

2014-06-09 Story of Buddha

Sat, 9/12 3:45PM • 42:05

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, life, buddha, story, peace, died, common denominator, ate, walking, common thread, death, trees, experienced, encounter, ancient india, craving, feeling, luxury, discovered, point

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Well, he's trying to make it work. Tell a couple of stories. One is that if Buddhism depended on having air conditioners especially in its, you know, hundreds of years it was only in India it wouldn't have survived and also in there when I was in Japan, sometimes practicing in the monasteries there it was very hot, hot and humid, much hotter than this and then there was also really cold in the winter really cold in the monasteries you know basically had no you got it thank you in the monasteries had no you know some of them had no insulation and sometimes in the cold Siberian winds would come down. We would have to sit and meditate at night outside on the on the girl on the deck and porch with shaved heads. So hot and cold was, you know, kind of part of the deal. And so the Zen masters in Japan would like to ask questions like, some like, what do you do when it's hot? Or do you what do you prefer hot or cold? It was like but you know, Zen masters ask me questions is it's really a test. And some of these questions they'd ask and, you know, I'd be given I give an answer, and they, they kind of go grant them and then they would say 70% it's like a grade or like this, it was only 30% good has an answer. That though, one of them, you know, when you're in They said that when you're cold just be cold. When you're hot, just be hot. So, I guess it's working now Jim, is it coming? Have you any cold air coming in those of you close by? Okay, so if it's too hot for those of you out there that might be getting getting cooler in here. You're welcome to come in. There's only a couple of seats but there's four space or maybe the air the cold air will go out. So

so once upon a time, there was a man who grew up in a life of privilege. pretty comfortable. And pretty much as he grew up, whatever he needed was provided for Him, got a good education. And when he became an adult, a young man, he was granted are given because he was a wealthy, all the pleasures that we associate with the central realms. He had easy access to music, food, luxurious goods, women. And it was a pretty, you know, luxurious life, maybe even indulgent life. And then at some point he, as he got older, to well into adulthood, he started noticing things he hadn't noticed when he was younger. And he noticed that people were getting old. Maybe his parents are getting old, other people are getting old and they're a little bit surprised. By this old thing. And then he noticed that there were people who were getting sick. Maybe he got sick. And it kind of was sobering. Maybe sometimes you see people who get really sick. It can be you know, I've never had much of that. It's kind of sobering. And then I he started to notice that people were dying. And I think many of you, you know, you know, some point, some people are experienced death in their family in their community, right from an early age, but it's not uncommon for people, young people not to encounter death until well into their adult adulthood, no man in the family dies. And, you know, I knew so I knew a woman recently who I think she was maybe 47 before she saw a dead body. And that was only because she was working in hospital. And so he started to encounter death and it was also pretty sober. Yesterday I was to smoke today I was told that one of my teachers in Burma men into luck and he died at the age of about 80. Today, I learned that four months ago he he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. So that goes

quickly, right? So when we encounter death, and that's, you know, quite something, especially for someone who's kind of been isolated, privileged life protected from it. And so then he has all this luxury he was living in not only paled in importance, but he got kind of disturbed by it. And he walked away from it all and, and he kind of reacted to it. And he just walked in, walked away with everything. left it all behind, and started walking around the countryside, walking around the cities and walking around. lived a pretty poor life, homeless, no money and wandered around for a long time shunning anything to do with sensuality and luxury and privilege that he had. And he got thinner and thinner and weaker and weaker. And at some point, he started stumbling and falling in his weakness and people people started treating and pretty poorly, voiding him kicking him doing things to him because he was just as decrepit then week. 30 may see it as kind of person, homeless guy. And he at some point, he decided that he was close to death. And he said, You know, I don't think makes sense to kind of just keep doing this just to die. And they didn't want to go back to life he had before the life he knew before. So he he went someplace where he could rest the head and rested before he can always be wandering and, and he ate some foods or eating food and started getting some strength back. And as he got his strength back and, and just kind of resting and hanging out to just being under the sat under a tree, and, and he remembered his childhood, couldn't you I had a good childhood.

