

# 2012-07-23 Sacred Pause

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

And welcome to our Monday evening sitting and I certainly appreciate the chance to come here and sit meditate with you. I think it's a special thing for people to be able to meditate together. I know there's some people who prefer to meditate alone. And there was a famous in our little corner of the universe story about a Thai teacher who went to England to lead a retreat. He was a Thai forest master spent years meditating in the forest building the temple. And near the end of the treat, or some person who retreat and asked him would it be possible for you to at least once come and meditate with us because he would just show up and give us talks or instructions and he would go and so you didn't ever set but they meditated with a group and so she Yes, can you please see no comments. And he looked kind of really surprised. meditates with people. He never hidden that all's meditation alone. That's what he did in the forest or in the monastery we lived in, it was kind of for an idea for, for seemingly, it's just by the stories told. So here we are, we come together, we meditate. I know that for me, it would have been impossible to have done the meditation practice that I have done. The years of practice I've done without the support of other people that I meditate with. And even when I don't talk to other people, I feel like I learned from other people who I sit together with, and there's a resonance or a way in which we learn from each other and this kind of way. So that's one of the feelings I have coming out of meditation and seeing you all and sharing that. I hope it's something you appreciate as well. And perhaps also those kinds of sentiments are on my mind because of whatever happen in Aurora, Colorado only a few days ago. And I think for some many people in this country it had a huge impact this event, maybe some of you and perhaps it would be not quite appropriate are right somehow to sit down and give an abstract talk on some obscure piece of Buddhist philosophy and to have you sitting there kind of wondering about this amazing, awful event that happened so recently in our collective psyche Hearts The first thing that comes to mind in talking about the shootings in Aurora for me is that is not to talk about them directly. But the first thing comes to mind is to say that Buddhist practice is meant to be a preparation for these kinds of events, not in the sense that preparation when they happen in our lives, they were prepared to meet them were prepared for responding repair to being present, for what comes up in us when it happens. And that Buddhist practice is not about discovering how to live blissfully ignorant or aloof or distant from what goes on the world is if you're a Buddha, you can just tell you know, Aurora, linora, whatever, it's all the same. You know, just kind of stay kind of peaceful and it's all good rather. I hope that Buddhist practice is something that matures people And develops their capacity to be able to meet this would be present for these or to be prepared for when these things happen. Buddhist teaching teaches that these things will happen one way or the other. They'll happen in our society and our world in our own lives here. And there not so distant weather I don't know of any anybody here been. Personally you went there, I imagine but anybody here know someone who was directly impacted by the shootings in your home when no one's talked to anybody in Aurora or so.

It's one of the things that I've kind of been affected by the role that I have a job I have as a teacher, I talk to a lot of people and people often come to me and talk about their suffering, their difficulty and challenges. And, and it's happened enough times now that someone will come and talk to me about something that they were personally involved in touched by connected to the family themselves or something that had read about the newspaper, some tragedies, some difficulty. And I look at the newspaper a different way. Now when I read it, I used to think the newspaper was about things somewhere else. And now I see the newspaper. So I should read this because someone might I might meet someone, it could well be that I meet someone that somehow has been touched or affected by this in some strong way. So I don't know. Someday someone will come probably hear from there. So the idea of preparing being prepared, being prepared for your own death is what's often said that meditation practice mindfulness practice is a way to prepare for your death. So that when you die, you're ready and what I mean to be ready. Maybe for each person means something different. I don't want to say I know what it means for you to be ready to die. But I imagine that for many people, it's to somehow come to terms with their fear of death. Their fear of pain, their you know, all they come to terms with all the unresolved issues in their lives that somehow would weigh heavy on them as they're dying. The amazing capacity human beings have to look that right in the eyes and not be afraid. In Look, I death right in the eyes and have death somehow not agitate you or disturb you or concern you in some some kind of way. The way that the Buddha talked about this in his kind of more mythological language, is that the personification of death Mara, he would say either say, Mara, I see you very directly. But sometimes you'd say if you are free, Mara cannot see you. So death cannot see you if you're not afraid of death. So that so that preparation for it to be ready for it, not to be kind of just, you know, deal with your stress, a little bit of Stress Stress Reduction, but to really deal with the great stress the big challenges and so in one way or the other, there's all these different challenges and that every human being is going to have you share the challenges of life. We share it you know, I think much more than we realize that basic existential dilemmas and challenges and sooner or later, all of you are going to die. Someone recently gave me some people here actually gave me as kind of a gift for some teaching I done you know, one of those nice wooden park benches that you had You see in the park or a little pig preserve, and it comes along with little brass plaque. And, and it had my name on it. And, and I, I said to them, oh, this is great. I thought you already received these when you died. And one of the people said, Oh, no, it's it's, it's enough to be subject to death. So it was an honor I didn't say in memory I said in honor of the. So the first thing comes to mind is, you know, are we preparing into, independent of how we're supposed to think or react to, or respond directly to such events as neuro? It's a reminder for me, am I prepared? Have I prepared myself if I'm not If this is too distressing, too upsetting for me, or I run away and shut down Maybe I should think about how for the next tragedy tragedy comes along, how can I be better prepared for that? What do I have to look at and deal with? and myself? What do I have to let go of what I have to understand what I have to overcome. So the next time it comes, I can be there and maybe help my community and be present in a more useful way. So that leads to the second thing that occurs to me in terms of this kind of event. And this, I think, will hopefully bring our conversation more directly to what has been like for you or your thoughts or your reactions or your responses to this thing.

