacher responsibility lies with a student. And one of the very, very interesting ways of looking at this is the assumption is same with people who come to Buddhism, like you're here for whatever reason you're here. You're here to practice. And or perhaps learn about a practice, learn about teaching in a practice that leads to some kind of personal transformation that's very meaningful and significant. And if that's the agenda, then as you hear teachings, on one hand, you could

receive those teachings or hear those teachings through the filter have what you like and don't like, through your preferences, what sound seems like you know, the good or not good or something like that what's true or false or something that's 111 to kind of whole approach. Another approach is to remember that you're here to practice, you're here to understand and be changed. You're here not just to understand something abstract, you're here to understand what's helpful for you and your life. So you take what's being taught, and you transform it, or you apply it or you interpret it or you work it to see how is it this is useful for me. So what that means is that a, you know, a teacher could say something really outrageous. or a teacher could say something really stupid. Or even a teacher consistently. That's, you know, I know some some level seems like a wrong thing to say. And you could be upset or see that, you know, that's terrible. How could the person do that? Or Do back and forth and say, Well, this That can't be true. And I have the truth. Let me tell you, that's certainly valid. I mean, it's okay to do that. But I don't know if it helps you much to do that. Another approach is to turn it around and say, well, that's kind of an odd thing for the person to say, or mostly I disagree with that. But let me study this, what the person said, and how, how or when, and what context might this be useful for me? In what way could this be useful? And, and so that question, how in what way, can I make this useful? In saying how can I make this useful, doesn't mean that you agree with a teacher, it means you are taking and appropriating a sensor or, or finding how to you make this into make you make yourself a better person through these teachings. So what that means, of course, is I don't have to take much responsibility. I mean, and And you know, I say what I say and do the best I can. And the responsibility maybe mostly lies with you. What would you do with it? So that was a long winded introduction to this topic, what are the qualities of a good student? All of you have been students some point in your life, but especially in terms of spiritual discipline, Buddhist practice. What does it take to be a good student? And that shouldn't that be an interesting topic for you? If you're not interested in that topic at all, then no Well, it's okay. But if you're not at all interest in this topic, then maybe I'm better things to do than be here tonight. You guys game for this. Not game

Not at all.

grades for you.

That's more of what I had in mind rather than this no student of algebra or something is a student of spirit a spiritual practice. And so what I had in mind was to do this in two steps. And the first step was for you guys to form little groups of three people. And then discuss it among yourselves for a while. And then and then I saw I'll ring a bell, and then I'll offer you a little different angle on a topic, and then you discuss it some more, maybe stay in the same group, and maybe I'll I'll see how it what it feels like maybe change the configuration a little bit. And then once we once you've had that discussion, I'd like us to come back into, you know, like we are here, and then see if we could come up with a list of good qualities of the students, what it takes to be a good student. And what might be very interesting to see here the range of different things that people have come up with, they might be quite a range of different people have different different perspectives on this topic. So now if this is something you if you came here to because whatever reason, you have a very good reason something important happened in your life, and you came here this was supposed to be a refuge shouldn't be quiet, did not interact with people he came to meditate. If that's the case, it's okay not to participate. I mean, you can go home if you'd like. But you could also stay and just be quiet. Keep meditating and be quiet or go sit in the outer Hall which may be quieter, and then be part of the rest of it and we kind of report back and Don't feel obligated to, to participate if it just doesn't feel right for you. Okay, so groups of three and then once you have a little discussion and then a few minutes, I'll ring a bell and we'll change it

okay so So, there is a kind of a Buddhist cultural understanding that one way to be a good student is to listen to the bell.

So,

so we're what I'd like to do you do now is to take take your group that you're in and join another group. And why don't you do that in silence, do it quietly and so then after you've joined a group that just then I will give you the topic that that's slightly changes this little bit

Okay, so now.

So the first topic was, what are the qualities of good, good student? What does it take to be a good student? And this this one's first it could could have kind of some of the same answers, but it's a little different angle on it. That's maybe a little unusual think this way. But the question is, what are the responsibilities of a student? What are the responsibilities that come with being a student? So see what you do with that. Thank you for participating in that.

