

2015-03-08 Practicing In Community

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning, and I'll make an add to that announcement. That so Diana Clark, who's been a longtime member here is going to teach a class on this Saturday on the life of the Buddha. And I've been hearing her teach. She'd been studying this for a while now and hearing her teach about the life of the Buddha has been quite a pleasure, quite a delight. He's gone into a lot of depth in it and he will make it very interesting and, and she she's is thought about this a lot. And so she has, she can answer a lot of interesting questions like, one of the interesting questions is, was there a Buddha and if you come You can ask her that. See what she says. And so, okay.

So in the time of the Buddha ... turn down Little bit, it's a little bit echoey in my ears. So how's how's that now for everyone? I work, and it's good, good, thank you.

So in the time of the Buddha, he had this monastic community that were his followers. And then back then this society was so much different than it is today that you couldn't just go down the street to insight meditation center to practice, or you couldn't go to a retreat center. People didn't have built in vacations, you know, for the three weeks a year, six weeks a year, whatever from work. And people didn't have bags to they could save their money and things. And so the idea of going and getting up and going to retreat center and sitting and practicing and studying was not really part of the culture. I really play possible back then. So what people did was, I knew we're serious about the engaging and exploring the spiritual life developing themselves spiritually. They're really the only main one of the main avenues available in society then was to become a monastic. Because in ancient India to be monastic, you are supported by society, you renunciant than you do food and basic needs, your head are provided so you can do this important work. That nowadays is much easier to get to and even 100 years ago in Thailand, there are stories of people who would walk for weeks and weeks through Thailand to find a particular teacher that they wanted to study and listened to. And now all you need is your iPad. You know, and you click around a few times and there's probably an audio recording of that teacher somewhere else that listened to and I think it's a world of difference between just going on your iPad and hearing great teachers. And, and, you know, spending weeks going through the jungles of Thailand to find the teacher and I think when it's too easy, sometimes it doesn't go in go in as deep or doesn't really don't bring all of ourselves into it in a way that maybe wasn't the old, old world. So the Buddha created a monastic community. And a lot of the training that he had was done in community, the monastics would live together and, and how they live together was part of the training for this path of liberation. And that's sometimes overlooked here in the West, when we teach meditation first and foremost, or maybe only meditation is the main teachings of Buddhism. And the emphasis sometimes is much more individualistic here in the West. And so the idea of being in community isn't so as such a central place is it doesn't monastic communities. And also some people late people have some squeamishness around the community and you know, I mean, I certainly have a little bit you know,

we're here we are Sunday morning, in what used to be used to be a church. It's a we're not a congregation, right. And this is not a Sunday morning sermon and I'm not a minister, you know, there's, you know, it's not you know, but functionally, you know, it functions you know, very much those kinds of ways. But, you know, the idea that what are we and how we are, how are we as a community. So, in fact, a community of practicing and training and community and rubbing up against each other and community is a time honored way of practicing in Buddhism. It's one of the what's called the three treasures of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the community.

And the community is not only a place where people come together, to commune together and cooperate together, get along and. I lived in Buddhist communities like I lived at San Francisco Zen Center and other places and sometimes from the outside people here in the West, we'll have all kinds of idealistic ideas about what, uh, you know, what these Buddhist communities are, like, you know, they're probably, you know, floating on clouds. They're probably all so filled with compassion and kindness. You know, and they're just like, you know, all there. And it makes some sense. I mean, people who get interested in Buddhism, are interested in some beautiful ideals. They're looking to find the alternative to the life they live the struggles they have. And so we read 10 books on Buddhism, and they talk about wonderful ideals. And so it's kind of natural to projected onto the Buddhist community. So that's where you'll find it. And you do find some of that there. But when you live inside some of these communities, you find out that it is not so ideal. And in fact, sometimes it's the people who most needs need to practice so the ones who you know, end up in these communities and because they most need it, that's because they have challenges. of all kinds of ways. And so what in fact, what you find in many of these Buddhist communities is what you find in many of these Buddhist communities is you find all kinds of interpersonal challenges that goes along with it. And what needs to be learned is to embrace those challenges and those conflicts, to see them as actually a very, very important opportunities for a number of things, but opportunities to look at ourselves in an honest way.

