

2015-11-30 Wisdom Truth Relinquishment Peace

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Can you hear me okay? out there. So I would like to base this talk on ancient discourse by the Buddha from the Buddha's time from a particular texts called the Middle Length Discourses. And part of what inspired me to do this is that, this fall and also coming up, I'm teaching a course on the Middle Length Discourses. And I'm also going to teach an online course on the same text starting in late January, perhaps through the Sati center. So I spending a lot of time with this text. It's kind of one of the primary kind of texts or scriptures of our kind of early Buddhist tradition. And there's one that I came across recently it was and I was kind of inspired by it and so I wanted to share a part of it with you and it begins with an Interesting story.

And that is that there is a man who has heard about the Buddha and heard a little bit about his teachings and he decides to become, go find the Buddha and become ordained, he becomes a home lever becomes a wreck renunciant in the ancient Indian tradition, like a, like a like a and then he goes and leaves his home and goes wandering across the countryside to the town where he's been told the Buddha is and on the way there, he needs to spend the night and he spends a night in the workshop of some local craftsperson just happens to be at the same time, the Buddha is left that town where he was staying and is wandering through the countryside. And it gets to be nighttime, and he also needs a place to stay. So he asks the crowd that craftsmen? Would it be possible for me to stay in your workshop tonight? And the Craftsman says, Well, you have to ask the renunciant, who is already there to make space for you. So the Buddha goes and knocks on the door and says, you know, if it's their space for you, and it's okay, would it be all right if I came and spent the night here in this workshop as well. And then and the man said, doesn't recognize the Buddha. So he said, Sure, this space for both of us. So the Buddha comes in and makes him makes a seat for himself. It says he got a bunch of grass and made a seat for himself to sit on. Because there was that's what they use for cushions for meditation cushions in the old days, they got grass and busted up. So he got this grass and he punched it up and the Buddha sat down to meditate into the evening and into the early morning and this man who was going off to ordained by the Buddha, he also did the same thing. So not still not realizing it was the Buddha. And kind of one nice reason I like this story is that is that usually and then kind of great myths of Buddhism, it would have walked in you'd know, which was the Buddha you know, but, but there's myths, you know, people the founders of religion tends to become, you know, bigger deals over the centuries, right. And but here in the early texts, he wasn't recognized. So I love that. So who knows maybe one of you today come in here and it could be you for all we know. And so, anyway, so the two of them without talking or planning it both setup, meditating to the evening and into early morning, and at some point in the middle of the night, the Buddha thought to himself this man is quite

impressive. It's as he conducts himself well, to sit up and meditating and he's seriously engaged in the spiritual life. Let me find out more about him. He said, Well, what's what do you have? You know, do you have a teacher? And do you have a teaching you follow? And the man says, Well, my teacher is the Buddha and I follow his teaching. And have you ever encountered the Buddha? And the man says, No. So you wouldn't recognize him if you met him? In the mountains? No. And so then, the Buddha is not giving himself away who he is, says, Well, what would be what if I gave you some teachings, and the man says, that'd be fine, thank you. So the Buddha gives us a set of teachings at the end of the teachings.

The top one dawns on this other man, oh, this is the Buddha. And then he asks for enough forgiveness or something or apologizes for not recognizing him. And so it's a kind of nice story little bit. But what's particularly nice is the teaching he gets. But the teaching he gets is dependent on the fact that this this man was sitting up meditating is conducted himself well. And I myself, I'm kind of inspired by this little story of two men, two people sitting before they had iPads or television or books. They chose to spend the evening meditating in the dark, I suppose. Maybe it was a moon some light well into the early morning when I was in the monitor, That's often what we did. There were times when we would go to bed quite late, there were some simple monitors I was in, we actually stay up all night and we would go to bed when did at dawn to get a little sleep for the day. And but I spent many, many, many hours and years of my life, sitting up meditating into the evening, together, usually together other people, sometimes alone. And there was something very dignified about a group of people sitting meditating into the evening or something very, very powerful and strong. To be kind of sitting still in a posture that's meant to be kind of dignified meaning not that you fake your dignity but it kind of expresses an inner dignity to sit upright and strong and sit this way. And so this new going to be monks in to be monk how The ability to sit there and meditate and sit upright and strong and into the night. So maybe some of you who don't find this inspiring that someone would do that.

