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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

Good morning, everyone. And so the last couple of Sundays I gave talks on aspects of the Buddha as a teacher. And I'd like to follow up those with a talk today about some of the things the Buddha said about being a student. And because teachers, you know, you have a teacher, your students and in fact, one of my teachers, my Zen teachers, said to me, it was always been meaningful for me, that it's the student that makes the teacher, that student teacher, it's a relationship that goes on, but that it's a student then next to a teacher. And I think of that sometimes because, you know, I just going along bumbling through my life until someone comes to me and wants, you know, relates to me as a teacher. And so I don't think of myself normally as a teacher in that way. So it's a relationship. And so what's the nature of that relationship? It's a two way thing. And, and so in a way that there are if you want to be a student, if you want to have someone be a teacher, what are some of the ways and that works? what is required of you? What are the responsibilities of being a student? Some people listen to teachers passively hoping to get knowledge or inspiration or something. But the tradition is that if you're going to be a student, a practitioner, who's a student, listening to teachers, that do it well, you have to go into the situation being willing to change to be changed. You know, only going in there to heavy be confirmed in what you already know. But somehow you have to be a willingness to change in the, in the contact with the teachings that you hear. And so is there that willingness Is there a receptivity is there that openness is there interest in Somehow changing. And you know, it's like, if you go to get lessons in something and in a musical instrument or athletics or something, you know, the expectation is that you're going to put some effort in to allow yourself to be changed by the experience. So, the same thing with in the teachings of the Buddha to be a student, you come with certain incense responsibilities, certain way to be, and so, it's interesting to see how the Buddha talks about this. So, this is from a text a sutta, called the Canki Sutta, where the Buddhist teachings to a Brahmin named Canki. And this young Brahmin came to the Buddha Brahmins are the priestly caste class in India and he in India special so they were the people responsible for preserving the ancient sacred texts, the that does and various things that are important for the ritual functions of these priests. And so, this is Brahman, young Brahman came to the Buddha. And he said, I made a statement, he said, in regard to the ancient brahmanic texts, that have come to come down through oral transmission, the Brahmins come to the definite conclusion, only this is true, anything else is wrong. What does Buddhists what is the Buddhists say about this? What do you think of this? They say this is the only truth, these ancient texts, these texts come down. So, this is an interesting question because, in many different religions, people will rely on some texts of Scripture and say, don't need This is true or this is true and they hold on to it in some way. So, here even 2500 years ago people had this approach and this man comes to the table for what do you think of this? And the Buddha's reply is to ask a question in return. And he says, among the Brahmins, that you know, Brahmins around today back to back then is there a single teacher or a single teachers teacher?

So, we say guys, the blue is the key among the Brahmins today Is there even a single Brahmin who says the following I know this, I see this only this is true anything else is wrong. So, I know and I see means that you know for yourself personally directly so Canki says, No, no, no one knows from direct experience whether these ancient texts are true or not. So then he says, Well, in that case, is there a single teacher of Brahmins or a teachers teacher back seven generations? Who has said, I know this is true, I see this is true through direct experience. And Canki says no. You know, we have no records of anybody saying, you know, seven generations not really knowing it for themselves. Then, how about this, the Buddha says, those ancient Brahmin seers, the creators of the hymns, the composers of the hymns, those ancient hymns that were formally chanted, uttered and compiled. That we still chant today. Do any of them any of them claimed they knew and saw directly? And there Canki says no, no one made the claim to know and to directly send the Buddha says something maybe a little bit critical. He says it seems among the Brahmins, there's not even a single Brahmin who would say, I know I see. Only this is true, anything else is wrong. And among the Brahmins, there's not a single teacher or single teachers teacher back to seventh generation, not even the Bose the people who created these hymns. say they no no and see this directly. Suppose there were a file of blind men, each in touch with the next. The first one does not see the middle one does not seeing the last one does not see. So two in regard to their statements, the Brahman seem to be like a file of blind men. First one does not see, the middle one does not see and the last one does not see what you think Canki that being So, does not the faith of the Brahmins turn out to be groundless? That's that's pretty strong, I think language. So is their faith groundless? And so Canki doesn't answer that question, but rather comes back this way. He says, the Brahmins honor this not only out of faith, Master Gotama they also honor it as oral tradition. So they're not saying this, well, you know, in addition to their faith, that that's true. It's their oral tradition that it's true. Somehow it's passed on from generation to generation. And the Buddha replies, first, you took your stand on faith. Now you speak of oral tradition. There are five things they may turn out intuitive Wait, what five faith, approval, oral tradition, reason, cognition and reflective acceptance of a view. These five things may turn in two different ways. Now something may be fully accepted on faith. Yet it may be empty, hollow and false, when something else may not be fully accepted out of faith, yet it may be effectual true and unmistakable. And then he goes through the same thing for the other four. So the five things are faith, you may understand some religious teachings hold it as being true based on faith. And then the second here is translation here is approval, which I think basically means you like it. And the fact that you like something you prefer, it doesn't mean that it's true, it might be true and might not be true. That Could you hold something on faith doesn't mean that it's true, necessarily. It might be true, might not be true. And then the next one oral tradition, just the fact that it's back then they didn't have written books, the fact that you have these texts, so these oral tradition, the fact that it's customary for many generations of people, doesn't necessarily mean it might be true, it might not be true. We can't be sure, just by that. And then the last two are interesting because they're more cognitive and the reason cognition, so using your reasoning.

