

2014-09-14 The Brahmaviharas Introduction

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I have a few announcements. One is that in the beginning of October, a couple of people connected to IMC Judy long and Jennifer block are each teaching here at IMC through the Sati Center, the compassion cultivation training that's been developed at Stanford. They've both gone through the teacher training there and last year, Jennifer offered it here and I went well and she's doing it again. And Jennifer is offering I think, on Tuesday afternoons and, and Judy long is going to offer it Thursday evenings for a small group, so you have to register for this. So you can find out more information, not on IMC's website, but on the Sati Center website. It's also flyers back there. Think it's an eight week course.

And then also, I said a few weeks ago I would announce when the fundraising letter for our retreat center was available to be picked up, because maybe some of you voluntarily would pick up a fundraising letter. Imagine that. The we had this great thing happened to us where the property next door to our retreat center in Santa Cruz County is a house next door and an acre of land. And it's the only really house next door and so whoever lives there has a big impact on us. The person who lived there, an elderly lady, she loved us. She when we moved in and open up a retreat center there. She wanted to make a gate in the fence between the property so she can come and meditate with us and she said she used to 40 years ago she when she first lived there on the property before anything was built on that we're now at the predict Retreat Center is now she said I used to walk Around here and tell my husband, this would be a great place for a meditation center. So and now it is and, and she moved. And so she sold the property was put on the market in May. And so we wanted to buy it to help to buy it partly to protect the environment, having the house next door has a big impact on us, but also to be able to strengthen the foundation for our retreat center. And we didn't have the money to buy it or to take out the loan. But to our wonderful surprise, a supporter who happened to be on the retreat when that came on the market, offered to buy it for himself and to hold it for five years, while we raised the money to buy it from him. And so that's a very generous thing to do. And it's worked a little bit better in our kind of mindful time, you know, timeframe. You know, to you know, you know, you know real estate sometimes is a, it's a rush to buy it around here sometimes. So now our rush is five years. And so we started a fundraising drive and there's a letter for Andrea Fella and I from us about this project and why it's such a great opportunity for us. And such a great thing for our center. And so it's there by the door and the counter. So if you're interested in reading what we wrote about it, and if you're interested in supporting this project, this take a letter, take one of the letters.

So today, I would like to begin an intermittent series of talks on what is called the Brahma viharas, sometimes translated into English as the divine bindings And these are, before I tell you what they are, I can tell you that they're quite important in Buddhism, because these are the they're really at the center of the whole, the Buddhist message. And they're some of the key virtues, qualities of character, states

of mind and behaviors, which are cherished and developed. And in Buddhist practice the word vihara means a dwelling, or a place to abide by Buddhist monastery, sometimes called a vihara. And Brahma is the one of the great gods of the Indian Pantheon. And it said that this great God had four faced head I don't think it forehead had four faced head and, and he would, you know, survey the world from high up there. In this heavenly realm, and depending on what was happening below, he would look with one of his faces. If someone was virtuous and doing wonderful deeds in the world, he would look with his face of goodwill and loving kindness of metta. If someone was suffering, he would look upon that person or that event with the face of compassion. And if someone had success and healthy, good, wonderful success and happiness, he would look with his face of appreciative joy of empathic joy. And then if there were circumstances where he could look upon people with all his goodwill, his love his care, but there was nothing for him to do. nothing he could do. Perhaps he would look upon them with a face of loving equanimity economists love Maybe you could imagine or visualize these four faces, each of them expressing a different sentiment a different relationship with attitude of loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. These are I like to think of them as four forms of love, which are cultivated in Buddhism that are part of Buddhist practice. And they are, I think what makes the path of awakening takes the path of awakening and translates it into our actions into how we live our life. I think of it as in sort of certain circumstance circumstances, as quite liberal or quite not liberal but radical, revolutionary even because it calls upon us to take the path of opening the heart to freedom to free the heart from what keeps me constricted, what keeps it divided between myself And others take the path of liberation, which is a path of freeing us from greed and hate and delusion. Freeing us from neurotic clinging to self erotic, kind of, or painful kind of separation of self and other and transform that to heart, mind which is to be open and available to the world, present and free. And to express that to live that in a relationship to the world, and it's revolutionary in that, whenever in circumstances, when people are divided, when we feel people live in opposition to each other, or we create a very strong separation between myself and others. And we know we live in a world of tremendous prejudice, discrimination, tremendous separation between people, some very conscious some not so conscious and These virtues, these practices of the Brahma viharas are revolutionary and that as you do them, it's hard to kind of then keep living in a world divided between the rich and the poor and you know, all the ways in which we could divide ourselves but can we become kind of open and available, open and present in a way that I think is transformative not just for ourselves but for our society? I hope it is.

