

# 2011-07-31 Papanca

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning. Thank you for all the announcements. They I meant that thank you because it's a, it can seem a little bit like a lot, but it's also it gets very, very, I think clear, clear sense perhaps of that what IMC is is a community. And that what we do here and can do here are able to do here is really comes out of a wide network or wide community of support and people involvements and so they got a taste of that, then I'm grateful for it.

So as a prelude to the talk, I want to tell you a story. And if you've heard this story before, then imagine yourself in the story And to see not just you know what the solution of the story is, but rather how you would actually feel inside the feelings you'd have. When you hear the end of the story, the solution the story has to do with a king may be a mischievous King, say it nicely, who gathered the three wisest, most intelligent people in his kingdom and said to them, I'm going to lock you up in the high tower in a room in a windowless room. I'm going to take and put you in that room, close the door, and you have three days to find your way out. And if you don't find your way down to three days, it's off with your head. So he marked these people up into the room and put them in the In the room and slam the door closed, and they kind of stunned they stood there looking at what had happened and they looked at the door and lo and behold the door had a extremely complicated lock on it. Set of locks, there was a complicated puzzle lock that and there was a complicated combination lock and there was a, some kind of bizarre key lock into all of it to kind of and they so how do you sort through this get, you know, is this how do you get out? So two of them immediately went to work, studying the locks, looking at the locks, measuring the locks, putting things into the key lock, breaking them inside feeling terrible. What are we doing now? Trying to figure out this complicated puzzle only to make it more more complicated as they did and calculating how many different options possibility They were for the combination. Trying to make sense of it guessing the two of them going to, you know, three days kind of trying to figure out these locks. And one of them just kind of leaned up against the sat down, leaned against the wall of the room and just sat there and nap, stretched and didn't do much at all. So the deadline was coming. And they hadn't figured it out. And they could hear the guards with their big I don't know what they have big axe with heads. You know, beginning to crank up the stairs and coming for them. What do you do? And so then the one who'd been just snoozing and laying against the wall, finally got up and walked over to the door and pushed on it and the door swung open. They had been so caught And looking at the lock thinking the lock was the problem. And that there actually the door wasn't even locked to begin with. It's just that they hung a big lock on there somehow. So, you know. So what does that say about that as a prelude to a talk about incense about papañca, a Pali word Buddhist word, meaning the ways in which our mind proliferate into abstractions, and how we get caught in those fixated on them in a way that sometimes makes the whole problem worse. We get entangled, and how sometimes we can use mindfulness as the sword that cuts through the Gordian knot, rather than trying to figure out how to untangle it. So that's a prelude to a talk. Because I thought today, I would begin by saying something

about the events in Norway. I thought it was a big impact on the whole world. I think Can people hear and I didn't want to talk about it last week, because it seems so recent that the time and it tells like often the good thing to do is to wait to find out more what, you know, when you don't get directly impacted. Sometimes it's better to wait and find out more, which we saw how important it was initially, people thought it was some kind of jihad in Norway, and the people all alarmed. And then, you know, found out was in Norwegian than other kind of conclusions and, and people kind of kind of live on their conclusions before finding out everything is going on.