An opportunity to, excuse me, an opportunity to cultivate some of the important personal qualities that come with being a community honesty, feedback, staying present for people who are very different from you and sometimes challenge To you and, and find a find a heart of compassion and kindness in that kind of environment finding some kind of concordant unity. That's possible. And in the process, people I've seen people who've trained in community, they mature in a very different way than the people who don't train in don't do Buddhist training in community. I've seen monastics, Buddhist monastics who have trained in and actually in monastic communities and they become much tend to become much more generous and friendly and somehow they there's there's less less of rough edges around them. And I've seen Buddhist monastics who have not trained in communities possible to do that. Kind of mostly stay on your own. And you can see there's rough edges or areas of the life they haven't really attended to and it gets a little bit different, more difficult sometimes There's there's pluses and minuses in both ways. And same thing for, for people who are late people, they're late people who really stay on their own, and don't share themselves, nothing community. And whole areas of personal development don't happen when that when you kind of do it all individualistically and then people who train and community really kind of involved and connected to other practitioners, you find, you see a kind of a certain kind of growth and development. So in the time of the Buddha, and he had this monastic community, and it was certainly not an ideal community. And in the sense that, you know, they didn't float on clouds and we're just all the embodiment of compassion and kindness and there are some difficult people in, in this in the Buddhist monastic community, the time of the Buddha that he had to deal with contact sometimes Apparently, they were so difficult that Maybe out of some wisdom that he had, he just left them out of here. And he would go off to some other place until they kind of, you know, reformed themselves or figured it all out, and then he would come back.

And one of these stories has to do with a group of monks in a town called Kosambi. And this is one of the more famous conflicts in the monastic community in time of the Buddha, that conflict of the monks at Kosambi. And it seems that what happened was that, you know, the monastics have all these rules they have to live by apart some of the rules are just to get along better and so things couldn't be more harmonious and including rules about how you supposed to conduct yourself in that terrain. And then they you know, outhouse they had, I guess back then. And one of the rules was when you used it, you weren't supposed to leave any water. That dipper, the water dipper, I guess the use of water to clean themselves. And maybe it was kind of maybe it was not. So I don't know what how they use those slippers. Exactly, but, but one of the rules is you don't leave water in it when you finish, maybe it's dirty or something. And so it's you know, probably made good sense back then it was more community harmony. If you left the latrine kind of, you know, we know in a good place for the next person to come. So there was one of the rules was, you know, don't leave water in the dipper. Well, one of the monks left the water in the dipper, but there was a rule against it. So some of the people knew the rules. So they did a complaint the formal kind of you broke one of the rules and this monk refuse to admit that he broke the rule. I didn't Do that acknowledge, it turns out that one of the rules of litigation of working out when someone breaks a monastic rule is that for the most part the person has to did it has to admit that they did it. If they haven't admitted it, you can't then have them do the next thing. You know, make amends, be on probation or whatever. There has to be an admission. It's kind of like because the expectation is people are honest.

So, we don't know if he did it or not, but he refused to acknowledge it. And so there was this big conflict. And in that conflict, somehow that he was banished from the community. But that raised even more conflict. And they were the people, the monks who were his camp and the monks in the other camp. And apparently some of the stories say that they ended up fighting even got that bad right? over water in your Dipper. And so, you know, in terms of this being an ideal community so At one point, so at some point the Buddha intervened, and he gave a particular teachings to them. And the teachings he gave was the six principles of cordiality, or the fourth word is also translated as the ability of a friendship and six principles. So that's what I want to offer you today is the six principles. And these principles are a little bit organized, or what they haven't one of the things they have in common is the phrase the phrase, in public and in private. So certain ways of behaving both openly so other people can see it. And also in a word could be hidden or covered. So no one no one knows you're doing it. Secret acts of kindness. So it starts off with three of these principles are cordiality. Have to do with loving kindness. And then as we get to the end of it, it begins shifting from how you relate to others, to how you practice for yourself. And And the final one is said to be the most important one. And what's nice when you get when you hear it is to realize it's being presented in the context of creating greater harmony and Concord and friendship in the community, that there's a relationship between personal practice and the effect it has on the community around us. And it goes in both ways. It's a wonderful mutual mutuality between doing your own practice and becoming better person that way. And then that creates better social conditions around you, you can be more friendly and supportive of others. And the more you're are kind of friendly to others that supports you in your practice as well. So the two go hand in hand. So these are the six principles of cordiality. that create love and respect and conduce, to cohesion to non dispute to Concord and to unity. There's a high value in unity a community coming together and being in harmony together. So this is a pretty pretty pretty far out pretty cool right? These things create love and respect, cohesion, non dispute concord and unity. And you find, okay, so, here, a monastic maintains bodily acts of loving kindness, both in public and in private, towards his or her companions in the holy life. This is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect and conduces to cohesion to non dispute to Concord into Unity. So to make bodily acts of loving kindness so that loving kindness metta, goodwill friendliness to all translations of the word metta gets a very high value in the monastic community and the teachings of the Buddha. You see over and over again, there's an expectation that

