

# 2014-07-27 Intention

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

intention, life, deepest, purpose, conditioned, day, live, people, deeply, richer, spend, intentionality, goal, important, question, experience, practice, infuse, reflect, activity

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning, everyone My intention to give a talk about intention. So one of the important areas of mindfulness practice is being mindful of intention. intention is the motivation or the purpose for which we do things. And it should be distinguished from what we want. Because sometimes what we want if we focus too much on what we want, we might not look more deeply and ask the question, why do I want that? And so intention is more to do with why do I want what I want? And so in many areas of our life to keep looking, why do Why do I want to say what I'm going to say? what's your intention? I want to say something. That's the intention, but why do you want to say it for what purpose? And if you start looking more deeply at Why do you want to do what you do? Why do you have your desires, you probably find that it becomes a variety of motivations or operating via a variety of, of drives and interests are going on. Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on the value of intention. Partly because the intention behind what we do the intention behind what we want is a very powerful conditioner. It tends to condition or shape, the habits of mind that the conditioning of the mind and so that it predisposes us to behave and think and act and feel in different ways. And so as your mind gets conditioned in different ways, you become a different person. And one of the primary conditioning factors is your intention. So to step back and be able to be more conscious of what your intentions are give more focus on choosing your intentions, so that you can act on those and lead by them is one of the ways of helping to shape your heart and mind. So your heart and mind is shaped for the better for you, for your betterment, but also for the betterment of the world, so that your heart and mind is shaped in such a way. It's conditioned in such a way that it's conducive towards liberation to becoming free. intention is something very deep, I think, are there are deep intentions we have. And some of those intentions are healthy and some are not. Some are conditioned by difficulties we've had in our life and some of them are not so helpful. And some are shaped by our life experiences and are very meaningful and helpful. But their deepest intention are something that's really worth spending time reflecting on what's your deepest intention for your life. What's your deepest intention, and what you're trying To do, what's the deepest, most important values that you want to live by. And it's very easy in the life that many people live, to lose touch with that. The busyness of life, the demands of life, the values of other people, of our society as a whole, sometimes comes crowding in. And then the needs of the moment, the demands of the moment, the loud voices of the moment predominate, and we don't have a lot of time to reflect deeply. What is it? What is it? How do I want to what's the deepest values a deepest purpose that I, around which I want to orient my life around which I want to shape my life or live my life? And if we don't ask that question deeply for ourselves, then it's all too easy to be influenced by our society and others and experiences around us. And then we're kind of like being pushed around like a leaf in the wind, rather than really deeply grounded in ourselves. What are the purposes of looking deeply at intentionality are the purpose of our life the purpose of which we do things is to certainly to give a healthy purpose to our lives healthy intentionality direction for our lives. It's also to energize ourselves with purpose but also to, it's also said to provide us with self worth. The intentions

that you live your life by can give confidence can give value to who you think you are and what you're about. If you're really kind of dedicate your life to certain purposes, even if you're not successful at certain purposes, to know you live your life based on this, what you're trying to do, can give a lot of meaning to a person.

Also, being having having a clear intention about what you're about what your values are, what your intentions are, is kind of like a ballast. You know, a ballast of a boat keeps To vote from, you know, knocking over and thinking kind of, you know, writes itself. So that intentionality can be the ballast for our lives, there's a lot of things that can push us around, where we come back, if you're really clear on your attention, take a stand on your intention. That's a balance that keeps you going keeps you study, and a lot of difficulties can come up. All kinds of things, health problems, work problems, family problems, all kinds of issues can come up that can really challenge us. But to come back, and this is what my intention, this is what I'm about, and to take a stand there to hold that is very important. In the Zen world, where I kind of first practiced in they have a lot of teachings around emptiness. And one of the ways that this emptiness teaching sometimes was taught is that there was nothing essential in life to, to kind of that you could hold on to, but because of that, You in Zen is talking about living a life of vow. So you you commit yourself to a vow to an intention. And you follow that intention in a world where there's no intrinsic value, they said. So I know you're not agree with that. But the idea that the following about living a life of intention is very important. In the kind of teachings that we do in Buddhism or Buddhist kind of Buddhism, it's very easy to get the impression that a lot of the focus of practices just being being present for what is being mindful, and a lot of emphasis on letting go, just letting go of your attachment, you're clinging. And both of that just being and letting go belong to one half of what practices about it belongs more to the letting go side or the being side. But there's also an important half of practice which is the doing side, the active side. And intentionality has to do with the active side and how to have these two in harmony to working together as part of the art of practice, to engage in an active way with practice, how to engage around an intention and a purpose and put energy in it, and how, at the same time, learn how to let go of anything that causes stress and tension. So that our intentional life our lived life, is one that is easeful freeing, and, and compassionate. So one of the one of the things we do in practice mindfulness practices, spend time looking at our intention. And one of the ways to begin is simply look at what are your intentions you live by now, currently, if you look at your life, and it might be interesting to do the exercise of imagining that you're an anthropologist from Mars, and you don't even speak you know, human language, but you can watch behavior. And if and so if this anthropologist from Mars came and Watch your behavior and what you did most of the day. And then they just broke back to Mars and said, this human, you know, they seem to spend a lot of time worshipping luminous screens.