And the Buddha makes this interesting statement that if you rely only on your reasoning, the results of your reasoning might be true, it might not be true. In other words, the reasoning by itself is not a good basis for ascertaining the truth or the religious truth. And then reflective acceptance of the view. So this is a little slightly different. This is where there is a teaching that's out there, and you engage in it reflectively thinking about it and because you're in your reason, reflection, it seems like a good idea, then you accept it. So that also, you know, might be true might not be true. So I think this kind of teaching is, I think it is being pretty radical pretty challenging, given, I think a majority of people who believe in religious teachings, probably the ground for their belief is one of these five or a very big part of it. And here are the Buddhist challenging say with this might not be enough to know the truth. And, and so I can imagine for some people, it's a little challenging to hear they're so pulls the rug from underneath them. Well, if I can't know it based on this, then how do I know what's true? So the Buddha continues in his little statement. Under these conditions in this way, it is not proper For a wise person

who preserves the truth, to come to the definite conclusion only this is true, anything else is wrong. So the fact that you hold something on failure, approval, tradition, reasoning, reflective acceptance, just those reasons you can't know whether it's true or false. And so it's interesting idea, a person who likes to preserve the truth. Someone who wants to be truthful, cannot in a truthful way, come out of based on those categories. Say this is true. This is an interesting preserver of truth to preserve the truth. So I think many people like to be truthful. So how do you talk about your religious faith, your religious beliefs in such a way you talk about it while you can still be truthful about how you talk? And that's what Canki asks, he asked the Buddha, in what way is there preservation of truth? How does one preserve truth so how Do you preserve the truth when you're talking about kind of your religious beliefs? And the Buddha answers like this. If a person has faith, the person preserves truth by saying, My faith is this. But that person has not yet come to the definite conclusion only this is true. Anything else is wrong. In this way, there's a preservation of truth. If a person approves of something, the person does not. The person says, my approval is this, this is what I approve of. But they don't claim this is true. When they hold something, an oral tradition, you say, Oh, it's from based on oral tradition, that I have this view. But you don't say this is truth. You say this is my oral tradition that I rely on. When you use your reasoning you make that you source your claim to your reasoning, I've thought it out and this What might they have been thinking brought me to. But I don't really know if it's true or not. But my reasoning brings me this far. So in this way, there's preservation of truth This way, you don't have to reject the views that you're operating on. But you understand the source of authority upon which you're holding them. And this idea of looking understanding where what authority Do you have your views, I think is a very interesting one. And then if you understand it's one of these five, then you would say, so, you know, I read it in the paper this morning. Is that true? You know, as opposed to, you know, saying, those people, you know, you know, who knows what those people are like, but I read in the paper today about these people somewhere, those politicians and you know, I don't know what's true or not true, but this is what it says in the paper. So to be careful about the source of your knowledge, as opposed to making sense Truth statements that you don't really have a basis for. I think it's gonna be a great thing for our society for people to be more careful in this way. So then, but then so the Buddha said, this is how you preserve the truth. But then the Buddha ends the little stitching here by saying, but but as of yet, there is no discovery of truth. So there's preserving the truth in terms of making a statement, which is true, but the person hasn't discovered what's true. And here we come into the section about how to be a student.

