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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I want to continue on a series of talks that I am doing, because of your word here. A couple of weeks ago, I talked about the practice of two people meeting. And it's a profound thing to have two people meet and know each other and really encounter to counter each other and deep, deep and close way. And that one of the things that Buddhist practice can allow is for sometimes sometimes it's a very deep sometimes the deepest kind of connection to people can have is when they can meet with a kind of freedom of mind, freedom of heart that could come from meditation or practice. And so then I thought, following that talk, I would talk more about the practices that support this kind of meeting of two people encountering and so last week, I talked about solitude and Important solitude is to be comfortable in oneself, comfortable being alone, even when you're with people, that the capacity to be a certain kind of healthy way have a certain kind of solitude allows the meeting of two people. If we're codependent and merge kind of codependency with people, there can't be any real meeting of two beautiful people. And so it's a whole training in itself to learn how to feel at peace and solitude to feel deeply and rest in one solitude. And, and, you know, it's cultivated many ways. And then today, I'm going to talk about listening, that the cabinet skill and listening is an important skill to develop and have and that in order to really be able to connect with someone, we have to be able to listen. Well and then Next week I'll talk about speaking, and the role of speaking and the way people meet. And so, listening, listening is something some people do a lot. Growing up, you did a lot of listening in schools. And now a lot of not listening as it was, and, and listening is a profound thing. in the, in the Theravada tradition in our tradition, the disciples of the Buddha, immediate disciple, seven people under the Buddha, were called the listeners, this hears this, they were to South Africa. And you see in the discourses it says, you know, the disciples of the Buddha, the words we use for disciples is the listener. So it's a really heard in here's a question Maybe quick goes back to ancient times the Greeks I think, it says that God gave us two ears and one mouth, so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. And that's the kind of nice rule of thumb except for Dharma teachers.

And then, you know, they, you know, some people point out that this connection to listening to spiritual life is also somehow pointed out then the rules of St. Benedict, because they, their real estate benefits begin with the word, a sculptor, which is Latin for listen. I don't know the rest of it. Hopefully was listening somebody well, but I sculpt that listen. And then also people say that the word obey or obedience apparently means to Latin, to listen well. Listen thoroughly, listen completely. Listen, listening is different than hearing. So listening and hearing are things that allow us to hear and encounter someone else. Listening also is what allows us to create community when people come together, right? If you don't listen to people, it's very hard to hear community. listening and hearing are also wonderful metaphors for mindfulness practice itself. And as we learn something more about the skill of listening and the qualities of listening, those translate to being able to practice mindfulness better, be able to meditate better because some of the same capacities or approaches are needed. So

hearing is an interesting, persistent store, because you can't as easily close your ears as you can close your eyes, and you can avert your gaze or not to pay attention to something. But it's a little bit harder to avert your ears you're hearing to someone you can. But, you know, hearing kind of, is kind of unidirectional, as Can you hearing kind of goes in all directions. Hearing doesn't really don't think of hearing interfering with what is being heard. Whereas we're seeing we sometimes say we see with rose colored glasses, we see with certain kind of bias or filters that we see things with, maybe, I don't know if it's true, but perhaps seeing is for some people a much more active sense than hearing itself. And this may interfere with it more, there's more conceptualization that goes on with the act of seeing. But hearing there's something about you things could come to our ears, and there are some meditators who will do listening meditation instead of following the breath because Sometimes they follow some people and they follow the breath and meditation or anything, it turns themselves inwards. The various self conscious tendencies Come in, come into gear. So they'll start controlling the breath, or judging what's they're judging themselves in some way. But when they open the mindfulness, just hear the sounds around us. Some people find that you can't control the sounds around you in the same way as you can control your breath. That sense of being the one who controls falls away, and becomes much more relaxing. Some people find it easier not to judge sounds than it is to not judge themselves. And so by just staying in the present moment of sounds, and listening allows them to kind of be learned to be present or relax in the present moment in a more peaceful way. And it's a beautiful thing to have to be deeply relaxed at peace alert and to allow Sounds just arise and pass to, to, in one of the ways that sometimes instructive to listen to Dharma talks, is you don't listen to Dharma talk, you hear it. And that you, you hear it with your body rather than your mind. And you just kind of listen. And as you're completely open, like the wind going through an open window, and you stay very present, so you can't let your mind drift off. And then whatever you need to hear, will kind of settle where it needs to settle in you. And if you don't need it, it'll keep going right through you. And I've met I've listened to Dharma talks that way, and it's a beautiful thing to listen that way. Though. Sometimes I used to listen to my Zen teachers this way, and I would get very concentrated. It was there was some time sometimes but more concentrated listening to Dharma talks, and I got my own meditation. The problem for me though, was that I would sell it seldom landed anywhere. So the end of the talk, I couldn't remember anything that was said.