Someone I read recently that someone said that he checks his cell phone over 400 times a day on weekdays, they dropped down to about 300 in the weekend. So that, you know, if you do the math, you know, that's a lot. So the anthropologist, you know, so what would they see, you know, so it probably wouldn't understand the depth of what was motivating the person, you know, but you certainly get an impression. So how much time is spent watching TV how much time is spent doing certain activities. And if you kind of you do the math at where you spend most of your time. What do you do? What is the most important things for you? It's not uncommon for people to come and tell me I have a hard time meditating every day. It's hard to get the time I'm busy. You know, a lot of demands and, you know, all that. And then I'll ask them, How much time do you watch TV? And it's Oh to three hours a day. And I guess it's really important TV. It's like, you know, one of the important formative experiences of American culture and you want to be a good participant in American culture, you better keep getting conditioned by TV, it's really helpful, right? And good citizen. And so you know, So you know, is TV really what serves us the best is it really, you know, why, why, why? Why this balance between I can't

meditate versus three hours of TV, what is a pool? what's, what are we trying to accomplish? What's the intention? Behind TV? What are we trying to accomplish? Why do we watch TV? So there's many things we do that we can ask ourselves, why do I do what I do? I like to say that one of the powerful windows into the depth of your being is to ask yourself, why do I say what I say? If you spent one day being very impeccable maybe before you speak and say why I'm about to say what I'm going to say, you would learn so much about yourself, you probably kind of be shocked at what drives you what goes on. But they keep asking deeply, deeply and keep asking, keep asking the question for the layers. So you know, why do you say what you're going to say? I'll because the person asked for information, I just you know, was trying to accommodate the person. But why we why we are trying to accommodate the person. Well, there was also a kind of I wanted to make a good impression. One of the persons see me as a knowledgeable person. So that's part of the intention. And then what you know, why would you want the person to see you as a knowledgeable person? Because you wanted the person to like you. But why do you want the person to like you? Because you want to protect yourself from being being attacked from being seen as a bad person? Why? So you keep asking that question, Why? To get to the layers because there are layers and layers of motivations of thoughts and beliefs that we operate under. And it's helpful to sometimes to ask questions to keep going deeper and deeper. What for what purpose? Am I saying this? For what purpose? Do I do this? Keep asking. One of the interesting questions to ask around intention is what need is being met. So sometimes our the purpose of all we do is satisfying a very important need and it's fine to satisfy the need. But then the question would could be interesting question could be if that need was met. What would that what's important for me to do then? And I've known people I've asked people this question, who had intention, intentions of being safe? And you asked him about, you know why they're so driven by security? And they say, Well, I'm afraid and had difficulties my life or a challenging experience in my life that conditioned me to be afraid. And then I'll ask them. Imagine that you had no more fear. What would you be your intention for your life then? And some people have a hard time shifting gears, but sometimes it's lovely. You see, their eyes go wide, and they say, Oh, well then, then I think I'd like to live. My intention is to love and then love becomes their kind of primary interest as opposed to being safe. So sometimes I asked you What's the need that you're trying to meet? And then imagining what if the need was met really met, then what's my intention?