So, the Buddha talked a lot about these four different brahma viharas, divine abodes. They're called English we say divine because they, they're the, when you if you dwell with these states strong, then you dwell like Brahma. You dwell like this divine being, so they're divine abiding. There was once two Brahmins who came to the Buddha and they wanted to know how to attain union To become one I guess with Brahma disgraced God. And it's not a not a goal that other religions don't have some of the house I had said yeah becoming one I mean union with the God or the Godhead or something. And the Buddha said, Well, I know how to do that. And then he taught them the meditation practices on each of these four forms of love. As you develop as meditation practice, they become stronger and stronger, and they're so strong and when the Samadhi is strong, your whole mental state your whole inner mental state, is characterized by either loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy or equanimity. You take the Samadhi the mind is can completely be gathered together absorbed and focused on a single thing, and have it focused on love without any distractions without anything gets in the way. Rather than the mind being Unlimited, it's a mind which is said to be unlimited. boundless, just in everything becomes love, everything becomes just touched by one of these qualities of love. There's a radiance, that people sometimes report they feel emanating from them, when they sit established in these states quite strong. The and so one of the one of the names for these for alternative name, then the Brahma viharas. That especially for those people who don't like gods, Rama is of such things you get there called the and the boundless states or the unlimited states of mind. And what's nice about this

is they describe the feeling of how when these feelings of love are strong, they have no boundaries, because the sense of boundaries that we have, we feel are constructed by the mind. They're kind of concept of perception the mind makes it there's a limit to consciousness or awareness to ourselves to our body. And so when the when the mind relaxed deeply in Samadhi the construction of boundaries falls away and the sense of awareness becomes more and more boundless. And when that boundless awareness is suffused by these love, it love feels boundless. It's quite a wonderful thing. My own entryway to the States was not through consciously practicing them, but rather from doing meditation practice. When I was a Zen student, I sat and open myself up to be as present and fully as I could, for whatever was happening and if I practice unconditional acceptance for what was and, and that kind of acceptance is one is gonna give you default, what falls away what drops away what's like oh, is anything that gets in the way of that. Accept Inserting the non acceptance resistance pushing away, wanting holding on all kinds of things which are not just just being with what is. And so I was practicing being with what is trying to at least. And the thing that I often had to be with, when my early years probably my first I'd probably seven years of practice was I had a lot of suffering. And so I ended up being with suffering a lot. And that was great. I didn't know that at the time. At the time, I thought, you know, this is not so good. This is not desirable. But I was committed to sit with it. But why it was good was that as I did the combination of being an opening and being present, and accepting, letting go of resistance, letting go of agendas, and just being very, very simple, with suffering, affected my heart and affected it, so that What got developed in me was compassion.

