

# 2010-11-22 Reflections On Loss

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, good evening everyone. And what should we discuss?

What's on your mind that you'd like to ask about or explore? Discuss? grief. It says the person is laying down.

Why do you Why do you ask?

Maybe it's more loss or

change

during the holiday season.

As we grow older and our kids grow older

and our families

this whole tradition changes and

So with the holidays, I guess there is kind of a regularity of the holidays coming every year and some things stay the same the holidays, you know, its principles stay the same, you know, whenever they are. And sometimes families gather together and there's change that happens. I know that a friend of mine has a custom of every family gathering once a year, it takes a photograph of the whole family. And then they put it on the wall of the hallway. And it's, you know, it's quite moving after 50 years or so she's she's a nurse, yes, after 50 years, to see all the changes. You know, kids, grandchildren, people who pass away people don't come anymore. So all these changes. So there might be all kinds of reasons why you're lying down, but I wonder how many people all seriousness, what's the difference? You asked about grief and this loss and how to work with it? What's the difference between addressing something like loss, sitting upright versus lying down? Both, literally, but also some kind of metaphorically? What's the difference between during the meeting with those two ways? anybody like to offer some? Yes.

Last week, someone told me a story about

being a duck. In regards to facing a storm, which we could say that grief is like a storm or changes like a storm and the ducks when faced with chaos face into it and lean into it, so that they're actually sitting up not reclining, and it passes over them over their heads and over their backs.

So when we have storms with when there's a way of leaning into it, facing it, which might work for us to some people have the tendency or running away. So I'm gonna ask you all a question. And it's kind of like a matter of some meditation. It's like a meditative question, but it's a kind of a reflective question that is very interesting to explore in a little bit more meditative way. And, and so if your game for this, what it means to containers is closing your eyes. And we'll sit just quietly for a couple of moments. And then I'm going to ask you a question. And after a while, ask you a second question and then see what bubbles up And perhaps not thinking about the answer in the usual way. But seeing you know what kind of maybe pops up from deep in yourself, you've been your belly or something as a response to the question. So, breathing, few times settling in again, relaxing.

And so everyone faces loss. Sometimes we face loss with wisdom. And sometimes we face it with no wisdom whatsoever that seems present and we're no wizard Time is present. When no wisdom is present for you, and you face really big loss, what is your kind of gut reaction to it?

When you're not wise in any way, have access to your own wisdom, good sense. What's the instinctual response that you have to great loss.

So then taking maybe a couple of deep breaths and letting that reflection go

and then when your encounter loss, large loss in your life And you have access to wisdom. What is the most likely response you have then to loss?

Okay, so then you can open your eyes. So Would anybody like to share, some make some comments about the difference between those two ways of encountering loss

and I did have a big loss and I didn't have any wisdom and I just forced I was so angry and I, I really contracted. And I caused myself a lot of suffering. And over the years I've, by following this path and getting wiser, I'm kind of opening to a more and getting a becoming my all I how I can explain it as my heart is getting bigger to hold the grief and so it's it's a it's a softer and so I just keep being getting bigger container inside more spacious

so in a sense the loss hasn't changed but what's changed is your heart has gotten bigger over the years who's going to hold it better? Yes and what helps to make your heart bigger

and just

a whole lot of the following the path

opening to gratitude, a lot of gratitude for what I have

compassion for myself. And you know, it's an ongoing thing.

Yes.

And just

learning with meditation, it's kind of the developing more spaciousness is all I could say it instead of that tight that closed heart that was

caused me a lot of pain.

Right. Thank you very much for someone else.

I had a great loss.

My son at age 30 past

the initial thought was pain and suffering and what could I have done different? How could I have helped

Self blame

lots of

lots of tears.

And with the passing of time and whatnot as he comes up, he would have been 60 this coming December 1, I've been enlightened. But the God of my understanding, of course I have through the years the, the gift I had of having him 30 years, he had been a beach mum in Hawaii for 10. And I have the gift of remembering all the good things that my saving my pennies to go visit him and have him come up and take a bath in the hotel. And the real gifts of having had what I had, and then some flashbacks of what might have happened when I might have been different but with the God of my understanding, the Gracious I was like God on that I know. Great.

