

2014-11-24 Five Jhana Factors

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good evening, everyone. Can you hear Oh, all right, everyone.

I came back yesterday from teaching a week long retreat. And the retreat is still with me, kind of both energetically. And also, in terms of the theme of what we talked about at the retreat, there was a theme. The theme was what's known in more technical Buddhist languages, the five and janyk factors for five factors of absorption and emitted in Buddhist meditation, when it becomes really strong, we get absorbed in meditation in similar the way that we might get absorbed in a really good book, or absorbed maybe in a movie or something. And there's a variety of things in life we get absorbed in and where the absorption in them, it feels nice, it has a really good feeling to be it's very satisfying. So it's the same thing can happen in meditation. We're going to be involved in meditation so deeply so fully, that it feels really right, very satisfying to me, so fully absorbed or engaged. And so the tradition emphasize five different psychological factors that come into play, that support that ability to be fully absorbed. So I want to talk about those a little bit. And since they're fresh in my mind, and but I want to talk about them a little bit. As factors for deep meditative practice, but rather as something that's relevant for our everyday lives, that how we engage in what we do is from you know from the point of view of our own inner well being, how we are is as important as what we do. And for some activities we do the how we are is actually more important than the what, and in our meditation practice in particular how we meditate is at least as important in what we do in meditation, how we meditate, what you know, what kind of meditation we do, the how we are is very important, what comes into play, what are the psychological, inner factors that come into play as we practice. So, and I learned a lot about this absorption in activity from my Zen training. So I spent many years practicing in Zen monasteries. And I didn't know it, we didn't use the language of the what's called the five janyk factors there. What we were told in in Zen training was when you did something you were supposed to do it wholeheartedly. And I was enough reprimanded is too strong of a word, probably it is but I was advised often that about how I was, you know how to be more wholehearted in the things that I did. So sweeping, there's a lot of sweeping and Buddhist monasteries. And so, you know, you could you could kind of like just, you know, you know, in a path you know, you're doing great breaking or sweeping the path ways you could either just kind of like just kind of lightly dabble lightly kind of touch, you know, or half heartedly do it. And then that would be pointed out to you, you weren't really there and sometimes someone would actually take the tool from you and show you what it was like to really put yourself in and really engaged with the sweeping in a union. You don't just kind of like you know, with one little and kind of half heartedly kind of, you know, scrape little bit or push a little bit you know, and look around and then you get around to do it again. But you take both arms, you hold this broom or the rake and you're really there, it's like, it's like the rake and or the broom. And the floor is the most important thing in the world at that moment. And you want to give yourself completely over to that activity. And so this idea of giving yourself over wholeheartedly completely to what you did was a regular part of trainings how they train you in Zen.

In fact, in traditional Zen monasteries it's possible maybe to say that meditate, that the everyday activities you do in the monastery are more important for the training and Zen than the meditation that is done. And in Japan when I was in the monasteries in Japan, some of the monasteries there, they didn't, they didn't do that much meditation, I mean, not that much. Not that much meant twice a day. And, but then you did a lot of sweeping and a lot of activities. And some of it you know, seemed pretty silly. One of the silly activities was so there were about 35 monks living in the monastery. Now that a good percentage of us, especially the ones who were more junior were assigned to mow the lawn. So I don't know how many there were 25 of us to mow the lawn. And you know, it wasn't like a, you know, a big monastery but lawn wasn't that big. But what we were what we had for mowing the lawn was scissors.

