

# 2013-07-01 The Absence of Mistrust

Thu, 9/3 5:35PM • 34:51

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

absence, people, precepts, important, stories, idea, buddhism, person, identity, religious practices, trouble, ethics, blank canvas, sensual pleasures, trust, nice, mind, buddhist path, mistrust, opinion

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Morning. Good morning. Good evening. It helps to be mindful so you can catch that.

Last week I gave a talk about trust. Some of it was most most to me was autobiographical talking about the role of trust in my life and how important it is. And today, I would like to offer you a different perspective maybe on the same topic. Because perhaps trust is only part of the picture or trust is not quite it. And what might be more important than trust in terms of Buddhist, the Buddhist path and how Buddhism develops for people? Maybe a little bit softer, be good, because it'll make so is that a lot better? Okay. So what might be more important than having trust is to have the absence of mistrust and, and so the question you know, it's it's an interesting is what is the difference between having trust versus having the absence of mistrust it's possible to have not have mistrust and also not have trust. Maybe if there's no mistrust, there's no need for trust. And some people are pursuing or feel it's important to have faith, to have trust to have confidence. And it's often championed as a very important quality in spiritual life, religious life. But perhaps this the what the reason people are so eager and some people to have trust and faith, or think it's important is because they live with mistrust. They live with not just absence of confidence, but they live with kind of the opposite of confidence. And this idea that it can be valuable to have the absence of something, as opposed to having the presence of something is an interesting thing to consider. And I would say that in the higher reaches of the Buddhist path, that the emphasis is not on what is attained and not what is gained, not what you get, but rather the emphasis and what is not there. What your aim and sometimes talking about what you'd let go of, but what is not needed. And it's remarkable sometimes to be in situations where it's clear that so much of We think we need is no longer needed the admin spending time with someone who's dying lately. And you know, when you're up close to your time of your death, how much do you need? How much stuff in your closet do you need? Much of the things you're trying to attain and do and get you need. There's a lot of things that fall away, and that falling away, it can be very precious. I remember many years ago, I, I went to spend time with a woman who had lost her son, and I was sitting with her in her garden. And there were certainly there are a lot of sadness. But there was something about the poignancy of the moment of just being there in this beautiful garden with this person. That everything kind of came to a stop. It was very still. And it felt like nothing. Nothing was needed. It didn't feel like anything was needed from me. counseling this woman being with her, what was needed with anything was the absence of stuff, just to be there just to be. And if I had been concerned or worried or strategizing about how to be a good counselor for her, and trying to find the right words and what to say, I could have easily filled my mind with worry concerns, strategies, trying to figure things out. And I would have missed the poignancy and the beauty of this silence or the stillness that we had together just being there in the garden, nothing was needed. So the absence of things, I think of the absence of things a little bit like, you know, if you're an artist, if you're a painter, it's nice to come across come across a blank canvas, because there's so much you can do with that. If you love to backpack. It's kind of nice, the absence of the snow

that you go into the back country. The music's some piece of musicians say their music. The most important part of their music is the silence.