the Buddhist monastics are going to have loving kindness to their fellow monastics to the village that supports them. If you're supported by a village, it says you should be kind of showering that whole area with loving kindness to people who are challenging to you, people who are your, you know, very challenging people, you're in conflict with the expectation that they're also supposed to have loving kindness to them as well. So there's high high expectation of loving kindness is one of the primary or the primary attitudes with which monastics would live their life, I think is a beautiful thing.

And that starts off this first principle is to do that bodily to physically actually do things. The second principle is To do that verbally, to say words of loving kindness, and the third one is to have mental acts of loving kindness, both in public and in private. So, the first three of these principles, cordiality has to do with loving kindness. And the ones the mental ones, the private in your own mind is to reflect and have and arouse attitudes, thoughts, reflections, that bring goodwill towards the people around you. And then the second one verbal ones is to say that to say words of goodwill to other people, be friendly to people and, you know, say nice things, say things that makes them feel connected and nice. One way say your appreciate them. Make a difference in people's lives by words of loving kindness. And then the first one is physical And what those physical expressions would be, maybe I'm not sure what they means, but it could be giving people gifts. One of the great ways of creating social harmony among your enemies is to give a gift. Try it, if you have a relative that you're in conflict with, you know, I've known people who had in laws that though, you know, the really headstrong challenge, challenging in laws and, and one of the largest wouldn't speak to the, like a daughter in law or something. And so the daughter in law started to bring gifts, just very small things, you know, here, you know, here and, and then also would say simple, simple, nice things. Oh, you know what a nice set of whatever Nice, nice, nice, nice, nice flower bouquet Nice, nice meal you made and just your acts of loving kindness, thoughts of loving kindness and also This mental aspect of loving kindness, I believe it makes a big difference. You know, just kind of superstitious thinking but over and over again, myself and other people have seen that in your heart, you can genuinely shift to think about some or approach or feel goodwill to someone who you resentful for something changes in the environment. Maybe they pick it up indirectly, or they kind of feel it in you or something. But even if you change, sometimes it changes what goes on around. So the Buddha's first three principles has to do with developing loving kindness, finding it. And I'm not going to suggest that that's always easy. In fact, the more difficult it is, probably the more valuable it is to be up against it. Not because it's an obligation, not because you're supposed to kind of force yourself to have goodwill. There should be no forcing here, no obligation to really be something that You want to do, and that you want to do the inner work that it takes to find how to have goodwill and friendliness to others. And if you don't have that desire that comes naturally for you, then it might be very interesting to kind of spend some time looking at that, what's going on in you. And this whole one of the whole aspects of this, especially when it's challenging, is how do you benefit How does support you, it probably doesn't support you very well, to continue with a grudge probably doesn't support you to have hostility towards others or animosity towards others. It's painful, it's a drag around kind of, you know, wearing yourself down with it. Closing yourself down. So, to do the work, to look at resentment to look at hostility to look at what we're holding against people is a very important part of Buddhist practice, on the path of liberation, because you cannot be free. If you're caught in hostility. You cannot be free if you're you're close down. And so what are you? What are you mostly committed to? What are you mostly interested in? What has the highest value for you, is the highest value for you to be angry or to be friendly, and the way some people behave?