There's a story of over one of the monk who brought brought what became Zen to China. And there's a lot of interesting stories about him. But at some point, he goes off, to meditate in the mountains for nine years. He has, he sits into his cave and a mountain to meditate. And when I was a relatively new Zen student, I heard this story about this guy going off and to the mountains, seven years, nine years to meditate. And that was so inspired by that. I didn't know why. So I went down into the night late at night to the meditation hall, the Zen center, and sat there for a few hours with this kind of very interesting question that kind of kept me alert and very present very curious about this. moment was almost as if that could be really still and very attentive to just, you know, like maybe like a cat and mouse door. Maybe it's a terrible analogy, but but he was very attentive, very present. And still, I would, I would, I would find my answer to this question. And the answer was, the question was, why did this monk in China sit for seven years and meditate in a cave? Why would he do that? And so I sat there with that they kind of, you know, wasn't exactly looking for an answer, but I thought, but anyway, so this is just this idea. So this these people are sitting up late at night. This is what they did. Why are they doing it? What is it? What's in it for them? What do they have to face to be able to sit upright and steal for hours into the night? What kind of doubt doubts to sale a person who does this worthwhile? Why should I do this? I'm not going to be good for work tomorrow morning. Or, you know, there's, you know, Downton Abbey is On and you have to find a way to find out where or what happens. Or, you know, there's a lot of things you know that that would keep a person from feeling settled and rooted and present and calm and, and, and happy to be collected and present and this alert, crisp way that sometimes can happen. So here they were sitting. So in order for this kind of teaching this monk gets you I think it helps to appreciate that maybe this monk had a capacity for certain kind of inner strength that allowed him to sit upright and present.

One of the interesting things I think one of the important things that comes from having a lot of confidence in oneself, when we sit and meditate, and this is one of the purposes of meditation is to elicit confidence, self confidence. Meditation is often associated with becoming calm, reducing stress, which is part of its value, gets a lot of press in America. The distressing effects of meditation and mindfulness. It's very nice. Some people make livings you know, promoting this. But the I think becoming calm for its own sake was not the purpose of meditation time of the Buddha. One of the purposes was to develop a strong sense of self confidence, and to sit there with that confidence. And the interesting thing I think can happen when you sit with a lot of self confidence. Happy, calm, settled, strong. Feeling like, like this moment is complete in itself, like this moment is enough just to be here in this confident way. One of the things that happens is that many of the things that we think are important, begin to fall away. Maybe doesn't matter what happens in the TV, maybe it doesn't matter. So many things that we so caught up in Maybe don't matter so much they don't matter enough to we want to take them up when we're sitting there meditating, or sitting and meditating, we see the thoughts arise about various issues in our life for various desires, we have various fears we have, and it's just like this not interesting. It's not, I'm not interested in getting involved in those, because there's a strength of confidence here that is better than getting involved these little petty concerns I might have. But one of the things that becomes less interesting to be involved in is thoughts about self identity, who you are. So, so, for example, we're sitting there and then, you know, you're wondering about you know, you know, you're, you're, you know, you're 50 years old and you start thinking about how in high school, you can Your hair just wasn't quite right for the for the prom or something. And you know that was really one of the great tragedies of your life you know and it you know it define who you are for the rest of your life right? But as you sit there and this confidence this kind of what happened you know 30 some years ago and high school dance or something just doesn't have it doesn't grab you anymore. That's I'm trying to come up with an obvious example something you you're not gonna sit there and be caught up in those concerns. But as we get closer to something, you know, something today that we're defined by maybe we we made a mistake at work and so now we're identity is tied to that mistake or people think think bad about me. I'm a bad person, I'm mistake prone person. And you can see those thoughts arise in the mind. And the confidence in meditation is such that you know that it's almost like an umbrella that lets the rain just wash right off. And these thoughts about the mistake at work, just wash right off because there's nothing going on, then defining yourself by what happened earlier the day at work. We can define ourselves by this idea that I'm not enough I'm not smart enough, I'm not beautiful enough, I'm not compassionate enough. I'm not this I'm not that. And people spend a lot of time with identity issues defining themselves or concerned that who they are a lot of human suffering have to do as to do with what we who we think we are. And, but to sit with a lot of confidence, a lot of inner strength that you sit there, the need to define yourself begins to fall away. The need to have an identity falls away, at least temporarily. It's like you have something better going on, than being caught up in those thoughts about who you will be what you have been, who you are now, all these kinds of thoughts, and so they just fall away, and things get simpler and simpler. And you become simpler. Without these, all these kinds of imaginary ideas, conceiving things, thoughts about who we are, who we should be, what we need to accomplish, all these things fall away.