The

so then there's listening to listen well. There's a story from the Indian epic called the Ramayana, which is told in our circles sometimes of Rama, the god Rama is out in the forest with his entourage with his people. And they're walking through the forest and Rama starts hearing something and he can't quite make it out. And he asks his companions you hear any any voice? I think, no, no, we don't hear anything. Anything. It's easy. It's really quiet and he listens. I hear something. There's some Don't you hear it? No, no, I don't hear it. And then finally here is very faintly hears his name being being spoken out to Rama, Rama, very faint. And so he decides to kind of move Towards the sound so he kind of goes goes in the direction the sound is coming, and it gets moves closer and closer. And finally he comes to this big boulder. And it sounds like it's coming out of the Boulder. And here's his name Rama coming out the Boulder. So he put in a very gentle way. He places both of his hands on the big boulder. And when he does, the boulder breaks open. And inside there's a woman named Elia who beautiful stories beautiful woman. And she says that she was placed inside the boulder or she was petrified only by a by a curse by some witch or something. And the only way she could be freed if such if someone came along and place their loving hands on the Boulder. And so she crawled out grandma's name and grandma came. So it's kind of a metaphor, beautiful kind of metaphor this story because The name of the woman is Elia and the story and Elia in Sanskrit means home. So who's calling Rama home is calling Roma and what is the and what kind of voice? How loud is home calling you the metaphorical

home or spiritual home or the inner home and it doesn't call you very loudly. And if you listen to your companions and ask them if they hear it they say no they'll say there is no sound there's no home there's no nothing is calling you. Come with us and let's go out drinking. You know, you should go to school to get a degree you should do this and that there's you know, they don't no one hears that sound. But then, in spite of your companions, you listen to this very faint voice is faint calling. What is it that's calling us this makes a beautiful another related to listening. Beautiful English expression to have a Calling something calls us come. So Elias you know home, here, here you, you and then and then finding something that's petrified and some people find things that are petrified and remember, for me I know exactly petrified but I mean that was about 16 I was in a boarding school in beautiful mountainous area and I was out walking with an older boy he was younger 15 maybe it was been 15 and the friend who was 17 and I and there was this beautiful beautiful beautiful blue sky You see the valley below and I I kind of looked at it all and nature and all that I said what are we here for? You know, so I can imagine a 15 year old like first time thing. First time kind of like hurts Look, wow, what is life? What are we here for? And my older friend who I look up to said to me, Don't be foolish. And I could feel that door the door just opened just closed, I wasn't going to shut that door down. It wasn't open that door if anyone again, petrified, closed, it's nothing. So it took a long time before that door opened up again. So is there something that's petrified or frozen, or simply not listened to inside of you? And what does it take to listen and then we finally come to it and then we put our loving hands on it. This idea of our loving hands so beautiful as well. So many people that I talk to are hard on themselves are critical and there's not much love that is deep inside and to not meet ourselves with criticism, or hostility to meet ourselves with care and kindness. Meet that parts of ourselves which are frozen or Difficult with kindness is what allows something deep inside to speak so we can hear it. So

