

2011-08-29 Mindfulness Practice And Beliefs

Tue, 8/18 6:36PM • 26:06

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

beliefs, people, holding, mindfulness, ideas, buddhism, conditioning, works, life, safe, activity, rest, views, stressed, deeply, nourishing, mind, refreshing, grew, meditation

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So in thinking about this talk, I'm going to give on mindfulness to society where the interesting questions is, what is it? What does it mean to practice mindfulness within the context of Buddhism as opposed to outside. And one of the things that mindfulness practice meditation practice has when it's practiced within Buddhism, for some people, is the idea that mindfulness practice is occurring in a bigger, wider context, or many contexts, many. And one of those contexts, is the idea of refuge. And refuge. refuge is a very important one in Buddhism. It's the idea that there's a context there's an understanding, there is a practice as an approach. There's a aspect of life that is support for us, that we could take refuge in, we can take support in The idea of refuge or the Buddhists sometimes described refuge as being something that's very refreshing, cool, refreshing, delightful. Happiness. There's sometimes talk about it being a place of safety. And that's a, you go out, you go for refuge, a place that's safe. And so you go feel the safety there. And so there's something about a wider context for mindfulness that provides for refreshment and refreshing coolness, nourishment, support, sense sense of safety. That is very helpful for the mindfulness practice because easier to practice mindfulness, if that's kind of the field or the atmosphere or the context in which it occurs. And it's, I think it's very, very helpful for many, many people. To have this kind of wider context is simply to say you should use mindfulness is showing up and being present for things as they are being mindful carefully to what they are to simplest definition of mindfulness. That's a tall order for people, when how things are, are pretty frightening, are pretty difficult, pretty challenging. And so it helps sometimes to have something else that contextualizes or supports it. And I've been thinking about this a lot about lately about how much human beings are deeply conditioned beings are all of us were conditioned by our life experiences by our families or society, what happened to us growing up as adults, and this conditioning is quite profound and powerful. And as a teacher of Buddhism, meaning that I meet with many people and talking about their practice. I, I get to see him one of those roles that I get to see kind of behind the curtain Behind people's public face or behind what you know what people usually don't share, you know, you walk around the street and everyone looks just fine. Right? And they are but, you know, there's often a lot behind what you don't see because often it's the private part private private life. And so, it can be quite powerful the conditioning that people carry around with them. I was talking to some, a woman recently, whose mother he grew up with a mother telling her she wasn't wanted and, and that, you know, she didn't really love her she wasn't really wanted didn't really want the baby and, and that continued to her whole lifetime. Until the last words her mother told her as a mother was dying was your pathetic and then they and so then because he was dying, the woman the daughter, it was, you know, it was it was a kind of a, I guess was trying to give her morphine. And then there was no more talking. But then the mother kind of starts smiling and looking and looking into her daughter's eyes for the first time and everything was so beautiful. And then she died. So, you know, with the help of the morphine, but you know, it's a quite a powerful conditioning for someone to have. And you know, it's a kind of dramatic story. But there are stories after story after story of things like that, that things that go on. As people

grow up, people have the experience. And sometimes the conditioning is kind of subtle. And sometimes it's quite strong. And we get these lessons we get these ideas or these beliefs, and then we carry with us into our lives. And we have ideas. It's quite common for many people to feel somehow insecure, or feel like they're not good enough. And that's a belief and idea that the mind has.