And at some point when there's a meditation, there's so much confidence in being present here rooted here, that there's no need to define ourselves whatsoever. There's no need to put a label on us ourselves, no need to and to finish the sentence. I am blank. You don't you're not there is no need to be anything. In fact, you could say just enough to say I am. That's good enough. So I'm here. But actually in Buddhism, we say that the M part is not needed. And it just kind of I and then we say with the is not needed. And then what are you then then there's no need for definition, there's no need for anything just kind of simple, strong, confident presence. Awareness here, that's very peaceful. So the Buddha wants to give this, this monk who seems to have some capacity for practice, give him some very

profound teaching. And the end of the teaching, I'll give you that first, he says, and he says, he's going to talk about four foundations, for foundations, that if you establish your life on these four foundations, then you won't be swept away. by your imagination, you won't be swept away by the translation in this book is the tides of conceiving their river of conceiving. conceiving means the ways we think. So you won't get carried away by your thoughts. And then the Buddha says, if you're not carried away by your thoughts, then you will be at peace. And here the assumption is that a lot of the ways in which we're not at peace has its source, in in the way we think the agitation or thought how we get caught up in thought and how we get swept away into our concerns. And if we don't get swept away, then we can stay here and be at peace. And some of the things that these conceiving some of these thoughts that he lists that people get swept away and caught up in, it gives him kind of in very brief kind of telegraph style, you can fill it in with your own favorite, you know, theme to fill in these with, in because I am is a conceiving the word conceiving, so it can also mean imagination, I am is an imagining, I am this is an imagining, I shall be is a conceiving I shall not be as a conceiving in the future life or in the future. I will not Not be I will be possessed with a body. In the future I will be without a body and the future I will be conscience conscious. In the future I won't be conscious. so caught up in ideas of who I am and who I will be into metaphysical thoughts even about the future what's gonna happen after you die? All these are imaginations that keep a person at this. So it moody says if you establish your life in four foundations, you will be at peace. So here are the four foundations in this text, the different than some of you know about Buddhism, when you think about the four foundations. The first is wisdom. The second is truth. The third is relinquishment. And the fourth is peace. So establish your life on those three resolves. So those three purposes those three aspirations, he calls him here foundations so for wisdom, for truth, for relinquishment, and for peace. You establish your life on wisdom, the Buddha explains, is to take your direct experience whatever is happening in the moment, when you can really get close to this moment when you've let go of the next day what happened yesterday and sit there maybe with this confidence that this Buddha wants us to have still and present peaceful and to sit there and whatever happens in the moment, whatever your direct experience is, to be able to see it without any reference to me myself in mind. Because when you're sitting peaceful and quiet, any thoughts about me myself in mind, are an agitation are extra are not needed? is nothing wrong with having thoughts of me, myself and mine, but it is you're allowed to vacation. Please.

It's rather embarrassing. How much many of us maybe not you know one or two of you out there in case you are different. But it's rather amazing how much of our thoughts places ourselves somehow at the center stage in our concerns and preoccupations me myself in mind. And it's wise not to always see the world see the situation see this the see our relationship to other people, always through the filter me myself in mind. And this is a form of wisdom that the Buddha wants to encourage people to cultivate and develop, to have that the wisdom to not see it through me myself. in mind, that does a number of good things for a person. One is it helps relax the agitation that comes from those that kind of self preoccupation. The other is that more important than it allows us to see more directly what's there without having the filter of me myself in mind, be overlaid on top of the experience. It helps us to see the experience we're having much more simply much pure for what it actually is, rather than what we think. I see. So the speaker out in the outer Hall went off. It's on again, though, okay, that's nice. It's um, maybe it was listening to the teaching and decided to get real quiet. Nothing more needed to be said. And so then so then with this ability to not overlay me myself on my mind On experience, the Buddha said, that allows a person to see how our experience is constantly arising and passing, arising and passing. And for the Buddha, the key to become free of suffering, is to see that things are constantly in flux. Our direct experience is constantly in flux in a way that's inconceivable if we're in our thoughts, because the nature of thoughts is to overlay more permanence and the experiences actually their thoughts kind of have a way of kind of like we have an idea of how things are and we hold on to that idea. But if we can drop the ideas and just be in the direct, immediate experience of things, things are

