

2015-10-25 Perspective That Leads To Liberation From Suffering

Thu, 9/17 11:16PM • 32:13

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, perspective, question, obsessed, obsession, unwavering confidence, river, buddhism, life, important, freedom, nice, stream, complete destruction, suffering, attain, buddha, dharma, interpretation, person

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I just finished teaching a retreat together with Ruth King, teacher from East Coast. And the theme of the retreat were six principles that the Buddha taught that are conducive towards to having love, respect, Concord, cohesion and unity between people. So that's very nice. And so we went through and talked about the six principles. And today I want to kind of say a few things about the sixth principle for creating love and respect. The first are things like having loving kindness for people and being generous and sharing and living a virtuous life. But the last principle is, having a view, having a perspective that is liberating. And generally we think of liberation as something we do for ourselves, we liberated but here it's in the context of how you create a society, a community, where there's love and respect and Unity and cohesion, which is a nice bit compared to how fragmented and divisive societies often are. And so this view, I like the, for this purposes of the talk, call it perspective, the perspective that's liberating and leads to the complete destruction of suffering. And in the Buddhist teachings, the complete destruction of suffering is the kind of the purpose of it all. And it's kind of a powerful statement. Wow, really serious. The complete destruction of suffering and, I mean, I can imagine kind of lessening it but complete, complete destruction of suffering. And that's certainly the bowl claim or the Buddhist tradition. It's kind of just this, this possibility. And so when he talks about this, and then he says, How do you know You have this perspective that leads to liberation. And this is what's interesting is he asks a series of questions. I think with the idea that you can ask yourself these questions and see do you do you fulfill these, these, these criteria for having the right perspective? The right view? The reason I like perspective is when we say a right view, it lends itself for some people to think that there's a true doctrine or true perspective to adopt someone else's view. In order to see which perspective is not so doctrinal. It's like just just a different perspective on reality. And that perspective is liberating as opposed to overlaying a view or an opinion or as some kind of doctrine on top of it. So there's six questions you can ask about yourself to know whether you have the perspective that leads to liberation from suffering The text say that these then it gives seven questions. And it texts say if you can answer all these seven questions, then you are what's called a stream Enter. And a stream enter is one of the first levels of spiritual maturity. They're considered quite significant Buddhism and its little bit maybe a little bit like this. That maybe you've heard that downriver is a beautiful, wonderful place. Three idyllic without any fighting people don't fight each other down there seems very nice. People love and respect each other. And but you know, you don't really believe it there you don't even believe there's a river. You know, you live far from the river and, you know, people have done the river you know, it's just, you know, 100 miles to the west or something. I don't believe in it. In any case, it's too far away. It's up over this mountain and it's probably not there. Anyway. And, you know, you might as well just, you know, stay here and make sharper, sharper, sharper weapons. That way we can defend ourselves and be safe.

But then someone actually, you know, makes the trek. And then they're going over the mountain and you see far in the distance. They see the river. Oh, yeah, there is a river. That's nice. So they know there's a river, but they say it's getting night, so most will go back to home. So they go, they give up their journey. And you know, remember, you know, there's, there's all this lures, you know, there's TV shows back in the old place. So what's more important, you know, liberation are TV shows. And so, but some, some, some people are not so obsessed with a TV so they make it over the top and, and they go down. And at some point, they reach the edge of the river and they say, oh, there we are not only a river, but it's attainable I can get to it, because I'm right next to it. So it's in here.