So I thought, well, maybe we don't know. So I thought last week, I don't want to talk about it, because we don't know yet. But then I thought we can maybe also do it. Maybe rather than talking about it, we can talk about how powerful reactions we have learning about it. And I don't know I think it's better to wait. And so I thought maybe today to bring it up and Thought I'd bring it up in the context of this Buddhist concept, Buddhist idea papañca proliferation or objectification, or the way we get caught obsessed in abstract thinking. So the thing in Norway, you know, it's particularly close to me because I'm Norwegian. I was born there. And I've lots of relatives there. And when I, as soon as I found out about the shooting on the island, just outside of Oslo, I've granted looked at a map to see, because I haven't had an uncle who lived just outside of Oslo in a place like that wanted to find out, you know, it's close to where they are. And they're on the opposite side of Oslo. So they weren't even close. And you know, so it's a country I was born in country that I've lived in country I go back and visit and know well know that people will and so it Feels, you know, pretty close at home to have something like this happen. It was also quite beautiful to see as a Norwegian to know the culture there to see the response of many of the people. And it was particularly touching for me to listen to the king because I speak Norwegian. I could listen to a speech in Norwegian and it's kind of the kind of a unique I don't know if this is other kings in other countries are like this, but I'm thinking about the Norwegian King and it's kind of like a, you know, it's there's no power in the king, no authority. And I think it's kind of like the high shame measurement of culture, or the high priest or priestess or something, you know, it's, it has it has a particular role, which I don't think American culture has. I don't know if anybody in America has this kind of role of being kind of representative of the whole people as a whole and particularly representative of the best values of the people and to kind of remind people of their best values and champion them and hold them up. And that's what came through in his beautiful speech that he had. And I felt reminding people and kind of took the kind of graciousness of heart and openness of heart. And it was quite beautiful. And the papers have been talking about, you know, how the regions have been responding. And then as I kind of, as the week went along, we learned a little bit about the fellow who committed these crimes. He's tragedy. And his lawyer claims that he's crazy, insane is the word and then reading something about his life and people who knew him in the last 20 years or so in describing him and then reading his manifesto that he wrote, it seems that he was fixated, obsessed around thinking about his life and thinking about the world thinking about Norway in Europe in a particular way. From a Buddhist analysis, he was living in a very elaborate world of potentia Labyrinth world of abstract thinking, that has a logic of its own, and that he was kind of locked in. He was pulled in and obsessed or fixated on his own logic, his own inner abstractions and ideas in such a powerful way that there was no, there wasn't very seemingly very little contact with reality. People who knew him say that they're that some of the claims he made about himself didn't weren't really connected to reality towards actually the case. And so they so you know, one of the one of the teachings we've gotten here in the West amongst some from some Buddhist teachers, is a teaching of not seeing people as other but rather seeing in a sense seeing ourselves And then and because if you see someone has other, we tend to shut down. We see them ourselves in them, then there's some kind of openness and heartfulness that's possible. And so can we see ourselves in this man and, and I could see it myself in myself that my initial reactions to this was also a papañca

was maybe a very small kind of represent the reputation of the kind of a much more dramatic way he is to feel a strong sense of discomfort, strong sense of tragedy alarm, or something like this. It's very easy for the mind to go into starting to obsess about, you know, why did this happen, who's responsible what has to happen, you know, and starts operating from the point of view of opinions offering a point of view of looking for solutions and look, operating opinion of looking for blame and often that that kind of approach the model It's easy to get locked in. And I remember after 911 we had a community meeting. The next day in the evenings, maybe some of you were there. And one of the, you know, there wasn't much I could say. But we could hold a space for people to process it to talk about how they're feeling. And you know that. But it was really important that we set the stage for that discussion that no one was supposed to say any opinions or what had to happen. Because as soon as you start getting to the politics of it, it closes the heart, it closes down, kind of people don't find themselves. It's hard for a community of people to feel like they can relax and share how they actually are feeling individually personally. If people are saying this has to happen, this has to happen or that or, you know, this is what this is what it's all about. There's a kind of, you know, when once we get involved in that abstractions, interpretations, Sometimes there's not room for people to feel seen and heard or space for people, because they get put on, like, you know, you'd have to, you're with me or you're against me or something. So I could see in my own mind afterwards, you know, starting to take some of those routes with my mind, you know, wanting to conclude and wanting to get involved in abstract thinking and all that. And I think that so in that way, in a small way, you know, you know, we could see ourselves in that person. Luckily, many of us don't take don't don't get obsessed and locked in to those views so tightly strongly. But the idea of punch is a very important one. For people who practice mindfulness to understand to look at and it has its own logic, the world of a punch, once you get into the world of obsessing in words, we're in the world of thoughts and Thinking, imagery and ideas. It's very easy to lose touch with reality lose touch with oneself, lose touch with a certain way of experiencing oneself in the world that's much broader and bigger, more or more inclusive, than how it is when we see things only through the filter of thoughts or images or ideas. And it's so easy to see in my own mind for the mind to kind of begin kind of settling into that narrow world. And, and I feel very lucky to have a mindfulness practice, which regularly helps me to step out of that world or to open up beyond that world. So not my role is not limited to the world of thought. But you see, there's much more going on here than what you can, you know, than what's experienced or understood through ideas that we have. And I've seen you know, that, you know, sometimes you know, if you start getting into the world of thinking and ideas and the logic of it It's kind of like the, you know, the Chinese finger trap. And the more you pull your pull to try to get free, the tighter and tighter it gets, and you have to relax. You know, relax your head and, you know, go back, let the hands come together again. And then that that trap loosens up and you can get your fingers out. And so sometimes that the thinking mind is like that, that the more we're in it, the more we get, the more we get trapped. The more complicated the Gordian knot becomes, the more we get entangled, and the more we get involved, get caught in the maze. And it can be very compelling. There has to be a solution. And there's a way in which obsessing about thoughts. camouflage is the cost of the obsession. It can we lose touch with kind of what actually how it feels the tension, the tightness, the heat, the darkness, it sets in the Because we're what's happening often is, when we start obsessing about the world of thinking and ideas, we're doing what? What some people will called objectification. The mind is focusing on the object of awareness object of something we can think about. And when we obsess about what to say, say if we're obsessing about what we're looking at,