And

soon, perhaps it would be nice now to hear from some of you Maybe some brief statements about what? Sure you talked about a lot of different things. But maybe some brief statements of something that you learned or something that surprised you as a quality of a good student. So let's see if we can take that take it from that angle and see whether that goes anywhere as opposed to listening everything. So Sophia in the back. There's another mic here. Maybe we can

What surprised me was that I fell into the trap that he said about good. And so in some of us some of the people here picked it up, that it's not about what's good or what's bad. It's about you know, what, what's working what's what's a skillful way To practice and what's not skillful,

great, thank you. Someone else

would you say something Cheryl

should get off the platform.

See, one way of being a teacher is to call on people. And if that's too high standard, you know what surprised you or what was new? I would just say, here are some of the different things came up for you of qualities of a good student. No, Yes, please. You have to do the work. You have to work you have to have it. You have to have a you have to have a practice.

Well,

I'm not I

don't regularly come here on a different

brand, I guess you'd say.

But I have gone in and out of, you know, being fairly, you know, involved in a regular practice and then periods when I'm not. And clearly when you're doing a regular practice, you get a lot more out of it and your life definitely goes better. Great, thank you. When you get away from the practice your life basically can go to hell. So,

but seriously, I think that's a big part of it.

It's just to do the work. Yes. Do it. Yes.

You guys. Yes. Their industry ready to move it and pass it over to the front. And then Jeff is gonna say something. Yeah. There's your pack pass, you can pass your mic forward, good woman there.

Someone brought up the point that to be a good student is to be open. Whether you like what you're hearing or don't like, but not so much to judge it, but just to

take it in,

reflect on it and yeah,

to and then be able to accept it as another's point of view or another way of looking at things.

Great, thank you. The one thing that I thought about was kind of along that lines is, is taking it in, but also not blindly following anything that comes in and holding the teacher accountable and we certainly know of stories in the broader community of, of things that have gone up gone astray, and I think we have enough questioning people here, that wouldn't happen, but I think that's another important part of a healthy community. So on one hand, students should be open to what's open to the practice to a teaching something the other hand they should also be questioning it and be discerning about it.

up to her. Sally,

our group talked a bit about

bringing it into our experience. So taking whatever the teachings and bringing into our personal experience and bringing it into our daily life.

Understanding it that way, or saying it's not quite

fitting, so applying them into our lives and really looking at see how they apply as opposed to keeping them abstract or something. Right. Great. Wonderful. We're passing it right back behind you there. Sophie?

Yes. I think we mentioned the word critical thinking but not too critical.

discerning,

and I know for myself, you know, as a student, it helps me to, not to have one teacher, but to have many, because I see it in different ways. I get slightly different perspectives. When I'm using it, some

things work better. Some things don't. I honor them all. But some things work better. Thank you. So I think it's good to have that different experience while you're learning And while you're practicing on oil.

So like so like, so. So your Sophie, Sophie, sorry. I forgot,

I think

to really help half the teaching to be integrated into your own self, to practice it, and ultimately, to have the

the passion and the willingness to many fasted so that it could be done daily as a daily practice.

Thank you for the other mic. Why don't you

one of the things we talked about is

Listening and incorporating, incorporating what is taught in, in our practice and in our lives. But to question it in terms of is this helpful? Is does it add to my happiness to my sense of peace and to really connect with that as much as possible, moment to moment.

So it was so amazing, you know, certainly a very important approach. You know, is it helpful, but another question might be, how is it helpful? Yes, it goes sometimes. You know, even if I said that the most important practice that you should be doing is collecting matchsticks. You know that what But maybe there's a way that you can make that interesting make that useful. Maybe, you know, he said that so I guess I'm supposed to, I guess I'm supposed to learn patience, or something? Or maybe I'm, you know, I don't know what but that so so. So it's one question is is it? Is it useful? The other question is How is it useful? And some people are really good at the first one. And sometimes a way of stretching is to ask it the other way, you know, how is it useful? And and, and it might only be useful, you know, once in a great while, but maybe occasionally it is. Yeah. Do you mean

being able to

persevere through your resistance,

persevering through resistance, looking at resistance, being honest about the resistance, working with it, thank you.

For me, and I got really kind of alarmed that I didn't have any thoughts about what

And then I realized it's because

I didn't have the mic, you know.

