

2014-11-03 The Man On The Bridge

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So you're all welcome to come to the Sunday community meeting. We don't have these very often at IMC and the chance to talk a little bit about the state of IMC or concerns about it, your questions about it your interests. Find out what's going on little bit. I know most of you come on Mondays. I don't want to do it Monday evening after our regular time, but some of you might want to come on. I think it's 11 o'clock on Sunday. So Can you all hear me okay. Okay.

So this evening, I would like to read you a story. And then perhaps have a discussion about the story. It's a somewhat evocative story. And some people respond to it as a challenging morality story. Some People read it as a story raises deep questions about our relationship and our relationship to other people. And there's other ways of reading the story. It's like a fable.

So this story is by Edwin Friedman, and he wrote a book called The Freedmen's Fables. So he wrote this table. There was a man who had given much thought to what he wanted from life. He had experienced many moods and trials. He had experimented with different ways of living. And he had had had his share of both successes and failure. At last, he began to see clearly Where he wanted to go. diligently, he searched for the right opportunity. Sometimes he came close, only to be pushed away. Often he applied all his strength and imagination, only to find the path hopelessly blocked. And then At last it came. But the opportunity would not wait. He was mailed it made available only for a short time. If it were seen that he was not committed, the opportunity would not come again. Eager to arrive, he started on his journey. With each step, he wanted to move faster. With each thought about his goal, his heart beat quicker. With each vision of what lay ahead, he found renewed vigor, strength, that main strength that had left him since his early youth returned and desires all kinds of desires, reawakened from their long dormant positions. hurrying along it came upon a bridge that crossed through the middle of a town. It hadn't been built high above a river in order to protect it from the floods of spring. He started across then he noticed someone coming from the opposite direction. As they move closer, it seems as though the other were coming to greet him. He could clearly see, however, that he did not know this other who is dressed similarly, except for something tied around his waist. When they were within, when they when they were within a healing distance, he could see that what the other had about his waist was a rope. It was wrapped around him many times, and probably, if extended, would reach a length of 30 feet. The other began to uncurl the rope. And just as they were coming close, the stranger said, pardon me. Would you be so kind as to hold the end of the rope for a moment? surprised by this polite, politely phrased but curious request. He agreed without a thought. reached out and took it. Thank you, said the other, and then added two hands now to remember Hold tight. There upon the other jumped off the bridge. Quickly the free falling body hurtled through this, hurled the distance of the rope slink in from the bridge, the man abruptly felt felt the poor instinctively He held tight and was almost dragged over the side. He managed to brace himself against the edge. However, after having

caught his breath, he looked down at the other dangling close to oblivion. While you're trying to do he yelled, just hold tight, said the other. This is ridiculous demand thought and began trying to haul the other in. He could not get the leverage. However, it was as though the weight of the other person the length of the rope had been carefully calculated in advance so that together they created a counterweight just beyond his strength to bring the other back to safety. Why did you do this? The man called out remember, said the other, if you let go, I will be lost but I cannot pull you. The man cried. I am your responsibility, said the other. Well, I did not ask for it. The man said, If you let go, I am lost, repeated the other. He began to look around for help.

