

# 2014-12-22 Gratitude

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So, there's a delightful teaching. So very simple little, like cliché that said in different ways. Today I'll say it this way, that this practice of mindfulness, of insight meditation, Buddhist, spirituality in general is not so much about having a new experience. But seeing our experience in a new way. It's not about living in a change the world, but rather seeing the world as it changed away. So these sayings say something about how we see the world, our attitude, our approach. And if we are certainly we can change the world. If your world needs to be changed, it's a good thing to do. But to expect to do all the change in the world and wait for that to happen for you to be happy, you might wait a long time. The so when, when the Buddha was there's a myth about the Buddha's awakening. But the myths often point to something interesting. And the myth is that after the Buddha was awakened, had his enlightenment experience. At some point he for a while, he just sat there and enjoy the bliss of his enlightenment. At some point, he got up and he walked some paces away from the tree under which he had been sitting, and he looked back at a tree and he stood there for a long time. The mist says for seven days, I appreciating and having gratitude for the tree. And this idea that after his enlightenment he had great attitude and gratitude for something as simple as a tree that shaded him, I think points to the way in which mindfulness practice meditation, Buddhism begins to awaken our capacity for a very deep appreciation and deep gratitude for this world that we live in. It's easy to protest already. You hear what I just said, because there's a lot of problems in this world. And some of you have a lot of challenges that you live under. And so, you know, it doesn't seem like it relates to you, or how could that be and gratitude it sounds a little bit too romantic to do focus on that. One of the great surprises for me and doing Buddhist practice was the number of Now it's called that is called positive emotions, positive states that came with a practice. And back then we would not have stopped practicing. We didn't have positive emotions back then. So, you know, or at least we didn't have positive the study that is the study of positive emotions. That's, it seems to me like it's only in the last 15 1620 years at positive emotions have become a field day for psychologists, and it's wonderful studies. But so I wasn't really thinking about those kinds of things when I was a new practitioner. But I was surprised that they found me and one of the things that came to me was gratitude. And, and, and one of the strange things about the gratitude that I felt was that I felt gratitude without a reason to be grateful and which is very Strange, because you should have reasons for doing things right. But I think that so how does it work that you can have gratitude for no reasons. I also found that I had lots of gratitude for lots of reasons, I started to appreciate things much more and not take them for granted. And one of the ways I think this works is that if you consider what blocks gratitude will gets in the way of it. The Buddhist tradition says that greed is the primary obstacle to gratitude, regret, greed and gratitude don't go together.

But being very busy meaning taking the forms of being very self centered, wanting things for yourself, wanting me myself in mind, to to get things to want things to have more things to be excessively focused on once safety for its own self improvement project becoming good, beyond improving myself.

All these things can can no way of feeling gratitude because there's no space and room for it. One of the, I think remarkable things about the modern world that many of us live in, like it's all of us living here is how much is provided for us to support our life. How much has to come together and work for our lives to work? Are all the things we benefits we get all the kind of the infrastructure to, you know, to get us to our life to work is provided by countless millions of people and things. It's amazing what happens. It's very different than in the old days, when we had to go out and hunt for food. would or would have to grow our own food. When we were living close to nature. I lived from the farms for a while. And it was beautiful thing to live on farms. Grow Your Own foods go out that dairy farm God every evening and gather the cows together so we can knock them was great. The and what I've seen is that people who live close to nature, who people who live dependent on nature in that kind of way, tend to feel a lot more gratitude than the people who so much is given to them so much is provided. I suspect that even the poorest among you here today, live better. And then some kings have done it to maybe go back a few thousand years to find those kings but you know, there was a time when you know the amount of the money The stuff that you have is available to you is more than a lot of people in the world have today or certainly have had down through history. And how much of the infrastructure of our life that we depend on? Do we just take for granted? I've lived in countries where if the telephone wasn't working, and you call the telephone repair people to come, they would say something like, yeah. We'll be there. And you know, it probably take five, six days. And, you know, and you're happy. They came on the eighth day. But here in this country, I think the telephone pair people come kind of the same day, don't they? They come pretty quickly. Not Comcast. No, and, you know, and it's, you know, and so they do that they have we'd expect things to work and if things don't work, then we get irritated were upset things, it's a nuisance it gets in where our life you know, they gave us this window you have to be there for four hours this window to come and get repairs. My God for Windows I have important things to do. My that interferes with my life. This is a drag. And so they finally come and you say thank you at the end, but you don't really feel Thank you, you have to wait for four hours, you know, whereas eight to eight days elsewhere. So I don't know if this is uh, expressing myself well enough. But the idea being that many of us here there's something about our modern consumer society or modern technological society or modern kind of life of, you know, infrastructure that supports us. that I think makes it hard harder for people to feel great. Maybe it's easier to take it for granted. It's easier to expect it being a consumer Society it's mostly about wanting things and having more. You know, there's lots of people who their primary wish for you is great. A lot of people always more people in the world who have, there's, there's some people in the world who want you to feel happy people little, you know, your family, your mother, maybe or someone, you know, that's you know that people suddenly want you to be happy demonte there's a lot more more than the people who want you to be happy, or the people who want you to consume isn't that remarkable? There's people who you know, you know, spend all day you know, figuring out thinking about not thinking about you particularly but but in the ag You know, you're just one of those, the mass of people they're trying to convince to get their product and the advertisements and all this consume, consume consume. You know, President Bush said after 911 consume you know, it's very important to be a consumer.