to listen to listen to ourselves to listen to others, there are nowadays in different settings, they teach skills and listening called listening skills. And you can go and you know, and you know, Google, do they category listening skills and you'll find different places that give all kinds of different lists of skills. And what's interesting about some of these lists is that these skills that many of these, some of these skills that they give there's some that are just for academic sites like what you do in your school when you you know, keep good notes or something. But, but the more psychological or psychotherapeutic, I don't know what their life skill the kind of approach Listening listening skills. The things they list are exactly same things you need for meditation practice. And some of these sometimes are called it's called active listening. And, and that's one of the differences between hearing and listening. hearing his passive. Listening involves some intention to hear some directionality to listen. If you want to hear if you want to tell someone to listen to a sound far away, say listen. And you'll get in there and they turn their hearing to listen to hear something and kind of directional way. So there's an active listening. Same thing with attention. We always are attentive, you can say you're paying attention all the time, but to have active attention, a certain kinds of active attention is what's needed in meditation. And so active listening is to Engage with interest in listening to somebody. So if you're listening to some other person to be interested in the person and actively listen, and one of the important things is needed for active listening, is the ability to put aside your distractions. Just like you need meditation. If your mind wanders off into thought, and you're not really hearing, then you're not actively listening. Or you might be half listening. And a humbling statistics is that people only remember 25 to 50% of what they hear after 10 minutes. And so I wonder how many of you remember what I just said in the last 20 minutes? Or I remember. So the because we know people are also actively listening, interested. And so you see that meditation how easily the mind wanders off in distractions. I've seen it in conversations with people It's quite kind of embarrassing to notice this occasionally, occasionally is happened to me that I realized, I don't know what they said for the last minute. Because I was off, I went off on some tangent that was off somewhere. Sometimes if I had it, it happens very, very occasionally Don't worry about it, it happens very occasionally. Very occasionally, notice when I have I can have a whole series of meetings with like,

what's called interviews or practice discussion, people, like 15 minutes, you know, sometimes like, eight 910 of them in a row. And people come with, you know, they're the fullness of their life, sometimes it's quite full, what they bring in, and, and it gets kind of intense, you know, to listen to them. And so then they leave and someone else comes in. And then you know, I'm supposed to listen to the next person with his fresh ears as I can, which I tried this, my practice to do that. But sometimes it's so you know, so such a big impact emotionally. I mean, what just happened, that sometimes I find myself going back to the conversation just had and I haven't quite been able to let go of and I'm still Kind of living in it processing What happened? And, and, and I didn't know, I just I just kind of didn't hear what that person said. And if it does happen usually I say, you know, you say that again. And then I get it they seem to people don't seem to mind. So active listening is to take interest in some some in someone what they're saying. But it also means being able to put aside your distractions. One of the distractions is planning what you're going to say. And as if what you have to say is important. Another distraction is to judge of what to judge or evaluate what's being said. Active listening involves really listening to what's being said.