But what he remembered was as a very young child, he remembered experiences of feeling very safe and contented and happy. That seemed to be to do with the luxury and the sensuality and the things that he had at the time. Seemed like it didn't require that at all. It was more of a inner sense of well being and you remember the Maybe long forgotten that but remember this wonderful feeling of peace and well being, inner feeling maybe he remembered the actual visceral feeling and was like, and it felt like a good thing to him felt like, like a good, good, healthy thing. And so he turned towards those experienced experience. And he allowed that experience to come back to him. And he allowed it to come up again this inner, embodied feeling of safety of peace, contentment, happiness, joy. And he allowed it to get stronger. And as the allotted get stronger, he noticed that if he picked up his thoughts, if he picked up his desires, his aversions that he would disturb that peace, but if you let go of all of it, he would actually get quieter and quieter, mine would get quieter and quieter or more peaceful. It felt even better than what he had as a kid. And then, he started remember he started at some point spontaneously, he started To review his life, not an uncommon thing to do they say that when you're, I don't know, in a split second before you think you're gonna die if you're in an accident, people review their lives. So he reviewed his life. And one of the things that came up as he reviewed this life was not not necessarily the details of his life, but the common denominator of all that experiences, the thread that went through them all. Interesting, interesting question to ask, what's the common denominator, what's a common thread that runs through all the different experiences you've had in your life as varied as they might be? And then he started kind of spontaneously also reflecting about all the people he'd ever known all the people around. And so that, just like he had gone through luxury, and then poverty and you know, up and down ups and downs and of human life, and he also reflected on the commonality, the common thread that ran through their lives, you know, we serve not just his life, but also their common thread the run through all human beings, life's ups and downs they go through. And then I thinking about those common threads, common denominators. He saw it as being, craving, clinging, holding attachment. That in all the different things that he was doing all the things people are doing when the common things was the degree to which human beings are attached. They hold on, they're clinging, grasping, craving, wanting, wanting to push things away, wanting to have things and they're seeing an infinite variety of things that people want. But still wanting is always there. And then he he turned his mind to the possibility of putting down the wanting, putting down the craving, letting it go and letting it kind of fail. away, letting it fall away, let it disappear. And he saw that he saw it come, he saw it go he saw the craving arrive and come back and forth a rose and pass the rose and pass. And then at some point, he saw the arising of it today. And then it passed, but somehow in the passing, he was so relaxed about it so at peace it that that craving, just kind of not just didn't just fade away, but it's

suddenly a way they never had experienced before. Dropped away. It ceased. And his mind got really clear, really feeling of peace in a way. And then he felt like he was time to start walking again. And he started walking or walking around. And he went to find his old friends. He had other homeless poor people who were wandering around, you wouldn't have found them but they were buddies, so they they You know, David, who weren't so interested in him what he had to say so don't you guys, I have something to tell you took a while to get their attention, but somehow is able to teach them to look, there's this possibilities, common thread that runs through human life. That is, doesn't have to be there. The craving, the clinging, the attachment. Doesn't have to be there. It's possible to have it fall away. Then he taught him a little bit how to do that, but he learned by himself.