It's clear, the answer is to be hostile mean really clear that there's somehow that a people hold on that really, really strongly. I saw I read an article this morning about a man in Boston who are in Massachusetts, who was angry at one of the doctors who was caring for students helping surgery for his very old and frail mother who died in the surgery. And he was he was so angry at the surgeon that

he went and shot him in prison. So I mean, that's so important to hold on to that anger, or whatever reason. So what is the inner work that has to happen to be able to have loving kindness. So remember the Buddha is talking to these monks who were fighting right and saying, Look you guys loving kindness is important here. Are you being you? Have you been kind to each other when you having this fight? What's this about? So, to do acts of loving kindness, one of the things that I've learned I've told many times, is if I have some irritation or resentment towards someone, there's a world of difference for me, having it in the abstract, you know, having it in my own mind, and not being around the person versus being physically with with a person. And I've learned that I can't really trust my mind very well. If I have an irritation or some difficulty with someone, if I that's not sitting with them, because it's so easy to kind of carry all you know, whatever. And so I make it a point whenever I feel some irritation, some some resentment or some sort Annoying answer something, to try to find them and kind of sit down with them. And it's because I find that I can't keep it very long if I actually see them and with them, and then I can find my way with it and, and work it out. And I've done that sometimes with great conflict with people. Some years ago, five, six years ago, I had tremendous interpersonal challenge with one person and I said, he was very angry with me. And I said, Let's go have lunch. And he said, Yes. And it didn't like solve everything and cure everything. But it was quite a remarkable difference to sit down and have lunch with this man. And then it was for us to kind of like be, you know, an opposite continents, you know, and whatever, you know, opposite mental continents, you know, just kind of doing our little thing with our own little minds. So maybe you can trust your mind better than mine, but you maybe have wiser minds, but, but I know that's one area where I am subject to delusion. So that's my way to overcome it is my way to overcome it is to go meet the person. So then the fourth principle of cordiality is a monastic uses things in common with his or her virtuous companions and the holy life without making reservations, he or she shares with them anything that's been acquired. That has been acquired according to the Dharma. So here the idea is the monastics shares, what they have with others. And the idea of sharing being generous, holding things in common, I think is a beautiful idea. And not just mine, it's mine. It's mine. Does anything really belong to you? Probably a lot. things belong to you, but is it you know, how important is it for it to belong to you? and to what degree does what you have belong to others to does it belong to they really belong to our world? You know your possessions my money You know, my house, my car, my this my that? Does it really belong to you? Where does it come from? And does it belong to all of us to some degree? You know, it's my plastic container of digital. No one's gonna have my plastic interior dish soap. But then we empty all the dish soap, right, it's all empty. And then we toss out that plastic containers not mine anymore. Now it's someone else's problem. The, you know, the Recology you know, the garbage collectors. It's their problem. You know, someone needs to recycle it they better you know, you know, you No, some might, you know, so it's mine at certain point, but then it's society's, you know, is it ever where's the line? Where's the line between when it's mine and when it's societies and how much do we share with the world around us?

It was very hard for me when I was 17 when I was 17, I was a I had a summer kind of being a hippie in Europe. And I traveled around with a Volkswagen van with four other friends old you know, beat up Volkswagen van and we went down to communist Yugoslavia and Greece and we had almost no money at all. I think I had \$50 for the trip. And so we ate we mostly our diet was bread and condensed milk somehow that that seemed like you know what to get by on and but it was really great. I mean, she sort of commune on wheels and I loved it and you know, One of the people were with the guy who was a little older than us, we were 17 and he was 19 he was looking for it to make the big hash deal. And, you know, bring it back to Holland didn't make all this money and so we were driving one of the things we did then it was we're driving around looking for where you can score. And now it seems ridiculous, right? communist Yugoslavia looking for and going all the way down to Athens and luckily, we never found anything. Only thing we held these addresses we go, we had this address in Belgrade. And we and we pulled in the evening in this residential apartment building area in Belgrade. We had this

address, so we went knocked on the door. And it was the only rock'n'roll band in Yugoslavia at the time. And so that was great. So they invited us in and it was like a great little fest and you slept there the night in the middle of the night the police burst into the apartment and I don't know quite why they because they knew we were there or something. And they wanted passports and the whole thing. There's no hash there. So that was good. So I got distracted Oh, so so.