And that is one of the responses that many people many communities have to events like this sooner or later, is they'll have a vigil. Or they'll have a moment of silence, or a minute of silence or something. And there's been minutes of silence for a roar already and people have had visual. It's interesting the word visual apparently in Latin comes from the word of Wake up. This is a nice Buddhist word, to be awake, to have a vigil to be present and be awake there to what's going on. And I think of this kind of pausing for a moment or having you know, taking mind dividual is a time to presale sacred pause. And I'm very fond of this term, a sacred pause to give yourself sacred pause at really important junctions in life. Because in the sacred pause is a time for vigils at time to be awake, it's a time to notice more fully what's going on. We have our reactions, we have a response, we had a situation when things are under

control enough that we don't have to actively be involved anymore, to step back for a little bit. And take stock, what's happening, what's going on here, take it in more fully understand it more fully. And one of the many ways of being respectful of things like this is to be willing to try to be more fully present. bear witness is a term that some people like but to understand it more fully to be mindful to investigate. It is a Buddhist approach what's really happening here, not to rush to judgment. It's already been embarrassments, apparently, for people in the news, writing things about what happened to Aurora, and because they jumped to conclusions of what it meant, or what it was about, and then retracted and apologize for what they had to say. So, one of the Buddhist approaches is to pause and look more carefully what's going on here. So this is where I want to ask you a question. In a situation like this, or in in, in this situation, the shootings in Aurora now a few days later, what if you really paused to really stop and take it in and to investigate and try to get get a fuller picture of what's happening? What are some of the things that you pay attention to? What are some of the things that you would notice? What are some of the things you would turn, turn directions you turn to look to understand or to see or to witness or, or for your presence to? So that's a question for you. And so I was hoping some of you would answer that question. And my hope is that many of you answer it here. So that may be very interesting for us to hear many different perspectives of because I think there's many prospective many things, a whole, a whole wide range spectrum of things that are worthy of our attention at this time. So what are what are they? What do you what do you think of and we have two mics and perhaps, if you're if you can, once you if your answer and you can look around, see if someone else near you, is We'd like it. Well, the first person next person speaks with a second mic.

Well, my first thoughts are with the 12 people who were shot and killed their pain and then the nearly 60 people who were injured

and

and then all the others who were in the cinema

theater Yeah.

And then

then the suffering of the family and friends of those people and the ever widening circle.

So so there's the people who are directly victims of it either because they were killed or wounded or were present to for that horror And then and then to be present to be a witness to take it in to be willing to turn towards it and, and in a sense be with them recognize it, that pain. And that pain kind of travels widely out into their families and friends in the communities where those people who knew those people, right.

