

2011-03-28 Our Attachments

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So became clear to me that this was kind of unusual. So I was kind of curious or just kind of curious. I don't know what I thought, but it is interesting. So I continued not to say anything for a long time. And I was wondering what was going to happen, but I wonder too much I was just sitting there quite content, like seemed like a pretty good time and what was needed, nothing was needed, right. I sat and looked around a little bit, sat there, you know, like, you know, like this. And no one got up and left. And no one complained. No one said anything. And so after quite a long time, quite a long time means I don't know what 10 or 15 minutes or something. I said if you're waiting For something, you've missed the boat. If you're waiting for something, you missed the boat, because in this practice here, the idea is to find your piece here. And now, if you're waiting for it to happen, you've missed something that's happening here. You've missed an opportunity to connect and be present for something that's here. And so if in this rare situation that the speaker doesn't speak,

then what? Where's the practice? Then? Where do you practice then? And do you practice waiting? You practice wondering what's wrong? Do you practice getting angry? I came here to learn something important. Maybe the most important thing is to be to learn something about yourself. When nothing happens. And you know, when we meditate, it's really important, right? So that's okay. Do you have no thing happened then because we're doing something really important, but when we finished meditating, is it okay for nothing to happen? Instead, okay, so what comes up for people? You know, what are the what are their concerns, their fears, the agendas, the needs. There's a lot of things that come up. So I thought that was a pretty, it was a pretty, there was a wonderful evening that many of you know, it wasn't something I ever planned. So I would never plan that. But it just kind of happened. So it kind of happened a little bit. Now with the speakers right there. We couldn't get into work, Mike. So I thought I'd tell you that story. In case you were waiting.

So what I wanted to do today is to read to you a very early Buddhist texts are the poem it's considered by some to be among the earliest oldest literature in Buddhism. And what's unique about this particular poem, it begins with the Buddha talking about kind of what motivated him to practice or how he felt before he started practicing. And what have you discovered in his practice? And it does. So in the end, you know, I would say kind of emotional terms. And the Buddha in the Buddha in the ancient literature mostly seems like a pretty even minded guy, even keeled guy, but here, you get a sense of his inner maybe struggle or inner angst or, or something. And I thought it you know, it's, to me when I read this, I'm kind of touched by the humanity of it, and how even in our modern life modern time someone might feel the same way. And maybe some of you have felt the same way. And In a discourse, the discourse itself is given the title of violence.

Violence gives birth to fear. Just look at people and their quarrels. I will speak of my dismay, and the way that I was shaken. Seeing people thrashing about like fish in little water, and seeing them in conflict with each other, I became afraid. The world is completely without a core. Everywhere things are changing. Wanting a place of my own, I saw nothing not already taken. I felt discontent at seeing only conflict to the very end. Then I saw an arrow here. Hard to see embedded in the heart. Pierced by this arrow, people dash about in all directions. When the arrows pulled out, they do not run and they do not sink. Touching little bit, the Buddha talking about his dismay, talking about how he became afraid. This is before he became awakened before he maybe started his journey. And then in the myth of Buddhism, it says the Buddha encountered encountered sickness, old age and death. But I think that whole story of him leaving the palace since is a myth that was created. And in fact, apparently there are no none. The early records say that this happened to the Buddha. The earliest records, have the Buddha saying this happened to mythic Buddha in the past. And then they've come down to the centuries came as this idea that all the Buddhists To follow the same pattern of life. And so if that happened to the ancient Buddha, and certainly must have happened to the historical Buddha, that he also saw the three sites as he left the palace. Anyways, admits are wonderful. And so that's a wonderful Buddhist myth that we have. But this year comes feels closer to, you know, not a not a myth, but actually what a human being, you know, struggles or difficulties and what a human being might actually, you know, have. And I think many people look about their lives and they see violence they see fighting, they feel see that everything's changing. And sometimes people get distressed and feel it's only because of this age and time. But it's always been this we've been better before it was better in the past. And one of the one of the common refrains that seems to come up in every generation is people nowadays are so selfish, these people and, you know, if you go back, you see that people said that regularly. Most recently recently I was reminded of this when I read a quote from an ancient Roman philosopher, people these days, they're so selfish. Now maybe it goes in waves, people selfishness, but I think probably every generation, you know, looks back or sees the next generation, you know, how could these young people be so self concerned and caught up in their own desires and things and, and they seem like they're an anomaly. But it's, you know, when every generation says, you probably people said about their generation when they were younger or something. So, you know, and so we feel like you know, things are getting worse. But the Buddha lived in a violent time and I don't know what he was encountering He talked about this, but there was his in his area of northern India. That was a time when they you know, before that there were these smaller kingdoms and Republic's and tribal units. And then in the period around his, his life people the king started consolidating the power and conquering the neighboring powers and creating bigger bigger states. And then these few huge these kings would fight each other. And the Buddha's own homeland was apparently attacked and we don't quite know if it was still in his lifetime or right after he died. And there was apparently some massive massacre.