So that so that you're not being pulled into your thoughts. There's plenty of time for your thoughts later. But you really take in all the information that's coming towards you, the information through the content, what they say and the tone of their voice, and Their gestures, their mannerism, the posture, you have to kind of give it person of your full attention, be able to put your your, your usual self conscious concerns aside. And for most people, that's unless it's grippingly interesting. For most people, that's a skill that needs to be learned or has it's a, it's a capacity that we need to be actively working on, in order to keep a high quality attention. When we're listening to someone. There's a story of a of a man who went to a priest and said, I think actually story was told he was a rabbi and said, You know, I have trouble with my wife and described the trouble is wherever it was, I know. And the rabbi said, Oh, you have to go home and listen to her. So he said, Okay, so he went home and listen to her. And then after that, he came back A few weeks later to the rabbi and said, it didn't help. And I listened to what you had to say. And then the rabbi said, Oh, don't listen to what she's saying. Listen to what she's not saying. There's a lot that's not being said. It's not that good said between the lines. There's lots of, there's lots of listen to besides the words. And if you react to the words, you might miss the depth of what's going on in that person. You might miss their home that's somehow trying to come out. It's a beautiful gift to offer our listening to someone else. The it's sometimes in therapy in some therapy circles. They say that most of the healing that can happen in therapy comes from their therapist listening. Or in pastoral counseling, especially even more so than therapy. pastoral counseling with someone like a pastor listens to someone spiritual direction spiritual counseling, a lot of just listening. And people hear themselves when they get to speak and to be able to do that to someone who really is interested and, and pulls them out and ask good questions. And you know, just the fact someone's interested, something. It's like alchemy that happens. I've experienced it myself, where I've been the recipient of someone's really good listening skills, and you can feel the alchemy inside. I can feel myself saying things I can hear myself saying things maybe that I've never said before to anyone, even to myself, or I've said it to myself. I've thought it, but I haven't really owned it. But when I actually say there's someone else than I really own it. Oh, that's how it is. Oh, I guess I can't I take this seriously now and I've said it. And there's a whole kind of change that happens inside when you actually speak it. In the end someone receives it fully. If someone receives it and then gives you advice Then it doesn't allow the alchemy to work as well. So to give you the gift of listening, and part of that active listening sometimes is that asking questions or indicating that you've heard. So for some of you know, Carl Rogers, who was this great American therapist, who apparently he had nothing to say at all, except to repeat back what he heard and even then sometimes he didn't even do that. He just nodded and said yes, and people were transformed in his presence. Because it's active listening to the active kind of people felt like someone cared.

The some of you know about avalokiteshvara which leads to great Bodhisattva of compassion. The great embodiment of compassion, the kind of stearic deity like figure and Buddhism's archetype of compassion, and in India was called I would look at ash barye in China was Kuan Yin, in Japan is condone, and thereby. And sometimes she said to be the one who sees the suffering of the world. And therefore, when they chose a name for the camera canon, in Japan, they named it after the Great presets of compassion, the one who sees the suffering of the world, the nice some of you might have a canon. That's what canon means think that the God of compassion, sees sees well. But sometimes is this bodhisatta is also described, not the one who sees the suffering the one the world we want to hear is the suffering of the world. So it's a compassionate thing to listen and to hear deeply.

So, now I've done all this talking about listening, carrying on a great monologue here. So now it's my turn to listen to you. And I'd like to hear from you. What you've learned about how to listen. What do you say have you learned in your lifetime? Some of you, I hope you've learned something by listening. What did you learn to listening or the value of listening?

In the back of the room?

Yeah, I think for me, it's taken a long time to learn is what I've heard an act of listening is deal with the emotion first, that if somebody is in distress or somebody is either angry or sad that they have to deal with that they're in that struggle. And they have to the motion has to come out first before the logic, their logic can start going. So rather than, as he's, as you mentioned, jumping in and trying to offer a solution, all that emotion has to come out, the pulse has to come down. And then after that, then the healing or the

can be addressed.

So as a listener, you're not just listening to the words, but you're listening to the emotion that's behind the words. And sometimes that's actually more important to the whole conversation than what they're actually saying.

Yeah. And then if they feel understood, or you they can feel that you're connected with them that you understand that emotion, then healing can be in

beautiful, thank you. So it's what the rabbi said. Listen to what she's not saying. Yeah. Thank you.

So I have a

Kind of a visual idea of what this thing is. And to me, it's like memory foam. You know that stuff that pillows or mattresses are made out of it, you lay on it and then impression of your head or body

is taken by the phone. Well, I think that's what this thing is like. It's really receiving an impression. And so sometimes I don't want to speak because

it seems like a privilege to have that effect.

So that's what I think listening is

great. Thank you. It's a privilege to be heard.