we might not be aware of what it's like to be looking. And so it happens like in movies, right? If you go to a movie, you're still you know, ideally, you're paying a lot of money to something because you borrowed money so you can get under lock with, for some of us a lot of money. So you can get properly obsessed. You can get objectify what's there. So you can really get into an involved in the movie. But I

think most of you have had the experience of being in a movie theater and something happens to break the trance. And you look around and say, I'm in movie theater. I'm not the end all hogs worth and you know and all these you look around you look at the people and you know, they're all stare staring is all of them are kind of obsessed and focused. And it's really bizarre. You look around. And, and, and you kind of broken the transfer bit and it's kind of interesting. And then you say, Well, you know, wait a minute, I paid a lot of money so you go back in. And so the same thing can happen the world of thinking it's possible to kind of dive into that world and be involved in objectification of people or things or ideas even about oneself. And because we're focusing on the object, we lose touch with something, we lose touch with ourselves, and often there's even an alienation from ourselves. And that alienation from ourselves. Can means we don't get all the information of what's happening. But all they what's happening The discomfort are happening, the feelings, the emotions are still there in the background, sometimes continuing to fuel the obsession. And there can be a feedback loop between how we're feeling somewhat unconsciously and, or the force the power that goes into continue to obsess and to think and feel that. So I think many of you have know this to some degree because I think it's not uncommon for people to realize that they're spinning out or they're so caught up in something, or stressed out that you need to do something to break to relax. And so people will sometimes, you know, take a nap or they'll go exercise although take a shower or they'll meditate or do something that helps the mind step out of itself, because if you stay obsessing and evolved, it just feels attention a stressor that just goes on and on. And so I think I need to break now. And sometimes you see that this, you know, I'm not going to find a solution to the problem. I'm working on it. If I stay kind of all knotted up around it, I think I need to step out. And it's not uncommon for people to point out that how solutions to something ideas come when they're not when they're thinking about it intensely, but rather when they're in the shower or when they go for a walk or some other time. That there are other ways that other ways the mind operates. Then only up you know only coming to solutions through thinking, thinking, thinking ideas. In fact, obsessing about ideas and thinking sometimes makes it precludes the possibility of the creativity of the mind operating. The mind is much bigger than the thinking mind. The mind is much broader and wider. In fact, the way scientists are studying the mind these days, it's quite humbling to realize how much the your thinking is the tip of the iceberg. And how much is going on behind this behind the scenes. So part of the function of mine This is to step partly to step behind the scene. The image I like a lot is that of toto pulling the curtain on the Wizard of Oz you know the Wizard of Oz in the movie was seen as omnipotent kind of figure. And the deep voice I think, and then turns out when the little dog pulls the curtains mine is just a little plump little guy standing there a little microphone kind of thing. And you know that and suddenly he's not omnipotent. So the same thing with mindfulness mindfulness post a curtain on the mind. So our thinking mind the idea is the obsessions we have lose their omnipotence and we can see you know, more what's actually going on. And often the thinking mind in and of itself, is you know, it's, I don't know if it's a plump little guy or gal but you know, it's not, you know, turns out not to be soundly potent after all. So the word is papañca. And sometimes it's translated into English as objectification. And sometimes this proliferation of thinking, I think are very closely connected to what's called discursive thinking.