And then I saw today the picture of

the James

Holmes

in the when he made the court appearance, and the commentary was that he was he looked dazed, but I also thought he, he, he was probably frightened. And

maybe he's

coming to terms with the fact that he he has committed the atrocity, killing a six year old girl and all the others. So

one of the one of the things too, one of the things we could stop Pay attention to is the maybe the suffering of the person who caused all the suffering the difficulties there. And is that something that many people are not willing to do or don't want to do or close to do? No. So bring that in. I saw in one of the articles that I read about it, that one of the pastors in Aurora on Sunday morning, I guess, gave a talk and apparently led a prayer service or talked about that even even James Holmes should be the recipient of prayer. And so you know, that's, let's be inclusive, taking it all. So that's one other possibility. So other possibilities of things we can pay attention to at this point to bring our attention to

there was a story this afternoon about

is a green light on Okay,

there was a story this afternoon about the, the mother of James Holmes and, and I found myself being a little angry for her. When a flock of reporters called her early in the morning to ask her at 530 in the morning, and she didn't, she'd gone to bed not knowing that this had happened. And was asked how, how she felt about her son doing that. And, and I, I really felt badly for her.

Yeah. So. So there's also the family of this James Holmes, and the ripple of pain goes out there and so and so too. Is it significant or valuable? Is it to other people in the world who are willing to stop and listen and understand and take in that suffering as well? And is that a noble thing to do a dignified thing to do is that enrich us does that benefit us as a society to stop and take it in and be aware of it? Do we have the capacity for that? So what else? What else can we pay attention to? So you can pass it?

Yeah, someone else can if she wants to she would substitute pass around the Thank you.

Just in addition to what the woman just said is one more thing is they on the news. When the when they told the mother, she said, that sounds like him, and that shocked me.

Actually, what you said was, I think you have the right person. And now she's saying the reporter misunderstood her. Meaning what she meant to say with what she thought she was saying to the reporter was, I'm the right person. I'm the mother of that particular man, rather than so she was crying she was misunderstood. Imagine 530 in the morning, you're sleepy right? In such a news so what else to pay attention to? So I mean, that's the one thing to pay attention to is the reports, the news? Do we are the news always accurate? how it's presented? The idea that just because it's reported in the newspaper, is that an accurate presentation of what actually happened? And apparently, or at least from, you know, from her point of view, it isn't. And so, and how many people have jumped to conclusions about her and about the whole situation, based on perhaps misunderstood, quote. So how do we stop? How do we stop and take into that account? How do we stop and read the news? And perhaps have a question mark behind it? What's really going on here? I think that's a really important part of this visual there stopping sacred pause is to be willing to have kind of a beginner's mind open mind and say, Wait, wait a minute, wait a minute, what's going on? So someone else back there is a good person straight behind you if you could pass it there. And then keep

Is this isn't working?

Yeah. What it occurs to me is that through the media through through TV and movies and video games and so on, that a person might be able to get into a mode and I don't know about his mental health, but where he felt that he was part of a movie, or that he was a joker or whatever. And it's extreme, but we can all feel depersonalized I think, or depersonalized other people in a society where we're so caught up in the lives of fantasy.

Great. So that's let's restate it. Just restate your statement according to the question I'm asking. So one of the things that can be pay attention to The impact that media and television has in our society and the psyche, what is that impact? And how does it impact? There's a lot of opinions about that. And diverse opinions about it. So what you know, stop pay attention notice. Ask the question, what is the impact of media it happened in a movie right to happen in middle of a violent movie. It happened in a violent movie where the person seemed to seemingly was playing out one of the characters or something similar. So what's the impact? What's relationship? How does this play out in our society? And what are the different what goes on? Just what what what's the What is this? And keep it I think, during the vigil time, the sacred pause is not the time to have answers. Not the time to tell it. This is how it is. But what's what's going on. Let me look more carefully. Let me ask what's happening here. Are there different perspectives? What are the different perspectives? So someone else has the mic? Where's the other mic, Kirk? Okay, go ahead. And

the Sort of following up on what you're saying, I've been staying away from the media other than just okay, that happened. And so when you started talking, my thought was, oh, gee, should I really should be trying to stay open to all of this, but

it's, it's very different to say, Okay, this happened, let's be with it. And then jumping to the meaning making mind that this is what our society is, it's, you know,

whatever. And, and these are the laws we should make whatever. And that sort of meaning making and sensationalizing is what I start picking up on whenever I turn on the media surrounding this. So I think maybe it has been the right choice to not not let the media start what is already likely to happen in my mind.