So then the key is, well, how do you discover the truth for yourself? How do you know and see for yourself? And so it goes this way. So you're living in your town and here Using the example of a monastic, Buddhist, monastic, there's a Buddhist, monastic, a teacher in your town. And so you're interested in spirituality, religious teachings or something. And so you go to this person. And the first thing you do with a teacher, is you examine the teacher, you test the teacher, you check out the teacher. So the first responsibility of a student is not to blindly accept the teacher, because of they've written books or because they sit up on a little platform or because, you know, whatever reason, but maybe because they sitting on a platform, you're willing to give them just enough benefit of the doubt that you you're gonna, you know, examine them carefully. Find out what's going on and the examination that Buddha recommends, is you want to examine them carefully, to find out whether they're influenced or caught up in Greed, hate or delusion. And I don't think it says it here. But it says in other places where the Buddha gives the same teaching, he says, You can't really know this unless you've hang out with someone for a long time. And so, you know, it offers some challenges. How do you how do you spend time with someone to check them out? To find out? You know, are they reasonably not caught up in greed, hate and delusion? Because if they are, then the idea is that that's going to influence what they teach. Also, the, you know, the idea in in Buddhism is to teach what you know. And one of the key things we're trying to know or experience in Buddhism is freedom from greed, hate and delusion. So you want to check out whether the person is free of those things or has some reasonable freedom from

them or work through them enough that they have something to teach? So you want to check out the teacher. So that of course puts us Teachers on the hotspot? And how you're going to do that? I don't know. But I do know that you know, it's a little bit you know, sometimes you need to come for a long time to hear someone listen to someone, or you need to find ways to hang out with them and outside of the festivities, formal teaching role. Sometimes the formal teaching role kind of is kind of formal and kind of like there's a little you know, you don't really get the full person in that context. And so the person might seem, we've had lots of examples of brilliant teachers, people have been brilliant in the formal teacher role. And in their private life, it's been kind of a mess. So how do you find out you know, and how do you check people out, but that's part of the task of it as part of the responsibility of the students. So then, once you've done the job of checking out the teacher, the monastic over Then, then the next step in this process of discovering truth is to offer your play here the translation is Place your faith in that person, offer the person some trust, some confidence. And remember that to be a student means you're willing to put yourself through change, you're willing to be open to become different in the process. of and so if you're going to encounter a teacher or teachings, you want to have some faith and confidence in those teachings. Otherwise, you probably should be more careful about going into them with some openness and receptivity. But without some confidence and trust, you probably would, you're not going to listen. You're not going to show up. And, and so that, you know, some some is required. So you're some some offering of faith and trust and it's interesting to look at oneself and say, Is there something? Or is there resistance is there or is doubt, the upper has the upper hand. And so whenever the teacher is saying your has strong reservations, you're criticizing, you're saying no, no, no. You know, and maybe there's a good reason to say no. But perhaps also, then you're closed, to take in what's being said.

So then you have some faith and trust in the person. And based on that, some some modicum of confidence or trust, then the next step in discovering a truth is to visit the teacher. In other words, to come in here and talk your teachings, meet the person, be willing to actually do something so that so this could say visiting going forth, you can't just sit in the privacy of your living room. But the actual contact, and there's been a long tradition in Buddhism is that it's a lot. It's really important. The personal connection doesn't Not necessarily your friends, but that you encounter the Dharma face to face. So that it's more embodied more more rich than you really get in the book, for example, where you don't really get so much you don't get the fullness Fine. Then the next step in this many variety of steps in what a student does to discover the truth is, pays respect. So there's some offering of respect to a teacher, which is an ancient tradition. And, in fact, in Buddhism, you're not supposed to teach unless there's some modicum of respect. People be dangerous, disrespectful, just wasting your time teaching. And so you know, why bother? In some cultures, the respect for teachers is very high. And some cultures prospective teachers is not so high here in the in the modern world. America, perhaps because of the very strong, egalitarian emphasis that exists in parts of our culture, we took and there's a kind of reluctance to have teachers elevated or to offer a lot of respect. And it's interesting for me to some people who come here to IMC, from cultures where teachers are given a lot of respect, or a bit shocked at how some of you to be the teachers and it just because it's so different from what they're used to, in their culture. I'm not suggesting you change at all, but it just no different cultures have different ways but some modicum of respect. That isn't you know, is suggested as part of the path of discovering the truth. So investigate place faith visit, pays respect, and then listens to the teacher. Remember, back in ancient India, there was no books so it was all oral. We have to listen. Maybe nowadays, we can Maybe reading their books or listening to audio dharma. You have to do something you know something in addition to so listen. So you have to take in the teachings, you have to listen to the teachings. The next step is interesting. Remember it's an oral culture back then didn't have books. The next step was to memorize what you heard it and now you don't have to do that necessarily. If you have you know, your, your book nearby and you've taken notes of the talk or you have your Kindle or