And so that seems you know, like, is this a waste of time? You can one person can mow the lawn, you know, much faster than 25 people with scissors. But the it didn't matter. It didn't matter if it was efficient or not efficient. What mattered in the Zen training that you did it wholeheartedly. No one was damaged, you know, by, you know, moving along with scissors. And none of us don't think any of us were damaged. We were young and you know, good knees. And, and, you know, so and then some someone might think, well, that's silly. Get him a lawn mower, have one person mow the lawn, and everyone else can meditate. I mean, you meditations really important. That's where the spiritual life really is, you know, really you can get work on your meditation and go deeper and deeper and deeper, you know, whatever. No, the idea was that not that mowing the lawn with a scissors is good spiritual practice. What was good spiritual practice as good or maybe better than meditation was to really when you do it really be there and fully engaged without resentment without, you know, like desperation, you know, without complaint. You just just, you were told to do that you should really do it for hardly an example This was when I was in the monastery. I went one evening to talk to the head to one of the cooks. He was doing some prep work in the kitchen chopping something vegetables, I think. And I had to ask him something or ask him something. And so I asked him something and then he, he put down his knife, stood up straight and answered me. He finished out to me picked up his knife, he started his work again. So I asked him a second question. He put down his knife, stood up and answered me, picked up his knife started. So I asked him a third question. And I'm kind of slow sometimes to understand what was going on. And the third time he put down his knife and he stood up and he said, Gil, I can only do I'm only going to do one thing at a time. I'm going to either be here and do my vegetable chopping, or I'm going to talk to you but if I go back and forth, I can't get my work done. So I thought about it. Thank you. And that was the last of my questions. They did that, you know, so he was practicing the Zen training you give yourself fully to this one thing. So what is it like to give yourself wholeheartedly to any activity? One of the interesting answers to that question is to ask the reverse for you. What does it look like when you're not wholehearted? What does it look like when you're half hearted? What does it look like when you don't give yourself completely to the activity you're doing if you're washing dishes or doing laundry or there's all kinds of things you can be doing? And nowadays, I think there's all kinds of situations where people were wholehearted and doing something that now they're not really there for because they can pull out their phones and check for emails. There used to be it was sometimes in the Zen monastery, we have to wait in line and so Video was then you wholeheartedly waiting in line, you just really there. You're just there, you know, you know, waiting in line, you know, in fact, you're so fully there that the idea of waiting was like extra just you were there. Can you imagine all the line of these end monks, you know, they're in line, and then they pull out their cell phone. And you know, it doesn't work very well for the training, you know if the training is to learn this capacity to be here fully for something. And this translates, so in all kinds of ways is wholeheartedness. It also translates to being with someone else, to be really present for someone to

really listen carefully to be a wholeheartedly they're fully present. Someone who's in distress, to have the capacity to really be there, boom, you're there.

And so what keeps you What keeps you from that you can understand the forces union standard, your distractibility and you understand the momentum, of your of your You know of your of your life that keeps you jumping around from one thing to the other, that you can really be there fully for one thing I used to well, that one that one one example that I used for this was maybe you had the experience of shaking someone's hand they say, Oh, hi. They say to you, and so you shake hands, but as soon as their hand touches yours, they're off to the next person. And yeah, this limp hand. You know, it doesn't, you know, like, Oh, you know, what was that about? You know, but but then there's a person and then there's people, of course, the people that crush your hand. That doesn't work either. But then there's people who like maybe shake your hand are really there and you feel like they're really stopped and they really they're just you for that moment. I've heard stories about the Dalai Lama, the people who've been in his presence and they say that you know that he was stopped First complete strangers and look at them as if for that moment, they're the most important person in the world. And it transformed to change people to be seen by dogs or sweaters. And you're right, they're already there. But they were not when they were when the Dalai Lama passed me by he ignored me.

I was. What happened was that that was it. He was going to do a little audience for this. They're all the staff and teachers at spirit in their families at spirit rock. So I know 100 people or so gathered together to do some special event with him. And so I went with my whole family and my son was he was speaking then so he must have maybe two or something is pretty young. And I said, we were saying go see Dalai Lama, and he said, Oh, the big alpaca and so we went up there and In this room, but he was too young to be able to sit there. So you know, I'm around this kind of scene a lot. So I let I today I took him outside, so my wife could be there and so we were actually outside in the lobby outside with dial Emma was in and at the end of his presentation, you could hear they did some chanting. And while I was holding my son in my arms, and at the end of the chanting, while my son joined in and at the end and everyone stopped chanting, because there's over and then you could hear through the building.