So you're saying that you're saying that you're influenced you can be influenced by the people who are already making meaning and opinions and saying, this is how it is? So by not not paying attention to that you stay on influenced by those voices and what advantages does that give you in relationship with this event? Not that it just keeps you away and free but right Yeah. How does it help you become a better you know in this and that sacred pause I'm talking about now where you

think

it just keeps it more as

life has been lost

as opposed to

look at the monsters that are in the world and staying with the life has been lost seems cleaner,

a cleaner place to go.

So for you part of what could you could pay attention to something a little bit more primal foundational about the human experience and how deep and painful This is, that maybe gets lost if there's a rush to the opinions and ideas and what should happen. And so for you the sacred maybe Not paying too much attention to it directly keeps you connected to it in some other way, a deeper way and meaningful way. Okay, so what else? What else can we pay attention to? I saw Okay, go ahead.

So so to be stated as an answer to my question, it would be let in this period of sacred pause, we open up and stay present and explore. Let me let me start to understand the people around me better, how do how do I not understand other people? How do I shut down How do I not allow myself to understand my neighbor and my friends and other people's experience? And so how can I open up to this more fully and, and so that's that would be an answer to that, you know, when answer to the question based on what you said. Someone else? Yes.

Right at the very beginning, when I was listening to the news, I heard a lot of firsthand testimonials, people that were there. And it came through to me that there was so much clearness and people were there, and we're responsive and we're awake. And the one thing I heard that that gives me curious about is, you know, one person said, It almost felt like it was part of being there. And it was supposed to happen at the very beginning, when this man was dressed up and as he took the first grenade and popped it and made people's eyes tear, and they were coughing, but she didn't realize at that point that it was actually malicious and right, and she actually thought it was acting out and that's part of our society that we live in that we all find pleasure in doing those kind of things. In a in a fun, dramatic like way, but I guess when I was first hearing everyone's people who were there and hours later talk about it. So clearly it, it really I just thought it was a really good example of people coming together and staying there for it and not running away and not being overwhelmed by emotions in a time when you need to be more level headed. So one

of the things we can pay attention situation to like this, then would be the goodness the strength that people have, how people who are maybe, you know, ordinary people, whatever that is, who you know who we can meet on the street, how unexpectedly in a time of crisis, something clicks and comes together, and, and tremendous courage sometimes comes forward, clarity, goodness, you know, can come forth in that kind of way. And it's very inspiring. It's inspiring for me to read some of the stories of people who helped others in this situation and sometimes at the end The risk of their own life so many people actually lost their lives because they threw themselves on top of their friends. So, you know, so there's, this is one of the things Obama said in his talk, right? It talks about the goodness of people that have come forth. And so and there's a lot of it, it's a tremendous amount. And one of the people to one of the one of the things to take in during this vigil times pause to what's going on here more fully, is also the, what's called the first responders, the police and fire fighters and people who come in to help in ambulances. And not only is a tremendous courage and strength and generosity, I think in people who have that kind of job and are willing to put themselves in that kind of risk and situation. But they also are dealing with the kind of there's something that is deeply traumatic to be experienced and be there and so not only is there's a goodness there and that they're doing, you know, that coming forth in them and that kind of situation, but then we also have their stuff suffering that they have to deal with, and now for probably the rest of their life. And so, you know, the goodness, the dignity, the courage, the strength, the generosity, that not only people who are there immediately, but there are people you know, all over the country who are responding and coming forth, in many ways. So what else to pay attention to? Yes. Now that I forgot what you can be next, noticed that I can pay attention to myself as the need to try to



understand the motives behind James and why he did it. Or if there is one reason or multiple reasons and that kind of compulsion to try to come up with something that sticks even though there's more facts to be learned, and there's things that I never know. So for you, one of the things to pay attention to is what happens inside of you, and your rush perhaps to judgment or understanding or putting meaning on it. And so, if you stop and just notice that you have this tendency is that useful? To learn that part of yourself?