And some people then our content, oh, this was a great accomplishment I do all this work, I make this great journey it's very satisfying and the satisfaction having discovered and really known something for myself now that other people don't know, I'll just sit here and rest on our laurels and anybody comes by I'll tell them how great the river is. And, but then, so one person decides that to get into the river, maybe in a boat and once you get in the river, you've entered the stream. It turns out there's a very nice current that carries the boat carries you down river, and it eventually it'll take you to this very idyllic, beautiful place where there's no fighting, no, no conflict and those suffering. So the person who's a stream enter in Buddhism is someone who's done all the work it takes an over the mountains The river got to the river didn't just rest to the edge of the river, but actually got into the river into the stream. And then it said that if you're into that stream, eventually the current will take you all the way to freedom, you kind of have to still do your practice. But you know, they're kind of like in the stream. So you kind of in the current or in the stream, you're on there, you're on the right track, you're clearly on the right track, you know, it's not the right track over the mountain to the river. But now you're really in the flow that's going to support you in the direction of some real freedom. And so these seven questions have to do with asking you have the perspective that places you in the river. And so it's nice that the river is not some external place, but rather has to do with the perspective that you have. And this is something often said in our tradition, that mindfulness practice is not about seeing something new But seeing in a new way, so seeing with a new perspective and, and then having a perspective that somehow that perspective can carry you along opens doors opens with current for you so you can flow and move along. In the modern world, Buddhism, like when I went to Burma, there was a tremendous emphasis on becoming a stream mentor. And many people in the West have been influenced by some of the Buddhism of Thailand Burma and really emphasize the importance of becoming a stream mentor. And it comes back to this ancient tradition of a talk about it. But generally, it just gives people headaches or worse. There's a lot of striving, there's a lot of comparative thinking, you know, who has it who hasn't, I have to get there I have to be there and then that can be okay. And then I have some status in my community or, you know, somehow and, and so mostly I prefer not to talk about about this kind of stuff and kind of, I don't find it that overall not that useful. But one of the reasons it's not so useful, I feel is that the way the modern Buddhist world thinks of stream entry, this, this state is very important transition where you're in the river and you're kind of in the flow is they attributed to attaining one particular experience and experience kind of a realization, a momentary, very dramatic experience of the bond of Nirvana. And there is powerful experiences like this that are very meaningful, but but the early earliest Buddhist tradition didn't describe stream entry by a particular experience. And so when you've emphasized the experience, you have a lot of people huffing and puffing for that experience, and they're kind of looking beyond the present moment to something they can attain. Then they're measuring themselves about whether they attain it or haven't attained it. And it just leads to a lot of spiritual suffering. Buddhism is supposed to help us be free from suffering. Some people suffer more because of Buddhism, which is unfortunate. So please keep in mind that if you're relevant Buddhism is supposed to help you be free of suffering, not add, not add to your add to your suffering. And be very careful. You know, Buddhism is it can be very, very important, but don't take it too seriously. It deserves our respect. But don't take it too, you know, don't get serious and heavy.