And then he spent decades kind of just continue to be homeless but no longer being emaciated no longer starving himself no longer trying to live a life of denial, but also not interested in the life of of sensual pleasure or luxury. Any encounter Many people and talk to them. It's a beautiful book of a woman in America who did this. I called the peace pilgrim. anybody read the peace pilgrim needs to be given out for free. And I think started in the 1950s 54 during the Korean War, she started walking for peace. And she walked for decades across the country and she just she had almost nothing she hadn't What if it would fit in her kind of pockets or a jacket, I think and, and she walked for decades and people invite her into her homes to sleep with them and she would, would feed her butt. Or she'd sleep out in the fields, whatever, whatever, whatever she was just like, she would talk to people, but peace, transform lives. So this man also walked around and talked to people and transformed lives. And then they got to be an old man. And as an old man, he continued to walk and he had friends who were in trouble and he walked to find them and try to help them Some of the last things he did. And then at some point he got really sick, a lot of pain, but he kept walking. And then he came to some point he came, he couldn't go any more. And then he laid himself down under a tree. People came and be with him, attended him or be with him and his last hours. And then in that experience of peace and well being that he had as a kid that he remembered, he kind of went back to that place again and went into that area was places of deep and deep, deeper, deeper peace and well being. That he experienced the feeling of wholeness or completeness of peace or well being of safety. contentment, right, right there when he was dying, what a remarkable thing to do as you're dying. And in one of those in those states of deep abiding peace and well being This his ability to let go, he let go. And he passed away peacefully, happily, that's the way. So that's a story. And that's the story of the Buddha's life. The told without some of the aspects of ancient India, some of the details to kind of make it every person story, kind of. And it's an important story for Buddhists, you know, there are people, scholars of religion, some scholars of religion who have said that the core aspect of religion is not the tenants or the beliefs or the, you know, tenants or the, you know, the truths of the religion, but rather it's the stories that religions tell, and that people organize themselves and relate to the stories of religion much more to them the beliefs. I don't know if it's true, but it's interesting how central stories are and how religious people kind of compare themselves to stories or expired by stories modeled themselves and stories see themselves in the stories. So for Buddhists, they see themselves or see their lives through the story that the Buddha's life. We don't know how much of that stories admit that much of it is true. But as some of us think, you know, myths also have a certain kind of truth. And maybe they're more true than if we actually had a, you know, live, you know, see no video documentary of the Buddha's life. And maybe the myth somehow speaks to these inner truths.

And so, you know, we know in here in the West, we have the story of Christ, who died one way and that's a story that has a huge impact on Western culture. And it's very symbolic, you know, as you know, many people in the West Sims take Christ crucifixions in all kinds of wonderful symbolic ways. It's there's a lot of depth and, and heart and maturity and wisdom in, in the way that that's taken symbolically and applied to human life. And the same thing with a Buddhist, that that's also what is life

and death, it has, you know, a tremendous value in terms of symbolizing certain possibilities of human life, a certain way of understanding human life. And it tends to be an understanding that promotes wholeness, completeness, peace, compassion and love. And a certain kind of, I think, certain kind of being at home in this world. That you don't have to leave the world but you live in the world, and you're living in the world and then when you die, dying is not a mistake. Dying is not a tragedy. Dying is not you know, Dying this way the Buddha died, it's completely part of the natural world and to and to be at peace with that for oneself, to be able to kind of face ones that be at ease. Not into ease but have a sense of profound well being. And in that state of well being to die, that is quite an accomplishment for any human being. And many people are quite afraid of death disturbed by it. I know people who I have people in my family extended family, who, even though they're 80 years old, really refused to talk about anything to do with that. Don't bring up that news. You know, it's Don't Don't be depressing. It's just like not capable of dealing with at all except by avoiding it. And so the Buddha discovered something he you know, he rejected The sensual, luxurious life The overindulgent life. And then at some point he rejected asceticism, self denial, so overindulgence in oneself, and under indulging consensus. And he thought he would he taught was the middle way. And for us in the modern world and just kind of the kind of lifestyle we live here, the lifestyle the Buddha lived could seem pretty aesthetic, pretty self denying, but in the context of ancient India, it was not that way. In fact, he was criticized for being too soft, because he didn't start himself. He didn't walk around naked. He didn't do austerities that, you know, living custom pain. He lived a lifestyle. Certainly he was homeless. He had almost no possessions, but the lifestyle that he chose in which he he designed for him His monastic followers, was a lifestyle where there was just enough to be to be comfortable and safe, just enough clothes, to stay warm in the cold part. And to be able to keep the bugs off and the heart part of the year, enough food to nourish the body and make it strong and capable, but not too much food, not too little food. Just enough medicine, to be able to take care of oneself when we add medicine to the times, and just enough shelter, to protect oneself, also from the elements, but not more than was needed. And this idea of just enough for him was the middle way. So you know, in our society, what's just enough, I mean, I don't think we're going to go homeless, but he had just enough and the idea was just enough so that there could be comfort and well Being and strength so that the deeper work of meditation of self inquiry or freedom of teaching of compassionate work, could could could be done to be engaged in just enough what is just enough for you? We just enough for you to do that same path to do that same deep work. What are the pursuits that you are engaged in you pursuit you pursue sensual pleasure? Do you pursue luxury? And I know a lot of people who say, Oh, we I don't really pursued sensual pleasure. I'm not a hedonist.

