

2011-09-26 Relaxing Perception

Tue, 8/18 6:38PM • 30:03

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

perception, people, perceive, relax, nice, mind, act, tires, relaxed, perceiving, intensity, idea, innocent, construct, hot bath, meditation, shoes, frisbee, talking, notice

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, good evening. So I had something maybe a little bit different in mind for tonight. And that is I thought I would talk about a simple idea. And then what might be a complex idea, a complicated idea that's supposed to be simple. And then have you guys discuss the complicated idea. I'll just tell you how it's worth how it works. So the simple idea, or is very simple, I think very nice approach to mindfulness. practice meditation practice, when the mind is busy, you sit down to meditate, and sometimes the mind is restless, agitated, or it's so easily, you know, gets caught up in the highways and byways of your mind. So much so that you sit down you try to be with If your breath and the next thing you know, it's five minutes has gone by and you've been less than you were aware of as you're breathing, you're not even here. And you try to come back to your breath and the mind slips off again slips off again, it's really hard to be here. So in that kind of circumstance, way of practicing meditation that some people find very helpful is to practice saying the word here and just say it's very peacefully quietly here, as a reminder that you're here and just appear here I am here. And you want to say gently, because you don't want to do it's like a command like you went to a dog. Your poor mind, you know,

Come here and sit.

And the idea is to just say here and then in a very allowing spacious, relaxed way. Notice what is here? What's happening to you? What's your experience right now. And if what's your experiences, if you have a mind that's really restless and busy, then you would not be in conflict with that you wouldn't try to stop that necessarily, you would take a moment to just recognize and feel that the here is a person with a busy mind. Just a simple here, this is what it's like here. So you're not trying to get anywhere, you're not trying to get concentrated, you know, trying to particularly to get really mindful. You're just trying to acknowledge here, what's happening. And then you do it again, here, what's happening here, and you kind of just ends a moment of kind of relaxed recognition of what is happening here. And now, regardless of what it is, everything's okay. And you have to do it again. And again, and if you keep doing it It begins to relax the reactive mind that's kind of judging and upset and wanting things to be different or you know, but it also begins to relax that part of the mind and wants to wonder a lot wants to run away a lot needs to be busy. And you'll find yourself probably slowly becoming more and more here in this room at this place at this time, yours here. And then once you're here, go back more than you had been, you might not so busy, then you can maybe start focusing on your breath and you know developing mindfulness concentration on the breathing here. It so I think it's very nice that the word here he, he is a guess. I'm an M with a here to listen a T AR. Because hearing is a somewhat receptive passive thing we do. Active hearing is Listen, listen, someone says listen to that. They don't say Hear that they guess they could do that occasionally but but the hear you hear and you you open yourself to hear and it's more of kind of a receptive mode in the present moment because you only hear in the present moment. So I like it, that's a homonym. So the idea is to kind of this spirit of listening that way,

any kind of open, relaxed way, used to hear. And if you're really upset, then here reveals upset person. And you feel it for a moment. You feel it, if you allow for it, users acknowledge it in a very allowing way for as long as you can stay. And then you do here again, it makes sense. So that's a simple idea. Then so it helps to relax and settle down. Now for the more complex idea, a complicated idea and that is that in Buddhism they act Perception is not an innocent act it's not just a natural thing that you have no responsibility to the acts of perception when you perceive it, there's no like pure perception that I just open my eyes and I see people out there and that's the way it is access perception are have a very big mental component to them. And it's a mental construction that happens of what we see. So for example, I'm pretty confident that you know, if he'd go down to some of these tribes still in the Amazon basin who have never, you know, seen sit, you know, are kind of civilizations at all. And you brought them a Frisbee. They would, they would, you know, wander, you know, they would, they wouldn't see a Frisbee. They frisbee, the Frisbee and so, the Frisbee is not obvious. In object, we have a history of frisbees. We know we throw them we know we catch them. We know how to play with them. We know you know about super frisbee, and different games, and so and so, like Ultimate Frisbee is coloring. And so we know all these things. And so we see a frisbee and we see this is a frisbee, but we only see it because we construct the Frisbee out of our memory associations and everything we have with that. And so our acts of perception often come along with that expression are a big part part of them is their mental constructs that happens so automatically so quickly. That it seems to us like it just we're just innocent. We're just standing there. It's, you know, what's the big deal. It's obviously a frisbee, that's the Frisbee ness is just kind of coming into your eyes and that's what it is. So