And discursive thinking is the kind of thinking where your thinking is having a conversation, where your thinking is having it holding holding forth with a discourse. It could be that you're having a conversation with someone else could be having a conversation with yourself. It could be you're repeating a conversation from the past, trying to come up with a better rejoinder. It could be you're planning a conversation in the future. It could be that it's kind of abstract. Not so much a conversation, but abstract thinking where you're analyzing, trying to figure out what's going on. And for people who spend a long, long time in this world to a punch of abstractions, it's conceivable conceivable the interesting word here, inconceivable, unthinkable that there's an other way besides thinking. And that's part of this trap of the world of papañca is it seems like that's all we know. It's all I know. And so I have to figure out the

solution here. But there is, you know, that's maybe not where the solution is going to come. So mindfulness is that it can be the sword that cuts through the Gordian knot. Or it's a very different way. For me, I often get the sense that mindfulness isn't the road back to being at home. And that abstractions, this objectification, this discursive thinking, is a way of losing touch with a home that's in the heart or the home that's in the mind. So to feel at home like there's a real home a place of comfort, a place of ease, a place of freedom and place of have warmed our hurt a place that feels that has deep satisfaction, a place of meaning in one's own heart and one's own mind is one of the one of the things that mindfulness or Buddhism is pointing to. Not there's something to believe in that there's a home in your heart, but something to experience to know for yourself. And what that required is to step out of the obsession step out of being lost and caught up in thought. So as it can, it can be as simple Lisa say it as an incense turning attention around 180 degrees and know that you're thinking the way you would look and know that the sun is setting over the ocean, that beautiful sunset, you see it and you know it, you turn around and you know, you know to answer Analyzing or thinking about the sunset and figuring out, you know, well, that red should be a little bit different place, and then you start obsessing. But you just kind of, you know, to kind of clear sensory way. So in the same thing you can turn around and know, the mind is now thinking the mind is now involved in ideas. And in that there's a stepping back, there's an opening up, it might not, you might not feel it right away with time, and sort of seeing Oh, that's the mind thinking. And there's a world of difference between being caught up in the world of thinking, looking for a solution. And being able to step back and say, oh, here's the mind that's thinking. Once you can step back, here's the mind is involved in this conversation and discursive thinking and ideas. Here's the mind caught up in images, it's movies, it then there starts to be a possibility of some openness or freedom or some space. Space in the mind. obsession. There's very little space In the mind, obsessed mind is claustrophobic. The mindful mind has a lot of breathing room in it. And sometimes it's in our circles, we talked about how mindfulness Christ creates space around things around our experience in the mind, in space, openness, being relaxed about how things are, those are not ideas. Those are not thoughts that there's more obsession. It's an alternative to it, or it's an other aspect of it. And as the mindfulness gets stronger, as the capacity for awareness gets bigger, as a relaxed awareness can become big and hold the experience, rather than loss in the experience. The sense of space is there, or a sense of relaxation is there or for me, the sense of there's something bigger going on here, in my psychophysical being in this world, then my thoughts and my ideas. And it can feel it can be again, very foreign to people to think that everything is understood through thoughts and ideas, they were stepping back and become aware of something much broader. Some people mediate their world not so much through thoughts and feelings. And they're nodding an agreement with me perhaps. Because for them, their obsession is their feelings, their emotions. And they were thinking

I was gonna get they're going to validate the mind. Yes, I can kill is gonna validate emotions. In a sense, maybe I am. But you can people can be just as obsessed about their emotions as they can about their thoughts and their ideas. And again, mindfulness is opens up that world to so that were intense bigger than that, or we're not caught by it, we realized that there's more space. There's other processes going on here than this. And so there's something very, very unusual, very kind of difficult, perhaps or challenging around this when we're encountering tragedy or when we are In crime encountering crisis. And that is when there's a crisis. A crisis requires response. And sometimes a crisis requires an immediate response. Well, it's really immediate, maybe you don't have any chance to do much at all. But, but because of the strong needs, something needs to happen here. The old habit are all very strong human tendency to jump in looking for solutions and think about an analyzing it. Especially if we that's the route for solving things is thinking and ideas. We lock into that world. And we lock into the world objectification of obsessive thinking or abstract thinking or analytic thinking, thinking that's the solution. It is. But in order to be open to a wider capacity for processing a wider capacity of tuning into the situation, it requires relaxing the fingers in the Chinese trap. It seems like we asked to go