something. smartphones, I know some people have smartphones and they have the whole all the all the Buddhist sutras downloaded into their phones, so they don't have to memorize anything. I just go to the phone. Look it up. But there's something it isn't just a matter of, you know, having access to it because since there weren't books in the ancient world, you won't have access to teachings to be able to revisit them. You had to memorize them. But it wasn't just a matter of just having access to them. I believe there's some thing very significant happens in the psyche in the mind, when you've taken them in so deeply are so fully that they've been memorized. They live in their in a fully, fully more fully embodied way. We massage them, we work them, they work on us in a very different way. And I strongly recommend that people do a little bit of memorization in the Dharma, whether it's just memorizing some of the lists, you know, list of five, or whether it's memorizing a passage or a poem of the Dharma or something, but have something that you're kind of, it's working on you in a way that works differently then, when you actually have memorized it. The next step is important one and this can be done whether you memorize it or not. And this is you examine it. So this is where whatever you're teaching you received, you don't receive them and accepted blindly. Even though you might respect and pay respects and have faith in the teacher. You don't accept the teacher so just this is how it is, this is the truth because this person's a teacher means it's true. The responsibility of a student is to, to examine what's been taught, to reflect on it, to reason with it, to argue with it, to challenge it, to, you know, grapple with it, you know, whatever ways and there's many different ways to engage, and maybe on different days in different settings, you engage in different ways. But

you know, I don't think it's useful to just passively here with some teaching and say, well, because it's been said this way, it must be true. You want to engage in I'm going to personalize it. Make it personal, make it your own, you want to massage it, challenge it. So I think it's really great when people challenge the teachings, the question it I think it's better to question and challenge and the process may be learn than it is to use blindly accept. And then once it's been exam and well enough, then it suggests the next step is reflective acceptance. reflective acceptance here means you've because you've reflected on it and reasoned with it and examined it. Then there's preliminary acceptance of the teachings you've heard. And the preliminary acceptances because you don't know for yourself, you haven't discovered the truth yet. But you're going to accept these teachings just enough, so you can test them out. You're going to try it. And so once you've kind of had done some reflective acceptance, then there comes motivation, to be motivated to apply to engage in the practice to do something with them. It's not Buddhist Buddhism is not for the passive. It is a kind of active quality to Buddhism, you have to do something. You can't just get knowledge and kind of go along with that. And then Then there's practicing to this is really key. So there's possibility of a student, the Buddhist point of view, is once you've gone through these careful steps initially, then you start practicing you practice what you've heard you practice with those teachings are, they might not the teachings might not be true. They might not be right for you. But you've examined them well enough that you can you're willing to give them a try. And you'll discover in the trying and the effort, whether this works for you or not. So the practicing the next step is also interesting. I think, once you've practiced for a while, then it says the Buddha said you should evaluate the word it's actually I think, probably worse two way to evaluate the what's happening for you. How's this working? What have you learned? Where's it going? How you changed? Is this helpful for you? How is it helpful? Is it not helpful how is not helpful. So it's not again, just passive blind acceptance of practice because the practice of mindfulness, for example should be true if teachers say it's true. There's now something like thousand books in English on mindfulness and mindfulness and eating mindfulness and depression. There's mindfulness and Angry Birds. And there's even a book mindfulness and poker. So, you know, it's, it must be true, right? This mindfulness must be, you know, useful everywhere. So no, you see what I try, you know, you have the teaching of mindfulness or you have some meditation prayer, you try it out, you test it, and maybe it needs to be adjusted for you. Maybe your way of practicing is different, someone else's. So evaluation is an