One of the functions of retreats meditation retreats is not necessarily to get calm or concentrated or you know to have wonderful experiences of meditation, but rather meditate retreats are meditation retreats are optimal time to get settled and calm, feel certain kind of satisfaction, have our basic needs met. You know, for safety and food and many things we have and to kind of feel whole feels complete, feel settled, feel contented in the moment in a very rich way. So that you can ask yourself this question. What is My deepest intention now that I feel this way, what do I want my life to be about? And you get a very different answer than if you're anxious if you're worried if you're living in a fragmented life difficult life, where, what what answers the question of your intention is the compensate for what's going on in your life. But what happens if you're not compensating for anything? What bubbles up from inside of you?

So you could ask yourself, what is my intention? What were the intentions I'm living my life on now? And then you can ask the question, what do I want my intentions to be? And one of the things that I have commonly advise people to do you know, I'm a meditation teacher, you think that meditation is important for me and, you know, I try to take that I put a high value in it. So Whatever we're about to say puts it, you know, makes a kind of emphatic point. I think that it's more important than meditating every day. I think it's important to spend every day reflecting on what are the deepest values you want to live by what are the deepest intentions that you have for your life, always the deepest you have access to. And I've done that for long periods of my life. I just don't always do it anymore. But I did it

every day for a long time. And it was very interesting to see how it shifted and changed over days. Sometimes it would be like I'd have come up with realize it was one intention that I had. And then I'd ask further. And then other days I'll go further go deeper with a deeper with it, or shift and change over the years. It's a great question to ask. So it's so important that I think it's more important than meditating. Please meditate. But, but spend all Please spend time really reflecting it's your face. You're probably wondering what your most precious treasures your precious resources side is your intention. And so to spend time and give yourself time to live with it and let it flower and develop is really good. It's also possible to be pre emptive to prepare ahead for what you're going to do think ahead about what you're going to do during a day or some activity, and then reflect what is the intention you have for that activity. So there's two areas. One is what intention Do you happen to have? But also, what intention Do you want to have? Because if you stop and reflect, there's an opportunity to infuse an activity with more intentions make it richer, more meaningful. So a simple example I like to give is going shopping. So I go shopping, sometimes food for my family. And if someone asked me, Gil, what's your intention? If I said, My intention is to get food for my family. That's really you know what I'm doing. It's not really the intention. It's also a lost opportunity. I'm going to get food. What I'm trying to do the deeper intention is to care for my family. And how can I best care for my family? So I start asking these questions and it becomes the richer what I'm doing. It's not just food going through the shopping list, or I know I'm going shopping at the supermarket. And my intention is to get in and out as quickly as I can. And I feel sorry for anybody who's blocking the aisle because I'm gonna, my intention is to get in and out and it's about me and about me, it's about me right and getting my day. That's conditions the mind in a very powerful way. And that's such a useful way. But but it's possible to think ahead. I'm going shopping. What are some of the intentions, motivations attitudes that I want to live by during the shopping trip. I really want to care well for my family. How can I do that? How can I infuse that caring in my shopping? I would like to care for the people in the store, can I go into the store and make the store experience nicer for some of the people there? Maybe just simply make it nicer for the people for the for the checkout clerk. I am quite capable of going to supermarket and hardly noticing is a clerk. You know her look down and hardly You know, I'm in my world and but it's also possible to look the clerk in the eye say hello, how are you and have a little chat. Try to see if you can get this person to kind of lighten up the person's day. Sometimes they have a hard time that had difficult customer before you and you could say something nice that Oh, that was you know, you handled that well. Thank you. Nice to watch or something.