Maybe they have people who could never do enough for their parents. They do to get 90 I remember Someone recently said, are we getting 95 out of 100 on my grade for school, and the response of my father always was, I'll do better next time. You know, so that's the kind of strong, you know, conditioning, you know, can you never quite enough you always have to do more. And so these things go in deep into the psyche. And, and we grew up there was fam family dynamics, where, you know, there's, there's a parent who was really angry, you know, always the kids are afraid of them. And so home is not a safe place. And so they're always vigilant and always hiding. Because, because if there are too much out about an F in the home, there's a danger of a parent yelling and screaming or hitting, or the parents are fighting and who and in order to in order to manage the child, it kind of becomes the mediator or becomes the rebel or whatever and becomes a conditioning to carry that with them. And it's reasonable because you know, that they'd people get killed. Have these things because I think there's a strong need for all of us to feel safe, strong need to be loved to feel like we belong, have self worth, have a sense of meaning in our life. And so when those things are being threatened, then there's all kinds of ways in which we try to cope and deal with it. And part of it also comes in, we learn something we are we think we learned something about what the nature of life is in reality and who we are and who other people are. And these things can be, it can be quite deep. And sometimes it's not. It's not obvious even for people who have these beliefs that they're operating in the background, or there's there. They're kind of these quiet voices that we don't ever hear because we're always with the forefront voices, the louder ideas and stuff that are going on. There was I think it was a far side cartoon many years ago, I saw where there was an auditorium that was almost empty. Except spread out this parts of the auditorium were two people just sitting there. And then above their torian wall, there was this big banner that's announcing which kind of national convention this was. And it was a national convention of functional families.

Know there aren't that many people for this for this for this convention, because, you know, one way or the other, you know, we have, it's a challenge to grow up. The life prints a tremendous amount of challenges that little things can go wrong, they don't think so, difficulty and tragedies and this and that can happen, and it creates, you know, and even small things can happen. Remember, you know, for me, I was growing up and the first time I came home, and I was the tender age of 13 or so, and I expressed that I had some interest in it. And I was teased at the dinner table. And so I never mentioned girls again, till I left home, I wasn't going to go through that again. And so these are kind of locked into this kind of view this it's not safe, I don't I couldn't do this, whatever. So you know, so here in modern, logical West do we sometimes call this conditioning so often takes the form of beliefs, ideas we have. And, and it isn't just simply beliefs that are idly floating on your mind. But there are powerful beliefs that that we have that influence our behavior and how we see the world. And we kind of hold on to these. One of the observations there there are teachings of Buddhism is that the beliefs that you have are activities of the mind. It's something that mind is doing when it believes something Active is the activity of the mind. So the mind is in some way working. And even though it might seem like it just kind of passive belief, it's in the background and most of the time you never think about it, to the degree to which it impacts your life and behavior. It's it's active, it's working there, the neurons are firing something. And so something's driving it driving those driving along. And it's sometimes you know, it's not so easy to drop it just to operate in the background, sometimes unexamined, even if it is examined and even when you have the wisdom to see this is not really valid anymore. Sometimes these things are so powerful they can take over the kind of, they don't necessarily listen to rational arguments,

because of the deep conditioning. Spirit is still inactivity and in the psychology of Buddhism, The latest. Buddhism likes to say that these ongoing kind of somewhat compulsive ongoing can deeply conditioned, deeply habitual views ideas we have about reality about ourselves. Some of them we don't even know that they are views and ideas because just the fabric of life it's like if they say fish doesn't see the water, it swims and we don't necessarily see that we even are operating through views and ideas of myself and others and what has to happen, ideas we have or what I need and what I you know and what has to happen and who I am in relationship to other people and especially ideas of who I am deeply, deeply, you know, very subtle, very quiet activities of the mind, that are telling us who we are. Buddhism I would say that we are actually nothing substantial essential solid, except for the activities of the mind that tells us or forms that And so it's for Buddhism. There's this idea that, or the way the Buddhists like to talk about this habitual conditioning is that we're holding on to these ideas, we're holding on to concepts, stories, viewpoints, beliefs, there's a holding on, there's a gripping to it. And it's kind of like, you know, if you're standing there the edge of a cliff with a railing, you know, you hold the railing pretty tightly, you don't let go too easily because it's not safe to let go. And so people hold on to their beliefs, their views, quite strongly because sometimes it's not safe to let go. That's how they got started. They're the first to begin with, or we have very strong ideas, that in order to be loved in order to be along, that I have to have to have it this way, where people also hold on very tightly to painful beliefs that could do that. I'm inadequate. I'm somehow wrong, that people, you know, have, we've got the message from society. And, and we could take it in that it's true that somehow I'm, I'm somehow inadequate, I'm wrong, I'm the wrong kind of person, I'm the wrong this. And there's a holding on there's a holding on