But then if you took a look at their lives, and you live in a home that's bigger than you need, but if you don't want to live in a home that's pleasant to have a car that's bigger and nicer and newer than You need? Well, yeah, because it's pleasant. You know, the food you buy? Is it just enough food? Well, yeah, it's more than that actually. Chocolate, I eat chocolate. You know, it's pretty soon you realize that, I think in, in our, in our environment around here I think a fair number of people who consume and buy and do things that don't aren't really needed but it's for their pleasure, it's for their enjoyment, it's nourishing it's somehow creates a nice ambiance. And maybe that's fine. But, you know, to pursue or their self denial, there are people who do that, that deny themselves, you know, in a way that results in pain and discomfort. So the Buddha had the middle way. And then he put, he was somehow discovered this inner path, this inner way, of really tracking one's mind really monitoring one's mind really well. To be able to both quiet the mind, but more important, with a quiet mind and a clear mind to really see the common thread that runs through the underlying common denominator of how the operating principle that's behind human life. And it's, you know, it's a much of human life is driven by certain emotions driven by certain desires, driven by desire to run by, and not just any desire, but often desire which comes along with compulsion and need and clinging and grasping and insisting neediness. And you

know, you could, you can call it a review your life and see if the ups and downs of successes and failures. If you get if you get kind of only focused on the details of what happened to you, we get one story, but if you can find a common denominator that runs through it all, you tell yourself a different story, usually See a different part. And as you know, if you find a common denominator of a mathematical problem, it becomes a lot easier to do the problem, right things just fall away. So if you can find the common denominator of your life, then it's it's applicable, in what you discover then is applicable in all aspects of your life. And so this is what the Buddha did is he discovered something was applicable to all aspects of ordinary human life. And so you don't have to go around solving every possible life situation you came into, you know, because it's complicated life. But you have to, once you are sensitive to that you can tune in to clinging to grasping to aversion to tightening contraction, rather than the details of the story of the event that's happening in the moment. And learn how to find inner peace, inner ease, by tending to that common denominator. And the Buddha did that. And he discovered something, there wasn't just degree of peace and ease more and more peace and calm. The Buddha wasn't like the first person to do stress reduction. But rather, he did that he followed this path. And he discovered something remarkable where something actually dropped, something actually turned around or shifted or was transformed. In that clinging and the grasping, where something of it just was able to really drop away once and for all. And then you don't have to go then you don't have to keep going back and studying the common denominator. You have to keep going back and figuring it out. You know, even common denominator because there's no common denominator anymore. And because there's no common denominator him anymore We no longer when we encountered people he didn't want to take on any, no ordinary human identity. Because identity is one of things we hold on to. And so when people kind of said, you know, who are you if he talked about himself? He didn't say he was a teacher. He didn't say he was a Brahmin. He didn't say he was a, you know the word caste or came from Mrs. sokkia. country or he didn't say that he was all kinds of things that he might have said. The most common way the Buddha referred to himself was as to say it in global colloquial terms in English. I'm thus