And so in consuming in that kind of society is there space for gratitude? Is there space for appreciation, when we consume and then it's done with and then we're on to the next thing to the next thing. Fear the same thing when we're, when we're living in fear, there's not a lot of space to be grateful, we're just concerned to always, always have the our guard our guard up something is wrong, something is dangerous, and we have to kind of take care of ourselves. So as we as with meditation practice for me, all the kind of forces in the mind. They kept it preoccupied, quieted down, as imitated by my mind and heart became simpler and simpler. And so there was a time When there was almost no greed, no desire, but rather than desire, I there was a satisfying feeling of just being here and being present. Rather than being afraid, which I had a lot of when I was young. It was a sense of deep trust, that I felt

just trust is to be present. And in this trust and simple presence, that there was space in the mind and the heart for other emotions to be there. And so those so called positive emotions, it's almost as if these pauses are called positive emotions operate the best when we don't try to make them happen. But rather we relax and allow them to happen. We make space for them to happen. And so it's counterintuitive to people who feel like they have to always be the doers to make things happen. If it's They're getting out of the way, and relaxing and opening and in a way that isn't just a couch potato, which is not just kind of, you know, falling asleep and napping, but or relaxing and settling and just being present and alert way. And that combination of being relaxed and alert presence. So then what flows from the heart, what flows out of us, and maybe for different people's different things. But one of the things that came for me was gratitude. So I felt very lucky that I was practicing my early years in the Zen Center, where at the end of every meditation, they ring a bell, and then we would bow and because I adopted that as a practice ever since, you know, the last I've done be doing that for the last 40 years. So I come here, I do right then. So I think many of you do it. Because you see me do it. Or maybe you've learned someplace else to do it. You don't have to do it, you know, put your hands together and bow. But I do it. I generally when I end my sittings, I have a sense of gratitude. And maybe it's gratitude for the sitting gratitude for the people I sit with gratitude, but I just a feeling of gratitude. Just how it is very nice. So to have gratitude, they so there is this whole school field now positive emotions, study of them. And there is plenty of studies now to show that the practice of gratitude, just a little bit of gratitude every day, reduces stress, improve sleep, produces more kindness. It goes on and on. Let's see read a couple of days it's worth reading I think. So this comes from the great authority, Wikipedia. A large body of recent work has suggested that people who are more grateful have higher levels of well being grateful people are happier, less depressed, less stressed, and more satisfied in their lives and social relationships. So which came first? Were they happier, less depressed, less stressed, and therefore they're grateful, or were they grateful, and because of that they were happier, less depressed and less stressed.

Grateful people also have higher levels of control of their environments, personal growth, purpose in life and self acceptance. Grateful people have more positive ways of coping with the difficulties they experience in life. Being more likely to seek seek support from other people. be interpreted and grow from the experience and spend more time planning how to deal with the problem. Grateful people also have less negative coping strategies, being less likely to try to avoid the problem, deny there is a problem. So that kind of nice. And if you don't, if it sounds like if you don't have any problems, you should not be grateful. Because if you according to this, if you're grateful, you're more likely to see it as a problem not to deny it. Also, you're less likely to blame, blame on selves. Grateful people sleep better, and they seem to be and this seems to be because they think less negative and thoughts. instead think more positive thoughts just before going to sleep. So you can read Wikipedia there's more and more. So and there's lots to be grateful for. So sometimes what Since gratitude is such a nice thing, what are the what are the simple ways, honest ways that you can feel more have more gratitude in your life? I think one is to kind of take a little bit of time, maybe just moments to stop and notice what's happening. As you're living, to notice that someone has opened a door for you to notice that someone has done you a kindness to notice that the electricity comes to your house. You turn on the switch. Do you even think about that? What all that took is, of course, electricity. Wow. But if you turn the switch and go, wow. Wow, how did this happen? You know, I was up at the cow palace this weekend. And if you've been to the cow palace, I never been there. before. But there's a huge lot in front of cup palace of electrical power lines and candle towers, all kinds of stuff quite impressive. Wow, I thought wow. I flipped the switch. And what is it that supports it? You know we see each other tonight because we have light Isn't that great? I'm grateful for that. So what is it? You know? Are there obvious things to be grateful for? are you grateful that you have roads to drive on? Or are you upset that there's some potholes? Has a glass half empty or half full? Is the road half paved? Or is it half unpaved checks it,