Beautiful. Thank you very much. Jim is passing the viewers on.

I have sort of a pregnant example. I was. What came up for me was a loss that I had when I was five years old. And it was about I used to share a room with my brother who was a year older, and we had twin beds from the time I was born. And my baby brother grew out of his crib, and it my parents decided I needed my own room. Which was like, why aren't I special? So all kinds of work went in to put making my own room all pink. I mean, it was like a little girl's dream. And I got you know, my first night in there was just absolute terror, terror, because I look around the room and I would see like hands and I'd have to go to the bathroom. And I would look down and see King Kong and the in the living room. And all I all I wanted was to go back and sleep with my older brother. So for a long time, I don't know how long I would go in at night and I would crawl into bed beside him. And I would actually put my teeth on his pajamas. So I would know if somebody was taking him. In other words, King Kong would get him first which was okay. With me, at least I, at least I would know. But as an end, I just felt this sense of a huge confusion and, and pain, that something that I had wanted so bad and felt so special about caused me. It just it was excruciating. And then when I looked back on it as an adult, I realized that it was just one of those transitions that we make all through our lives. And it means letting go of something in the past if you're going to grow. And I think what made me so sad at that time was I realized, there's no going back. There's no going back. This is what growth is about.

Beautiful, thank you. Maybe that's relevant For your question today to someone else, what's the difference between responding with without wisdom and responding with wisdom might just might be interesting to have a have a range of people speak, you don't have to tell a lot of story around it, but just what is the difference? Because there's a lot of different ways that people respond. might be interesting to hear the range.

And, yeah, okay. And the first word that popped into my mind was appreciation. Kind of like which we're sharing, you know, the reflection of, we have this great loss, and at the same time, it's really added to our life experience. I mean, that relationship, whatever that loss is, without it, we are who we are on some level. No, they are that is it's co created who we are. So I think there's a tremendous for me appreciation and so when you have wisdom baby you're likely to kind of appreciate appreciation kind of makes it makes it easier to loss and when the wisdom is not there, how do you tend to react? Um

I think anger probably you know, some some

sort of the poor me kind of self pity other conditions start to sort of percolate up right away, you know, why? Why me, you know, that those kind of conditions, I think, thank you. Please came up for me was, I sort of envisioned a loss of my life and, and the feeling that I felt overwhelmingly was rejected. have the experience that this cannot be and I need to do something about this and it sort of flooded my mind and when when I added the wisdom and sort of tuned into my breath, and what I found was the big change was the acceptance, I sort of saw it as, you know, like when I meditate and something comes up for me, I'm practicing noticing it and just saying, hey, there's there's a thought, you know, there's there's a feeling right there. And then coming back to the breath, and that's kind of what I did when I added the wisdom was I, I sort of said, oh, there's there's a loss right there and, and kind of came back to where we were beautiful. So when when there's wisdom there you you can clearly identify that there is loss of feelings that are there, the thoughts that are there, and you can come back to yourself more rather than losing yourself and trying to fix it or be angry, rejected, as you said. Great. Thank you.

What else?

What came up for me with

not looking at something with wisdom was blaming and

feeling

that things weren't fair. And I didn't deserve this what this person was doing, and I was suffering. And with the wisdom, I've started to think more about what the motivation of that person might be for what they're doing and, and that they may be suffering. And just trying to see things more from their perspective.

So seeing things more from their perspective, as opposed to maybe only seeing it from your perspective and how it impacts you were beautiful, it's important to me pass it over here.

I think that in the past When I've felt grief, I've just contracted into myself. And I think the more I practice, the more I've opened my heart and realize that when the most healing thing when I'm grieving, or maybe after I've done some grieving is to then turn around and take that compassion and turn around and give it to someone else. And so I always try to remember that, you know, when you feeling

really bad, I think I'm gonna go find someone who feels even worse. And I'm gonna feel so much better and they're gonna feel so much better and it's just a win win situation. Thank you.

straight back.