So in the modern world, they had this definitive experience they were looking for to become a stream mentor. And I saw people in Burma who knew people who had what they thought was his definitive experience. And some people were radically changed by it for the better. And some people it didn't help them at all and some people were quite dismayed that it didn't seem to change and they still had their same obsessions and concerns and But I attained what I supposed to attain, but it didn't really make a difference. So the earliest tradition, the, you know, there isn't this definitive experience is the point. But rather it's a growing confidence and understanding and the perspective that's liberating. And one of the ways of becoming street mentor is define is a person who has unwavering confidence in the awakening, possibility of awakening, the existence of some kind of awakening or freedom, and unwavering confidence in the Dharma, the teachings, the practice and unwavering confidence in the Sangha and the community. So it's more defined by confidence, and then it is defined by some experience that you've attained. So these seven questions or questions you can ask about your perspective. So the first one, so What's also nice about these seven, seven, especially his first two, the first two are kind of the most important is that This makes you your own teacher. It points that points the finger back to yourself, understand yourself as opposed to understanding some esoteric doctrine and, you know, study endlessly for years Buddhist studies and try to understand what the teachings really is. It's funny to look back and look at yourself and you'll find what you need here in yourself. So the first is question, Do I have any obsession that might so obsessed my mind that I cannot know or see things as they are? Am I prevented from seeing clearly because I'm obsessed, preoccupied caught up in something. And so this idea of seeing things clearly is considered very important in Buddhism. But looking at yourself and saying, am I obsessed and in doing that I cannot see clearly what's there. It takes maybe a lot of mindfulness, sometimes a lot of self understanding and self monitoring to track our perspectives our point of view, our preoccupations, our bias or prejudice that we have, or the assumptions, the interpretations, we have to recognize that in fact, yes, I am preoccupied with something that prevents me from seeing accurately what's going on. You could be in an argument with someone and you're obsessed with being right. And then being right, you can't really you know, see clearly what's going on and the discussion and hear someone you know, you could be obsessed with a particular person because the person is very sexually attractive. Some of you may have been your younger maybe you had that. Teenagers, maybe, and maybe you can remember back And maybe your majors maybe your perspective on your people you're attracted to romantically. It's possible your perspective on them was a little bit skewed as possible. Now, of course, it wasn't skewed at the time of your, of your interest in them. But afterwards you realize what you had done and who they were all. And so sometimes in the throes of romantic interest, it's hard to see but afterwards or what have I done. And so, you know, we don't necessarily see always so accurately. And these things are, we might have a very strong desire to have something, some project something we want. And we're so focused on that. We don't see the people around us, the people around us sometimes it come casualties because we're so obsessed, so concerned about what we want to have so important. addictions, you know, where people are people are addicted to things. Remember, Remembering right now that I never thought about it for decades, but when I was about nine or something like that, my father was smoke cigarettes. And one day late at night, he ran out of cigarettes. And he had to go and get go to store to buy them. And he was so kind of, I don't know, dismayed that he felt compelled that late at night to go out and buy cigarettes, that he just stopped smoking. You know, he didn't want to have his life run by that kind of strong drive.

And so, you know, we have addiction for things, you know, like cigarettes or alcohol or coffee and sometimes, you know, people go on retreats to become free. And but the way that they beeline for the coffemaker in the morning you know, yes, freedom, but only half or so.

So, you know, is there enough? Do you have an obsession, you have something that you can't put down something that, that filters or colors, how you see the world around you? And I think most people do. I think we have to be honest and track record for human beings as we tend to do that mindfulness practice as we start seeing what how our mind operates and be able to track much more carefully the kind of thoughts that arise that belief survives interpretations as they arise. This gives us a much better chance to notice them as such. It's an interpretation, it's a bias. If you sit and meditate and try to stay, for example, in your breathing, try to do you know, stay with the breath during the course of the meditation. If you can stay there more than a few breaths before your mind wanders off into some kind of important concern. You let go you come back wanders off wandering on over and over again, then that qualifies as an obsession. Because obsession means you can't put it down. session means it's something inside of you. That's not you is in control. And be nice if you were in control wouldn't, you know? So obsession, usually there's a compulsion. So another word would be compulsion. So what I like about this question, is there an obsession that keeps you from seeing things as they are, is that there's nothing about believing Buddhism, believing the Buddha, it's nothing about having some doctrine. It's starting from where you are, where you are, right here. And taking an honest look at what's going on for you. And that honest look and self understanding is the doorway to some deeper understanding some deeper, a movement towards freedom. It's always nice to hear people's rig. There's so many different kinds I do like it. My old phone had, I was able to have a rooster crow on my new fund, I can't find the rooster crow. So I really like that because it would go off and people think with some chicken in the neighborhood. But I knew it was my phone. So there's no there's nice things to this question. It starts here with us and what's going on for us honest look at ourselves. Some people think that this is a bad news. Because you're looking at your foibles, you're looking at how you're obsessed. But you know, that's how you're going to make progress. That's how you're going to make some change and move into this beautiful possibility of freedom only by being honest but how you're not free. The Buddha then gave a number of things that people are obsessed with just just in case we needed examples. So, sensual lust, so not just sexual lust with sensuality, ill will so hostility or hate people obsessed with resentment, sloth and torpor. Now, you probably don't use the language sloth and torpor in your vocabulary, but to be obsessing, we're obsessed with sleeping and being with our Jake and being resistant and giving up. restlessness and remorse, doubt speculation about existence. You know, so philosophical speculations about the nature of life and who we are and all that. quarreling and brawling and being deep in disputes. Some people obsessed with their conflicts that they're in Without these obsessions, the Buddha said, The mind is will be well disposed to awaken to the truth. So if you want the truth, you know, you want to clear away the obsessions. So mindfulness practice is definitely one of those ways to settle the mind to learn to let go to relax deeply, to see what's there, to have wisdom about it. That's a very important part of the process. The second question when I engage, develop and cultivate the view that's liberating, do I obtain internal serenity and peace? So if you have it is that the other way? Another way of saying this is the perspective with which you live your life, the perspective with which you engage in your spiritual life? Does that lead to you to have no Internal peace, internal calm tranquility or not.