On one hand, it allows me to be more truthful about it because more open to new information

Oh, yeah, I just have to think it's great. Great. Okay, thank you.

Well, understanding

but I feel like it deeply uncovers the blame and say, you know, maybe the parents see whatever

and from there kind of see it so that for me is really big. So I'm always in my leg James like how can I understand him what he can do us you know, he's really lonely. You need a friend like something really struck me. Someone's apartment complex that he was really quiet and really say hi to anyone. And so, on top of that, someone that hears that that like, and what little ways are we actually not

So your, your your response is how can I pay attention to my way of relating to others, or the ways that I can relate to the world and to other people that can be helpful and supportive for people, and maybe make a little difference if someone doesn't go off? The, you know, in this kind of direction? So you're speaking about your contribution to society? And are we citizens? Are we citizens of society together? Are we here to support each other and help each other? Or are we here mostly for our own pleasures and individualistic needs? So someone else was the other one now. So you can pass that through there and you can be next.

So

I remember I was in the gym in the morning and I heard someone say, Well, he should Just they'll probably end up in a mental hospital. And it started getting me to think about, if I could make a decision, what would I want to see happen to this guy? You know, he's going to go to prison, mental hospital, whatever. Would I want to see him practicing meditation and I saw these things come into my mind, sense of either revenge or what what would happen, you know, what would I want if I could direct the show, so to speak. And then something came up and I realized that hadn't even thought about it much. But there is someone I know who's and some people might know about this because it happened in this community where her husband was brutally killed. And she has some even some ties here. And I mean, it was so well known in this area of his years years back, and I haven't been in touch with her. I saw her a while back, but it's been a while and just makes me think I might want to reach out to her. It's it's and not now but just at some time, they realize She went through this.

So so there's so this kind of event, pausing and taking it in reminds us that this kind of things has happened in the past to other people, maybe people we've known. And do we have a kind of ignored or forgotten it and because these kinds of pain can linger for a long time forever for people, so just some way of being respectful or caring for people who still carry those kinds of memories and scars. So that's one of the things maybe to notice. Yes. Green light.

Okay. Sometimes during meditation, I feel this. My consciousness is LinkedIn with every human's consciousness, and I've talked about that with friends before and it really seems like there is some kind of mass consciousness of the Earth's consciousness that we're all Part of it just something to pause and ponder that.

We are all part of this one. So one of the things to stop and pause is how we are interconnected and how we affect each other and relate to each other and it's not out there, you know, it's not like them, you know, I'm here safely by myself and it's a then it's happening to them. There's I think, in a very real way, it happens to us. And so how do we, how do we take that in? How do we understand that? How do we hold it in a way that's useful for our society and for ourselves? Thank you.

We're not when I was in Thailand, I noticed a strange thing. They have magazines they're on shelves in stores that are all devoted to like horrific automobile accident. Yeah, and, and just mangled bodies and things. I couldn't understand what was going on. And in the same magazines, he holds his Buddhas. And, you know, you can send away for these amulets and things that are all tied in with it. I didn't quite understand. I don't know, you might know something about it. But it was an interesting journey to

the, this

temple of Buddhist monk named poty. Locke

says, I say, obey because I like I like to stay on the question, okay, because we're doing kind of a process here. I think it'd be nice if we just allow

this as part of it. Okay, I'll make it really quick. Okay, we went into a museum, and it was just incredibly peaceful monk who was the caretaker of it, and he said, come in and see my flowers. And he showed us and we walked in there and it was all like, mangled people and bloody automobile accidents, photographs. Yeah. I don't know if that's related to this at all, but I just

can't. So let's see what other questions do we answer? The question

what I'm what I'm noticing about myself is the lack of reaction, the lack of response to the story. We've been hit left and right with stories like this. Through the media, Trayvon Martin is still going on with Zimmerman. Yes, the drive by shootings and the gang violence in Oakland and in Richmond, the political mudslinging that's going on right now. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. And so when this story came along, I had no reaction at all. I had no response at all. And it made me wonder if I had become desensitized to at all. So for me, it's not even a numbness or a mixture of confused emotions that I have to untangle. It's literally I have to sit and wait to feel something because I've been desensitized.