And I was very surprised by the strong feelings of compassion that welled up and started to be there in kind of riding the waves of breathing in and breathing out, riding the waves of awareness as it kind of radiated out into the world as I sat there and being present. And it felt very good. Compassion was one of those surprises is compassion felt. It was very satisfying to feel compassion. There's a feeling of warmth or of happiness almost that comes with pure compassion. And I think it's probably why the Dalai Lama has taught me maybe one of his favorite teachings, that if you want to be happy, have compassion. Compassion is the foundation for happiness. And since then, I've read that pure compassion, compassion that doesn't have any clinging or fear or distress associated with it. releases oxytocin and so you know, you can get pretty good with that oxytocin stuff. The and then when I started doing the passionate practice, the practice we do here at IMC I kind of worked through a fair amount of my suffering. So that wasn't really the operating kind of thing that had to be present for. But as I was sitting again, doing similar practices, being mindful being present of what's there, I was surprised that at some point, what welled up was a strong word identified as a strong state of loving kindness of metta, goodwill. And what surprised me there it was very similar to the compassion is kind of very broad, boundless feeling that kind of radiated out for me, seemed to be centered in my chest and just kind of flowed and until very satisfied, very warm, very nurturing, just did have this way. And one of the things that surprised me was that it was love that had no object. Isn't that nice? Like many people think of love has to have an object, my beloved, my children, my family, whatever, my money my car, my favorite restaurants I love the food, you know, whatever an object but but to have this boundless state this bound this quality without an object was a great surprise for me and to realize that this is a potential that there can be strong states of love that are not conditioned or dependent on something in the world that stimulates It was very freeing, because then you could feel love without you know without having to be around your beloved or be around things you love or make use of kiss relax and let go. It was more like to relax and let go. And it's almost as if it's intrinsic to the heart to be loving. It just got out of the way If everything drops out of the way and we see this in the teachings of the Buddha, that in some places he talks about once you let go of the hindrances, and once a few other conditions may be in place, like one of them is to start having a visceral, immediate experience for yourself of freedom, some degree of freedom from what you're holding, but you held on to that the inspiration that comes from no longer having the hindrances, the inspiration that comes from realizing something true about the path of freedom, that that combination of letting go and inspiration, he says, leads to the arising of these four

forms of love. So again, it doesn't not dependent on having an object here, but rather it's just something intrinsic quality of how the heart operates and under certain conditions, I would like to read to you the so these qualities of metta loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity, are referred to in the teachings of the Buddha as a form of wealth. And this is a quote, it's a, it's a wealth for a monastic. So monastics are not supposed to have any money, they must not have any money. They have just their robes in a begging bowl, very few possessions. And so if they can't have conventional wealth, what is wealth for a monastic? So the Buddha says, What is wealth for a monastic? Here, a monastic abides pervading the East with a mind accompanied with loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, or equanimity, and likewise pervades the south, the West and the North. Above Below, horizontally everywhere and all over pervades the whole world with a mind a company with loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, equanimity, extensive, expanded limitless, free from hatred and ill will. This Well, this is well forum monastic.

So one of the great wealth that resides in your treasure house. It's there waiting for you, more or less and, but it really is tapped into when you've learned not to be preoccupied by things. If you're preoccupied, there's no space for it. And oddly enough, if you've been preoccupied with your beloved or your hoped to beloved or whatever it, it gets in the way. Anytime you're preoccupied, it limits the free flow of awareness of the heart of the sense of presence, you get contracted or focused or limited by what you're focused on. As the mind becomes more and more free, the mind is no longer preoccupied by things. And because it's not preoccupied, the mind is not limited by what it thinks about what it's concerned with. If it's preoccupied, it's limited, and creates boundaries limitations. So, in Buddhist practice, these brahma viharas are not left to chance. Love is not something that we just allow to exist the way it happens to be for us. We don't just say, well, it's there. When it's there. It's chemistry, you know, and then it might be there, but rather, it's something That is cultivated and developed. And there's a variety of ways that done. One is indirectly as I've described, by just doing meditation practice that helps you relax and open up and drop the scales or the dust or the, from the heart, the heart begins to kind of be tender, open and relaxed. The other ways to begin appreciating the different kinds of love that can exist when they do appear for us. And the appreciation of it can allow that which is healthy to grow and develop. And so the usual reference point for this kind of brahma viharas is parental love. It's not Mrs. Loved it's and it's kind of nice that it's parental love, because for most people in their lives, that was the first contact they had with love was from their parents. And if some some of you have been Parents, maybe you remember, if it went well enough the birth, the first time you held your child and how you felt and then they grew up and things weren't so uncomplicated ever again. muda you know, I remember, you know, is very my children and newborns, very touching and their firstborn.