So but we had, we had almost no money and we were traveling around. And so we share it. We shared everything in common. And it was quite a formative experience for me to be there sharing we all our money we had was shared in common, whatever food we had we shared in common. Everything was shared in common. And there was a freedom and an ease and a friendliness and a familial feeling. And the idea being all together was very meaningful for me, and that was hard was when I came back to Los Angeles to go to high school and back to my buddies and they didn't have that value at all. And we would go, you know, we'd go hang out up to school someplace and go to a burger joint or something. And in one of my friends who I don't have money to buy hamburger or something, so it's okay, I have some money. And they would say no, you know, they didn't want to receive anything. And I felt I feel kind of crushed. Oh, but we all we're all in it together. You know, this isn't mine, mine is yours. And the feeling is walls go up. And you know that there wasn't this share was actually kind of painful for me. And so this idea of sharing and the beauty of that and feeling we're all in it together in this. So one of the principles of love of respect of cordiality is to share possessions. One of the things that's interesting here is how would they say, it says, share those possessions without reservations that one has acquired according to the Dharma. And what that means is that your possessions your, your wealth, whatever you have that it should be acquired in ways that are honest and compassionate and not taking advantage of anyone and monastics, you know, there's rules for monastics to not manipulate their donors. You can't make any you can't you can't even be suggestive. You can't like say, Oh, you know, I haven't had any mangoes for a while. And, you know, because that's kind of manipulating people so and so the idea is to be completely clean and whatever you require, and you feel really good about and it has come to you in a very ethical way to that, that stuff you can share.

And then the fifth principle of cordiality is a monastic dwells in public and in private possessing in common with the others. Those virtues that are unbroken, Unturned unblocked, unmodeled, liberating, commanded by the wise, not miss apprehended and conducive to concentration. So here, it talks about living in a virtuous way. So ethics being virtuous is as again, it's also very, very high value in the Buddhist path. And here you start seeing a shift in the discussion, because it says here, it says those virtues that are unblemished. But it also says, the ones those that are liberating. So virtue of being liberated against the whole idea of not being caught or stuck, obsessed. Having the heart the mind set free and open, is kind of the measure in the kind of the direction for all things Buddhist. And so one of the purposes of living a virtuous Life is not again because it's moralistic, like thou shalt, but because it's, it's liberating for you, you benefit from it. You're actually much better off if you if you live virtuously. And then so the two personal benefits that are mentioned, is liberating. But it's also says it's concentrating and concentration, practice being having a mind which is quite stable, and has ability to be very still not agitated is a very important part of Buddhist practice. And one of the ways of keeping the mind agitated is to not be virtuous. Do not. I know, maybe I shouldn't use that word. Some people, especially women don't like that word. Sometimes. It's been used in the wrong ways. So ethical is that better than and that's probably as promised, all these words have problems. And the lady with integrity, maybe and but The but to live with integrity, to live honestly, to live with quite the precepts is a way of helping you become concentrated, to have the mind that's quiet and peaceful enough to do the deeper work of liberation. So here we start seeing that, that focuses on being virtuous yourself. And that benefits you. But also the whole purpose of these principles of cordiality is to benefit to create harmony and love and respect. The two go hand in hand, and there's something about being virtuous or ethical, that is

conducive towards social harmony that conducive to love and respect between people. And if and if love and respect in our society is important, that wants to be developed and supported. So do what do we do to support that, as I said publicly and privately? I love this idea of privately because one of the I think real Litmus tests for your ethical behavior is what you do when no one sees no one no one's around. You're only virtuous in various ways. When, when people see what you're doing, or do you do a whole bunch of things that you know are not right, you don't really feel good about it. But, but you know, no one's going to catch you, no one's going to see you. And hear the standard. I think it's this idea of publicly and privately becomes very important. And again, there's no obligation for anyone to practice Buddhism. But if you want to practice Buddhism, if you want to practice a path of liberation, it's as important that you take care of your personal private life, as it is your public life. You don't want to have a public persona and be free publicly. You know, that's not really freedom. And then the last principle of cordiality, a monastic dwells in public and in private, possessing in common with his or her companions in the holy life. That view that is noble, and emancipating. That leads one who practices in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering. This too is a principle of cordiality that creates love and respect and produces to cohesion to non dispute to concord into unity.