moving and changing, arising and passing quite quickly. And if you can see that arising and passing, then in between the arising and passing, there's a possibility of not clinging to anything that's going on. That's where the freedom is found is not to cling to this world of our experience. So the wisdom of not seeing things to me myself in mind allows us to see things more directly without concepts without ideas, which allows the mind to let go even more. The letting go of what we're attached to the clinging of the mind, the way we grip onto things, grip onto our ideas, grip onto our fears and our aspirations, our wishes, and our resentments, and our hopes and all these things. The idea is to be able to let go of that the letting go. The Buddha says it is something that's true. So we base our life on the truth in the second Foundation, he defines that truth as the truth of the direct experience of release. So if you hold your hand if fist really tight, long enough, it'll hurt. And that's somehow true, that's hurting. So also true that if you let go of that fist open the hand, you feel a relief in the release, they don't feel good. That open hand. That experience of an open hand is something is an experience. It's the absence of the fist. The release of the clinging in our mind, the fist in our mind, or the fist in our heart, or the fist in our belly, wherever you hold, hold tight. That release is a thing. Kind of like a thing. It's an experience which is very significant. And the Buddha wanted to point to that experience as being true. That's the truth that we should base our life on. If we can ever have a palpable and visceral experience of what that release is like a freedom is like of not clinging. That is a guide for how to live a liberated and wise life. So that's the truth. relinquishment is not having known that release, to be able to then cultivate that further and further relinquishment of our attachments in more and more areas of our life.

And then the fourth foundation is peace itself. The experience of peace is held up by the Buddha as one of the preeminent experiences human being can have. Some people will say well peace is not good enough for me. You know there's other things must be better than peace. You know, like love, you know, I want to be in relationship with someone I want to love and be our have love and love is must certainly must be more lofty than peace. The argument counter argument would be that there cannot be pure love, unless there's peace first. That if the mind is agitated, the love is going to be have a lot of static in it and There's a lot of static, you know, it's going to be kind of rough going, sometimes the more static, the more rough going to love things going to be. And so the experience of peace of mind, which is economists at ease, settled, open, receptive, and has the ability to see much more clearly. So our empathy can operate more clearly and the world that comes out of our empathy, our appreciation of his world can come out more clearly. Our wisdom, our creativity, so much more could come out of that piece. But it's not a piece that is easy to appreciate. Because if we go back to the notion of me, myself and mine it's kind of like if the surface of the water is completely placid and peaceful, so Clear Lake surface, you can look over until they can see your own reflection. And then you put us there, that's an interesting reflection. Look at that person, that person looks great. As you'll see that person, then you take your finger and you poke it into the water, and it creates ripples, and now you're all distorted. And that's no good. And so then you get kind of excited or what happened to me and I better get back. And so you start steering your hand around and you know, you know, trying to get that you know, reflection back and you know, more you got to do something about that. And because it's important to have that me there. And so you have to make an effort to get the knee back. Right. And you can't not do anything right because you're important you have to be do something to be but what you have to do is not ignore if you want that reflection back, you have to stop disturbing the lake. And you stop thinking about me myself in mind. If you stop thinking by being myself in mind, the mirror like surface comes back, the clear light comes back. But as soon as you poke your finger at the lake, you'll lose it again. But it's me, I'm important, you know, I have to exist, I have to prove myself, I have to apologize. You know, whatever it is. But no, you have to do this radical thing of letting go of thinking about the world or yourself, for under any category of me myself in mind. So don't use the Lake of the mind can get completely peaceful. And then the analysis simile that the Buddha used is that if you stand on that edge of that lake and look into the lake was completely clear. And, you know, and you're not get, you know,

maybe you don't even get sidetracked by your reflection and like, you'll see what's in the lake. And you'll see as clearly right down to the bottom of the lake to the beautiful rocks and fish swimming there. And that same way you'll look you know, your mind will get peaceful and you'll be able to see right down into the bottom of your mind, bottom of your heart, with complete clarity and see what's really there. What's going on?