important as we evaluate and see that it's helpful and useful and preliminary helpfulness and usefulness. The next step here wording in English that's given by Bhikkhu Bodhi is strive, the person strives. And I don't know how to make of this, but except that, once you've kind of checked it out, tested it for yourself a little bit and seeing that, well, it looks like it works looks like it's good. Then at some point, you give yourself over to it more fully. To the practice, you apply yourself more fully striving or persistence or more full, full, turning yourself over to it. So it could be for example, like going on a retreat in our tradition, you've tried it out, you've practiced at home meditation, seems like meditation is useful. And, and you know, you have some confidence in how it all goes. And so you're going to really put yourself wholeheartedly into it for a while and go on a seven day retreat and see what how it pans out there. And then, in that for wholeheartedness, really putting yourself in fully into the practice. Then at some point it's much better matures or comes to fruition when one realizes with the body the truth and to the expression an ancient question time the Buddha one realizes with the body The truth is actually two statements. But its first one realizing with a body.

I think that's what means it means in the ancient world is that you've got you've seen it directly you've realized that directly. So with your body is experiential truth as opposed to reason, truth or passive truth because you've just accepted from someone else you've experienced for yourself. So for example, if someone tells you that you know, when I was you know, when it's raining, you'll in the wintertime, you will stay warmer if you wear a rain jacket. You know, it's a reasonable thing. Never been to this winter to the rain, but then you put on the rain jacket and then you experience how the red jacket keeps you dry. If you if your teachings are that, it's, it's better not to lie, your life is better, then it's one thing to believe that is another thing to actually have a direct experience of what it feels like to be truthful. And then you know for yourself direct experience what it feels like. It's one thing to know that, you know, reasonably, you know, that seems reasonable, the meditation is helpful. The stresses you, it's another thing to actually experience the distress, how you're calm. And so when you experience the lack of stress, that's a direct you feel your body, it's a direct experience. And then you know, for yourself, oh, yes, meditation, relieve stress. So coming eventually, to direct experience is the goal. And once you have a direct experience, then the Buddha said, You have discovered the truth. And so the whole momentum of practice To become a discoverer of the truth. So you don't have to preserve the truth carefully by saying, you know, based on this, you know, my book or update or something, but now you know, for yourself, you know and see for yourself. So, it might seem like a lot to do. And, you know, this, this unfolds slowly over time. Some of this happens, I think, kind of naturally without being so caught, you know, intentional about it. But I think the principle behind this has to do with the responsibility that students have, and how do you engage responsibly with a with a Buddhist Buddhist tradition with Buddhist teachings? And how do you come to be a person who knows this for yourself directly. And so here are some suggestions of ways to do this and teachings to Canki so that's what I had in mind for today. So do you have any maps any time if you have any comments about that or questions? Yes, either. Click in.

So as as you were, as you were speaking, I was thinking when the Buddha was teaching this, he was teaching something new. That was a departure from I guess what was understood at the time. So we we are in a situation where there's many teacher, there's the Dharma, there, well, there's, there's Vipassana, a doctrine, I guess we could say.

There's many teachers and many of us here have

tested if that's the right word, the doctrine and also some of the teachers.

The I guess the point of my question is that

our situation today here is a little bit different than than it would have been for that Brahmin who was coming to the Buddha

to see if his teaching and the teacher were

were true.