is the Buddhist way of looking at it, we hold on to these things. And what's nice about the idea of holding on is that that's our contribution to it. And the holding on is not necessary is not required. But it's where the hope resides. If we're deeply conditioned, and the conditioning is causing a suffering, we're not we don't have to have to be stuck in that conditioning that we can begin slowly to release the grip. And, you know, maybe first you have to kind of just loosen pry open that the, you know, the little finger and then the ring finger, the middle finger, and you know, it takes a while to kind of, you know, and then it's been kind of some of the grip have, you know gotten kind of rusty and yet to figure out, you know, to get some oil in there or something and massage it and you know, it needs a lot of help sometimes. But somehow to begin to let go of the holding, somehow to release the momentum of the beliefs, to release to give up to put to rest, the activity of the mind that's having these thoughts and these beliefs in the background. So Buddhists like to talk about letting go, someone else might talk about putting that activity to rest. Someone else might talk about, I don't know, described a different way, but the kind of preferred way for Buddhism is to let go of the holding let go. And one of the most useful ways one of the useful ways to help us to let go is if we can feel that it's safe to do so. And so, to really feel it's safe, we've come into a situation where it's safe to find Lee put down our burden Simon finally put to rest that activity. And, and so the idea of refuge is partly this idea that there is there is something that can hold us there is a way of being that where it's safe. And now finally, we don't have to always assume that we're wrong, that we're always holding on to the idea I'm to blame, holding on to the idea that I'm the victim, holding on to the idea that, you know, any kind of ideas we have that kind of we carry with us at fester and every, we don't have to do that. We can let go. We can put it to rest, we can put it down. We can let go of the burden we're carrying all the time. And part of the function of meditation is to do that, because as we get quieter and calmer meditation, one of the things that begins to show itself is some of these deeper beliefs that we have. Or sometimes we don't see those deeper beliefs, but some Sometimes if we get calm enough in meditation, what's happening is the activity of the mind is being put to rest. And if enough of this stuff, kind of all this chatter and ideas and beliefs of the mind are put to rest, we get a, we get an alternative experience of ourselves. Rather than experiencing ourselves through the filter of those ideas and beliefs. We can experience ourselves independent of those beliefs

and ideas. And, and it can feel very different and usually it feels really good. And then to begin feeling and experiencing other way of being that feels good. And feel that it's safe to do that it's okay to do that. begins to re educate something within us. It isn't like we're rational, rationally understanding something new. But it's like you being re educated. It's like being in this you're all frozen. And then you stand in the sun. And you know, you don't rationally tell yourself you know, can now you can relax and stop shivering because Cuz you're in the sun, you wait for the sun to warm up your body, and then you kind of begin to relax. So this can help to find the safety and the delight and the happiness of a relaxed mind and a quiet mind calm mind begins to re educate, you know, those places of holding those places those activities of the mind. And it's possible then at that re education to begin to realize those of us don't work anymore, are not necessarily accurate, and perhaps to have developed different views different different ways of being in the world. And I think, I think it's well known now, that when there's stress, when people are really stressed, stressed out, a lot of the optimal functioning of the physiology doesn't work so well. It's much more easy to get sick. When you're stressed. Your your cognitive functionings don't work quite as well. When you're stressed when you're stressed. Your emotional life isn't As kind of fluid, you notice, not a resilient emotionally and psychologically, there's a lot of limitations. And when there's a lot of stress, when people get these stressed and get relaxed, the immune system works better.