My son, he and then my son came down to Darla came out first he was the first exit, you know, respected man like that. So we were there in the lobby, you know, and And so he came over, he saw my son, not me. And so he came over and he kind of, you know, patted my son very nicely, and then he walked on. So that's how I was ignored by that. So this whole wholehearted so okay, so these factors in Buddhist tradition, then champions for five factors, they're important. And so again, as rather than thinking of them as having to do with deep absorption, I'll never get that let's do hard. These are things that are common in our lives. And I trust that you probably some time in your life in some activities you do, you probably recognize that these are these are in play, and to learn to how to recognize the different functioning of our minds or psyche is very helpful, because this is one of the ways to find our way forward. And one of the ways to find out how to be in this world. become wiser and wiser in how we work inside the mechanism, the operating system that we have. It's a little bit like the story with the idea that you can feed give someone lunch, or you can teach them how to farm. Lunch will be good for that afternoon, teach you how to farm Will you provide them food for the rest of their life perhaps. So, you know, you could cheer someone up by you know, hanging out with them, or you can teach them about, you know, how their mind works. And there's them the more and more they understand how an inner life works, the more they can kind of take care of themselves. So this is a Buddhist has a lot of different teachings about the inner ecology, how the inner ecology works. So these five factors are part of them. So the first has to do with directing the attention or placing the attention. So our attention is one of the most precious precious resources we have and where our attention goes, has a big impact on what shapes us. So our conditioning, for example, and the influences on us. And when we start having some

choice about what we do with our attention, then we become less influenced by or by all the fact all the things around us that go on. But if, if we don't have the ability to choose where our attention goes, then our attention gets a pool left and right by all the circumstance and activities of life. And we feel like we're kind of more victims to circumstances than we are masters of circumstances. So in Buddhism, learning how attention works, and to begin to have some ability to engage it and use it is very important. So the first factor is choosing where your attention goes, and directing it there. And so I think we do that all the time, right? You get in your car to drive and you know, whether you're consciously or unconsciously doing it. You're choosing To pay attention to the road as you drive, right you put down your cell phone and you know your look when you drive. And if your mind wanders off, you know, you see something interesting side of the road, you bring it back pretty quickly back to the road and you keep looking on the lookout for the traffic in front of you. So you're directing your bring your attention, you place it somewhere. So this is a this can be a choice. And that choice is supported by understanding where it's useful to put your attention. And so if you're doing some activity, you want to put your attention into the activity. And then in the Zen monastery what we were trying to do if you're using your hands like chopping vegetables or something you were there fully as you can with their with the vegetable. But also you put your attention in the part of your body was doing the work you really were there with with your hands. And you and one of the things I learned one of my great one of the great teachers for me in the Zen monastery was The carrots because I was assigned to the kitchen to be a prep cook. And I had no interest in being a prep cook and never chopped much vegetables in my life. And there was just me and the carrots left there. And but you know, there were 50 people in the monastery and so you have to chop a lot of carrots and onions. And so I'd be standing there at the cutting board and all these carrots and onions to do. Literally, I had my body turned away from the cutting board pointing to the door, you know, the way out.