So you can go with the intention not just to buy food for the family, but you can infuse it with all kinds of other intentions. Not because you should not because it's a moralistic thing who's supposed to do that. But rather, it makes it richer, it makes it a more more varied valuable experience to do that. And it conditions you, it trains you, it develops you it brings forth from you some of your best qualities. Is it nice to bring forth what's best in you more often. If you bring forth what's best that comes more often than if you condition yourself for that to come be more at the forefront, you do more. So to spend time ahead of time thinking about what are the intentions you want to have for this meeting this conversation for this activity at work, whatever you're going to do. When if you if you go to work, or you just simply going to do the job and leave. You don't like your work. You just want to get over it as quickly as you can. Then it's a lost opportunity. Work for people who work Work is there is there monastery, you know, in a Buddhist point of view work at your workplace of work is your training place for practice is the place where you kind of can really do a lot of your inner work of developing your mindfulness practice developing your Buddhist practice developing the qualities we want to develop and practice. And if you think that their real practice is not up to work, and neon lights or whatever cubicles or whatever it's your story is the real work is that a meditation center IRC, and I just got to do this job as quickly as I can get over it so I can get to the real place. You've lost a big opportunity. Your your workplace is your retreat center is your monastery is your training place, if you choose to make it that and you have a

responsibility about how you choose what intentions you live by, what perceptions will go by, and to spend time ahead of time thinking about that. Can it make it much richer experience more meaningful, more beneficial for everyone? There was a time in my life where I would look at my calendar for each day. All the things that had to do lists things I was going to do that day. And I would sit down after I meditate in the morning. And look at that list. And reflect and think about what intentions I wanted to bring to those activities. And it could be more than one intention for any one activity. But I would think about it and then because I thought about it, give my time for it. I would do it. Oh, I would like to do that. I'd like that to be about that. And it became richer. Sometimes. I failed completely. I showed up from activity. I didn't remember at all that I had an attention set in the morning, but sometimes it did. And the fact that it just did the exercise was a conditioning factor. So I, the way I'm presenting today the intentions side of our life is the active side of practice. The near enemy or the challenge around intentionality, it can be very closely connected to our egotism or self centeredness. It's about me. And so we have to be very careful, our intention to really see how much self is involved, how much strain how much tension, how much is the intention, we have creating more separation from ourselves and others? Is it creating a strong sense of self versus others a strong sense of I'm better, or I'm doing building myself up in some kind of egotistical way. Because the idea of Buddhist intention is to do have an intentionality or have having the best Whatever we do, the intention to become free, the intention to become free of self centeredness, the intention to come free of tension or craving, or clinging in the things that we do, to, to come to a place of ease with what we do, because the deepest experience of freedom in Buddhism, you have to even let go of your intentions. In the moment, in the moment, a moment living, there's a place of yielding or letting go of peace, of just being where we yield away we give away our self centeredness for just being and so intentionality has a very important role.

But you have to be careful how you use it how much self is involved and is How you're living an intentional life, a purposeful life, one that moves you in the direction of becoming freer, more at ease in this life more free. So why do you do what you do? If you have a good friend? Don't ask your friend that question. But rather ask your friend to ask you regularly. Could you ask me periodically? And why are you doing that? What's the purpose? What purpose? Are you asking that? Or what purpose? Are you saying that? are really that's the purpose? And what? and for what purpose? Do you have that purpose? Oh, and for what purpose? Do you have that purpose? What purpose? Do you have that purpose? Do you have that purpose? Just, you know, it's kind of silly to kind of say it that way. But if you really get quiet and start listening and asking deeply, deeply, it's really great because I have tremendous faith or trust that in the depths of our being, our deepest intention is quite beautiful as quite wonderful. It's part of our core part of our, I think what's really precious about human beings. And then if we have a way of going deeper and deeper and deeper, we'll come to a treasure house within there. And so then I'll end with the suggestion. So I talked about the danger of intention being too self centered, very easy to do. or trying too hard to accomplish. Something's also can be a problem. There's a word a different word that's in the family of words in English that's connected to intention, you know, as motivation purposes, things like that. And then lovely word is the word dedication. And so you can ask, if the word intention seems to let subtract and intellectual for you. You can ask yourself rather than asking what intention you have for your life, you can ask the question, what is your life dedicated to? This? What does that teach you? For me? At least I know for you, the word dedication kind of speaks more for that to the heart. What's going on in the heart? What do you What's your heart dedicated to? What are you devoted to? So that's what I had. Maybe we can take a question or two, we have a little time. anybody like to ask a question? Gil, could you say something maybe about intention versus goals? In terms of, if that makes sense to you, please? That's good. That's good. I think that from what I was trying to say today, the way to reword it would be, you might have a goal. But you can ask yourself, for what purpose? What's the purpose of that goal? What's the reason I have that goal? And now, you know, goals can be many layered, right. But the most of you know that I think for the most