that is one way with many of the things that we perceive in the world, that it's not just an innocent seeing But that were involved somehow participating in the construct. The first time that I kind of noticed this kind of interesting way was when I was at Tassajara, the Zen monastery in Big Sur, and they have this natural hot springs there, and they had to come into a nice little hot pool, you can go soak. And now so I would go there every day, it was a part of the schedule, you can go to soak in the hot baths very nice. And then one day I went there to do my soak, and it lowered into this hot bath was this very large frame of I don't know how long, maybe four foot long frame four by one foot or something. But they had all these one gallon glass jars in it. And in there, there was a milk culture with yogurt culture in it, and they were making yogurt. They were using this hotbed as an incubator for making yogurt and they I made a very good yogurt, you know, we need it. So I looked at that. And I said, Now, is this a hot bath? is a bath or pool? Or is this an incubator yogurt maker? You know, depending how you look at it, you know, what is it how it's used, we might see one thing, see another thing. It's so much used as a hard task that maybe it's hard not to break that perception. But there may be other things that we see that that like we have at home, we used to have my kids were smaller. We had something which was a stool for the kids to sit on. When the kids outgrew it, it became a stand to stand on to get to the upper shelf. Is it a stool or is it a stand? It depends how it's used. But how is used is defined by what we choose to use it for. And so it's perfectly a construct, that it goes into the perceiving of it, there's no inherent stillness or you know, stand thing. So as many many things like that, then that's true with people as well with We see a person we don't just see the innate, pristine, original nature of that person. We see person through the filter of constructs and ideas. And I saw this many years ago when I was 18. I was traveling around Morocco. And it was the first time I'd been to a non western country as an adult. And it was going around. And I noticed that this is long ago. And I noticed that my mind felt different than I had felt before. And I got kind of curious, but it felt fresher or lighter, or somehow somehow fresher, lighter, more open or some more movement, more rested or something. So something a little different, I think, what's going on here, and I as I pay attention to it, the conclusion I came was that the reason my mind was this way, in the kind of walking around these cities and towns and stuff, was that the people back in Morocco back in those days in the towns we were in, we're still wearing their traditional clothes. The men are wearing these yellow bows, these long kind of dresses.

And I had no reference point for understanding it like I did here in America. In America, I had all kinds of associations with what guys were, that's a jock. That's a hippie, that's this, that's that, you know, and with that recognition came judgments about different people. And the act of seeing someone was not so innocent here in America because it all this construct, the perception came along with all this constructs. So and in Morocco, I could see people and I didn't have any constructs, because it just like what men wearing dresses. You know, we didn't have that was fine with me. But, you know, it didn't come along with Oh, that's a Republican and Democrat, you know, maybe they were, you know, whatever and believe in parties in Morocco, but it had no meaning for me. So I could feel this freshness likeness in my mind. So Perception is not innocent. And one of the ways Maybe that's you know, that's complicated is that there can be intensity connected to perception. It's not just simply that we just perceive, but we can be very interested in perceiving we can be interested in certain things. So, you know if I said something I know what I could say maybe I could say, you know, one 10th of all the cars that came here today your tires are flat.