I'm like this. The one who is this? I'm like, this. doesn't tell you much does it? Who are you? I'm like this You know, it's a little bit irritating I know if people were didn't run around. But I think it's also something very profound, very meaningful, to not take anything on just to be here, kind of empty or clear. You don't need to be anything, be at peace. You don't have to be anything just here. I'm just this. I don't know who I am. I'm just this Deus and what you see or something. And then he spent 46 years teaching quite a long teaching career, wandering around India talking to all kinds of people. And as he, he and his wanderings people came up to him and would come and visit him and ask him questions and sometimes he would give talks to mostly to his monks but to others and taught and taught and taught, degraded and monastic monastic community Ain't got to be an old man. And it seems from the stories of his time they start they're kind of the stories that records that kind of survive. If you kind of look at the cracks, the little things that are being said on the side because the people who compiled the ancient records didn't care about the history so much they weren't but this, the teachings and the real teachings and practices the Buddha was about, but in that in the in the in the edges of the of those teaching stories. It seems that the end of the Buddha's life was a time of social collapse or chaos war for a man who spent 46 years walking around talking to people peacefully and he had friends who was kings friends everywhere. The Kings he knew or being usurped in power or being killed. Country countries he traveled through and lived in, we're going to war with each other He his main disciples and died before him, it seemed like it was a time of great social. You know, society was kind of crumbling and falling around around him. And it's kind of kind of poignant. This idea that the Society of the todos times was going to war and death than problems. His life hadn't prevented that. His teachings hadn't prevented society and created social harmony. Society was crucifying itself and his time, Christianity, it's the teacher Chris Coase crucified. In the Buddhist time, it was the society around him. That was crucifying

itself. Societies do that. Some of our societies nowadays do that. But he stayed at peace, he stayed engaged, he was peaceful, the friend he was trying to help with the And he walked. I don't know how many miles, a few hundred miles try to help this friend was the king who had been usurped and even sent into exile. And he tried to follow him in exile looks like maybe they help them before he could help them or the king died, their old man. And then he turned around to walk 200 miles or so back where he came from 81 year old man and, but he didn't he looked like he was going to go home to some country, but he didn't make it. And there's the stories recounted, he laid himself down between two trees. And the literary description of it of the situation was very beautiful and peaceful. And in that beautiful, peaceful place, you know, the images between laying down between two trees. Instead, standing up, right flowering, flowering trees, dropping the flowers all around. As opposed to two trees, they were crossed over to get crucified on quite a different kind of image and story. When there was a great Indian, Cambodian teacher, the patriarch, the surviving point of surviving only few surviving monks, after the Pol Pot massacre is in Cambodia was a wonderful man named Maha Ghosananda, kind of the Gandhi of Cambodia. And I met him in San Francisco some 20 years ago and was having a meal with him and one of the things he was doing that he was planting trees in Cambodia, Cambodia had been devastated, devastated. So he was replanting the forest and replace the smartest at one of his projects. And so a little bit sad to kind of a little bit provoke him, I guess a little bit to find out what he would say. I said, you know, what are your Buddhist monk What are you doing? planting trees? You know, you're a great teacher, you should be teaching people and meditating and, you know, training people in the monasteries something. And he looked at me so kindly and patiently. And he said, The Buddha was born under a tree. He was enlightened under a tree. He taught under trees and he died under trees. Trees are important. So I plant trees. So the Buddha died into a tree. So I think it could be a story from someone today. I think it could be someone's life story. And maybe different details. Maybe it could be one of your stories. Maybe it could be your story. Maybe you could do this. Maybe you could discover what you're the common denominator. The common thread that runs through your life what it is, and maybe you can pull that thread out. Maybe you don't need some of that common denominator if the common denominator is what brings you suffering, the stress, fear, anxiety. And maybe you can discover how to pull the thread out in such a way that your life is a teaching your life is a blessing. Your life is a peacemaking event for this world that need so much peace and blessing. And maybe, for your sake, and for the sake of those, you know, you two can die peacefully. It's a really great gift to give to the world and to others. It's a I think it's one of the great incomparable gifts that you can pass on your legacy. To the people I know you is to die with no anxiety whatsoever. To die peacefully, happily, and that great because that inspires people, it shows people possibility. It shows people some of the greatest possibilities of how to live in this life, how to be in this life and how to participate in that part of life, which is also his are dying. So the Buddha, his story. So what you got today was one one person's might my kind of retelling my take, because that's what religious people do. They tell the stories over and over again. And every telling is told differently. So, now it's your turn to tell the story. Tell it yourself. So we have a few minutes you have any comments or questions that you'd like to ask about what I said.

I understand that the Buddha Passed away because he ate a plate of spoiled food. This is why I learned the documentary about him. Is that true?