So I agree with a lot of things that have been said here tonight. But one

one feeling that comes over me when I am I, experiencing grief or anything that's very upsetting is a very severe contraction. And it's almost like a shuttering, and

an impulse to go and do something,

to avoid to change. And when there is more wisdom, there is a sense of, of having the space to just look at it, to observe it, to not get pulled by pulled by the river of emotion and

too

Just to understand and let it be, to know that that nothing needs to be changed, that that this is a process and that there is actually great beauty in that loss. Because out of change, there is an opportunity for, for, for change for beauty for, you know, something new to grow something for new growth, almost like, you know, on the winners there's spring.

So when so instead of contracting, it staying present thing, mindful, open to the experience. And when you're open then perhaps you can work, work work through you in a way that's beneficial. There's something there's some benefit there too.

Well, this, this topic kind of hits home with me. A year ago almost to this day, my nephew died, young guy with a great wife and a seven year old daughter. And it was a freak thing. He had had surgery some weeks before, and he was out playing with his kid. And he ended up with a blood clot that went to his long and then into his brain and he died. And I can remember, without wisdom, I keep asking myself why, over and over again. Why? And, you know, I finally came to the realization, there is no reason. It's just what it is. And you can't you can't. You can't make it anything more than that.

Great, thank you. And if I May I ask you, unless it's still raw is what was the emotion that was fueling the question Why?

I think some of it was anger.

I, because I wanted to reason. I wanted to know, How could this happen to somebody who's a good person and is healthy?

And

it made no sense to me. And so the few that means it's reasonable to have that question. It's understandable. And the fuel which gave it power to that question was the anger.

Yeah, I think I was angry about it.

Yeah. Make sense? Okay. Thank you.

So, you know, what we're talking about today is Laser, the heart of what Buddhism was designed to address. And you have, you know, next to me here, the Buddha, sitting in ideal way upright, I like the idea of upright, facing our life being upright. And fuming, he sits upright this way, he's not cowering. There's kind of an ability to it. But he's also not like the ducks leaning into it. But he's also aligned and balanced. And in this kind of posture, the idea is to be present for your life, all of your life. And that kind of he's also very grounded. He's sitting on the ground, grounded, stable, upright. And there's something remarkable that happens when we meet our life, in this posture, not to reject anything not to turn away from anything or deny anything, but to let whatever is going on or loss or grief. For anger, whatever kind of be processed, be worked through us to have it feel open to it. So we don't resist it or tighten up against anything, but we also don't give into it. And that's a remarkable thing that happens with that kind of balance, uprightness. So Buddhism was designed and the heart was to address these kinds of issues, you know, to talk about it today to mention some of these great losses some of you have had is to and to learn how to work with it and find a way through it is really what you know, this is not we're not just talking about stress reduction here. And, and then he sits with a smile and a half smile. Buddhism is meant to address these issues, and you work through it and you come to the smile, or something like it. So I would actually like to hear a few more people if it's not to get into too much

I was just thinking about the loss of a friend that happened to me about 12 years ago. And what you said right now really resonates with me because that's how I came to be interested in Buddhism. I didn't have enough wisdom to deal with that. And I was very much in in complete turmoil and very much focused on my pain. And I was trying to find the answer for me. I usually try to find the way to the inexperience of other people. So my first question was, yes, I mean, it's obvious that other people were in that situation and what did they do? And eventually I'm taking that way. I'm did find some wisdom. And for me it was not being focused on myself. I just realized that I'm absolutely not important that there is a lot of pain happening to everybody everywhere every minute. When I take a breath, somebody dies a horrible illness somewhere. So why should I be so focused on my pain? Why not to focus instead of on pain of other people other living being and see maybe I can do something about that. And it definitely helps dealing with losses. I also had the losses last summer, and it was very different experience for me.

Beautiful, thank you. So there's there's a certain way of focusing too much on oneself that it's like we're having a heavy, heavy weight around their neck carries us down. And it's not supposed to this Ignore yourself, but not be weighed down by our self focus, which can be so much more of the ways not to be weighed down is to, is to turn it outward and live a life that tried to benefit others. do too much of that though, and no focus on yourself at all, that can be a problem too. And the idea is to have the right balance of respect for yourself. And so again, the statue of the Buddha is, you know, kind of balanced, you know, so it says that his own he meditates this way, his eyes are actually half open, not closed, like we do sit and meditate. And the idea is that when you're when the eyes are half open, open, you're actually connected to the world still, when you close your eyes, you're kind of like, you know, shutting out the world in a certain way. And so they symbolically the idea that you both focused inwardly and outwardly equally and so you're not stuck in either either domain.