And I would, you know, I would kind of not use my left side of my body and my left hand what I was doing is kind of like just, you know, tapping out or kind of like, you know, uncommitted you know, commitment problems. And so I was gonna and so I would note This because one of the trainings in the Zen monastery was to really pay attention a lot of what you do in your posture, what you do with your body. So it really started noticing that I wasn't really there physically in my activity. And I learned to turn myself around and really face the carrot. And just me and the carrot, just really be there and just, and then I find myself going away, you know, and like, Okay, come back. So I would place my attention on the activity I was doing. And I had to keep doing it because I didn't quite get the lesson very fast. It took me a while and I had important things to do right out there. somewhere that wasn't here. But so they come back. So placing and choosing the attention here, this what I'm doing now. And so the mind does wander off, and then they come back to place it back where it wants to be, where you where you'd like to be. And this coming back and placing it where you want and is a muscle that we can develop Have more choice about using and to be able to recognize more quickly, when when wandering attention is wandering off. What we want to pay attention to. What really helps in developing this muscle is to do something which is not inherently interesting. Because if it's like a really good movie, your mind's not going to wander, you know, you're there. But if, if you do something which you're not particularly interesting, then you get to really start working the muscle inside of what is and start noticing what you're doing and what your choices are. And instead you start exercising the free choice, as opposed to that, you know, the fascination choice because you're so pulled into the story of the movie. So, you know, for me, carrots. For some of you, I'm sure it's sitting down to meditate and watching your breath. Some people do tell me what's so interesting about the breathing and maybe that's the point. Maybe it's not supposed to be too interesting. Maybe the less interesting the better for you. Because then you're really training and developing. So that initial placing of attention or directing it here, and then that second factor of absorption, or I call it the factor of wholeheartedness is to stay there to hang out there to hang in there with the experience to sustain the attention over time. Some people can be very good

at directing attention for a moment, but they can't, there's no continuity, there's no commitment there. And then the mind jumps around and goes over. And so there's a different muscle in the mind. That's the muscle Hang in there, stay there. Rest in that experience. A lot of that has to do with not with brute force, but with letting go because you let go into the experience and stay there. You're rest in the experience. Just you and the carrot You give it give into the carrots. Okay, you and me buddies. And you're like we're, we're in it together, we're gonna stay here until it's over. And so there's really the sustaining of the attention and not allowing the mind to wander. And as you get better at this, you start noticing that the mind wants to wander, or just begins, but you don't have to, but then you kind of like relax back in and you stay there. The tradition likens these two factors, the initial application of attention and the sustained application of attention to a bird taking flight. So there is there's a work to keep applying yourself and be there, come back, come back, come back. So like flapping the wings, and then when you can really stay there. Then their wings are caught the updraft and you can soar you can glide. I liken it to catching a wave surfing body surf thing or you know, boogie board surfing, you know, you got to paddle the other you have to, you have to connect to the wave and paddle so you can be there. But then the sustain when you really kind of get into the sustain part, it's like, you've caught the wave, and it feels that way, sometimes you get caught away for a moment you're there. Or I liken it also to petting the cat. You know, you don't just hold your hand on the cat. And you don't just do it once and then your hand wanders off to do something else.

