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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So welcome everyone. And so here we are on our ninth Dharma practice day of this series, and Dharma practice day on the perfections. And those of you who are new to these Dharma practice days, welcome this one here, you're welcome. Even though the ninth one at all, they hopefully stand on their own as well. And these number practice days are meant to be a time for kind of community practice to explore some topic or theme of Buddhist practice, in some focused way in the course of the day, but to do together with others. Much of the way that Buddhist spiritual life develops isn't in community with other people and in monasteries, Buddhist monasteries, often in the conversations that monks and nuns practitioners have together where a lot of the Learning and Development grows, marry each other, we hear ourselves we see what's going on. And we hear teachings from the teachers perhaps. And then there's a discussion about it amongst people. And so here and they kind of are kind of urban suburban life. People sometimes hear teachings or read teacher read teachings, whatever, and then go off into their life and don't really have a chance sometimes to have the kind of discussions about it and explorations of it. That often makes it very rich. So these direct practice days are designed to have a variety of different ways of exploring the particular topic. And more often than not, it does involve often a chance for you, you all are here to break into small groups and have discussions around particular focused questions or themes about the day. There's some teachings I'll give, and there's some meditation, maybe guided meditation that's included and it's kind of a rhythm hopefully through the day of going including some meditations, some teaching some chance for questions some time of discussion amongst you all. And the theme for this year is the perfections, which are 10 practices and 10 qualities that can be developed within us that are particularly helpful for the unfolding the development of Buddhist practice overall. And so, these 10 are generosity it's helpful. If you develop a generous spirit enters into your capacity for generosity, it turns out slightly easier to develop Buddha spirituality overall, partly because generosity puts us in relationship to other people. generosity is not meant to be just something you do in the privacy of your own house, but it's involves relationship to other people. And, and I'm very fond of the fact that Buddhist spirituality The classic development of it begins by creating healthy relationships with other people. And that's partly the function of generosity. It's not just going in meditating silently by yourself, but being in relationship in a healthy way. And the second perfection is that of perfection of ethics of integrity. And that also it's a very personal thing integrity. But it's often ethics is something we do in relationship to other people, again, creating those healthy relationships. And then the third is capacity for letting go. There's wisdom. So if you let go wisely, before the quality, then there's effort making effort. There's, when you make effort, it's good to be patient. And so the next quality is patience. And then there is what's the next one, truthfulness and followed by resolve And then loving kindness, which is a topic for today. And then the last one next month will be equanimity. loving kindness again and clearly back in some ways back in the world of our relationships to people, because you could have certainly loving kindness towards yourself. But it's also meant to be something we do in relationship to other people. And part of the value of this seeing our

spiritual life in relationship to others, not just a private individual kind of thing is that is that I think it speaks to the deep connection that human beings have to each other and how important that is in our lives. And it's hard to imagine spiritual growth, without it being also somehow happening in relationship to the world around us. In Buddhism, this is often articulated in the close connection between awakening or liberation, spiritual freedom, and the arising of the cultivation of compassion. And, in fact, with ease 10 qualities that perfections

ordinary generosity is not a perfection, perfection is only considered. generosity is only considered perfection, when somehow or other it's informed or integrated or motivated by the path to liberation awakening, and the expression or the activation of compassion in the world. So if to create to make one of these 10 qualities of perfection, it means what it means is that it's integrated with these two qualities. So we see how it supports us and helps us to let go in a very deep way and liberating beautiful way. And it helps us to feel or to express or to act on compassion for others. loving kindness seems closely connected to certainly the compassion part. You know, it's kind of love is kind of both of them are kind of kinds of love and Buddhism. It's a little bit harder to see how loving kindness is connected to letting go. But if we if we hold on tightly to our clothings and attachments, forms kind of a barrier between our capacity for empathy and our sensitivity to feel and be aware of other people. As the crusts, the barriers of the heart fall away through liberation through freedom, then the natural sensitivity, and my natural capacity for empathy and caring begins to operate more, more strongly. So that we see I think most people see that as they become free or spiritually, it often translates to also feeling greater capacity for love for loving kindness, for compassion for the different beautiful qualities. So today, the topic is metta. And it's in our particular Theravada Buddhist tradition, metta is considered to be the foundation for the other forms of beautiful love. Love is a very important part of this tradition, though often we don't use the word love by itself. Maybe because in English the word love is kind of so vague what it means. I love you know, I love Thai food, you know? Yeah, sure. And but the these these four forms of love that championed in this tradition, there's loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and then a certain kind of equanimity that is understood to be a form of love. And but of those four, loving kindness as seen as the foundation for the other three, the goodwill the generosity of spirit that goodwill, that there's metta when it encounters suffering, morphs into compassion, someone suffers someone or goodwill takes the form of wishing that suffering to go away when it encounters someone who is having lots of wonderful success, healthy success and happiness in life, then that goodwill morphs into sharing in that happiness and wishing that happiness continues for them. And then when that goodwill encounter someone who's maybe having something, some kind of suffering some difficulties in life, where we can't really help them, compassion does not feel compassion, but we can't really help them. They're on their own, they're making choices of their own, something's happening that we can't really help, then there's a certain kind of, or not appropriate to help or we have to leave them alone to find their own way. Then there's this kind of love called equanimity, which I like to refer to as grandparents the love. And the reason for that is that the grandparent hopefully you know, ideally, you know, loves the grandchildren, and will take care of the grandchildren you sometimes, but they tend that often maybe they're always the ideal when it goes tends not to have the anxiety of first time parents. And first time parents I know firsthand experience and you know, everything can see so consequential and meaningful and oh my god, you don't want it. And now, you know, this is the end of everything or something. And then anybody, grandparent have seen it all before. And you know, the little kids, you know, falls and scrapes or knee and really bloody and, you know, it's, that's what kids do. grandparents have seen and many times and so they do what needs to be done, but they don't get all worked up. Or the kid says, in one, one minute says, you know, Mommy, I'll marry you. And then you know, a minute later they with great ferocity says I hate you.