If the perspective that you have leads to that, then you're on a good track. If it doesn't, then you're not in a good track. Now, nowhere in here does the Buddha say, What the What perspective is this liberating? So some people would scratch their head when he talks about this perspective. He doesn't say what it is. But it's kind of it's kind of a tricky thing. It's not something it's more like a principle. The perspective is what is it that leads to tranquility and peace, internal tranquility and peace? So rather than adopting something the outside, you look at yourself and try to understand learn from yourself, what do I do? What can I do? That leads to tranquility into peace? That questioning that perspective would ask that question. That's the perspective as opposed to, there is this particular teaching that's perspective. For example, the teaching of not self. Many, many Buddhists kind of adopt

the teaching that there's not self they adopted teaching that everything's impermanent. And they use that as an overlay perspective to see the world. Oh, that's the perspective of supposed to have everything's changing. I suppose to have the perspective that there's no self here. Maybe, but that's not what the Buddha says he actually he doesn't. He doesn't tell you what to do here. I understand what he's saying is, look for yourself, understand for yourself, what do you do? And how you live your life, how you, what you do in your mind, how you relate to yourself, how you relate to the world around you. What are the consequences of that? What effect does that have on you? You have to learn how this works for yourself. You have to Monitor to track and see the cause see what goes on. So I you know, many years ago I was watching some little bit of TV I got to for a little while idle era for a few months I got interested in watching football because what time in the 49 years of doing well and, and but I gave it up because I discovered that I felt worse after watching football than I did before. And even though I kind of enjoyed the game, I just didn't like how I felt afterwards. So I think this is not worth it. So tracking, see where the consequences are, is very important. And so what are what are the consequences for things you do and everything. And recently I gave up coffee. most of my adult life I didn't drink coffee and slowly I was kind of seduced into it. First with decaf and then half Caf Natural. This is a nice, this is nice. I kind of liked it. But I finally decided that actually, it's not that good for me. And when I stopped drinking coffee, then I can't I Oh, that that's right, Gail, that's who you are. It's like I came back to certain kind of, I don't know call it between kind of clarity or subtleness that Oh, yeah, I thought I was fine. But I Oh yeah, this is better. Sometimes now a little more tired. But I prefer this old way the old way. They used to be the new the new old way. So for the time being, we'll see how it lasts. I feel very, very happy to have stopped drinking coffee. So we track ourselves. And then the answer that you're looking for, a Buddha says answering this question. Yes, I have first hand experience that this protect this person. Active leads to serenity and peace. So this perspective so the perspective again, I'd like to suggest his perspective as is, is looking at things from the, from the point of view, does it lead to peace and serenity? That's really it means for a lot means a lot. And one of the great questions is, why do you Why do you sacrifice your peace? What do you destroy your ease with? Is anything so important in your life that you can get at you're willing to give up your inner well being your inner peace? And you can have it's a great question. And my guess is you'll argue against that question. You'll have you'll come up with all kinds of good reasons why some things are really so important that you can't maintain your own inner peace. Because you have to worry. That's important to worry right?