Anybody else? Yes.

As far as grief in the present

grief for me doesn't always mean the end of life. I'm currently living with my husband who very painful to watch people that we love. Live in great fear, and live in great doubt and insecurity and

contracting, so to speak and not.

Maybe not really knowing what to do about it or knowing what to do about it and not doing not doing the self care, not doing the meditation, doing the kinds of things that would be helpful. So, to me, there's a lot of grief and in watching that

watching that loss is a loss. For you, for him personally many people that perhaps and you're living it, you're living it every day it's different than some ways is different than when there's like a death where it's right it's you know, it's something so there's something usually

finality and you know, and it's just day after day, and you know, there's not much you know, I can try to impart my wisdom, you know, as much as I can or give suggestions or, or whatnot, but it's, it's just very painful. So

what wisdom do you have for yourself?

What I need to do is just allow

that person to

know he's got his own God and for myself,

come to meditation.

You know, kind of go inward and look at you know what I'm what am I doing to

feel empowered? And then to, you know, bring that to other people as well. He said, I just can't, can't change people.

Beautiful. So he has his own God in Buddhist a minute. Now, that does not mean to say I'm saying the same thing, but in Buddhism, he would say, person has their own karma, right? Work through half stories take responsibility for themselves. Right? And you could try to help them and support them. But ultimately they take responsibility. And then learning Take care of yourself, you're taking responsibility for yourself.

Absolutely. And not go down with the burning ship.

The Thank you.

So

So it's interesting to reflect in times of any kind of crisis, not just loss, to be if you can be aware of what is your gut reaction to the crisis to the challenge to difficulty Because there are times when you're not going to have access to all your wisdom. Maybe you're really tired, you know, you've, you know, you're exhausted and so you don't, you know, or some reason you're stressed out or who knows what reason.

And if you're really familiar with this, so some people, you know, everybody, I think everybody has, like, you know, their specialty, or their predisposition in certain direction. Some people, when they're challenged, go into the fight mode. They, they, they attack, they get angry, and sometimes they get angry, they attack what's out there. Sometimes they attack what's in here, they get angry with themselves and blame themselves. Some people are more of the flight type, rather than turning and facing the problem or attacking or, you know, something lashing out. They tendencies to pull back, run away, close down, put their head in, you know, it'd be like an ostrich put their head in the sand. You know, they really do that upsurges But you know anyway and, you know, just try to pretend it's not going on. Some people like a bit like introverts become very much more pulled in and trying to sort through it kind of much more on their own. People who are more extroverted, tend to go out and find help and want to be connected involved in with other people. And so what is your way and what is you know, as because if you can recognize if you have a predisposition, then you're more likely to notice it, if it starts happening. And you might be study a little bit and, and reflect and learn. So you prepare it ahead of time. So this is I'm often this way, I tend to select for myself, I tend to pull in to myself, I tend to pull inwards and so when I in that kind of place, you know, I had to try to find some way too, to open up or reach out. Or I've told some of my friends to my wife, for example, if I'm ever in the state that you feel may see me kind of like getting really quiet and pulling in, but it really helps if you ask some questions. You know, so I know myself well enough that it actually helps sometimes they get some help from outside. So I could have asked the best for it now from her. And so if you know your way, you know what, then it helps, you know, because you can maybe have learned some skills around that. If you if you're if your way is to assume that you're perfect and that you have no flaws or shortcomings or you know what the right word is for you, but you know, me, you know, look at my issues, then you might not become wise about your issues, you know, your challenges. So I think it's really Good to know what your kind of instinctual thing is your thing your way. And then to learn what wisdom is for you. And there's a lot of things to learn a lot of wise things to learn. And, and some of it is specific to your type your way. And some of its can be specific and be relevant for everyone. And kind of to the to belabor a point, the point, the point of sitting upright and sitting still this way, beautiful, balanced posture of the Buddha. not collapsing, not attacking, but something but the dignified very openness, chest is open and present. And, and that capacity to make space in the heart and the chest and the body in the mind. To let what we feel move through us. And it's one of the safest places to do that has to do with meditation, that anything that anything arises can move through us can live there. Because all these things that arise and pass within us are processes. There's nothing fixed and stuck and you know, unless we freeze around it, and to be able to do it in this posture and let these energies course through you, and I'd recommend it if you have never done it. We haven't looked out for some really good, juicy, strong, emotional storm. You know, mean don't, don't go Don't go make one Don't, don't, don't go look for trouble. But if one of those should occur, you have such experience and have happens occasionally. Then