And you know, there was a say that Buddha's time also was a time of urbanization because as they consolidate these kingdoms, they created this bigger urban cities. Some of the guilds and crafts started getting concentrated, you The rise of business and trading and any kind of craft skills and things that was very new compared to a more subsistence, Gary and culture and society. So everything was changing. And so violence and consolidation and fighting and, and society as they knew it was changing radically and urban culture was arising and I don't know if every generation changes as much, but it's certainly, you know, in the last couple hundred years, 200 years we've had tremendous amount of change in the world. And change continues right to today. And in the violence continues, and is there no end to the violence? Are we supposed to be the war that ends war? And, you know, finally, you're the one that's going to end it all. And who knows, is it really gonna end it now that Ben Ghazi has been saved? That's gonna end the like the end the fighting. You know, it's gonna go on And who knows where it's gonna go? And then, you know, it's this world that's seemingly so stable. how stable is it? You know, and you know, in some of our lifetimes, we've seen tremendous change. Countries come and go.

The Soviet Union is no longer there. Eastern Europe has changed dramatically in our lifetime. Now, Middle East is changing dramatically. I grew up on the edges of Yugoslavia and the border, we used to go across the border to buy butter. It was that close. And gas and, you know, it was like our, you know, it's just it was right on the border. And Yugoslavia doesn't exist anymore, you know, a country that I was, you know, familiar with, and, and so change is, is getting worse. I mean, you know, my own parents went through World War Two, and my my parents in law went through the concentration camps in Germany. And so they went through huge upheavals and change and, and, you know, they experienced their instability at a young age. So we meet this world. And so how do we, you know, and so the Buddha felt dismay and felt afraid. And that's a common reaction is a very human reaction. And I think it's appropriate to have a lot of care, respect, compassion for the tremendous strong impact that the world can have on a human heart. And so the Buddha parently, it was no different than that. And so you felt discontent, the way translated here, seeing only conflict to the very end.

But then he says at the end, then I saw an arrow. Some translators translated as BB BB BB makes more sense because smaller than I saw a BB because it fits in the heart better. Then I saw an arrow here, hard to see embedded in the heart pierced by this arrow, people dash about in all directions, when the arrow is pulled out, they do not run and they do not sink. So what the Buddha is doing is to is really kind of a dramatic shift of rather than looking at the problem or the solution in the world outside. He's turning around and looking at his own heart. And that's where he found something that was, you know, very significant. And the whole revolution there were all kinds of radical offering. Buddhism offers began when the Buddha was able to find in his own heart, the arrow the barb was piercing it and, and so, and then more important than that, he saw it as possible to take this out. And as long as we had that BB in us, then pieces here people run about dash about in all directions, or earlier image is quite strong, I think the image of a, you know, efficient little water and shallow water. You ever seen a fish kind of flapping around? It's kind of a dramatic image, right? So people that way. And so you know, what is it that causes that. And you could say it's the world outside the conditions outside and the owner of the world was different than I could live safely. But I think the radical suggestion of Buddhism is that certainly you should help make the world a better place. But the real issue is what's in your own heart. And that's what triggers the fear the thrashing about the running around. And I certainly have met lots of people, it's very obvious that they are not willing to be present for themselves. There's some people There's a sorrow there's a wound, there's some discomfort. There's something they don't want to look at. And as they don't want to look at it, they run around in circles or they run around they, they get involved in addictive behavior, they get really busy, very busy with work or very busy with social relationships, or very busy with entertainment, television, anything in the kind of run around busy all the time. So to turn around and look and what is it that's embedded in our hearts, what's embedded in there, and perhaps for each person, something a little different. But the point being that the fear, the dismay, the discontent that can really click or get us to be contracted, resides in our own hearts, or in our own minds. And, and so the task in Buddhism is just is it's really useful to take that out. To take responsibility for what's in here to find the roots of knowledge Only our own distress, but also the way in which people behave in the world here in us. Someone has to do it. When, after 911 right after 911 there was two friends of mine who went off to sit a three month retreat, you know, within a week after 911 or something. And then 10 years ago and I said to them I made a point to go find them before they went said, you know, after something such a big thing as 911 it might feel like you can't you see, there's not really a time to go off and do a three month retreat. You might feel you know, your friends, family country needs you this is the time to stay present and, and be with a view of the world. The country was going through this big upheaval and change and it might seem like it's selfish to go off you know, that everyone's suffering and be selfish to go off and retreat. And I said, it's so much actually it's really important. It's one of the best things you can do, because we need to have some people Who sits still enough, quiet enough, mindful enough to go down to the depths of their own hearts and really find