So here, it's talks about a right view. So right orientation perspective, the right understanding. And this is considered very important in the Buddhist practice, that when you're practicing, you want to have an orientation about what you're doing in your practice that supports you that shows you where you're going without the right orientation. If you want to go to Los Angeles and you head towards Alaska, you know, you're not going to get to LA or at least not for a long time. And so if if what you want is to liberate your heart to be free of suffering and develop harmony and Concord in the world That, that having the right orientation is important. This morning, I was looking at some of the YouTube videos of President Obama speaking at Selma yesterday. And it was really inspiring for me to kind of see that and to see some of it and also be reminded of what people did 50 years ago, and I did to see that some of the survivors of that time still walking across the bridge, what to think, to have done and, and to be do that, and then back 50 years ago in the face of tremendous hostility. And and, you know, the occasion of the civil rights movement back then was to do it with love, you know. And so this idea of, and they were, you know, the idea of the Civil Rights Movement was, in fact to create harmony and Concord and love and respect all the way around. And one of the one of the people who walked yesterday was a former Congress john lewis, who one of the, one of the powerful images I, for me, in kind of married American histories, is john lewis, going to the bedside of George Wallace, and forgiving him, you know, john lewis was was one of the people injured on the bridge in Selma. And George Wallace was what we know the governor who was, you know, very powerful basis to really inflame the racial tensions of his times. So the idea of going there to his hospital and forgiving him was quite, you know, and somehow having this goodwill between them. So I was seeing all this I'm remembering all this. And then I saw this, you know, Obama speech, and then you know, I did that probably shouldn't have done. I looked down at the comments. And one of the comments was liking likening prisoner Obama to Hitler. You know, so the whole context of you know, of harmony and goodwill, creating Concord. And I'm sure that some people feel really angry about President Obama because they feel like he doesn't do that he's kind of divided into three for people to devise a person. But to to inflame and perpetuate. Division in our society, I think is one of the great sorrows, the really great sufferings. So the principles of cordiality apply to our local community or family they've applied to our, in our society as a whole. And some of that involves having the right to you. And one of the right to use that in Buddhism is the view of the Four Noble Truths, to really be concerned about suffering, to see their suffering, to see the causes of suffering and see the possibility of ending suffering, whether it's in ourselves and other people. I think it's a form of compassion for ourselves in the world. Around us to be interested in suffering enough to want to do what it takes to overcome it. And this is considered one of the most profound things that Buddhism has to offer. And you know, it could if you read it, in certain context, it can seem very self absorbed, that

Buddhism is about kind of helping you become free of suffering, or what about society as a whole? What about take care taking care of the world around you. And here in this text, it's presented as this view is presented as one of the forms of principles of cordiality. And the Buddha said, of these six principles of cordiality, that Chief, the most cohesive, the most unifying is this view, that is noble and emancipating, which leads to the one who practice in accordance with it to the complete destruction of suffering.

So here, you see that the idea is that your own personal practice, you don't just do it for yourself, but You also do it for the world around you. And I think this is one of the beautiful things about practice. And I believe you can't really do this practice for very long, unless at some point, you're also doing it for the benefit of others as well. And a lot of it might be very personal, but you clean yourself up, if you kind of figure out how to do it for yourself. That is one of the great things to be able to help support our society and create you as a person who's a unifier rather than divider of our society, or our families or our neighborhoods or places of work. So six principles are cordiality of how we can live in this world together with others. They're not easy, but they're really worthwhile to engage in this process of finding how to live by them in a genuine way. Good. So we have a couple of minutes before the tea and I think because of the tea and because it's about cordiality in Ability friendship. If those of you be willing, I'd be very nice if you just take a moment to turn to someone next to you and do a couple of things say hello, welcome them to IMC even if this is your first time here, welcome them because we're all in it together. And then you also you could invite each other to stay 14. There's, you know, hang out and talk if you'd like. Thank you for coming today.