chances are that it's 99% paved 99.9% paved and there's like, you know Few potholes. And so which which do you emphasize? Which do you appreciate the situation? I don't know why it is we pick out the 99 that with a point 01 percent. That's the problem. The potholes, you know, or you know, what's what's the potholes do you have in your life 2.01% of why did it Where are these properties, these issues this looms so big. Whereas, you know, 99.9% of what makes your life go smoothly. I think it's more than that. 99.999999999% at least of what it hit of what it takes for your life to go smoothly and happily. I mean, they're never things they have to work harmoniously in order for you to be alive. It's like I can't stop the numbers point. 99999 your body you just your body, how it all stuff to work, right? And so, and then we focus on that point 000001 whatever, that's not working. The internet's not working. You know, oh, no. The internet's not working. What are you gonna do? Good, be grateful it's not working. So it's really great to express gratitude.

It's really great to receive gratitude from others to be thankful. It's nice to receive it. They say grateful, say thanks in return. Thank you for that. And it's really nice to offer gratitude. It makes it for a better world for everyone. But don't do it unless you really feel Like they they are you have the attitude of it or understand it, but to take the time to say thank you to appreciate someone who does something for you. Are there people in your life who do things that you take for granted? That would be a good thing to thank them. So here we are. For some people, it's kind of this season of gift giving. And it's good thing to give gifts, it's a nice thing to do. But maybe it's a greater gift than a present is to offer gratitude, to give a thankfulness to each other for what we have and who we are and what goes on. It's a wonderful thing. So, this is my last talk here, IMC for this year. And so, part of the reason I wanted to give this talk was because I felt a lot of gratitude for all of you and people who come here and my chance to come and be part of this community for all these years this year, certainly is, I feel like I'm a better person because I get to come and teach here. Who knows what I would have been if I hadn't been a teacher, where I got to get reminded all the time, with all this stuff, it's great. And to be among people who are interested in practicing and they're sincere in dedication, I think it's a really great thing. I feel very grateful for this opportunity, this life. So as we come to this end of the year, what I'd like to ask you to do if you're willing, you can sit quietly if you wish. What I'd like you to do is to turn towards one or two people next to you, and, and share with them. A few things that you're grateful for. Maybe some people you're grateful for some things you're grateful for, what you craft some things in your life that you're grateful for. And And then after, you know, a few minutes of that will ring a bell and then we'll come back here as a group as a whole. hope that's okay. Please, if you don't mind.

So thank you for that. And so, what are you? What are some of the things you felt in talking about gratitude and hearing people talk about gratitude Anybody share what you felt in doing that.

You felt both fear and relief, you know, frayed would, you know would would I be saying something that would be sound grateful enough and relieved that I you know that we're sharing with another human being? Mm hmm.

Great. You're lucky

indeed.

I didn't have any kind of big,

philosophical grand

notions of gratitude is just so primary and Knowing that when I went out to my car was going to start and that I had a nice bed to sleep in, at night, and just little, little things like that.

Yeah, if you're able to be grateful for the little things, and you'll have a lot of gratitude, because there'll be a lot of little things.

Yes, we, we were talking about the profound and the profane. It's, I think there are spectacular things to be grateful for, and they're very small, precious things to be grateful for. Sangha is is really big for some of us over here, and we were talking at the same time something as simple as a flushing toilet that works.

Yes, great. Thank you.

So for me, after I just like, share my gratitude, I feel more happy. And at the end, when you ring the bell, I look around, I feel that people are like smiling and just the esmo fears is more positive and more happy,

great, beautiful. So you've you felt happy, and it seemed like other people were more positive too. What are some other things that people felt today so there's fear and relief and happy and other things, just having that conversation.

I had a tendency to get caught up. So with the things that my gratitude partner was grateful for, when she'd say she was grateful to say for health, I feel like I was feeling grateful for that, too, like grateful that our operation went well. So there was this sort of kind of reflection back and forth.

symbiotic gratitude or

Yeah, or something? Yeah, some great, yeah, just get caught up in. It's

great. Thank you.

So all of us were grateful for you. Oh.

And this also reminded me of a retreat we did with temple Smith recently. Like, he was asking us to, like breathe all of us together and ask us if we could just be satisfied. And grad have gratitude that just go just do that. Yes, have contentment and then start thinking about allies before the house. I need to do

nice. Very nice. Thank you.