Sure, I follow you but in your back in time with the Buddha, there were a lot of different spiritual teachers going around with different spiritual teachings and I mean, it was apparently pretty rich and diverse. And just like, you know, I don't know if it's just like it is here in California. But you know, we have a lot of diversity here, too. So how do we use a question is how do we deal with all the diversity? How do we find our way through it all? And then even in Buddhism, you find all the vipassana traditions, there are different teachers and so how do you how do you find your way through that? That the question I think that it's also possible to evaluate not only a teacher but also a tradition or a collective or community. So it's possible to look at the you know, I'm part of a network insight meditation teachers and we meet regularly I'm part of the Spirit rock teachers Council and, and, you know, here at IMC we have, you know, Andrea Fella and myself or their co teachers. There's, you know, the wider scene of IMS and teachers there. So it's also possible to get a sense of the wider kind of the community and also there's people like there's practitioners who practice and you could also kind of little bit, look at The people and the culture and how people are and so you know this this this these people kind of see okay with me these people you know they seem to be a little bit free of greed and hate and delusion you don't want to be have to high standards for practitioners because because it's the people who have these problems who need it need the practice so they're the ones who want to come and you know, they need to come to practice and work through this stuff. But I think it's also reasonable to be able to you know, to evaluate a community and say does it seem overall that this community is is representing values representing ways of being that seem in harmony with what's being taught or what the purpose is? And if it isn't, then go someplace else. And then so also the teachers as a Cole just seemed like a teachers as a whole things, okay. Or some teachers work and some people, some teachers don't. So there's a natural selection process. goes on. So I'm not sure if I'm answering your question because I wasn't sure your question.

As you were speaking, I was thinking about

particularly in this area, and I'm a business professional and I encounter a lot of people who teach other sort of unsolicited teaching, if that makes sense. And

let me tell you what to do about that.

Got me there.

So I that was kind of like how, you know, if I'm didn't designate that person, as my teacher, you have any perspective on that and how to, how do I listen or

if you have, if the person is not your teacher?

Well, I didn't designate them. You know, I didn't seek them out for teaching, but I think that's the A lot of how we talk to each other I, myself included, you know, I see myself doing that. So

it's a question for me to respond to. I should be careful here.

You as my teacher, so

yeah, I guess I would like to hear your perspective and

the

I don't have, I don't think I have any, any simple answer for you. And sometimes people are worth listening to some people, some people like to teach, and they do it a little bit too easily. But sometimes it's okay, you can be you know, humor them and go along, and sometimes it's useful. It's interesting, and sometimes it's oppressive. And so sometimes it's really you need to say, you know, please stop. You know, it's, this is not the time and place and this is not, you know, you're not my teacher. My wife had to tell me that at some point. Many years ago when I first I, you know, we were together before I was a teacher, but then at some point, I started teaching and it became a little bit of a habit to be teaching. So she I came home one day I was talking to her when he said, Gil, you're starting to use that voice.

So

I guess I'm thinking in terms of the, I don't know, what you call them, you know, the, the five or how many whether you use the five? Yeah, the five sort of guide guidelines for lists, you know, for being taught being the recipient. You know, sometimes I guess I can make the decision that it's worth listening to what's in listen to that degree. Or not. So

yeah, so, you know, I don't have any simple answer how to find your way through that. But it's certainly an interesting question. And, and, you know, you have to pay pay attention to the particular circumstances in which it's happening to know whether you accept it, whether you stop it or whether you do some wonderful like Kido with it, and see what That's very interesting. And, and on what basis? Do you believe that? Or, you know, or, you know, you kind of engage it to a question at back or, you know, or, or teach them? I think, you know, I think the I think, you know, it's one thing to have someone teach you on, on, on, on requested. But I think it's always good to be careful about teaching other people, unless it's been requested unless it's somehow been asked. And, and, or if you feel like you need to set tell someone, ask them permission, you know, would be okay, if I tell you I think it's best to do it that way. And, and so in Buddhism, there's, that's the assumption is you don't teach unless there's a request. And, you know, I haven't gotten the request at IMC for years because I think it's implicit that the request is here, but when When we first started when I first started teaching for this group 20 years ago in Palo Alto, I didn't do anything unless the group asked me. And at some point, it just, you know, like we had we, we had one day sitting, you know, I wait until people ask me, let's do one day sitting and let's do this. And at some point, it became clear, that was kind of a, you know, the expectation was I was supposed to kind of make the decisions or the imitation was the request was Gil, don't, don't let us keep having to ask you take some initiative. So after about three, four years, I kind of thought, Okay, I got if not just wait because the invitation is implicit. So I hope that works for you. I mean, I assume that that's been kind of the deal, and otherwise you wouldn't have come. I take you're coming as the request. So okay, so I hope that was nice and, and if it wasn't nice, even better, if it was challenging in a good way. Thank you.