And number one my wife saw my first son for the first time she cried, by seeing seeing him. And so this you know, so that's kind of the first experience that we don't remember we had for many of us is that we were touch were held contact by a parent. And we grew up that way. And hopefully, if things went well, and they were parents who that loved us and cared for us, if we didn't have that, then it's very hard to be able to love oneself or love others. We grew up in an unlimited way generous way. But it can be learned it can be developed and not too late. And then as we grow up, some of the next loves that happen, I think are you know, kind of close, warm connections often is with friends, or family members or playmates or siblings or something. And so there's a, you know, just kind of natural thing that happens. And then as we get older, and then it becomes maybe partners and our children and all that. And this is kind of built into the human kind of kind of system often for many people, is to have these primary relationships with people and sense of contact and connection very important for us, when we tried to do in Buddhist practice, is to begin there, to appreciate what's already there, not to not to deny it in any way, but not to expand it and universalize it so that it's not limited to your family to your tribe. To your clan, to your group, to, you know, the usual places, but learn to expand it and open and Open it,

open it up. So that it becomes a can become boundless, which means that we can encompass anyone and everyone in our goodwill, anyone in everyone in our care. And that becomes a practice. How do you do that? It's not easy to do that. But you have to want to do it can be interested in doing it. And so, Buddhism offers meditation practices you can do to develop that. There's a meditation practice, specifically each four of these kinds of love. And some of them are very systematic. It's amazing to have a very clearly developed systematic technique or approach to developing love. It's not great. You know, you know people who've tried for years at at dating websites You know, to see if that somehow the algorithm that they have there will help you discover love, you know, think whatever that algorithm is that their algorithm bit make love. But I think it could be done faster than most of these websites. It makes my friends who have tried, it seems to go pretty slow, but a lot faster if you sit down and develop the meditation practice on loving, you know, spend that time, the systematic practices that are presented by Buddhism. But even more powerful than meditation practice, is to be interested in or have a sense of what it means to have goodwill for others, to have a sense of what it's like to have compassion, to have a sense of what it's like to have appreciated joy in the joy of others, and have a sense of what it's like to have this economists love and with that sense Or intuition to begin seeing and exploring and stretching, and how to have that interactive daily life. How to Act from that? How to sew to have goodwill for others, Goodwill's and other translation for loving kindness, have goodwill for others and act on it. You know, what would it be nice? What's it like to do a favor for someone to be do a kind act to do something a little helpful to someone? What's it What's it like to be to offer compassionate care for someone who's sick? And to do it not out of obligation, but do it out of this beautiful quality of heart that can be there and express it stretch, explore what's it like to do it here? What's it like to do it here? One of the great benefits I feel that I've received from my practice is that as I go about them My days now, that's a constant reference for me. And so when I consider what am I going to say here? Or do here? Or how am I going to live? I refer back to what is the kind thing to do?