The story goes that he was walking back toward probably North he was walking north or probably back to his home country. And he was quite old, 81 years old. He said at that time, that his body was like an old chariot held together with straps falling apart. And he said he had he was in a lot of pain. Remember, this is before they had even aspirin, let alone pain medication and medicine, like we know it. So to be 81 years old in ancient India, maybe you know, and no, no modern medicine. So he wasn't a lot of pain, physical pain, maybe our thigh us hit back pain. We know. I'm getting to it. And so old guy

and then he came Any he was given a meal. And we don't know we see the problem with the knowing what he ate is that we don't know what the Pali word, but the literal meaning of the word is the eight pigs delight. So was it pork that was bad? Or was it mushrooms that pigs love to eat meat, so we don't know some people say it's mushroom but he ate, but he ate something that the Buddha said this other people shouldn't eat. This is not good for anyone to eat. And when I finished eating moderate, berry everything else, but he ate it and he got violently sick and a lot of pain. But he recovered from enough that if he continued his walk, he had diarrhea and everything. And he continued his walk going north. So I so I don't know to what degree that he did whatever he ate was the cause of his death or not, I don't know. But it certainly contribute to the his weakness as he kind of in his old age. Probably But he kept walking for a while longer until at some point he laid himself down last time.

Well, the story I heard was that he accepted the food not to offend his, his guests, even though he knew it was spoiled, didn't want to offend the person who was giving it to him, so he ate it and that's what happens we died.

Right? So that's it's possible. That's what he did. It's an interpretation that literally all we have the record. Remember there's 2500 years ago, right, just a little few lines in a certain text. And he said that Chunda the blacksmith offered, pigs still like to the Buddha. The Buddha looked at it and he told the other people don't eat this only. I know only one person who can eat this and that's the target that the one who is this and, and he ate some and he gave in it. They stopped eating and he gave instruction for it to be buried. So that's about all it says. So it's possible that I mean, a fair interpretation would be that he felt like he was an offering from this man and he wanted to honor the offering. But we don't know if that's the case. We don't know. You know, it's kind of cryptic what that whole story is about.

You know, all the statues of the Buddha or, you know, he's still pretty young. And you know, there's, as far as I know, there are no statues of the Buddha as an old man. There's a few statues of him being as as ascetic times all emaciated and all that. But he there are there are in the ancient records, ancient texts. He did, sometimes it takes himself as being all bent over and all wrinkled and you know, so You know, we tend to idealize or we tend to use these stories and use religious founders. Not Not for who they are historically, but rather as symbolisms as symbolic purposes, or as representations of something. And so, you know, I see it that way that there's something about the idealized version of these stories or idealized versions of depictions and icons and all that which is not talking about it historical being, but rather are meant to be a mirror reflection of you that when you sit further when you sit down to meditate and your meditation is deep and strong, you kind of feel that way inside. And some of the beautiful tangkas Tibetan Buddhist paintings with full of colors and or eyes and all this kind of stuff. highly symbolic or highly represented representation of what happens when people feel like from the inside out when they're doing meditation. And so when you look at that you kind of see in yourself. So that's why this, this idealization of the Buddha is not so much that the Buddha is being held up, but rather has this representation or symbolic meaning that we see ourselves in that. So the same thing and the story I told you the story of the Buddha's life. It has it has certain usefulness, not because the story is true or false, it has a usefulness, that in a true way we see ourselves in the story we can or it helps us see our own lives and important way. And the story of the Buddha in some ways is, is, you know, he of encountering sickness, age old and death, and that being a turning point. That's a story of many people. And they encounter these things and it makes a big difference and they To change their lives, they pursue something or they don't and they get more. You know, that has its consequences. And then to really Face Face these things and look at them and really face, you know, face oneself down to the depth, the roots of who we are. And then to be able to face one's own death, to face one's relationship to the world around, you know, how do you relate to the world around you, the Buddha related to the world by teaching and then how do you relate to your own depth? So these stories kind of

point to all these different junctures in human life. And maybe it helps us to reflect the question and wonder and, and, and what's nice about the story of the Buddha, it's a story of, of peace, enlightenment, liberation and freedom. That I hope can be your story. Good luck. Thank you.