The silence allows for everything else to kind of be highlighted. Or if you go to Japan it's very interesting to see the difference between a flower arrangement in Japan's flower arrangements United States, sometimes America is a big bookcase. And in Japan they have a custom of these little niches in the wall of the rooms where they it's kind of very special a place where they happen to be a vase and have one flower. And not the whole bouquet was bursting called full of colors. With that one flower kind of stat that the what that flower in and of itself stands out in the highlight by the absence of a lot of business and other things. And it's kind of you can kind of usually kind of feel kind of a feels kind of very different feeling of the options. We talked about having a click Your mind, you know, I need to clear my mind. It's just so full of confusion and stuff and junk. And it can that kind of context, it feels really good to the absence of all this clutter in the mind, to have the clear mind to be the absence of. And one of the nice things about the absence of something, it doesn't require work maybe requires work to get there. But the absence itself doesn't require anything. So in terms of trust, if trust is an activity that we do, its work. It's activity, something you have to do. The absence of mistrust. That's nothing. Nothing is needed there. You know, once you don't have it, nothing's needed, you have to do any work at all. And that's why in the higher reaches of the Buddhist path, the absence is so important because one of the We start discovering in the higher kind of more mature path aspects of Buddhism is how the possibility of something really beautiful and poignant that comes not from doing any more stuff. doing more practice or, you know, but rather the absence of it, the falling away of it, you know, clear and open heart doesn't. I also like to expression, an open heart, never to have an open heart, there has to be an absence, right? There has to be an absence of being closed has to be a space, that that space something can happen. So, one of the very occasionally in the ancient Buddhist texts, someone who is spiritually mature, is said to be someone who has no faith. Isn't that nice? It has no faith. Don't say Other way the person in person isn't fully mature as described, described as someone who has nothing. It's called a kin channel. So word no thing no thing Person person who have no thing. And I think this idea of, you know, a few here that if you follow this path to its maturity, you'll have nothing you know, maybe you're gonna look for another religion because you want to have something to show for yourself. You know, you want to have something Yes, you know, you you go over to visit your neighbors and they're involved in a great religion and they have all this crypto mind stuff that goes along with it and they say, What do you have? Nothing. Nothing. How long have you been doing this practice I've been doing for 25, 30 years and you have nothing Nothing to show you know, but the idea to have nothing not because it's a diminishing of ourselves or not because it's a lessening of who we are anything impoverishment, but rather because there's a richness in the piece richness in the what happens in an open heart richness and beauty that happens in a clear mind and what can be there. It's kind of like a blank canvas, as I pointed out, might be very welcoming to an artist. Because it's full of potential artists, he likes to have blank canvas.

And then once it's done and painted, some artists will put it away and look for the next blank canvas. Because what's important is not the result of what they do. But what's important is what comes out of them what's being expressed. And so the same thing perhaps in a mature, Buddhist spirituality, what's not what's important is not what you have, but rather your capacity to respond your capacity to what comes out of you, how you are in the world. And so to be left with nothing, isn't that great? It doesn't leave you with nothing. But it leaves you with much better ability to respond to the world to meet it in some way. It's also a lot more peaceful. So I'm finding this kind of analogy or idea that you can look at two people. Maybe they're both in the same very difficult situation, very trying situation. And both people seem really patient. And then you go inside these person or you ask these person these tests a diverse person You know, how do you manage to be so patient? such a difficult situation? Oh, I gritted my

teeth, I really kind of really reframe the situation and think about it and look at it through a different point of view. I had to, you know, remember, we're all going to die soon. And, and, and I have to use cell phones as a mindfulness reminder. And that there's really great and, you know, and to do all the stuff you know, to try to and so that's nice. And then you ask the other person would it take for you to be so patient? And they look at you perplexed patient? I wasn't patient. What are you talking about? Why would the second person say that? Why would the second person that you thought was patient safe patients what I wasn't patient, he didn't have inpatients right. There was no impatience. He wasn't triggered, he wasn't irritated or frustrated by the situation was the absence there, right? And so in that absence, it could look as if the person was patient. But patients for the second person was not an activity didn't require any doing. So the mind can be more at ease. The first person needed to do something. So what do you know about absence? What do you what do you know about the value of absence? What do you think about this thing about having nothing? This is this a frightening idea, discouraging idea? This is a welcoming idea. I think if the answer is depends on maybe a little bit, now lighten up who you are. Your kind of way of working in the world, but also the perspective in which you bring to it. Sometimes to be told that you'll have nothing in this path. It's kind of insulting. Or it's kind of it kind of reinforces the idea that some people have that they're insignificant. They're not worth they're an unworthy and in that unworthiness Yes, I finally I came to religion that agrees with me have nothing. Isn't that great? I'm no good at finding all those people, all the other all these other nobodies. All these other nothing's, we're all losers. So you know, so it can be heard and that kind of years. But if you kind of try to do a little bit of the work of turning around a little bit, and tried to look at this from the way that might be useful and helpful for you How is it that this idea that spiritual maturity in Buddhism, this idea, how is this idea that the absence of things is the highest benefit you can give yourself? How is it that is really I was what why is that attractive to you and meaningful for you?