But there was no one. How long would he have to wait? Why did this happen to befall him now, just as he was on the verge of true success, he examined the side, searching for a place to tie the rope, some pro to Trojan, perhaps, or some, or maybe a hole in the boards, but the railing was unusually uniform in shape. There was no spaces between the boards. There was no way to get rid of this newfound burden, even temporarily. What do you want? He asked the other hanging below just your head. The other answered How can I help? I cannot pull you in. And there's no place to tie the rope so you can go. No place to tie the rope so that I can go and find someone to help me help you. I know that just hang on, that will be enough. Tie the rope around your waist, it will be easier. Fearing that his arms would not hold out much longer. He tied the rope around his waist. Why did you do this? he asked. Don't you see what you have done? What possible purpose could you have had in mind? Just remember said the other. My life is in your hands. What should he do? If I let go All my life I will know that I let this other die. If I stay I risk losing my momentum toward my long sought after salvation. Either way, this will haunt me forever. With ironic humor, he thought to die himself instantly to jump off the bridge, while still holding on that would teach this fool but he wanted to live and to live life fully. What a choice I have to make, how shall I ever decide. As time went by, still no one came, the critical moment of decision was drawing near. To show his commitment to his own goals. He would have to continue on his journey now was already almost too late to arrive in time. But what a terrible choice to have to make and new thought occurred to him while he could not pull this other up solely on his own efforts, if the other would shorten the rope from his end, by curling it around his waist again and again. Together, they could do it. Actually, the other could do it by himself, so long as he standing on the bridge kept still and steady. Now listen, he shouted down. I think I know how to save you. And he explained his plan. But the other wasn't interested. You mean you won't help? But I told you, I cannot pull you up by myself. And I don't think I can hang on much longer either. You must try the other shouted back in tears. If you fail, I die. That point of decision arrived. What should he do? My life or this others? And then a new idea, a revelation. So new. In fact, it seemed heretical. So alien was it to his to his traditional way of thinking. I want you to listen Carefully he said, because I mean, what am I, what I'm about to say, I will not accept the position of choice for your life. Only for my own the position of choice for your own life, I hereby give back to you. What do you mean? The other asked afraid? I mean, simply, it's up to you. You decide which way this ends, I will become the counterweight. If you do the pulling and bring yourself up, I will talk a little from here. He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself a new against the side of the bridge. You cannot mean what you say. The other shrieked. You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be what could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me. He waited a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope. I accept your choice, he said at last and freed his hands let go the rope. So

would you like me to read any of it over? In order to kind of see if you miss something or

so what do you think of this story? How would you How would you have done if you were holding this person up by the rope. No one was coming to help. You couldn't hold much longer. The person who wasn't helping him or herself or would you do? What do you think of this story?

It's reminds him of trying to help someone with addiction. So you're a little bit more but with the mic. When you're

helping, when you're helping someone with addiction

requires their effort,

as well as yours that you can't do it alone.

Okay, great. And if they're not helping themselves, then

then it

can't happen to joy so you kind of let go Yeah.

Mike, you're going up there. Sir Mike on that side of the room.

Well, I was struck by the idea of the responsibility. And I don't think it ever works to try to make someone else responsible for my life.

And I think

the decision that the man on the bridge made was a recognition of that fact.

So the person who threw himself over the bridge didn't understand that that person wanted someone else to take responsibility

never works.

I read the story is for great, great, great. I read the story a little differently, rather than looking at it from the point of view of the person who jumped off the bridge. I look at it the point of view of the person who was holding on who took the rope and was struggling with the issue of responsibility. So sometimes we take the responsibility of others and that's the burden.

Yes. Just read the last few

sentences.

Understand what happened. Yeah.

I don't know what the other man said.

Oh, I don't think there was anything more. That was part of the point.

So he said so they the fellow holding the rope says, You decide which way this ends, I will become the counterweight. You do the pulling and bring yourself up. I believe in tug a little from here. He began unwinding the rope from around his waist and braced himself a new against the side. You cannot mean

what you say what you say, the other shrieked. You would not be so selfish. I am your responsibility. What could be so important that you would let someone die? Do not do this to me. When he was holding the rope, waited a moment. There was no change in the tension of the rope. And he said, I accept your choice. And with that he let go of the rope. pass the mic back.

That was a really interesting story. It triggered a lot of different situations that I've been in. With helping out a few I too was positioning myself as the person on the bridge. And all I kept thinking towards the end was it was in a Dharma talk. I don't remember who said it, but he reminded me that it's okay to set boundaries, but not to block other people like from your heart, right? Like, the person on the bridge shouldn't say like, You're crazy. I don't know why you're doing this. Like, here you go, you know, throwing you off. He just said very simply, like I accept that you are making this other choice that human beings come and do what's best for me. But that didn't. There was no blocking like, of love. At least it didn't seem and it's still really tough in everyday life, but that really stuck with me for another talk. So right.