When you leave here, you're going to be pretty curious about your tire. And you're probably going to be perception is going to go and look at your tires walk around your car, look at all the tires see if you're one of those 10% to you has a flat tire. And so you're going to be now focused because I talked about this about the tires and, and depending on what you associate that with, if you're completely relaxed about flat tires mean big deal, you know, and You know, it's the night it's dark, it doesn't really matter and you know, just jack your car up, you fix it and you go home, it's like, you know, it's nice to be out in the fresh air. You know, then you perceive it one way. But, you know, you you know, you know, you're, you live over in Oakland, and you have no money with you know, nothing, you don't even have triple A, and what are you going to do, you're never trying to change a tire in your life before. Then when you go to look for the flat tire, you're going to look with a certain kind of different kind of intensity as if it's nice to get some fresh air and get some exercise. So the looking, you know, you can look in a particular way, with certain intensity or you and you look for certain things, you're kind of narrow and focus, depending how important it is. You get more focused, some of you will go out and all you'll see when you go out is tires. And if I hadn't talked about this, you wouldn't have occurred. You look at tires. It's like, you know, don't think of white elephants, you know, pink elephants, whatever. And suddenly, you weren't there. about it, but now you know, why do you tell me I think about it. So now so. So there's a can be intensity and focus and, and preferences around the act of perception as well. And some of that can be deeply embedded in our psychology. So that when some people when they're going around through the world, there's always a veneer or layer of certain kind of activity around perception. That's kind of common denominator of all acts of perception. So for example, some people maybe for good reason, go around being afraid. The world is a dangerous place. And so when they when they go around and look where they're going, they're always kind of scanning the situation say, where is it safe here? Is it okay now am I gonna be okay now, do I work here I fit here with these people are these you know, mix and match accepted? And it's very, could be very subtle, but it's kind of built into The act of perception. And my person might not even be aware of it because of how ingrained or how subtle it might be. Or it could be that it's desire. Some people have very strong motivation to have and to get. And so they're always looking around a little bit like, what can I get out of this situation? What's in it for me, and that's kind of the act of perception happens through that with with along with that kind of motivation. Some people, the act of perception is completely entangled with self referential thinking. And so we don't just kind of go out there and look at something in the world, but we look and we look through the filter of what's in this for me, or how does this relate to me? And that's a, you know, it's a deep part of the act of perception itself. So the complicated idea we're going to say here is that perception itself is not innocent. It's a lot of things go into perception, Buddhism, Doesn't pause it pure perception. It emphasizes how perception can have intensity to it that can be tension, attachment, clinging. Perception can be tense. And one of the things one of the instructions in Buddhism is practice classic

instructions, is when you sit down to meditate, to also relax your perception. Soften your perception, make it calm. And even in meditation, when your eyes are closed, some people you're still perceiving maybe not with your eyes, but you're not still perceiving. And there can be because we never look at perception so carefully. We don't we don't we're not trained then to notice all the associated aspects that go together with that act of perception. We might notice that we might, we might not notice that the act of perception is overly eager or repentant trying to get something from the experience or trying to do something a little bit afraid or be hesitant. So we're sitting here being with a breathing, and the breathing is relaxed enough perhaps. But there's an intensity in trying to see or perceive or sense experience. They breathing, we're kind of leaning into it grabbing onto it. And some people start getting headaches if they try too much this way. This idea that perception is not innocent, is kind of conveyed to the ancient Buddhist kind of more. I don't know what,