That's why I wasn't hearing anything that really, I know, I'm happy with the student I am when I'm really not thinking, and I'm just coming from my heart. And I just sort of in that flow, beautiful. So I think for me, practicing being a student is learning how to

read my thoughts great or beautiful or just have them not run me. Beautiful.

Thank you. Yes. Where's the mic? Now? Someone you want to say something? Did you want to say

I mean, I don't know if this is a responsibility of a good student. It just seems like it's important we touched on it is being able to work with resistances hard times challenges, and be with That. And also when you are things don't seem to be going well so to speak, that one is not judgmental, self judgmental and kind of gentle, certain amount of gentleness with oneself, especially through these difficult times. Right. kind of see it through in that way.

Thank you here in the front.

I think for me, I think being a good seat is I guess, being humble or having humility. Because I think that it's really difficult to learn things if you already know everything.

Beautiful,

very nice. Thank you. See, I can move it straight here to the back here or here. So this one's going there.

I'll paraphrase what someone else expressed but allowing seeds to be planted and to reside, even if you don't understand them at the time. Because at some point in the future, you may relate to it.

It's something you don't understand something, don't just kind of brush it off, but let it kind of stay close by or be planted so that it might sprout later for you.

You know, it's one thing if you're taking algebra that is enough just to do the problem set and, and then answer the questions on the final exam, then you're an adequate student, I guess, but maybe that doesn't even work in algebra. But in something like

inside meditation, that's

that effects there. Everything you do in your whole life and his or your spiritual direction, then seems to be that at some point, you need to think, what would I do if I were the teacher? How would I? How would I approach this if I were going to teach it to other people. And until you do that you're kind of looking up the bottom of the boat and saying how the boat floats, but I'm just looking at the bottom, I think you kind of need to get in the boat and see if you can make it go, probably probably you can the first time you try. Probably it won't be that satisfying, but it will. It'll, I think until you're ready to, to at least take on your imagination, the role of the teacher, which is like what the Buddha did eventually, then you don't, you're not really a serious student. You have to be willing to take that risk in order to become a complete student. So we talked about other things, but that was that was the thing that meant that that occurred to me the most strongly. Great, thank you.

So coming to the end of the third time together, and just anything anything anybody would like to say or asked to kind of feel complete this evening and something maybe it could be that more these qualities or something differently this this this there's something up or raise some other issues or, or do something that you want to feel anybody wants to feel like want to say

something.

I think in order to be a good student, you need to have a good teacher.

Seriously, I've had really poor teachers in the past in other areas and It really impedes your ability, your self confidence, a variety of things that

is unhelpful. So,

I think so, I think I think there's some truth to that. But also the worst teacher, the better student, you have to be

straight back there.

I think also trust is important

in learning how to trust yourself, your teacher, the teachings, there is so much especially when it comes to ways of life and you know, I mean, there's only one mathematical solutions or when it comes to science, it's solid, but when you Scott when it comes to ways of life in your heart, there so I think trusting is important. And, I mean, I just came up for me and, and then maybe you can also be fun too. I mean, it could be painful, but it could be fun too. So eautiful

I love I love both those answers. I think that the trust is really at the heart of this kind of, you know, without trust that can't be really discussed spiritual learning. And it's kind of the kernel of the currency is the right word, but conduit the boat to the universe is the vehicle for it all to happen. So trust, and then it's good to have fun, to be playful and have curiosity and interest and you know, it's not supposed to be a grim thing. It can be sometimes, but, you know, hopefully it doesn't stay grim for too long.

Okay.

So, thank you very much. And I hope that this given you something to reflect on and think about, and I would encourage you to one way to be a good student. is when you come to like to hear and hear a teaching topic is just not yours to leave and say, Well, that was it that was that. But to take it with you for a while for a few days, for the week, and, and kind of reflect on and keep thinking about it, keep coming back to it, maybe pick it up with some friends and say, you know, I heard this. We did a strange thing at IMC. This week, teacher asked us the question. And the question was, what does it take to be a good student? And what do you think the What do you think and so it kind of explore it with your friends and different people and look at different angles. So take it with you and keep living with 80 of these topics. So it's not just a one time thing. So thank you. Next week, I won't be here. I'm on retreat teaching retreat next week. And next week. Westminster is going to come and give a talk. And Wes is a wonderful teacher and personality and Yum yum be in good hands. So thank you all.