Now, you know grandparents have hair. I've seen all that before and see the coming and going through this and so they're kind of like more economists about it. The Love is still there, but they don't take it. Don't get too worked up and caught up in the drama of the moment the way some first time parents can do, maybe not any of you, thank you for first time parents. But I know some can be that be that way. So that's why I think equanimity is kind of grandmother they love, this love, it doesn't get caught up in the drama of things so much. So loving kindness is is, is sometimes defined in different ways. The word is metta. And it's sometimes even translated different ways. The most common in our tradition to when our Buddhist tradition is translated as loving kindness. Somebody people like that a lot. Some people prefer other words. I like I liked both words because the loving part refers to the feelings of warmth of appreciation, of kind of a heartfelt connectedness with other people. That kindness and implies that it's not passive and not just not a feeling of just, you know, goodwill or love. But it's also kind of wishing or extending oneself for the welfare of other people in some way or other. Tanisha Baker was here last Sunday and he preferred translation of goodwill. Because sometimes loving he feels that loving kindness sometimes implies that you're always kind of proactively out there, being kind and doing something. Whereas goodwill, it can be a feeling of goodwill generosity of wanting something wanting, wishing someone well, but not necessarily gushing over them or unnecessarily going out there to do something. You can be kind of minding your own business and feel a lot of goodwill for people and if they come into your orbit, that goodwill is expressed, but it's not like you go out of your way to be kind or actively you're kind but you know, you just you know, you You can be quite independent of them, but you receive them into your orbit into your presence when the need is there with goodwill, but if they don't need anything from you, your goodwill is still there but nothing is required of you. You don't have to feel you have to do something which I think he felt you have to do if you're imply loving kindness, something some people like benevolence as a translation. And so the different possible choices. Some people are not just like the word kindness by itself. classic definition is to liking it or to compare it to the feeling you would have for a really good friend, and B and the word metta is a cognate. To the Buddhist word for friend, metta friend, the word friend is Mita. And so they come from the same root. And so the kind of the kind of kindness kind of goodwill you'd have for a friend is the standard for doing loving kindness for having this whatever that is. So it's not romantic loving kindness, romantic love. It's some different kind. Another way of seeing it is that there's another Deaf classic definition for it or description of it. The characteristic of metta is to promote well being, its function is to prefer well being just like someone's well being, whether it's your own or someone else. It manifests in the removal of annoyance. It's proximate cause is seeing the loveliness of beings that beautiful to be able to see something beautiful in someone else. And I think that's one of the things that I tribute to my meditation practice my Buddhist practice is that I see people as being beautiful for much more than I ever did when I was younger, and, and you know, because partly I don't see beauty anymore very much physically. But I see something shining through people even if they don't even know it themselves. And I see so much of it in the world. It's quite, quite wonderful. So the proximate cause is seeing the loveliness of beings. it succeeds, when it makes ill will subside. And it fails when it produces selfish affection.