what's there, and clarify and purify it, and bring out what's most beautiful, that's there. And if there aren't at least a few people who do it then each generation, then maybe there's no hope. And we're all going to run around. And it's really powerful there Pete there are people who really turn around and do that kind of work. And whether you go a little bit in there and pull out that BB a little bit, or you go all the way and extract a completely the fact that people turn towards and look at it and do it i think is such a beautiful thing and powerful thing. It's a can be a source of tremendous joy. To know that you have a path No, there's a practice that can help us do with it do this, because the other way of trying to fix the world you know?

I don't know we all hope right. If only if only if only, you know, people have been trying for a long time. And of course, we should go try to help the world the best we can. But I believe we help the world. One of the ways we help the world is to have done the inner work, so that we can meet the world calmly and peacefully so we can meet what's going on, and support people help people through our own ability to become peaceful in the midst of difficulties and distress. If we keep running around the dismay and discomfort, you know, we can't really help people. It was a powerful image that tick not Han I gave, when he was helping the both people, both people leaving Vietnam and escaping Vietnam in their, I guess their 70s and 80s. And they would leave this Vietnam and these really rickety boats filled with people that you know, apparently the, the water level was just right up to the edge of the, you know, the boat so and then if a wind came or some waves came in Would you know the boat would capsize and a lot of people were lost at sea and taking the Hon says that you know if this weather got kind of rough you know last thing you want to do is get it all people get excited on the boats, you know, running around and we got to do something you know, and you know and so what he what he said was if one person can can stay calm, it keeps everybody else calm. And that's a powerful image you know, I don't know if he was making it up or was real story if someone who's but one person can say calm, make an adverb ripple out and affect everyone else and creates some stability.

So, one of the hallmarks of Buddhism down through the ages. That is to look it as a spiritual tradition, is to look towards is to emphasize or point back towards the heart or to the mind. as being the Genesis and the source of this life of ours we live. And so the opening of the Dhammapada, though, is kind of like the Buddhist Genesis, at least it's a nice contrast to the Judeo Christian Genesis, where in the Bible it says in the beginning there was God. So that's where it all begins. That's the emphasis. And so the focus is turned towards God in a certain way. And Buddhism, the, the Dhammapada begins by saying, the mind is the forerunner of all things. It begins with the mind or the heart. And so it's a kind of, in some ways, a very different approach doesn't have to be or there's a way of kind of seeing them as very similar but at least, you know, explicitly very different approach, where the emphasis is not to look externally, for the truth for salvation for the answer, but to look for the answer in the heart look in ourselves. So we sit and meditate. And this is one of the functions of meditation. It's not just to make ourselves calm, and to reduce our stress. I always felt it was kind of strange when I read about generals in the Pentagon who were taking up meditation. I mean, you know, I'm glad for them. And I'm sure it's good for them. And, and, you know, and I met a beautiful man who actually worked at the Pentagon, he came on retreat, and he's a beautiful man. And he was really genuinely trying to bring peace to the world. And he was trying to make a real difference in the culture and all approach the Pentagon and trying to prevent wars is really what he was there trying to do. But anyway, at least, you know, and, you know, the idea that you'd use meditation to be calmer and more stress free so you can be a better, better soldier. You know, somehow it doesn't quite work for me. And you the So, but we sit still in order to go deep inside and look what's here. And then I think of meditation, I thought of a little bit like, it's kind of like a wind tunnel. And you know, you put something in a wind tunnel, and you see where all the all the resistances and the wind drag is you put yourself in the meditation wind tunnel. And sooner or later, you'll start seeing where the wind drag is. And, and, and you start understanding where