There's a lot of great things you can do with your hand, right? And so why should you do the cat? Now you, you know you, you place your hand on the cat, you stroke it, and then you drink do it again. And so there's the initial kind of directing of attention is like touching the cat and sustain is like petting it. The reason I like that analogy of the cat petting is that as this we get into this full heartedly getting giving yourself over to the point experience in a relaxed way, it becomes enjoyable something and the cat begins to occur. So you begin to there's something about giving ourselves wholeheartedly in a relaxed, committed full way just absorbed in an activity. That must be really good for our psychophysiology maybe something happens in the nerves or the hormones or something that something happens that you know, there's a feeling of well being that wells up. Partly it's because the more wholeheartedly your attention is directed in something that's wholesome and good to do. The less involved in unwholesome activities less involved in kind of thinking that is stressful. And in the in the, in the fading away of stressful thinking helps the body to relax deeper, the more deeply the mind and body relax, the greater sense of well being can just be there because much of people's lack of well being is not inherent, but comes from kind of how we think often or our reactivity and our built up stress and all kinds of things. And as that falls away, natural well being arises, a lot more energy arises. And the analogy I like for that an example I get, is if you take in, hold your fist really tight, make a really good fist, and they get into it and hold it for a while you're not to do it, and then you don't want any damage here. But, but you can do it, I can, you know, suffer they do it. And so I really hold tight for a long time and then at some point it so much that hurts and I get tired. And then at some point I let go of my, my tight fist open up my hand, I release the pressure. And for a few moments for a while, this very strong sense of well being happy occurs in my hands, I feel relief, I feel all this blood, maybe blood flowing, this energy, this tingling, this, it just feels really delightful in there to feel that release. So the same thing happens psychologically, is that when we have a lot of tension, psychological tension, and then it gets released, there's a, an inner energy begins to be freed up and flow through us. And there's a sense of well being that arises. So that the well being that arises is divided into two kinds, and these are the third and fourth of these chronic factors. The third, the third is joy. And the fourth is it's sometimes called happiness, sometimes called contentment or a deep, deep happy satisfaction. And the joy is more like the thrill of having your fist released. Finally, it's all good. The happiness is more like after a while, the all the energy and the surging blood and all that wherever the initial excitement and thrill of the release is faded away, but you're left with a feeling Ah, that's nice. It's really nice. So, as we give ourselves wholeheartedly,

something, sometimes there's a variety of sense feeling of joy or well being. And I suspect that some people like when they read a really good book or some good hobbies you do, and you feel kind of a sense of well being. It's the well being that people enjoy, enjoy a lot more so than maybe the particular activity. They don't, maybe second, they can't really separate the two. So they say, well, it's the, you know, it's the building those model airplanes, and that I really liked doing. But for some reason, the model airplanes, when they're really there brings a sense of fullness and wholeness and well being that they're part of this sense of well being comes from a sense of wholeness.

So this wholeheartedness means your whole and whole means that we're not divided against ourselves. We're not fighting parts of ourselves or criticizing parts of ourselves or, or holding parts of ourselves at bay are no energy of that at all going on, just like we're like we're just complete at home. It's a great thing. And so wholehearted engagement, what we're doing leads to a sense of well being, sometimes it can be quite strong, the joy, the thrill, and sometimes it fades away and it just feels like a very deep, peaceful happiness, there's a sense of deep contentment and happiness and well being. So the fifth factor that comes into play with this is called the trishuli. Usually in English, it's translated as one pointedness. And I kind of prefer not to use that because, at least in my little mind when I hear one pointedness, I think of the laser focus from the control tower. I'm just going to zero in and just really kind of be one pointed on what and that kind of that kind of attention, it tends to be more stressful than helpful. The wholehearted attention that that I think that Buddhist practice is pointing towards, is not a laser focus, but rather a full involvement with all our faculties. Like we bring all of ourselves fully there for the experience. Not just you know, some little capacity in the mind. And so, sometimes I like I like to like the word wholeheartedness as a translate, you know that it's not a translation but as a way of talking about this factor. The other thing that I like is to call it a single mindedness to be single minded in what we do. It means that you're not distracted you're not focused on anything else. You're single mindedly your whole mind is involved with this one activity for the time that you're doing it. Now we know that being single minded it can be imbalanced if that's you know, so we're not talking about you know you know, the you know, excessive single minus all the time, but serial single mindedness you know, or you know, or polygamous single mindedness. You know, your single mind They're for the activities chosen that moment for that time for that minute or whatever. But then you know you go do something else then you're single minded for that you're a single mindedness, you're really there for that one activity and so, in So, so, all of us there wholehearted complete. So, all this is pointing also not only to idea of well being and happiness can be there, but it also points to a feeling of being having integrity or having wholeness feeling complete, not feeling divided, not feeling held back, not feeling inhibited, not feeling scared, not feeling. And the opposite also can be a problem if you're overly engaged it's, it's possible to attack things and, and attacking is attacking something or really, you know, doesn't isn't that isn't conducive this relaxing into letting go into it in a way where the Enter well being wells up. The image of the well being that the tradition gives that comes from these jhana factors is that of a lake that has a natural spring at the bottom of the lake that sends water up into the lake in suffuses the lake with water. And so it's a peaceful, slow movement of something. It's not a storm, it's not greedy, it's not pushing. It's something that's kind of like water like that, you know, kind of just flows through us in a nice way, kind of suffuses the whole lake. Again, the wholeness of the experience. So five factors of wholeheartedness. So I would suggest that you consider through this next week, tape you can notice when some of these might be in play for you. When when out of choice Do you bring your attention to something? And really, when choice do you bring your attention over there to something and then sustain it and really give yourself fully to that one thing. So not just your attention by your eyes or your thinking or something, but like your whole being so like, you know, you're not turning towards the door and paying attention. But you're like, really there with the carrots with the dishes, whenever you go and do folding laundry. One of the things that