Well, What I've learned about listening lately is that it's probably more important than talking at times, or at least for me, because normally when I'm listening, I'm only half listening, because half the time I'm thinking about my rebuttal or what I'm going to say next, in regards to what they're saying. And I realized that that's pretty arrogant of me. And, you know, going off Buddhist teachings is that by listening by, you know, creating that concentration to focus and listen, at the end of whatever they're saying, I'm actually able to acquire much greater wisdom and have something a lot. A lot better to say than I would have if I actually thought about it, and it would have been instantaneous. And I've also learned that, you know, to really be engaged, it's like, what you were saying is you have to see the person Notice your gestures, you know, see the body language. So you could get 100% of the message, not just words, because they say that, you know, 80% of what you're actually translating of the message essentially being said, through your body language through your emotions. And the last thing that I've learned in my communications class is actually noticing or having, you know, being able to notice the invisible compliment is what they call it, which is, you know, just send us an example, that would be invisible compliment could be, you talked about, you know, touching your water. So, in some ways, it's supposed to make you feel good about that aspect that you probably didn't notice yourself, and it shows how much I was actually paying attention to you and doing so it gives you that much more confidence to be able to speak the next time. So that's kind of what I've learned about listening lately. Beautiful. Thank you.

It's rather remarkable. It's the first time I've been here and
about listening.

It's the first time in decades

that I've heard the name Carl Rogers.

And

when I was in graduate school,

I had five years of therapy

from a therapist who work directly into Carl Rogers. And that's one of the most transformative things that ever happened to me. And I never got any advice except for the very end.

He said, Be very clear about what you want.

Five years

So that's it.

Thank you. And did you learn how to be your own Carl Rogers?

Sometime

was really great.

Remember, I learned how to trust my own. The thing about it is I'm a rich sharing therapist really trust the process.

And I learned to trust myself.

Beautiful. I think this is what we're trying to also do with mindfulness intensity our own Nigerian therapists. Just listen and trust the process, if you're president pay attention carefully to what's going on this month,

recently is that it really shows up in my therapy session. Like, I go in with this agenda, like all these things that I want to bring up, and I found myself kind of cutting off my therapist and not listening that well. And as always, I have all these things I want to say, and I just need to get them out I need to heal, you know. And I just find myself just cutting them off and not listening. And just till the final minute of our therapy session, just talking nons you know, and he, he's really a cool guy. And I've just seen it on his face a little bit like a little bit of kind of, like irritation or something, I don't know.

But it's something that I'm really trying to work on.

Like, you know, so now when I go into therapy, I always remember to pause after I say something, let him talk for a while.

And I get a lot more out of the sessions now.

It's beautiful Matt. Thank you. brought this there's an art theory, both as listeners and speakers have learned not to be self centered. Please.

I have a question. With this new age of information.

How can you listen to all of these that comment here? Just how I really sometimes I'm so overwhelmed that thank God I have this to meditation that I can calm myself down, but my surroundings are very loud and crowded and, and sprayed and different and it's just varieties. Not mean it's not bad, but it definitely It's really overwhelming. How can I listen to this or focus on some specific, and I even have problem that

was answering your question directly. But it reminds me that many years ago, I read a study. They, I guess they did a study or tests on children, group of scripts with children with how much noise was in their environment. And so if there was a lot of noise, like a lot of loud noise, aggressive noise or something versus was a quiet environment, and they found the more noise there was an environment the more aggressive and the kids were. So you know, we're affected by what's in what our environment noise, its ways. So, you know, how do we how do we protect ourselves from all that mean? One way is to turn some of it off if we can. And that's not always so easy. It's not it's outside. home, but receiving the input that has tremendous inputs, this essential sensory stimulus that comes into us to slow it down, don't have it as quickly you know, turn off the TV, turn off the computer, turn off the radio, have only one on at a time. And then if you learn to meditate, then it's also possible to learn a skill of how to go inside and kind of feel, feel feel a refuge inside and not be in the sounds around you don't penetrate as deep or you can kind of it's kind of way I don't wanna say tune tuning tuning them out because that sounds doesn't sound good. But there's a way of finding a fullness inside that the sounds as seamless around.