And so, but aren't but don't just question that have a debate, have an honest debate with yourself about whether it's really true that you have to give up your inner peace and well being in order to take care of what needs to be taken care of in the world. It's possible you can take care of things in the world much better if you maintain your inner peace and serenity. The next question to ask and this took me a while to kind of get my head around it to appreciate it. That's kind of my interpretation, I guess. Are there people in other spiritual traditions who have the perspective I have? And you're supposed to realize No. and large to me, but, but but i would i how I take it take it to how I understand it is that you As we pursue, or safeguard or develop this inner peace, inner well being that's possible. We're interested in doing it as thoroughly and completely as we can. Do you know anybody anywhere else, that they can do it, that's better. They have a better way of doing our deeper, fuller place to do it. If they do go there. But if you don't, then you can have this unwavering confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the thing that makes a Buddhist a street mentor. So that's my best effort to understand this. So the next one is I'll go through a little bit quickly. Do I have the character of a person who has this right perspective? Do I have the character and personal character and this is how you would know that you have the right character that if you do an offense, if You hurt someone, you would then immediately go and reveal that tell that to someone who you think is wise. If you if he doesn't say you'll never make an offence, never cause harm, but if you do, you'll go tell someone. Is that nice? I think it's nice. No, you don't like it. So that willingness to add willingness to be open with your life, honest about your life, to be

transparent, not to hide and protect, not to feel like you can't let people know but at least the wise people let them know so your life so you're accountable in their willingness. That's a sign of good character. And then they asked the question a second time, do I have the character of a person who has the right view? And here the answer is, although the person is involved in many affairs, many activities in life The person who would stay focused on maintaining the best possible virtue, the best possible quality of mind, and the best possible wisdom. In other words, you might have work you have to do important work in the world, you might have a lot of things you have to do. But you would not give such priority to those, that you would lose touch with maintaining your virtue, your and this peaceful mind that you're in attaining high quality, harm, harmonious mind. And so here we look at ourselves again, it goes back to the first question of obsession. Are you obsessed by all things you have to do? So that you lose touch with so you don't no longer give priority to the quality of your virtue, the quality of your mind and the quality of your wisdom? And then the next question is, do I have the strength of a person who has the right perspective This string here is defined. That one gives eager attention to studying the Dharma. So or like then listening to dharma. So by now after 30 minutes of talk, if you're not sitting here in the edge of your seat excited and eager, either I'm not teaching very well, or you're not a street mentor. And then again, he says, Do I have the strength of a person who has the right perspective? This time? The answer is, yes, if one is inspired and gladdened from learning the Dharma. So I like this ending with the idea of being inspired and gladdened that somehow that this Dharma is that thing that moves us to cultivate the best possible inner quality of life? cultivate this deep sense of being at home and being at peace with ourselves. And are you inspired by this class? Ability inspired by this awakening, inspired by the teachings and move in that way, it doesn't make you happy, the word is glad in English.

And if so if you can answer yes for all these questions this way, then it says your stream, Enter. And if you're not, I can't say yes for all of them. Then it maybe it shows you where it's good to go study and look at and monitor yourself. And so you can see where it might be interesting to develop and grow in certain ways. And then, finally, to repeat what I said at the beginning, that this principle of having the right perspective is also done for the purpose of creating a society where there's love, respect, conquered cohesion and unity. Isn't that nice? So as you develop this inner freedom from obsession, this inner freedom of Peace, inner harmony, well being, that we don't just do it for ourselves, but we do it for our community as well. And it's a way of supporting and helping everyone. It's a way of being able to meet people as in friendly ways and loving ways and kind ways. And I think maybe very importantly in respectful ways, so that we can all live together in a shared life, perhaps as one family of people, rather than fragmented into groups that are at odds with each other. So maybe someday you'll enter the stream. And you'll be so in the flow of how important how valuable it is to maintain a peaceful settled heart. That that's peaceful settle heart will carry you and down the river to help you Place of real freedom, the complete destruction of suffering. Right. So thank you timely