again, not just the Buddhists, but it's the ancient Indian idea of how the perception of seeing occurs. You know, they didn't have this theory of light that we have. And so how do you see so they believe that there was some kind of force in our eyes, something in our eyes, that would would go out of our eyes and grab on to what was out there and bring it back so we can see it and then go out and grab and in some ways, for some people, that's often how they see, they kind of they're there, they're kind of like they're kind of put on a little bit analyzer popping out. But there's such intensity and their eyes are almost as if their eyes are trying to hold on and grab or get something. So relax, relax the acts of perception. That's part of the instruction. So it's not a complicated idea. complicated enough. So this is what I had in mind. I would I would like to suggest that you go into groups of four or five people, and you discuss the degree to which you're comfortable. How it might be, that your acts of perceptions are not so innocent. What I mean doesn't mean that you have to kind of so again, this is not you know, for confession, but whatever you're comfortable talking about, about you know, can you imagine you can think a little bit Thank you stretch yourself a little bit. And think when I when you kind of go around the world and perceive the world, other people Things, what are some of the associated activities of the mind that comes along with that for you? It's almost automatic. Maybe not not just once in a while, but maybe it's a common thing. What goes, What do you think of might go into your active perception? And if you're mystified by what I just talked about all this stuff, but the perception then talk about that. And perhaps the group as a group, four or five of you, maybe can explore this idea a lot more and maybe even say it better or simpler than I have said, Okay. Now, it's very common. We don't do this very often have people break into groups to talk. Some people come here to be quiet and not to do that. So you can leave if you'd like, or just be quiet, sit in your chair and be quiet, not do any not participate. And just, yeah, that's fine. But some people are uncomfortable about talking to people, new people, after all. But almost everyone really values this afterwards. And one of the things that's really nice It's not that many opportunities to meet other people this way. In a meditation group, we sit, meditate and listen to the teacher, and go home. So it's actually kind of nice to kind of make a little bit of, you know, hear other people and get to make some contact. So it's a nice thing to do. So we'll do that for about, you know, 10 or so minutes, and then we'll regather and then we'll kind of debrief in but what your conversations were like. Okay, so when you find a group around, you have four or five people and have that conversation. So I'm curious if some of you learn something new in that conversation in about yourself or about perception or something. And in particular, if it might, you have learned something about possibility of relaxing perception or relaxing around perception, becoming calmer about perception. So I don't know if anybody would like to mentioned on what you might have learned or what came out, and I'd be interested to hear a variety of things, I'm sure there's many points of view.

Oh, there, we were talking about the, our perceptions and the truth. And in relationships with people how, you know, it's amazing how we can all be in a similar place, experiencing the same thing. But yet

we all have a completely different experience, and can all recount a completely different experience. And so we were talking about the truth, and what is really the truth at our own perceptions.

What's the difference between truth and what our perception is, but often I think we have different we have different perceptions, different things that are important. You know, the, like my eight year old son now, he's, he's into being an engineer. So I know that if he came into this room here, he'd be looking around What he's looking for is engineers. And then I have a 13 year old son and almost 14 and I'm guarantee you if he's coming into this room, he's going to look for something very different then who's the engineer

and so people look at look at different things and i don't maybe this is silly to say but a woman told me recently I know if it's true or anything but maybe it's the idea in principle, you know, applied elsewhere may be relevant. But she was telling you about women and shoes and, and I said something I never noticed women's shoes. And she said, Yeah, mostly women wear shoes for each other.

So I mean, I don't know so I don't know if that was politically incorrect or worse, but dangerous territory but

but you know, Go into a room I'm not looking at the shoes. So we perceive different things, depending on our interests. So someone else

You know what, come on about woman in shoes first, like I have like five or six pairs of shoes and they're all very utility, like, one's for work, one's for leisure, one's for the rain. It's all and then like, there's no connection as far as I'm concerned. But then I realized that I do notice women the different shoes that women wear, especially if it's like heels, just on a subconscious level. So it's like

something about you has some concern about that or some interest there. So

so I didn't even think about

so so there's that right. If things are interesting about something like that is, you know, not only like that, there might be some Little bit of concern or focus on that, but also, how strong is the concern? What's how much energy goes into it? is you just kind of like, you know, you know, whatever. Or is it you know, there's there's some kind of narrowing of attention. And does it come with ideas and judgments involved as well? Anyway, thank you. Oh, yeah,

just one addition. Like, I'm, like, when I say a pair of shoe shoes that's like, Oh, that's a cute pair. But then, like, I noticed one lady this morning, this morning, where she could hardly walk in her shoes. I'm like, Oh,

it hurts to watch. Thank you.