try taking this posture or your your, you know, your, you know, the way that's appropriate for you to do the same thing. When you sit upright in a dignified way, open way and and see what happens if you just allow the energy to be there and course through you. As I've said a few times now I've been that I've read a few times recently, a claim seemingly a research claim from psychologists studying people's Physiology or emotions. They claiming that no emotion lasts more than 90 seconds.

And the reason the reason why we think they lost the reason why we think they last longer, is they seem to be stable seem to be coming, but we're constantly reinforcing it. We're constantly involved in some way. we tell ourselves stories, we react to it, we build on it. And there's, you know, that happens very fast and we're not trained very well to see our contribution. And how it looks like it just kind of washing and washing through is happening, you know, for a day sometimes. But one of the one of the,

one of the things we can discover through mindfulness is how we contribute to the process. How we pick it up and react to it, and how there's sometimes a long chain of chain reaction that goes on, that allows these things to keep going on and on. So even something like you know, like, you know, resentment, we can be resentful for years. But the resentment if you, if you don't latch on to it, don't hold on to it. Don't keep reinforcing it. Maybe it only lasts 90 seconds. Now it might re occur doesn't mean it doesn't, you know, might be occur. But that's a reoccurring is very different than kind of just kind of just being kind of there all the time. So this thing about this posture and meditation, you know, this idea of being open and present, keep your chest open, keep your head upright. Sometimes there's tremendous forces inside of us to give into it, to collapse, to fight to get up to something, anything to, you know, a whole range of things we can think you can do except it's still And, but sit still upright and strong and dignified. And then stay mindful and see what happens if you do that. It's amazing. What can happen. Yes.

Can you give us like a step by step or recipe from getting to two days of this emotion to 90 seconds? And you know, I can see mindfulness and you know, okay, that's a story. Okay, that's ego. But 90 seconds

is going amazing. I'm kind of amazed at that figure, but, but I have seen myself amazing how quickly things can go through. If I get out of the way Don't interfere with it.

How do you get out of the way

with the first first thing to do is to learn how to recognize How to be present for yourself and in a clear and strong way. So that's, you could come at IMC in January, when I do my six week introductory course in mindfulness meditation. And then the six weeks where we slowly kind of on Wednesday evenings, I lay down the foundation for how we do mindfulness here and how the skill of mindfulness that you can do, and doing the courses on they're necessarily going to help you but if you apply the material in the course, and then slowly over time, you'll develop this skill, mindfulness to help you do that. You know, it's it's doesn't work so well usually, to wait to do a spiritual practice until you come to a crisis. It works a little bit better usually to prepare the ground for the crisis that's going to come. And so you know, build build up the strength of the mind and the heart and develop the compassion develop the ability, pay attention. develop the ability to let go there's a lot of things can be developed and strengthened. And then sooner or later when that crisis comes in, everyone will face a crisis sooner or later that it's part of human life is to have so much crisis, a crisis, except I'll end with this wonderful story of a friend of mine, who, for many years was a hospice nurse. And so people that are coming to the hospice to die and there will come a point where she would get the family together of the dying person and say to the family, from this point on, there's no more crisis. Meaning that from this point on, it's just good flat nature where they let this take its course this is not we're not calling 911 and we're not calling you know, this is not a crisis anymore. Now. This is just Might you know the time to and hopefully we are prepared for that. So thank you. And if this sounds a little bit heavy today and you came here to be lightened up, it's good to come, you know, it's good to have open to something and you know, it's this is really as I said earlier, this practice address is meant to address these kinds of issues. And hopefully we can, this helps us all become stronger and, and face it and realize that there is a wonderful practice that can support and help us in times of great need. So, thank you very much for your those people who shared and everyone's being part of this evening. Good night.