Don't, don't seem to quite touch you. So there are times I've been in environments which really loud and difficult and, and it just ascendency how stay open to all the sounds. And I don't exactly pull away from them. But I put I kind of come into an inner fullness.

And then it's like,

it's like you go into like this wonderful thing of going into if you ever go out with your car into the carwash. You know you feel safe and comfortable. You know, there's all this sound and activities around you.

Okay?

So one more we can do two more, why don't you start with you
to the mic.

So I find that if I'm present in my body, that that's very important. And that if I'm aware of a strong emotional response, that I cannot listen well. And that if I consciously focus my attention on that person, so that I'm not feeling time stressed and I'm really Just focused, then it's a lot easier to listen and hear and understand.

But if you had made but if you're if you have a strong emotional response and it's hard to listen, but then if you put all your attention on the person and you're in some ways there for the person, but what happened to your emotional response?

Yeah.

It gets picked up it brings Mike back if we can.

So what I try to do is to go inside and let that emotional response court sort of

work its way through my body while you're listening. Well, yeah, that's the problem.

I think this is important. I have a lot of respect for The emotional responses we have, it's all information. It's all part of the part of the bigger picture of what's going on. And to, to turn away from it in a conversation and focus completely the other person. Maybe occasionally, it's useful, but I think that that's part of the overall the overall environment, the overall ecology, what's happening is your response. And I think there's some way of trusting it, even if it's a little bit off and somewhere not appropriate, but trusting enough to listen to it, and maybe listen through it, or listen with it. Don't act on it. If it doesn't seem appropriate, but don't ignore it either. And your says you listening carefully to someone else, you could simultaneously be listening to yourself. And I find that the best listening I do, the attention is not 100% of the person. But I'm 100% in the present moment, with my attention is a somehow hovering back and forth to myself in the person so kind of For 50% each place, so I'm tracking what I'm feeling and what I'm thinking. And I'm tracking what they say. And so I can I can have this opportunity for me to process my feelings, the important part of what's happening, but I'm not losing touch with a person either. Anyway, that's what I do.

Maybe we have,

okay, we'll do two more than Yeah, this this subject kind of brings to mind a quote I like by Benedictine monk who said, the language of God is silence. Everything else is a mistranslation. So yes, please.

I'm interested in the subject. I've worked for a long time as an audio engineer. And one of the things I've learned is that our sense of hearing is often tricked by either what we're seeing visually or what our expectations are about the sound before we hear it. And then the other thing I was thinking of was an interview I heard a while ago with John Cage on the radio. And he was talking about how, you know, he had come to us traffic noise and random sorts of sounds in his compositions. And he was talking about, it reminded me so much of what is talked about in mindfulness practice, because he was talking about the importance to him of being just being aware of really listening to all the sounds around him, because he never knew which ones of those would be useful for him to him in his compositions. And that he felt very limiting to just think of music what we traditionally think of music as the only element in his compositions.

Beautiful Thing. It's beautiful and I liked what I liked about the gentleman before said about the language of guided silence, but we don't want to Limit God to silence only. I think we might miss God or the equivalent. Sometimes God speaks in other ways. So that he is always you're always listening for the Dharma. You don't know when the Dharma will come and I find it. Very interesting for me to the Dharma teacher, because I tend to listen or look or try to find out, where's the Dharma in my life much more than I would if I wasn't a teacher. I'm going to be teaching this stuff. And so I find myself kind of listening or paying attention. And there's so much Dharma that happens all the time. If you listen more, so John Cage has heard the music is always open for it and we're open for the Dharma. So I hope that this gives you some appreciation of the value of listening and I'm sure All of you have already understood a lot of this before there's like more like a reminder. But you might do it yourself this week to exploring further than you have. were actively maybe you have in recent times, this whole thing but listening, and perhaps was next week. Focus more on listening and speaking. Switch the balance and see what you discover. Thank you all.