Or what would be goodwill here? How do I take this situation with care and compassion? Would love look like in this situation? And I don't, I wouldn't say that I do a great job at it. And, but I think that when I, when I can't do it, and it's, you know, feels uncomfortable and all that, but I'm kind of like happy too, because, wow, I get to try. Isn't that nice to have a life where you get to try to come this way and explore all this. So one of the protests that people have in this kind of teachings of the Vinyl bogies, four forms of Love Is that it? It really, people protest and say this that sounds sentimental. It's unrealistic. And if I live this way, then I'm living a weak life. And it comes kind of a weakness. I'm a pushover, and I don't really, you know, I'm not really able to take care of myself take care of my society, because we need to have rigorous truth telling our rigorous kind of black and white, you know, fight for justice or something. And there might be some truth to that and how some people carry this goodwill within them. But the I think that this is not what's in what's going on. There's a number of conditions that really allow this, this loving kindness and compassion to really thrive within us and one of them is confidence and to develop A lot of confidence in myself to be able to sit upright and strong, metaphorically sit upright, the upright, to be able to walk into any situation, and be grounded and stable and strong and yourself. To be able to know yourself really well to know. Be able to read and understand the situation well enough to not do things which would harm yourself or harm other people. Remember, the Buddha was a warrior. So one of the interesting questions in his reference point is how does a warrior exhibit goodwill? How does a warrior in the old old days when warriors were kind of had some stability to them? honor what is it? How is it How does a war warrior Express kindness have warrior Express compassion or empathic joy? What kind of strength and capacity and presence there's a call for we don't have to diminish her selves and expressing goodwill to others, but rather, to be boundless, to be big and be present in a strong way. So, be proud, I'm almost proud and proud. Maybe it's kind of too limited, but be confident and you know, let your chest be open and present. You don't have to assert yourself asserting yourself is just as bad as being self effacing. But to be neither self effacing nor asserting self effacing as a kind of attachment to self, asserting oneself as an attachment to self. To not

be involved in self allows you to be confident and present in a strong way. So that kind of strength and confidence makes it easier for love to flow freely, because you don't feel threatened by what goes around you. You don't feel so easily threatened by opening your heart and taking someone in and feeling and be present for someone. A lot of people feel threatened by their own love. I love this person. If I'm kind to this person, then the first Don't take advantage of me will get too close to me want too much for me.

There's two stories from the Buddha of two people, two men who came to see the Buddha who were angry with the Buddha. And the first story was, the Buddha did nothing during that, but practice loving kindness toward the angry man. And by the time he left, he had relaxed and his anger was gone. Just being being, you know, just being kind. And I've seen that over and over again, that there's a kind of I'll tell you another story of similar that the Buddha had an enemy named Devadatta. When they were kind of a, it was kind of trying to take over the Buddhist order and from the Buddha at some point Devadatta arranged for a from the Military, a military elephant who is used to going into battle to go and charge the Buddha on the street and kill him. And apparently this elephant was barreling down the street. And everyone kind of all the people in this town just kind of got out of the way until the buddy Get out of the way run. And he refused to run he just stood there in the middle of the street, like John Wayne, I guess. And raid raid radiated his loving kindness towards the elephant. And as the story probably a myth goes, that as the elephant came to the Buddha, it slowed down and then came to stop right in front of it. Buddha and kneel down in front of them, the Buddha kind of patted him. And so maybe it's a myth. But there's a kind of an unseen world that we live in, we don't always see where the These things how they actually work the cause and effect relationships between things. And I've seen many times that when I have shifted my relationship to other people to one of goodwill, even when they don't haven't been, you know, they're not in my presence. When I finally can see them again, something has shifted and our relationship was strained. But something changed and what happened? I haven't seen them. You know, how did you know what why did? Why did things change? Did they have to do with my developing goodwill towards them? Or was it a coincidence? What happened? No, he went to, I went whale watching a couple of weeks ago here in Monterey. And we saw the humpback whales which are up now. And it was great. And today, the naturalist who took us out in the boat, described the humpback whales as their friends to all species. And then she described how they will not like whales will play with others. animals in the ocean and also protect other animals. When the orcas come along, the humpback whales will get between the workers in their prey and protect them in variety of ways. And so not only did they have all this care for other species, maybe because they're mammals make this oxytocin thing. It, you know, is a mammal thing and then kind of we have kind of hardwired for care and compassion some way. So anyways, going on and I, so the Buddha, you know, this one angry man came to the Buddha and he just expressed his loving kindness and that change that change the man. Another man came to the Buddha and was angry with him. And then here the Buddha did was he said, he said, ask you a question. If someone comes to your house with a gift, and you refuse to take the gift, who does that? Who does that gift belong to? And the man said, Oh, if I person doesn't take it from me, then it still belongs to me. And the Buddha said, in the same way, I don't accept your anger, it stays, it stays with you. The clever Yeah. So, you know, was he being unkind? And the second example, you know, kind and the first one, probably he recognized there was a difference between the two Angry Men and each of them required each of them called for a different response. And the one who kept second one who came, he held his held this ground in a certain way, and countered it a mess method in a strong way. And, and, you know, kind of pushed it back in a certain way. So this thing about, you know, goodwill, it doesn't mean we become a pushover, it doesn't mean that we have to kind of every circumstance we're in, have to kind of embrace and hold the difficult situation.