So the difference between there's a kind of affection or kind of love that's common enough. That is, that is, you know, love is love. What we call love is many different things. And sometimes we say we love someone, and it's, it's entangled with lust. Even I remember when I was a teenager, I would certainly love girls, women. Lots of love and boy was there desire I think maybe what I was, you know what I call it love was just raw desire that was for my sick thank you and none of you I'm sure had that confusion but but so is loving kindness fails when it's confused with or produces selfish affection affection was mostly just for me whatever for myself so it's considered a perfection in that that really is a tremendous support for Buddhist practice overall. And, and the whole path of liberation of being free from attachment clinging is supported by cultivating loving kindness. It's I think it's easier to let go it's easier

to want to not be attached to be selfish. If you feel your life connected in a loving way and an added attitude of goodwill For this world we have. So it's fairly common in Buddhism to actively cultivate goodwill or cultivate loving kindness, cultivate compassion. Because we don't have to leave the degree of love, we feel the degree of loving kindness we feel to chance to whatever it's, you know, we Bumble through our life. And sometimes we fall in love, sometimes we feel all this friendship to someone, and causes and conditions come together a certain way. And, you know, you know, sometimes, you know, if we fall in love there, there's an English expression of it's chemistry. We attribute it to chemistry, as if you have no role. Just you know, you put those ingredients together and there's an explosion, you know, and it just happened that that person had the right ingredients, and you had these ingredients and, you know, you know, it's kind of mystery how it happens. It's magic or mystery, and just, you know, I'm not responsible just happened. When I was about, I don't know how many years five, six years of doing a lot of Buddhist practice. I got really interested in trying to understand or trying to see how choice worked in my life, how there was choice and feelings and attitudes and beliefs and different things that I did. And one of the interests was just to see if I could see the choice behind following them up. And because before I kind of assume that was just something that you fall, or it just was an accident, or you know, you there was no choice involved, just kind of boom to happen. And so it took a lot of mindfulness, a lot of care and a lot of attention, you know, when I got in situations where that might happen. And with time I began seeing Yes, there was a choice, it was a choosing towards that goes towards something, that choosing towards to pick something up involved in something. It was kind of subtle and very minute or very fast, but there was choices involved. But yet mindful has been quite strong to see that Oh, that is you pick something up and so on. To say that in Buddhism, we don't let falling in love or feel love or kindness, loving kindness, be a chance for something we can cultivate, we can develop, we can create, we can create the conditions, we can choose to create the conditions. So we're more likely to feel compassion more likely to feel love or goodwill, a lot more likely to have a positive attitude towards other people. And part of Buddhist spirituality is to help create those conditions, you might not be able to necessarily automatically on call evoke feelings of love or compassion. But you're more likely to have it because you've created the conditions for it to arise more often. So in this last meditation we did, the big I gave you kind of a guided little guided meditation, to try to set yourself more at ease. And part of the reason for that is that it's a lot I believe, it's a lot easier to feel goodwill to feel loving kindness, if you feel at ease, if you feel safe. Some of the conditions that help promote it, so if you could feel more at ease than I felt, maybe Even more interesting to do that reflection we did on the different kinds of love you've experienced in which were more satisfying, more meaningful for you. So is that was that something that was interesting for you? Is that something that produced some reflect interesting reflections to do that? Now, people are nodding their head, yes. So then then because of that condition, because of that condition,

I would like to, for you guys to have a chance to discuss that a little bit and hear, hear each other and hear what came out of that for you, each of you. And so before we take a break, and some of you this kind of dead time of day, people's coffee is beginning to have an effect. So you might need to slip out, you know, as part of the group if you need to, but we'll take a break after the groups. But what I'd like to suggest is you form groups of four people and share it with your group. What came up for you? Or what you're comfortable sharing is what came up for you, you know, to share things you're comfortable saying, but what came up for you in that reflection about the different forms of love that you've known in your life? And particularly which ones were most satisfying, most meaningful, most peaceful? Or, you know, most something, you know, for you that you really value the most. And what were the characteristics of that? What How did that manifest were the conditions that allowed that what did that feel like for you? What value that does that kind of feeling have for you in your life? that give you something to enough. And don't feel like you have to answer the question. Like there's a right answer. Different people will respond or hear different things in these kinds of questions. So feel free to find

your own way out of those questions into your life. Make sense? And then share yourself here that was fine. Find three other things. To sit with, and we'll take probably about 1012 minutes or so I'll get a sense of how the conversations are going. But take 1012 and then just so before we take a break, they would be nice for us to hear a little bit from some of you what that was like and any surprises and discoveries, anything significant seems like it'd be interesting to share to the group, given that I wasn't part of any of the groups, you know, get a sense of what's going what happened. But also, probably each group had a little different discussion. So use some way of kind of, of spreading the wealth in a sense by hearing a little bit out something but

in our group, there was An overwhelming theme which was that you need to feel safe and in love, and that there should be and that you feel safer when there are no expectations or demands either way. And so it's kind of a flowing, give and take

with no demands. Great, thank you.

So in our group, there seemed to be a consensus that it was simpler, more useful to experience loving kindness with strangers, because people, you know, your children, your, in my case, you know, husband or whatever, with family, it's, there's all this other stuff, you know, I mean, of course, You love them and you know you do and you are most likely your firm in that. But if you talk about the ease and the more simple simplicity, for example, helping a stranger spontaneously, there's no judgment on their part. They're probably surprised and pleased, you know. So there's all these good feelings back and forth. And that moment is very simple and pure in a way without a lot of

great thank you. Back there in that tier.