I've thought about is, you know, I spent this time a lot of time in monasteries. And I've had people say to me, Well, that's nice for you. But you know, I can't go off to a monastery and practice I have kids and jobs and responsibilities. I'll never be able to that and so I guess I won't be able to practice as well as you did. The practice in a monastery and the practice outside and their life is not actually that different, do a lot of the same activities. monastics fold the laundry, the chapter vegetables and cook and do all kinds of things. Probably one of the one of the factors is makes a really big difference in the monastery is that you're supported and encouraged when you do something to just do that one thing, one thing at a time. And if you want to part of the experience, the benefits of monastic life or experience some of the growth that can happen in monasteries, you go a long way by just looking at the simple things you do in your life, the ordinary things every day, and give yourself holding over to that. So for example, you've done you put your laundry in the washing machine to come back an hour later, right and, and it's time to put it in the dryer. Perhaps that's how you do your things. So you're on the other side of the house or someplace. And so I've done this where I have been living the last 20 years in very small places. So but I still have to cross from one part of the house to the other part to get to the dryer, the laundry here, right? And so Okay, so my purpose is to go and put the clothes from the washer to the dryer. That's what I'm going to walk through. That's what I'm setting myself to do. So I started that's the initial application initial thing I'm going to go but then as I'm walking there, I noticed something on the table. I look at that the mail came in, I look at the mail and then we have a laundry and then I walk a bit further and you know maybe I can have a glass of water I'm going by the kitchen. You know and oh, but you know, and so you know I get distracted. So it when you decide to go walk To the laundry area and put the clothes from the washer to the dryer. Do that wholeheartedly. Just do that. And don't get distracted. Just walk there and just there and then when you do it, really face the washer machine and really be there and just wholeheartedly just that activity. You know don't okay now you're going to move the laundry and you know it's time to turn on the radio and make sure the TV's with you and you know, because you don't want to waste any time cleaner. You don't want to waste time doing laundry, right? I mean, that's what a drag you have a perfectly good life and exciting life. And you don't want to do something boring, because you'll miss out on fun. The way to have fun is to do the laundry wholeheartedly. Like it's the most important thing at that moment. Just give yourself over to it and don't believe all those little voices in your head and said this does. This is not important. This is boring. I have important things to do. And you know, whatever you guys get if you start listening to those voices and you get start getting distracted, if you're listening to these voices is B enforces the idea that you can't really stay and be present for one thing. So entertainment if you want to train yourself to develop this human capacity to really give yourself and be present, take the ordinary things of ordinary life and do it wholeheartedly. For those minutes you do it. And I am very confident that if you do that, and train yourself in that, then when you're with the really important things, you'll do them much better. You enjoy it a lot more. Because it's all too easy to finally do the really important things be involved. They're really important thing has to be done. And I gotta check my email. I get distracted so that was that was I hope harder enough and giving the talk you know enough.

So, okay, I guess it's time so thank you for listening and I hope that you have a wholehearted week and a Happy Thanksgiving or whatever you say.