Our capacity for empathy works better our capacity to have a wider range of sensitivity, understanding or tuning into what goes on in the world is much better, our thinking works better, or our creative functioning works better, so much works better, when we can relax in a deep way. So the same thing when so something beautiful begins to happen. So when we can learn start learning that we don't have to hold on to those beliefs anymore. When we can identify them and see, I don't need those anymore. When we can challenge them and say maybe it isn't that way. Maybe it isn't that way. Even if that just very questions, put a question mark behind a belief. Maybe not. Maybe it's differently. And then and then but not necessarily to decide that it's around. belief, but to recognize that to have that belief is an activity of the mind. And it's possible not to question the validity of the belief. But it's possible to question the validity of the need to have that activity operating. And, and so it's kind of like, kind of bypasses the truth and false sort of views and ideas for the time being. But by questioning the activity that keeps the mind from resting, and all activities of the mind, all these thoughts and beliefs and everything, have to be put to rest. If we want to experience a deep sense of peace, and then when we have that peace, and we've put to rest those activities temporarily. Then when we come out of meditation or come out of someplace where we put it, put it down, then we can We then we can begin questioning them better at that point, because we've seen that it's possible to be alive without them. We've kind of broken their monopoly. And then it's a lot easier to question. Is this a valid belief or not? Is this a useful belief or not, or attitude or view or something? Do I still need it? And it's remarkable how much it's possible to put to rest to drop to drop burdens that people have, that these deeply deeply conditioned experiences from childhood can be put to rest and this woman who I told you about to mother said she didn't want her dying words where you're pathetic. From the time that between the time that she was born, the time that her mother died, she had done a tremendous amount of personal work, and she no longer took her mother. Statements personally she didn't see herself as someone to be She didn't say she was no longer to be carried were there a sense of blame, and she no longer felt she was claimable nurse. And she put that to rest. And so, that pathetic statement at the end of the mother's life wasn't a big deal for her wasn't difficult. So, you know, so that's kind of the city of refuge in Buddhism is for some people is very meaningful to know, there is a way there is a context of safety where we can be willing to let go, to put the burden down to rest the activity of the mind that we don't need anymore. And so far, what the idea of refuge is different for many people. But the idea that there is teachings to do that there is examples of people who've done this path and taking it through to the other side, whether they put things to rest the so there's a wider kind of some people like say wider reality wider truth that

holds us. It could be just as wide as realizing it's wider than stress, that when we're distressed when we're relaxed, the whole system works a lot better. And some of them less rational aspects of our being supports us and helps us and guides us along in a beautiful way. And you realize it's not up to you just your thinking mind trying to figure things out. And it's okay to put to rest. The always figuring mind because it's something else. It's important to you that guides you.

So, what is it? What could it be for each of you, that would help you feel that it's safe to draw temporarily at least All in every belief that you have temporaries are temporaries because some of your protesting Why have good beliefs. I'm not saying that you don't need to ever have them again. But all beliefs are an activity. And if you have an activity of the mind is not addressed. So we'll help you feel safe enough to just drop all activity all all beliefs, all views, all ideas of who you are. All forms of how you represent yourself self images you have yourself and then just to be here, just be what is it to just be alive? Without an idea that tells you what it's like. Who are you when you don't use thoughts to tell you? Who are you when there's no images or no ideas or talk That explains to you who you are. Who are you?

And you can't answer with words. Because you can't use thoughts in this kind of this kind of challenge. So then what do you say? What do you do? What do you find? What do you see there? What do you experience there? In that place? Where thoughts, words, explanations, images? Don't, don't explain, don't tell, don't describe. Don't overlay a belief and what goes on? What do you find in that place? But is it there? And do you feel safe there? Is it is that something nourishing and meaningful? And I would suggest that if it seems frightening or difficult or not nourishing that place. That's because there's a belief Maybe invisible belief that that through which you're seeing that place of rest. And so then the work of mindfulness is to turn around and look, what is it what's one of these beliefs that are still left? That makes this so dark or so challenging or so difficult.

And so that's kind of the, you know, the, the, the offering of Buddhism, when Buddhism teaches mindfulness, it doesn't teach mindfulness only so we can just be present and mindful of our life as we go through it. It's offering mindfulness as a way to pay attention carefully and deeply so that we can experience this beautiful, nourishing, refreshing, satisfying piece. That become become a Wellspring. From which someone was beautiful qualities of our life can flow forth. And so, but that piece requires putting to rest some of your most cherished beliefs. And many of us the cherished beliefs are not necessarily the beautiful beliefs, but the ones that we hold on for dear life. So, my hope is that each of you will explore and think and wonder and discuss with people, what would it take what provides you with a sense of safety, deep safety, so that you can in Buddhist terms, so you can let go and other terms so you can put it to rest and other set another another way, so that you can experience yourself free of ideas. So those are my thoughts.