Just very simply, it seems so good to share gratitude because the

the feeling gets magnified in when I hear somebody else's gratitude my own heart just planes up and I think mudita comes up at at

at somebody else's gratitude. So, really so feeling joy and their gratitude. Yes, yeah nice. Thank you

as we talked about feeling grateful. Like Gail, my heart opened. And I had then the feeling of gratitude without reason. Mm hmm. Nice.



Very nice. Yes.

I'm grateful for my family this time of year.

I

haven't seen my daughter's one of my daughters and nine months, you've been away at college and another one is home and we're all together. And it's just just a joy to have them. I went hiking with one of my daughters up on the ridge. And we separated because she's a lot faster than I am. And I just looked around the Bay Area, and I can get sort of mired in all the traffic and all the cement and all the development. And I sat there up on the ridge and looked around. I said, it was just a gorgeous day. And I thought Thank you

Great, thank you.

Oh, I noticed that I was feeling gratitude, listening to everyone talk about their gratitude that came up. But for a moment, I felt so much gratitude for all the things we were talking about. But at the same time, I was hit with a tremendous sadness for something that I don't have. And I really wanted and that was a child. And so for me that I mean, I'm giving a lot to other children in my life. But when I wanted to ask you about that when, when something it's not like greed for like to buy something, God forbid, but when you when, like if someone dies that you love, there might be gratitude for what they were but this feeling of caring both feelings of Something like I felt so much gratitude for what he was saying. And then I had gratitude and disappointment at the same time.

Sure, I think so, I think this idea of the heart or the mind becoming simpler and simpler, quiet or calmer, so there's lots more space for things, then the heart has more space for the whole range of emotions and feelings we can have. And we can have a lot of ease and peace about having them. There can be a broken heart sometimes. And but the broken heart, there's plenty of reasons in the world to have a broken heart. And, but that broken heart doesn't have to be a problem. It doesn't have to be a challenge is just just there in an open way. And just like the gratitude is there in an open way, and that ease just having just be there in an open way, makes all this a lot easier. And in that space, a range of emotions and come through one after the other like a kaleidoscope. So there can be both happiness and sadness that follow each other. But hopefully it's a sadness that is very simple. It's not weighing down, it's not a disappointment. It's not a lost expectation. It's not a demand. It's not a it's not tied to a sense of self and you know, you know, you know that if I could be a parent than people would like me better and I don't know all kinds of other complicated things people to do. But to keep it really simple, and, and it's possible to feel these things as part of something you're grateful for. Even the sadness I saw Anybody else? Okay. One more here, all the way up. Martha. Mike's on the stage, or Trudy has it

So I thought your observation about opening space was really interesting because in fact, you know, in truth, there are things we're not kradic we don't have that we don't have gratitude for and things that we do. You know, and I would say for me, the challenge would be to be more attentive to the things I do have gratitude for. But a way to do that other than just being attentive remindful about them, a way of opening that space wider.

Well, I think that learning, learning a variety of ways of shedding the preoccupations of the mind shedding greed, hate and delusion, so those aren't operating, don't they? Because those things make the mind claustrophobic. The heart claustrophobic. So there's a variety of ways to shed those in one

way is you know, simply relax. So meditation and calming and slowing the mind down is a way of Having these things kind of fall to the wayside. But wisdom is also very important wisdom, meaning that there starts seeing how greed operates, how we're hooked into it, and how it's overrated. And so as we get more wisdom about it, then it would be in letting go of it. Also learning to develop the muscle of letting go. It's like I think of it as a muscle that needs to be strengthened. And as that muscle gets stronger and stronger, then it's easier to let go of the things that are not needed anymore. And so as we learn to let go of the greed or the fear that gets in the way, so there's a variety of things we can do to help them help the heart help the mind become more more open, make more space for it all. But it takes it takes practice. Not something we can do overnight. Is that okay? So one more over here.

So when we all got together, I just noticed, I was thinking about this. For me, I think for all of us in the group or the boundary disappeared, we started to think about the things that we appreciated and listening to each other, just dissolved any kind of a protective mechanism that we had going on. Maybe I'm just speaking for me. And it was just really a really nice thing to have that dissolve the

beautiful, sorry. And with that comes a deeper sense of connectedness.

Yes. And what we were saying. It was all interesting, but it just kept going.

Beautiful. Right, thank you. So, the end, I'd like to read a quote. And in my heart, it's exactly the quote is not directly not about gratitude, but in my heart, it's connected to what I've been talking about today. And maybe this comment about sadness and appreciation or happiness coexisting as part of it, but how far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong and the strong. Because someday in life, you will have been all of these George Washington Carver. Someday in life, you will have been all of these. So thank you all for this evening. Thank you all for this year. Thank you all for your practice your interest and I hope that you can spread the seeds of gratitude out into the world. Connect