So for me, I can't speak for the group. It's just my experience is that the first thing that came to mind is on the surface the people I feel most at ease with are the people I have no friction with. The people perhaps don't have like good people skills that don't just rubbish. Wrong way all a family's just getting your face that sort of thing. Whatever realize is that the most satisfying ones are the ones who act, they actually that I had an opportunity to be mindful of my behavior. My reaction when I was reacting negatively to that person that I realized is something that I wanted to change about me. It's not about them, it's more about me. And when I did make the change, the relationship changed completely beautiful. So it was satisfying, most satisfying to me in that sense.

It's part of what was satisfying was letting go of this complex you had exactly beautiful. Thank you.

I was noticing just the ability to be with the person however they are. And so it didn't matter so much. How they were as being with them with the attitude of not needing pushing away.

So feeling of love that had no need as part of it, and no need to avoid just just being present. Nice. Behind you.

We did two points. One was I think we found it easier when we thought of goodwill instead of loving kindness, that loving kindness seemed like a stretch sometimes. And that also we talked a little bit about chemistry and about trying to figure out specifics of what's in that chemistry what is it that attracts you to that person or repels you?

Thank you.

Speaking Just from my own experience, I'm glad you brought up that question about examples of loving kindness people. He I struggled with that question, you know, like do family. Okay, that was difficult. I think it's like a lot of baggage with personal relationships. Even with any type of personal relationship, I noticed that there's baggage, so it gets in the way. And I work with, in general, my work is loving kindness. I'm a body worker, I teach meditation, I do Tai Chi, I stress management. But more often than not even the most needed clients that are in pain. I could do the work and be loving kindness, but it's hard to feel loving kindness to those people, even though they're really in need. But when I started teaching inmates and people in the halfway house for that population, it was easy for me to be loving and kind without any type of judgment. It seems to me that it's a matter of how much compassion I have towards that person is directly related to how easy it is to be loving and kind. It's like that compassion part is really important,

nice and beautiful. And so for some reason for you, inmates and people halfway homes elicit a different kind of compassion. Oh, definitely. And then the compassion of someone who's physically in challenge and they need a massage or something.

Or even if they're in great pain, chronic pain, which is what I specialize in.

So that's a different kind of compassion then so the chronic pain doesn't elicit the same kind of compassion as for someone who's incarcerated, right, that's it.

I think it's a population of the incarcerated ones and the ones that are in a hope, like a halfway house has a lot to do with me understanding that a lot of them have been abused. Mm hmm. Right, a lot of different ways. So there's suddenly That kind of gets to me. So there's a compassionate part that is very strong about that scenario. And I'm sure that some of these people don't even have that background. But I just embraced the whole. It works. So that was a very interesting thing I learned just right in the beginning. Great. And I was afraid I was gonna be bored today.

Thank you. We'll do one more.

So I don't want to say elderly but older. And I think Hello,

I sir, we're all older than somebody.

And so I think we related to, to your use of the word choices. Yeah. That as we've gone through our life, we have seen the choices we've made. And then we specifically decided to make the kind of choices like you're seeing Today that, that you could reach into yourself and find compassion for an area that doesn't come naturally to you. And so we talked about those choices we've made beautiful increase.

It's a great, great, great, that's and that's a beautiful thing, the idea of choosing to reach into ourselves to have compassion or loving kindness, where it's not easy. It's not obvious, and maybe even worse, counterintuitive, or were some of the messages we get from other people as you shouldn't do to that person. But some something something inside of us wants to come forth from there. Nice. Well, thank you very much. And so there are different kinds of love different kinds of ways of feeling. And by beginning to differentiate between the different kinds, it's possible to cultivate or develop or highlight or value Particular forms of love that are the ones that are most valuable for you and the ones that you most want to develop or most want to have the bigger part of your life. If it's all one big Bush, then you know, you can't, you know, you're not going to have as much choice around which direction you're going to develop and highlight. And so the cultivation of loving kindness or metta or goodwill, is a

particular subset of the wide world of English word love. And so to begin to kind of identifying something inside of us ourselves that positively corresponds to this word. metta is one of the tasks of cultivating more metta. You don't want to get too hung up and what the Buddhist definition technically exactly is, but you know, because then you might not find yourself endless endlessly kind of, you know, trying to match someone else's definition. But, you know, you get kind of in the general idea of what loving kindness is in Buddhism and then what it What can you find that course best corresponds to that from yourself from your own experience. So you have your own personal reference point for something that you're cultivating and developing. So hopefully that exercise points point pointed you in that direction. So let's take a break and let's start again in here at 1115.