The idea that of absence of doing absence of the mind having to do to work to have something to be something or is it mostly perplexing? Some people's spirituality is deeply rooted in the idea that it's important to love or important to have peace or to have this or have this or have this. But is there something that goes beyond all the having and being And is more an absence, the Via negativa, the emptying of ourselves. So that's the topic for you. What do you think of that? So what I'd like to suggest, if you're up for it, is if you would turn to two other people near you, and share a little bit for you, with the Explore with the three of you. What you're, you know, is there any value for you in this thing of absence, spirituality of absence. If you don't want to speak, you're welcome to leave. You're also welcome to sit quietly by yourself. And then we'll regather here and continue discussion here in about 10 minutes, take about 10 minutes a little discussion. Okay, so please so and early his teachings The Buddha he emphasized the importance of wisdom. But the wisdom the emphasize was to have wisdom about what you don't need to do anymore. To have wisdom about how the mind works and operates and not that necessary ways, are to say differently to have wisdom about how we get into trouble with our minds. And then, to understand if you understand, if you'd have wisdom about that, then you have the opportunity possibility of maybe stop doing that or stop investing yourself in it unconsciously and this is really important. So to let go of the activities of the mind, which get you into trouble, that let go of those activities of the mind which are not necessary, which keep you preoccupied whenever and what's nice about this process approach to wisdom is that it's not a wisdom, positive wisdom about, you know, it's not like and that's something you have to acquire and get. It's mostly to understand what it is you can disinvest yourself from this invest in that what causes suffering. And then what happens after you're free of suffering, what happens when you're no longer doing activities of your mind that cause you trouble? Some people want to know, the cause. Sometimes part part of the drive that gets into us into trouble is the want to have something, to have definition, to have security, to have an identity to have things because if we have things some people will feel safe, or feel secure or have, you know, feel something and the idea of not having anything just being present and open. First is kind of a kind of like

You know, it's kind of like, slightly unsettling because, you know, you want to have something to show for it.

So in this ancient tradition, Buddha's teaching of the Buddha, he talked about a list of four things that people invest too much efforts into too much mental activity goes into these things. And it's really helpful if we can disinvest ourselves from being preoccupied and caught up in these, these, these four things like maybe any diseases, the four primary things are very strong ones, and I'll give them to you in a different order. Then the conditional order, partly because maybe it's more palpable that way, palatable way. So the first is one of the ways we can get into trouble is through precepts and religious practice. And so, we see that in religions we see that in Buddhism, where people hold on to and cling to all you know things Buddhist, some set some situations they have close you know, you can be a good Buddhist you have to wear a certain kind of clothes or have certain kinds of paraphernalia with you that shows or you have to have certain badges or certain status or yet there's something to acquire and get, or the idea of precepts, you know, people some people as a really cling tight to the idea of ethics and precepts as being so important and, and how to be safe and how to be right and justified and how to create a sense of myself and other religious practices we feel are so attached to their religious practices. because they're so desperate for some solution of some help some way of getting out of their suffering someplace out of their loneliness or despair or discouragement. And so after only religious practice can do it. There were many reasons. And Buddhism does not want to discourage ethics precepts, religious practices is very important part of Buddhism. And there is no spiritual maturity in Buddhism without being ethical. So we're not exactly supposed to abandon precepts. But one of the ways to get caught to cause trouble for yourself is to be too attached to everything to do with religion. Isn't that nice? that somebody religion says that? So, the and, you know, with precepts the generally it's How it's understood is that ethics being ethical is another example of something which is involved the absence of something. It's the absence of cause of wanting to cause harms, the absence of violence is the absence of lying of stealing and so forth, is not a doing. And so that to someone who's spiritually mature, they didn't buy the precepts is like the second person who is patient. Are you ethical? No, no, I'm not ethical, as not ethical in terms of something that person is doing. There is no no doing just how they are. So, at that, you know, looking at behaving ethically is important, but it comes naturally not doing but out of kind of being makes some sense. So the Buddha talked about precepts and really Just practices of being a source of trouble for people to be careful about it. The second source of trouble is excessively investing yourself too much, or be too preoccupied or attached to your, your opinions and your stories. And of course, none of you are but you can recognize it. But you can recognize it not those other people. And, and you can see yourself perhaps and other people, sometimes the extra amount of trouble and suffering and distress, sometimes can cause and when people are really caught up in their views, their stories, their ideas, this is how it is. Even sometimes when the stories are true. The fish they get bigger of every telling.