Nice, thank you.

I was thinking of this possibly be Two parts of one person, because at one point, they said, as you were walking, the only thing that looked different about them is that the one person had a rope. So I don't exactly know what that means. But as he was trying to reach his goals, he had to get maybe rid of something within himself, but I can't really get beyond what that really might mean.

Great. So that's a whole different twists on the story, rather than in two different people. There's two sides of the same person. And you've hit the first stage is met Matt part of himself on the bridge. And one side that doesn't take responsibility, maybe, and are one side that's a burden. That's it one side that gets in the way stands in the way of progress of going ahead and was one life And you can't let go a part of yourself. I mean, you can't let go that important part of who you are maybe your ego, your identity or something. I mean, that whole ego thing, you know, you're, it's completely dependent on you, you know, it's gonna die if you don't hold on if you don't feed it if you don't participate in it. And it's and you can ask to try to help itself but it just won't depends on you. But it blocks you from where you have to go. So then to drop the burden of yourself. Maybe that's it. That's a whole different twist. Thank you. Yes, Mike up here. So here's this one here coming.

I found myself identifying With the man on the bridge and sort of wondering, is it on the inside? Yep.

And wondering, why is this man doing this what what are his motivations and I think it's difficult sometimes to accept that someone else's motivations may be completely incomprehensible to perhaps even fundamentally irrational. But there come times when you need to do that, and I sort of started thinking about this as you were, you were mentioning the with people struggling with addiction, you know, sometimes you sort of have to throw up your hands and said, I just fundamentally don't understand where you're coming from. And that's okay, but I have to let you know.

Thank you. They can assist can be done. thing to do for some like addiction because you know can consequences can be so dire. I've known I've known parents who've had to make that choice with a child or you know, a grown up child who they tried for a long time to help the child and finally they had to let go and let the person be homeless on the street. They tried everything else at some point they had to just like go hard thing to do.

I guess I want to put in a word for maybe he made a mistake. Letting Go. Mistake

cuz every time I hear people saying here, oh, yeah, sometimes you just have to let go people you know, or whatever. Maybe that's true. But there's something that is important for me about practice about actually keeping holding on in some way.

are that the letting go is just don't make a mistake about what letting go. means don't,

don't let go the wrong thing. Yeah. Yeah, that's good. So that's a good thing is there I mean, a few a few things from that point of view is, you know, for the, you know, I spent the adult life time of kind of learning to let go and so one of the one of the ways that I read this story is that what was so important about where I was trying to go, you know, what was all of the goal and final fulfillment of his life and, and I know, there's something really great about even letting go of that letting go so delicious. So the problem was, he shouldn't have let go of that person, he should have let go of, you know, his goal, maybe. And that would have been a kind of liberation. I thought, however, he wasn't strong enough to keep holding on. Because if he kept holding on not only was he gonna eventually let the guy slip out of his hands, because, you know, he couldn't be strong enough. And he was going to lose this other good thing. He's going to lose both things. Or he can get so tired, maybe he'd be pulled over the edge and they both die. Anyway, so I kind of the other thing is I, we discussed the story in other group I had today. And one man said that basically said he should have hung on hung in there and kept thinking about, are there any other solutions? And maybe there's another solution. No, no one else coming, no place to tie the rope. And the person who was telling saying this, what he could have done is he could have put the rope around his own waist and twisted and turned around and then he would have slowly pulled him up. So, you know, so maybe you know, the idea of Be careful about quick decisions. You know, think hang in there for longer as long as you can, and maybe like, oh, the other option, but that's what's great about these fables. Because I saw a hand over there, and then we can do Jessica afterwards. Yeah.

My

favorite.

Great to see you bring it bring it back to Jessica Jessica want to say something?