people think of goals, I think, at least when I think of it, I think of the obvious overt behavior. This is my goal for my life. This is what I'm trying to do a thing. And so if the goal is a thing, an event, then you can ask, what's the intention for that? If the if the goal you know, if the goal is to be a kinder person that's different than the goal is to be rich. So what you know so you could mean it's goal, just another way of talking about all this, what's the goal you have? But there are some people in our circles so people don't like to use the word goal. So much Because goal is more explicitly the result. And so sometimes in focusing on the result in the future, we lose the present. And I think that as you go deeply, deep more deeply into this topic of intentionality, I believe it becomes more important how you are in the moment.

And, and how you are in the moment is really the, the, and this in Buddhism, though that whole kind of discussion about intentionality is a way of encouraging us to really pay careful attention to how we are in the moment. What's the intention is what's the purpose we have of how we live, how we take the next breath. I always say the next word, how are we living moment by moment? So the word goal lends itself to something in a distance, but it's certainly appropriate to have goals in a distance. You know, work goals, school goals, all kinds of things. And, and, and to work for goals. But for what purpose? I mean, that's not a satisfying answer for your question. But if you want to ask again a different way, then okay.

a disproportionate amount of my life is spent trying to sell something. Right. So I write, I want people to read what I write, so I gotta promote it and sell it.

You spend more time promoting what you're right than writing.

No, but it's still

no, I don't but it's still a huge sinkhole in my life. Okay, okay. So, that's all about me. But I don't I don't know how not to do that. Unless I just want to you know, have No readers.

Maybe

that was not a satisfying answer.

You can please them all.

What occurred to me though, what I didn't say was you spoke is, why don't you give yourself a fast? Why don't you give yourself some significant amount of time where you do your writing, but don't do any time give yourself any activity any time whatsoever, trying to sell yourself and I don't know what long enough significant of time is, but long enough so that you don't you kind of like doesn't even occur to you for a while because you've kind of forgotten About a completely and then see what your life is like how you feel your inner life, what happens to you, when you've really given yourself a significant break from that activity. And then it's then pick it up again, start selling yourself, and then compare how you are and ask yourself whether it's worth it for me on the inside,

neither satisfying or dissatisfied. So maybe one more and then I want to make my little announcement

this way, yeah, this way. So one thing that occurred to me is integrating it into the work life.

work life.

Yeah. And as you spoke, I don't know if it's your livelihood. But that was the first thing. You know, I understand I think, doing it at home. I mean, doing it at home. And some of it maybe is inappropriate work. But it would be sure nice to

bring it silently yes and no. And so keep in mind that we can operate the same time on multiple intentions, right? So your employer might have certain intentions for what you're supposed ideas of what your intention should be. And so you might have to fulfill those those those goals, those intentions, but at the same time, you could try to make the workplace a nicer place for everyone who works there. And as I've said, I think it's in my book, the, you know, to two people can maybe, you know, start a company together, have the same intention of having a successful company makes a lot of money. One of them just wants to have money. The other one wants to create a company that makes good money in order to take really good care of their workers to have a good experience for their workers. The company could fail. Both co owners had the same experience with a failed company, but one is left with nothing. The Other than wanting to just wanted money, I'm rich, the one who really tried to create a good working environment for the workers, maybe accomplish that to some degree, and has at least had satisfaction that while the company worked, that there was something good there, or had the satisfaction of knowing that he came from or she came from this good place, and that, you know, did their best and try their best to make the world a better place. So, you know, what is the intentions you have for work? And so there's all these different layers, right? You can try to make it a better place for the people who work there. You could you just just by you know, maybe you bring cookies, or maybe you smile more. So ask people how they are. Or perhaps the intention for work is to make it a place for mindfulness. So how do you infuse it with your personal mindfulness practice? And so that when you time you leave, work, you're more mindful than when you came, you have more focus. So as many intention so I think because we many of us spend so much time at work. Bringing practice intentionality to work is really crucial.

Thank you. So thank you all.