the wind drag is where you're attached, what you're holding on to what you're clinging, what you're resisting. And there's a variety of things that can cause when dragging slow us down can be this resistance to his life as it flows through us. And one of them the Buddhist list for things that the Buddhist tradition puts tremendous emphasis on. And maybe these are some of the barbs that maybe some people will find in themselves the arrows. So one is the attachment to B to B uncomfortable, and they are an attachment to pleasure, sensual pleasure. And it can seem like a lot of people say why attach a sensual pleasure? But actually, it's it's a very powerful force in our society and people.

So one example, that I don't know how well this will work, but so in our, in our kind of corner of the world here, it's recognized as a relatively affluent place. Not that everyone's affluent by any means, but relatively. And so I bet there's a fair percentage of you all who live in a house that's bigger than it really needs to be. And why do you live in the house, it's bigger than it needs to be? Well, because it's more pleasant. It's more enjoyable? And what do you do so you can live in a house that's more unpleasant, more enjoyable, while you take an extra job or you try to, you know, you know, take out a bigger loan and you do the sacrifice and do all this stuff, a lot of effort goes into pay for that rent or that mortgage or whatever. A lot of extra work. It could be said, then I would think that there's a certain attachment or clinging or drive to pleasantness or pleasure, which underlying some of the choices about how a person lives their life. So could that be true with other things in your life, you don't have to do the things you don't really need. But why do you Why do you Why do you do them? Why do you Why do you do these things? Because they bring pleasure you feel more comfortable. There are some people who have a policy in their mind unconsciously perhaps, that only if things are pleasant and comfortable. Is everything okay? Only if they're pleasant and pleasant and comfortable. be successful or right, or something. So the attachment to pleasure and comfort is said to be one of the forms of wind drag. Maybe that's, you know, maybe like that image to two images, right? You could choose wind drag or arrow in your heart. So the second one is, at the usual way of describing Buddhism, it is attachment to opinions and two views. I like to sometimes translated as attachment to your stories, because us views and opinions, you know, that's like philosophy and, you know, your politics and all that, but your stories. I mean, you know, what happened to me and what's, you know, we have this whole narrative about our life and we need and all this stuff, and just, you know, mostly just an opinion anyway. But you know, but you don't see it as an opinion if I say that word. So story. So we're attached to a story and the story of our people or my family, or what happened to me earlier story about how life's supposed to be. And there's all these stories we tell ourselves, and or we've told our society tells us stories, tells us stories of what it means to be successful. The American Dream supposedly was a story, right? And people bought into that story that if you'd be happy and successful if you bought into that dream. And so another one of these wind drag is having a certain kind of grasping to stories and opinions. So as we sit and meditate as we get quieter and quieter, the stories that we're attached to will continue to operate. It's hard to just stop something because you're meditating if you're attached to it, so they'll start appearing the bubble up, though appears unresolved issues issues or as frustration or as a drive or a preoccupation. And so you've got to feel and see and hear and your wind tunnel, you see wow there's a lot of wind drag. And so then it's your choice you know, you could you know begin changing the shape of the of you or you could get a bigger engine for your airplane blast through better and some people choose the you know the blasting through and some people get a Prius so you know, has less wind drag, something like that. So, the third attachment is and this is a really big wind drag, and that is your self image, attachment to self concepts, self ideas, the way you represent yourself to yourself the way you want to represent yourself to them. The world around you.