Someone else.

You mentioned engineers. I always think since I'm an engineer, or educated is one. They're always looking for. What's going to go wrong? And people that saw you know, our or how's it going to work and will it fail? And, and you go through your life, what what's gonna work and what's gonna fail. And then you go home and you see a wife and you

and you let you know, she does something, you know

that, you know, you think, Oh, you know that's not quite the way to do it.

Critical mind is already there and you just spent eight hours looking at a machine that's failed for for maybe you know three or four months and you're trying to figure out why this thing doesn't work. And

so here's an example You know, there's a perception that way of perceiving and that can be relaxed. Yeah. So this is where the wife says I think she can meditate.

Actually, she goes

out she's gonna say something

interesting. Because I did mention, my husband, in our group discussion didn't like when we were talking about how judgment is whether it's about back pain or about what somebody is experiencing when you look at them, or about what they might be thinking about you. And sometimes I'll see that he's going to be critical, but he isn't. He's not.

So so it's always different.

And we came to a really nice point at the end, I thought of just kind of unity around how well if we can just remember to be open and open and new and what were some of the words along those lines were and that does feel like kind of a relaxing of a concept and letting other things Come in.

Nice. Thank you. We one more.

I didn't think of it when we were talking. But I think, for me, when some kind of health issue comes up, how I perceive it makes a big difference and how do I react to it? If I see it as, Oh, this is like the last row and top of the, you know, nine other ailments I have, then I have a very strong reaction of being demoralized for a couple of days. But if I can perceive it as I'm 55 years old or so the

my peer group has this kind of

this sort of, you know, Ellen or pain or whatever, then I can handle it. be normalized.

There's a common phenomena I think, sometimes recognize when someone has an injury, or something hurts in their body, the pain goes away or gets a lot less when the doctor gives you a diagnosis. You know, it's you know, it's okay. You know, it's when you then you know, just the unknown the fear that comes into it that has a big impact on how we perceive pain even. So, there's a lot of room for to relax perception, perception and Buddhism. The words for perception is sunya. And it's, it's occasionally see translators translated his concept conceptualization, because perception and conceptualization come close very closely together almost another, there are overlap quite a bit. And so as soon as you have concepts, you have all these others, you know, associated ways of being with it, some of them which can be tense and agitated a lot of energy around it. So one of the things that happens in meditation practice is that we we relax The conceptual mind, which translates or includes also the relaxing of the perceptual activity of the mind. And so it's very interesting, perception gets more

and more calmer and calmer. And in deep meditation, in fact, it gets so calm that many, much of the ordinary ways of perceiving things is takes a vacation. So for example, you would not hear really hear anything anymore, you might not feel your body in meditation, you know, I've opened my body to open my eyes to make sure I still had body and it hadn't gotten anywhere, just you know, but the inner tactile kind of sensors that used to perceive the body from the inside just was not, you know, had calmed down and was so calm and just, you know, it was nothing, no, nothing being perceived. And it kind of you get you get them to kind of the outer reaches of how deeply relaxed the person can be. So, I mean, so I offer this tonight with the idea that it's an idea that it's an idea that maybe isn't often thought about or realized we take perception as for granted as an innocent act. And by turning the attention looking at perception, and considering it this way, it might be a certain Avenue or doorway into learning where you can relax, soften, open up, be fresher. And perhaps you can also have the kind of fresher more relaxed mind that I had in Morocco, which was nice for me. But it's also nice for those people in those people and any people that you are judging, you know, and seeing through certain filter, if this relaxed that filter, and just kind of see in a fresh open way is really good. So thank you for participating in this. And that was it was quite nice for me to watch all the animated conversation look like it looked like it was nice for you. So I hope and also hoped that it was nice to meet some other people here and Thank you very much