You know it's still it's the way we play people hold on to their stories and cling to them. For identity to be right, to have, you know, to to be entertaining to make an impression to show, you know, it's all kinds of reasons why these we hold on to our stories and these views and opinions. But it's still it's a doing. And this is a very interesting thing to doing the views and opinions. Because if you see that having an opinion is an activity of the mind. Then there are some times where you'll see I You don't have to bother, why would you bother? And what becomes an interesting question or exploration is not what opinion to have about something. What's more interesting as a first question is, is it necessary to have an opinion here? I've been in contact with someone likely who in in some people's eyes lives an unethical life and other people's lives, that person's own eyes and other people that know nothing unethical. Till you know, just there are a there are just kind of gray areas that are different ways right that people have on ethics. But I know plenty of people who see what this person does is being



unethical. And so I had to kind of consider should I do I need to get involved, but having an opinion about this person, ethics is unnecessary. So, sometimes is necessary to have that sometimes necessary to evaluate and consider and come to a decision. But is it always necessary? Maybe it's not always necessary. Maybe it's possible to meet someone and not carry with us the judgments, even if the judgments are true, good appropriate to have, do we need to have them so the question is, do we need to have the judgments is maybe more important than what is your opinion? And I don't think we're asked we ask ourselves that enough. So next time you're with someone and rather than asking them their opinion about something, ask them. Do you think we need to have an opinion about this? and have a discussion about the need, you know, sir, Is it really necessary to have it? Someone handed me a lead me a book today. It's called life after murder. And it's a woman, a journalist who spent four or five years getting to know five men in San Quentin, who were in the jail because of murder. And she talks about she follows them through a process of she calls redemption. And, you know, they spent decades and in jail says, you know, she follows through them but she, she records or learns their story and they come out and, and I've been to San Quentin and met with people who were murdered. And, and do I know, you know, that's a pretty heavy thing to do right? Do I need to judge them? Do I need to be involved in having an opinion? Some people say it's natural terrapins should have an opinion. But I'm sitting there in a room with these people. And that's not what it's about. There's no one there's no point for me to have an opinion or judgment about them. That's not the story. So that's not a time for it. We're meeting a meeting them in a very different setting, very different situation. And not only is another time for an opinion, it's not helpful for me or for them. So stories, opinions, views, being right. There's a time for it and not time for it. And so that's another one of these places we get in trouble. And another place where we can have an absence of it is really helpful. The third place of trouble is around all the IDS We can have about ourself the stories and views and opinions about ourselves subcategory of the story thing. And to have a self to be caught up in self identity, we all have some kind of identity. But do we have to always go around with it? Do we have to always kind of wave the flag in Buddhism, the idea of the identity conceit is like a flag to grow. Look at me over here. This is who I am. One of the beautiful things are great things I think of I've experienced of sitting in a meditation hall with other people. Is it the normal kind of social identities that people kind of relate by or game social games will play, fall away. It is difficult for them to survive on a meditation retreat, because it's a lot of work. to prop up your identity, sprung a lot of work to try to be someone all the time. It's nice not to be someone nice just to be. And so and so retreats are great place to learn that. And then it's interesting to be with other people who you know, have all that kind of social identities and kind of fall away. And there's so many kind of stories we tell about ourselves, not just identities about who we are, but also how we are, you know, I'm worthless. I'm a bad person, and, you know, I'm the best person and everybody else better realize it. And I'm going to make they don't, I'm going to make sure they do. And, you know, it's all this whole stuff, right? So, to study this to understand how we get in trouble, around self identity, and then to learn that maybe there are plenty of times we don't need it. Just like we don't have to judge someone else all the time. Always. We can just meet someone, maybe murderers or sometimes just meet them. Without the history of the story. What happened? In what you think about it, just meet them. So the same way maybe you can do that for yourself, you can just meet the world, be in the world without a story that being someone, need to prove yourself, disprove yourself, defend yourself. Just be and then the third, the fourth of these places people get in trouble is around sensual pleasure. Or it's probably more useful to to expand it out to call the pursuit of comfort. But, you know, pleasure comfort is a very big driving force for people. I think more than most people realize. Some people kind of bristle at the idea that Buddhism says you should give up attachment to sensual pleasures because I don't have a problem with sensual pleasures. But, you know, it's it's kind of embedded in many, many, many people's kind of mold. To moment choices about how they live their lives. And so it's an area where people get in trouble. I mean, it's the obvious kind of trouble that people get into when it when it's, you know, dramatic pursuit of pleasure or addiction or lust or something. But the very preoccupation with being comfortable, the occupation with pleasure is an activity of the mind. And it's tiring. It's an activity of the mind, which is not