What what I was thinking about

was, I guess the pace that he was going to get somewhere. And he was so quick to grab the rope because maybe he was like in this pace and not it will like stop and think and reflect about it. We had a choice to take the rope or not. No, we couldn't talk to, you know, talk to you know, whatever the person beforehand like, Well what this is tail like what's your Yeah, I guess I can resume resonated with me like that moment right there. Sometimes I get so far ahead of myself, I ended up you know when somebody is like oh, you know, do this, okay. And then I'm like, Wait, do I want to do this or you know, like what is that that a lot of times getting caught up in

your take on things that maybe I don't want to

take on? It's a great, great point. So, yeah, the man will crossing a bridge had a choice of whether to take the rope. But he didn't. He didn't really consider that choice very well. And a great thing to do

would have been to see you said to have asked why should I hold the rope? What's that about? And so, you know, people come along in our lives and they asked for help. They ask for something. And maybe we don't ask first, you know, what, what are you hoping for him? Or why do you want me to help? or What does that entail? And then we get involved and pretty soon we're like, how did I get into this?

Yes. So this is a little different. You guys sit back, Jessica all the way back. To me it was okay. So the guy on the bridge had something important he wanted to do in his life. And the man with the rope what happened way I see it, the guy with the goals got caught up in somebody else's head trip. So you know, I think about this like family. So I might have something that I want to do that's important. And then if you know, it's this, and then somebody approaches me and they they have their own head trips about it. It's like they're not there minding my business. They're not paying attention to themselves, but they're projecting onto me their own ideas or Thoughts about why I should or shouldn't do something. And without thinking about it, you know, we buy into that sometimes. And then that's what happened. He without thinking about what he was doing it just, he bought into somebody else's head trip. And then he realized later, wait a minute, that has nothing to do with me. And he had to let it go. So he could get on with his life. Right?

We have a, my wife and son have a very, very good relationship. But there's a standoff and on a particular thing in her house. And he wants her to do it for him. And she says, No, you have to do for yourself. It's been going on for months. So maybe bring that up someone back there. Yeah. And you can maybe pass the mic bringing up to the front here. Yes. Here

Yeah, for me. It was Also I was seeing it from men on the journey. And also, he just took the rope without thinking about it. The man offered it to him and he didn't think about it. So how often do I get myself into something without having been mindful and then realize I'm in the thick of it, and I have to figure out what to do. And I'm in meshed and I'm embroiled. And like I was frustrated, you know, just throw the band over, you know, it's, it's, it's his problem. But I but I really appreciated the fact that he struggled and tried to find a way and struggled and tried to find a way because that's what we do. But what was apparent to me was, in the end, he had to be able to live with himself. And he didn't think that he could live with himself until he tried each and every one of these ways. And then finally at the end, the man said, he said to him, You have to take this responsibility, I believe in this with you, which is proper. So even though we're not mindful and we find ourselves caught in something, we can still finally pull back and say, This is mine, that's yours. And I'm going to continue from here. And then we have to be able to live with it. And I think that's the one that's really a sticking point for me.

So very interesting, especially sitting next to, especially you sitting next to Meredith right now. Because you do it you have you have very different interpretations of the story. You'd like yours better. But you might have some conversations tonight about her her point of view, and how yours supports that her point, how yours applies with her point of view. How you get caught in yourself.

So one thing that was very meaningful for me was how the story began. About how he thought about what he wanted from life, and what his desires were and how he could find that by going somewhere or doing something or meeting someone, that this was something he was going to find outside of himself, and that he had this passion, he was focused on that goal. And he really, you know, he was moving very fast. And he really wasn't paying attention to what, from the way, the way I understood the story really wasn't paying attention to what he was actually doing. It was he was just focused on this goal, and he was moving very quickly towards it. And this thing with the bridge going up over a city over it just, I mean, it was kind of like, well, what what is that? You know, it's like, why would you even step onto a bridge like that when there was no need for a bridge and why wouldn't she stay on the Round

and, you know, walk walk on the ground. And that seemed very odd to me. And it just seemed like he really wasn't paying attention to how he was on his path. And that this thing was the man handling handing him the rope. And then bam, within an instant he was over the side. And it really pointed to me about how things turn on a dime and how important it is to be present. And to see what's happening moment by moment by moment, rather than getting caught in an idea and, you know, a long a long term goal.