We make try to make ourselves safe, we try to get what we want in the world, by having people see us a certain way. And so often there's all kinds of people can kind of maneuver and say things and do things and act in ways in order to have an impression. So people see you a certain way. It said that

sometimes that many people give more care to what they wear, then what they say. You know, because of the impression it's giving. And so, as we get quiet and still, the, if we're attached to self to self concept that appears in the mind as a form of agitation, and that agitation will start feeling uncomfortable. And so, part of the function of meditation is to learn how to relax and to soften and hopefully not just relaxing. Often, but pull out the BB to, to eliminate that area when drag. So to find a different way of relating to self different way of being in the world, where self concept, self image, self representation, self identity are not something we're grasping and holding on to. And a sense to self is, you know, a special kind of opinion, a special kind of story. So it has its own category in this list. And then the fourth, the final one is it's a little bit obscure or difficult, I think, for the without expected explanation, but it's the attachment that was to English English way of saying it, it's attachment to becoming. And one of the ways of its attachment one way is understanding its attachment to existence, to being alive. And that's kind of you know, like, that's kind of discouraging.

If not supposed to be not supposed to be alive or what's the alternative. And, but rather, the attachment to not being alive is as bad as the attachment to being alive. In Buddhism. The solution is not to be against life, but rather not to be attached to it. And, and the attachment to be living is the fear of death is a very powerful one. And so to somehow begin feeling how that's when drag out, slows us down. And what I like about this image of wind drag or may perhaps, have the arrow is that we're not talking about a should we're not saying there's not like a moral obligation. It isn't like, it isn't like someone says, you know that you know, you'll be a better person or something if you do this work, but rather, if you're if you You're sensitive and feel, you'll feel the resistance, you'll feel the suffering the pain of it. And then it's really good news that there's a practice techniques in a way of working with it and freeing yourself of it. This is the really the good news of Buddhism. So the one of the words in this poem is the word dismay. The Buddha said, violence give gives birth to fear, just look at people and their quarrels. I will speak of my dismay. The word is translated dismay, is Pali word. Some Vega and second is a very important word in the Buddhist tradition, sh m v ga, ga, some vague and it's dismay, doesn't quite captures members know English word that really captures what this means. But it's a combination of feeling a certain kind of unease discontent with the condition of our world, the situation the situation of human life as we encounter it. And the motivation to practice to overcome that discontent, or to come find the alternative. Sometimes they emphasize more the sense of the discontent or the tiredness, a tired all this I'm tired all this running around doing all this stuff and building up my sense of self and putting up all these walls and trying to get all my ducks lined up all the time. And once in a while, I get everything lined up and everything's perfect. It just, and then it falls down again. And, and then I have to do it again. It just goes on and on. And we see the violence in the world and it's just so disturbing. People saw Suffering all over. And so some people emphasize that part. But if you only emphasize that part, it can be discouraging. It can be kind of depressing. But it's the other part, I think, which is really encouraging, which is the part it's motivating for practice. Yes. Let's, let's do this work. Let's go on the path. We say we don't find a path of practice, that often. There's a many messages, many paths offered in life, which take us away from the heart. And so here there's a path, this beautiful path. It's a path of clarifying and purifying and finding love and compassion and finding a deep inner peace. And it's so beautiful to find it. And so some Vega is what gives us the courage or the inspiration or the or a lot of strength and power to walk on that that it's meant to be energizing, and to have this some Vega, so there's something about encountering the world seeing it for what it is, that is not supposed to be distressing in the end, but rather be energizing in a good way. Just like compassion. It can be energizing to do a lot of good in the world. But you don't feel compassion unless you feel a suffering of the world. And that's, that's the kind of thing about compassion comes together with suffering. Some Vega comes together with seeing the condition of this world certain aspect of this world how it is, and then seeing it as an alternative. And so the Buddha was a living example, alternative. down through the ages, there's been many people who have practiced in their example. So that alternative, and the hope

is that you become an example of that alternative that you do become an example of someone who understands him or herself so well, that you understand what's deep in your heart. The deepest resistance, the deepest attachment, the deepest holdings, the deepest fears, and that you have learned you You discovered how to pluck out those attachments,

to have the courage to live without those attachments. That's a beautiful thing to do. And so, the teachings of Buddhism, the techniques of Buddhism, the practices of Buddhism, it's all there in place to offer support and more important support and encouragement for doing that work. So that we have hope, so that we have really possibility for making a difference at the root of where the problems begin. So, I hope that was okay. And we have maybe five minutes so maybe one or two questions or comments, if any would like to make. Victor who just came back from sitting for a whole month

wishes to say something before about why it was so important for you to sit for a whole month.