Yeah, so So, again, the sacred pause is a time to also notice ourselves more fully what's happening with us and, and how we're responding how I react. Acting what's going on for us? So perhaps there are people in our society who are numb and desensitized, because it's so prevalent, so much of what's going on. Or there's also another perspective on that, you know, not being as impacted by it as maybe some people is that some people live in little bubbles. And they're not really aware of what goes on in Oakland, and, you know, some of these communities where there's so much violence and going on and, and it's out there, but something about this event, came home to them. So Where have you been all the time? Why does this event Finally, pop your bubble? And, or, and so some people can say, Well, my point my goal has been popped for a long time. This is just one more in a series of things. And I'm sensitive, I'm aware, but it's just I'm not surprised. The variety of reactions, but I think taking take taking



careful account into our personal reactions is really important. What I've seen over and over again, in these kind of situations, that it can have a huge these things can have a huge personal impact on many people. And rather than taking being aware and conscious and responsible for the reactions, they react out of that in some impulsive, habitual way, in a way that's often not so helpful. So the idea of stopping and really taking stock of oneself. So if I may ask you, you don't have to answer. So for you, maybe you're desensitized, maybe numb in some way. So in this in this sacred pause of taking time to see that and how is that useful for you?

Well, I'm very curious because at the same time, I feel very detached from from, from others. And so it kind of folds. It's kind of connected to that as well. And I'm sitting with sensing that detachment from my fellow human being

in the wake of this event. Yeah. Yeah, So yeah, I think that makes sense, you know, so. So one of the things to be aware of when we stop and pay attention to our own reactions is our reactions are offered, often part of a process. And so there might be periods where there's anger and you know, rush to blame and might be periods of going down and grief and sadness is kind of enter allow these cycles and allow it to be how it is. So it's very, can be very respectful of it. In the sacred pause, the speaker pauses of time, so allow it to be. So I'd like to say a couple of words to finish here this evening. To me, it's been very meaningful in these kinds of situations. Especially when someone has died, like in this kind of way, or anytime someone has died.

Is

is to, to reflect on what do I want the consequence of that person's death to be in me And you know, the person knew the consequences in me, what consequences? Would they feel good about knowing ahead? And would they feel bad about it? So what I mean by this is that if some if there's this tragedy in Aurora, it was a tragedy and people died. I think it would add tragedy to tragedy, if the consequence of their death was it, I became more angry, more bitter and more afraid. I think that if I died in such a tragic way, and I learned afterwards, that this is what how the world responded, I feel sad. I would like that, you know, the, I don't want anyone to die this way. But when it happens, is there some way that the consequence of that can bring out the best in us? human beings? Can it bring forth or care for each other or generosity for each other love or kindness or wisdom? Can you bring forth these really meaningful and wonderful capacities that the human heart has? And that's the choice that we have we all have, which are these two sides of our heart gets prominence which we wish to be feed, which do we cultivate? Which seeds do we nourish? And my hope is that, Oh, that's a very meaningful way of responding to this is first to pause and take in the full range of how we feel, take in the full range of what our community feels take in the full range of conflict in our community that this kind of event triggers. I mean, already, there's conflict, you know, people are in conflict about gun control. You know, it just it's, you know, it's a conflict that came right away so quickly for some people. But it takes stop and pause and take it in. And in that pause, perhaps, begin questioning deeply, how do I want to respond to this audit? What are the values I want to come by? What is it realistic for me to feed and to cultivate? So that my response can help bring the best for the best that the human heart has, for all people, for yourself and others? Can this make it a better world? I hope that situations like this, help us and motivate us in a powerful way to live our lives to try to make a better world, a world where these things can happen less and less. And I think that that's one hopefully very meaningful way of responding to this. So I hope that this is meaningful for you. And some of you didn't expect to come here and have to go through something like this, but it felt to me like it wasn't appropriate to really, you know, not somehow address it. So I hope that this was worked well enough for you to do it this way. So thank you.