Nice. Yeah, so nice. Maybe sometimes, it's more useful to see that the journey is the goal. Then we can live mindfully and present each step along along the way. And be careful how we live. Yes, Who's someone else? Your yesterday,

family analogy occurred to me as well. But the story didn't provide any guidance there. You can't really let go. And the choices are not so binary you don't it's not life or death, the smaller conflicts. And it wasn't clear what the right course of action is when it's not a life and death situation. So for addiction I can it's in some ways easier because you have to let go, that's ready. The only choice but in others, it's not so clear.

It's pretty clear for my wife. The issue is that my son wants her to call the DMV to set up the appointment for getting a driver's license test. But she says you have to do that. You have to take responsibility for that you have to call and think for months What he knows he knows that he knows that. Anyway, his mic there, please. Thank you. Is that mic back there for you? there? So go ahead. Gotcha. The situation is sort of fantastical and, and this is a fiction. I mean, it's a fable. And a lot of the quandaries we get ourselves into are really overblown fictions, I think. Yeah, it's like, it's like, it's like Mark, Mark Twain said some like, I've had a lot of troubles in my life, most of which never happened. So one more back there and then we should stop

Since every one of us is sort of naturally taking the position of the person on the bridge, if we take the position of the person who's just dropping off at the end, just even as a provocation, I think it's part of maybe being human and part of the contract of what counts that when you ask someone to hold on to the rope, they expect is that they hold on to a rope, that's part of something that we define for ourselves, and you have no choice that's just part of being a civilized society, I guess, to some extent, and that's the way it is, it's a social contract of thoughts. And you're in the position of throwing rope to someone expecting them to pick up sometimes and sometimes you're in the reverse position. And that rules keep changing even now and then that to be calling yourself civilized means that that we hold on to that contract. So every time someone throws a ball, you have to catch it some at least that sounds good. looking at

maybe he has a very interesting Thank you. I saw there was a, you know, a candid camera. So many years ago, I saw a candid camera someplace like in the street corner of New York, big skyscraper and corner and, and, and someone was holding a rope and someone is walking down the street, one side and they said can you hold us for a minute like a construction worker was the actor. You hold this rope for a minute and said okay, and then he went around the corner with a rope and then someone else is walking through it. Can you hold this rope? And then he left. So the people couldn't see who was around the corner, but they're both holding the rope. So people do it. Yeah. So people do help, you know, and our social contract to help. But what occurs to me is I learned it. It's kind of a children's song. I don't know where maybe it has some of you might know where it comes from. That in my face. At spirit rock, I won't sing it. I'll spare you the song, but I'll sing the words. Don't walk in front of me. I may not follow. You know the song you sing it. Don't walk in front of me. I may not follow. Don't walk behind me. I may not lead. Just walk besides B and together we'll walk to the land of peace. Hmm Fritz perls has

been Fritz perls Wow. Okay. And so what what the different versions of it yeah so but they may be my friend. So the so this idea you know there's different kinds there are contracts but not all contracts are necessarily wise. And so you know, to expect you know that someone someone's lead or someone's behind sometimes that's right. But it's really great when we walk together. So thank you for going along with the story. And it's a nice fable, I thought that it was full of different interpretations, different angles to look at and see, the group that I gave it to today was a group of people who are being trained to be mentors to kind of be able to do kind of Buddhist support for people who are Buddhist practitioners. And one of the things I wanted to get across to them was a tremendous importance of in the role of being kind of a spiritual mentor, of not taking responsibility for the other people's choices. And it's such a dramatic story about not taking responsibility, but leaving the responsibility and in in other people's hands, and you're ready to support them and to help them and that's part of, I think, wonderful part of human life is our compassion, our care, mutual support, but there's something quite different about taking responsibility for other people. And so that was purpose with a story. Just today, purpose of telling you was just to see what would come out, see what would what would evoke and evoked a lot. So I appreciate very much think what you said and I hope that maybe it continues to live in you for a while you'll keep wondering and thinking about the story. So thank you all very much.