always needed. And so do you have the ability to put that down? To stop? Wanting pleasure, stop wanting comfort? Do you have the ability to stop wanting when you're uncomfortable? is one of the things that I learned from my experience of meditation retreats. I found that my early years of meditation retreats, they were rather uncomfortable. My knees hurt and things like that. And I learned that my mind could be peaceful. If I didn't get involved with the discomfort if I just left it alone, just left it alone. And it took quite a while to learn that was okay to do. I had all these strategies and all this motivation to fix and do and react and judge and be upset and have self pity. Plenty of doing that I was capable of, not capable of I did. And then what I learned slowly because I did a lot of these retreats was I didn't have to do those things, and have to do those things. And then came a point where I began to appreciate the value. the quality of my mind, the state of my heart, when it was at peace, when it wasn't in reacting to the discomfort or pursuing one in comfort, and I could just be uncomfortable and be peaceful. The absence of the reactivity and all the doing of the mind, the drive for pleasure, the drive for comfort. So these five areas are areas in our life where it's really useful to learn how to live with the absence of them.

We're not to live without them all the time. Just put them aside once and for all. There's a time and place for rituals and mean ethics and religious practices at a time and place for our stories. There's a time and place for having a self identity and there's a time and place for sensual pleasures for sure. But you have the ability to be at ease and comfortable and enjoy the absence of all those things. And that's one of the things that meditation practice is helping us to do. meditation practices. One of those places where it's not about attaining something or getting something, it's more like letting go of things, divesting yourself, doing less, discovering how little you need to do. And in that absence of doing, there's meaning in the absence of doing there's freedom in the absence of doing. There is a different perspective on our lives, that then we can bring with us and see our lives in a new way. So maybe you don't need to trust it is some of you are troubled by last week's talk. As to religious faith, I knew today, today instead of faith instead of trust better than faith better than trust is the absence of mistrust.

May you be, we see it's hard, you know, I've had to use all these negatives that people don't you know, this doesn't work either. So we say, may you be filled with trust. But what I really mean is, may you have the absence of mistrust. It might look the same. And in that absence of mistrust, may you find deep abiding, satisfying sense of peace. Thank you.