Well I had this

enjoy retreats and as difficult as they can be, is always, always fruitful in one respect or another. I just intuitively knew that in this case longer was better.

Also, I

might not have too many opportunities to sit long retreats. In the future, we never know what the future may bring. And I wholeheartedly recommend sitting.

Monthly three treat every 30 days or so.

I think it's a good prescription or remedy for anything.

And it seems that the longer time you're able to settle more things, you're just able to explore and unearth more things, you get more and more quiet. And it's, it's really extraordinary. It's no different for you. Oh, yeah, absolutely. It's great.

You ready to face your challenges better?

I've been ready for even very well.

So

it was actually is able to see the, the aspect of impermanence much better. And working with the aggregates sort of very specifically. It was very difficult to do that just in this shorter retreat because this wasn't enough time to get settled. See those things come up.

Leave a question, a

question on non-existence.

craving, I don't understand the aspect of craving non existence.

So there's, there's, as I know that there's two general ways of interpreting. There's the attachment to becoming an attachment and non becoming so complicated, but the simplest way in English you say it is existence, non existence. And the one non existence in terms of human life, existence means detachment to living, attachment to non living to non existence, we'd be someone who is suicidal, for example, enough of this, I'm out of here, this is too much, you know, I, you know, I just want to not feel I don't experience it anymore. I want just enough, so that that's one interpretation. The other interpretation of this, these, this these pair is that it's attachment to identity and non identity. So I have my thing, you know, in terms of being I don't know if I don't know No, this is quite accurate, but I have a thing about, um, you know, in some ways I'm more attached to non identity than identity. So, for example, it's a form of, I really don't want to wear a T shirt that has any kind of sign on their emblem or logo or, you know, because, you know, that's like, please, you know, I want to be invisible. I don't want to stand out, I don't want to have an identity. Like but my son, I mean, he's so happy to have you know, you know, all these logos, you know, blasting across his chest, you know, these stores, I can't believe it. You're walking advertisement, you paid all this. You paid all this money for this. So you know, so they do so. So some people are more attached to not having identity. And sometimes in the Buddhist circle, maybe I'm the example of it but in Buddhist circles, you find sometimes people getting stuck in To the idea that Buddhism is teaching not self, and so I'm not supposed to be anybody. And I don't want to be anybody and you know, just that kind of, you know, and this nonidet attachment to not having an identity is as much a problem as attachment to having identity. So what's left, right? You know, if you can't have it, you know, that was left is not to be attached to either, but it's okay to have an identity and you all we all have some kind of identity. I mean, you know, your, your gender, your sexual orientation, your ethnicity, or, you know, just all kinds of ways in which you can be, but, you know, it's not something that you hold tightly to, which is not something that you, you know, just today is, is when it's there, and it's not when it's not there, then you know, things change, who knows how things change. The so there's a third interpretation of this Becoming non becoming just as non acute because it's not as it's much more general, it's has to do with either desire for something to be, or the desire for something not to be. So aversion, like pushing something away, so anything at all. And so now it's kind of almost universalized, you know, just a movement of for and against things is that's how it's understood. So that's my three three ways I have an understanding for understanding it. And luckily, there's an alternative. And that is not not to be attached. And what's what's what needs to be said, I believe, is that is to reassure you that you can take care of your life better, you're actually safer if you don't get attached. And, but most people feel like it's not safe to let go of those those that's what keeps me safe and defended and protected and all that and, but we'd become safer not non non attached Not clinging is the place of safety. The Buddha actually says is later on that same long poem he says, release, which we release of clinging. Release is peace. Release is peace. Sorry.

One of one of you will come next week and give me one. I'll put it on then. To show you I'm not attached.

Yes, these attachments appear in

this list. Oh, offhand, I can't know. It's one of the many lists. Oh yes, yes. Just no shortage of lists. attachment to lists is not one of the problems.

Yes. Anyway, so thank you all and I hope that you find your BB