But I found over and over again To this day, that coming into situations with relationships where I find challenging, and in privately myself, considering, what where am I closed? Where am I held up? Where Where am I resisting? What's going on? Where am I judgmental? What is it like where where can I find a way to be, to have my heart open, to be able to be present here in a confident and open and relaxed way and meet the situation with goodwill or with care, to be friendly to the situation. And I find that it stretches me and develop me it cultivates me, and I feel like it actually does more for me to develop my loving kindness, my goodwill and compassion than doing this practice in meditation. I don't do the meditation practice on these things very often. But when I do do it, I love it. It's so nice to sit here and to kind of sit here and be able to spend 45 minutes or however long I meditate for Focusing on love. Isn't that pretty lucky? Wow, you get to do that. And it's a good thing to do. So, there are a lot of benefits that come from doing these practices. Some of them are beneficial for us personally. Here's a list of them. If you have strong, loving kindness, you will sleep happily. You will wake happily, you will have no bad dreams. You'll be loved by others. And you'll be loved by non humans are the elephants that come charging. And here's an interesting one. It doesn't say you'll be loved by the devils by the gods, angels or whatever their bizarre. One is guarded by the dentist and a nice one protected by this kind of unseen protect force that comes when you enter into a place with goodwill and French friendliness and then it gets little bit more far fetched from fire poison or sword won't touch you and then nice yeah your fire didn't touch you. one's mind becomes concentrated quickly one's complexion becomes clear. We should up we should open up a beauty salon. The brahma vihara salon. They will do guided meditations for people. One dies with a mind free from confusion. And if no higher attainment is reached when is reborn together with Brahma promise realm. So noble higher attainment means that as with a basis of love, the basis of these four loves one doesn't. Then take one step further and have insight that frees the mind completely. And so if you don't take that next step, then that strong love that's cultivated and developed. They say they say here in the ancient school, you get to get reborn in your next life in the heavenly realm with Brahma. I don't know if you'll have four faces, but you get to live with this person has four faces. So those that's an introduction to the Brahma viharas and the Dharma practice days, which are these once a month on Friday, practice days that we have here. The theme for this year will be these brahma viharas. And will spend two months on loving kindness two months on compassion two months on appreciative joy and two months on equanimity. And then somewhere around the time of month where these Dharma practice things are happening on Sunday. I'll give a talk of each of these as we go along to kind of support the demo practice days. And for those of you who don't come to Dharma practice days, you'll get a little flavor of it as we go along.

And so each of you are mammals and as mammals as with our relatives, the humpback whales, you also can become a protector of all species, all beings. You also have bodies that produce oxytocin. You also have capacity for being open hearted. You also have the capacity to be friendly, to be kind to be compassionate. Look for where it's easy. For this kindness and compassion to exist for you, or it's easy to have it whether it's for your pet, to for your relatives or for its easiest with total strangers, it's easy to do it in the abstract. Because people are complicated with the abstract or not. Do look for where it's easiest. And begin exploring it and getting to know it, get more familiar with it, spend time with it, live with it, and see if you can begin expanding where you spread where you extend those good feelings out into the world. And it's a playful thing, experimental thing. There's absolutely no need to say to yourself that, Oh, I can't do this. Of course, everyone can do it. If nothing else, as an aspirant And don't underestimate how powerful and transformative it is to aspire to above that begins the process of opening the heart up. So experiment with that play for it play around make it part of your life, you will get wealthy really well the investment is really good. So thank you all very much