in the opposite direction, opposite direction of what is needed in the situation. So, you know, so in the time of crisis, if there's you know, unless the unless you have to, quote, pull the kid from out of the road when they because the cars coming down the road, if you have time, one of the things that can be very, very helpful is to relax and relax and make available other qualities or the capacities we have to inform the situation. So for example, one of the very important qualities we have that doesn't come with car I believe comes much broader capacity than just thinking is our empathy. And our capacity for empathy is a very important ingredient, I think, to living a wise and careful life. So if you look at the Norwegian response, and there are many, many people in the world now our commenting is that the Norwegian response we've publicly has been to go in the opposite direction of where you think you'd grow rather than closing up. Rather than becoming more totalitarian as a society and having more rules and laws. They're saying this kind of thing, is a challenge to the very deepest values we have of being an open democratic society, inclusive society. So we're going to our response to this is to go take a step further into that we're going to open ourselves even more in some way. So as a country, they do that, but I think we can do that for ourselves too. Rather than responding with crisis with tightening up it's probably too hard. Better interest to open up and opened up partly what that means for me the opening up is to open up so more of our human capacity for processing for feeling for sensing for understanding, can operate to the same time. And what happens if, when we open up when when mindfulness shows us other capacities, we find that the mind can be a place we feel at home and I don't think we can feel very much at home in the world of obsessive thinking because it's, it's often tense, it's often uncomfortable. But I have found that that are actually the way I like to describe it to myself. So sometimes is when I especially when I meditate that sometimes my thinking quiets down, but sometimes I step away from the discussions, the abstract thinking, I'm having and I and in that stepping away, there's a sense of warmth, a sense of relaxation, a sense of peace, a sense of spaciousness, a sense of broadness, a sense of

that's all associated with awareness itself. And so awareness feels like a place that's my home. And so you find when Buddhists sometimes talk about the heart as the home, the heart they're talking about, it is synonymous with awareness itself. Awareness becomes a home. Now, I don't know what your associations are at home home is, but I mean, it's all complicated people's lives. But if you kind of just kind of the stereotypic idea of home is a place where you can relax home is a place you feel safe. Home is a place where you can, you know, feel more peaceful and let go the stresses of life. We have that capacity in our own minds. To feel at home that way. And it was one of the things that requires to feel it is to be able to cut through the Gordian knot of abstract thinking, obsessive thinking ideas. Not that ideas aren't important, not that abstract thinking isn't important it is at times. But it's not that it's not the only game in town. And so if you have the capacity to know there's more, to understand the other games, or to understand it or step out of it, then it's possible to use abstract thinking more wisely, and actually more effectively. We don't want to jettison that important part of human life, but we want to kind of have within context and this beautiful context where we feel at home in our mind. And, in times of crisis, it can seem counter intuitive You can feel like it's not okay. It's not even appropriate, it's to come back to that home. Because how can you know sometimes people don't say how can I feel this goodness inside of me the sense of peace or well being? When everything around me is burning everything out, everybody else is suffering and struggling around me. You know, it doesn't seem right to kind of like, leave that place. Maybe with maybe not. Maybe if we come from that place we feel at home in our hearts, and kind of respond to crisis to struggles in the world from that place, that we be able to respond and meet the world with much more what the world actually needs. Maybe it needs more compassion and love, maybe needs people to show that there's a way of being peaceful and at ease. So the last thing I'll say is it's on my mind connected to this. So I was asked this week to come help that guest talk for a benefit, or Zen hospice in San Francisco. And to be part of a conversation between a doctor and a practice a contemplative traditions, I'm the contemplative tradition guy. And to talk about

the different approaches between towards death and dying for a doctor's standard doctor, I guess, and, and a contemplative approach. And, you know, death and dying are sometimes seen as a crisis. But what happens if we meet that with a mind that feels at home What happens if we find our peace and ease with that? So I hope that all of you are very respectful and for yourself of whatever response reaction that you have with tragedy in the world, like what happened in Norway. And I don't want this talk is not meant to be disrespectful or to discount how you're feeling. But there's a but perhaps we won't move it rather than that is to show that there's a possibility of turning towards how you're feeling. And it's a wise it's very wise to do that. And that, and then as you turn towards how you're feeling, you might discover a beautiful alternative of how to be in the world. Then, being caught up in thoughts and obstructions and ideas and shoulds insurance and blames and victims and that whole world objectification that RepRap capable of.

So, thank you. We have a potluck today. And it's often nice when we're having a potluck, you know, some of you are new, and please feel free to stay. I believe we're a relatively friendly community. So please stay and meet their people and introduce yourselves. But it's also nice perhaps if you are at all inclined to turn towards someone near you and just say hello. Especially those people who are new might appreciate having someone contact them and say hello and then we can get ready for the potluck. Thank you.