So, this monk or these ants is going to be monk soon to be monk hoping to be monk heard all these teachings, and he said in he thought to himself, indeed, the teacher has come to me. The fully enlightened one is come. Then he rose from a seat they arranged his upper robe over one shoulder and prostrated himself with his head to the Buddhist, saying, venerable sir, a transgression overcame me, confused and blundering, I presumed to address you as friend of venerable Sir, may the best one forgive my transgression as seen as such for the sake of restraint in the future. So you're not supposed to call the Buddha a friend. So anyway, so he Apologize. And anyway, which is a little bit disappointing. To me after hearing this great teaching, you know, it's like he should have just stayed in that space, stayed in that peace check, probably closed his eyes and meditated some more and not, you know getting the ball involved and need to apologize for anything just just to be here. So for foundations, if you establish your life in these four foundations, then you won't get swept away in your thoughts. And so, establish your life and wisdom. And particularly the wisdom and not seeing things is always through the filter of me and myself in mind. establish your life in truth, particularly the truth of letting go for what happens that feeling that experience of peace that comes from letting go the stablish your life in relinquishment, which means letting go to do the letting go and establish your life in peace, beautiful peace, which can be your gift to the world around you. The world needs a lot more peace. So maybe some of you go home now. And be curious about why this guy is why they sat up all night. And you'll go home and your setup into the evening. Wondering what is this about? What is it to do sit here fully present confidence strong. Without any concern whatsoever for me myself in mind, what is that? What is that? That'll be great. If some of you don't know me did that. What is it? What is this moment? What is this year? What just here? So what do you think?

Do you want to answer as some questions or comments or? Oh, hand went up quickly. So we have the mic out in the outer Hall. Thanks.

You asked how we start with I am and we lose the adjective, and then we lose em. And then eventually we lose I. And you also talked about how we let go of thoughts and just be here and experienced this very moment.

Yes. So then, if we did that, how is it possible to evaluate oneself? Better oneself?

How can you do that?

Huh? Yeah. So remember I said, I talked about giving good It talks about it as a vacation. There is a time and place it's all about context, there is a time and place to, to evaluate yourself. You know, we know if you really need to pee, we hope you have that self evaluation, that's, you don't ask your neighbor to go pee, you know, that's you and you know who it is. And you know that there is a time and place for understanding myself and all that. But it's also their time in place to give yourself a radical vacation from that. So you can so you can see yourself in the world through a very different perspective than you can if it's always through filter by me and myself in mind, and to know that there's an alternative. And if you know there's an alternative, then when you do need to evaluate yourself in some way that you don't take it too seriously. It's not like that's the whole game is that you hold it much more

lightly. It needs to be done. You play the game, you go along. is appropriate, but you're not going to depend on it for your happiness.

I agree. Just one last comment on that is that when you follow that line of explanation just gave a lot of things starts becoming relative. And indeed, the mind has a need or the identity has a need to attach itself something permanent, something you know, you want to put yourself or your back into a rock or something like that, you know, like you want to hold on to something. Yes. And that seems to slip away.

That okay.

Feels good. I know that. But it also is very, a little bit bouldering I have to say, yes, it takes a while to get used to. But one of the other things you should consider because you said the mind has a need to do these things. It used to, if you if you if you see it through that perspective, it's harder to work with it. The mind has a need means it's a requirement, then this is what the mind does. And you have an idea what the mind is. And it becomes a little bit more difficult to investigate what's going on. And to use the word mind to simply in from Buddhist point of view is the same as using the word AI to simply and it obscures what's really going on. So this isn't the mind that has a need. But it might be that that's just the kind of generalization if you look in the mind, what is it that needs to hold on to get attached? Inside the Mind, your fear needs to your fear drives the attachment. And if you can see if you say mind, you can't do anything about it. But if you go underneath that and see Oh, it's fear. Maybe then you can do something about it. You can address the fear. Thanks,

Mike. Jen, right behind Joe, but other people need the

How do you stay awake all night without coffee or tea or without falling asleep? I would be right to sleep one hour?

Well, it helps if a few things can help. One is that you get enough sleep to begin with. And a lot of people in America many people in America need sleep more than they need to meditate. So, you know, sleep deprived culture. So sleep helps. The other is develop a strong mind. The mind is like has it like a muscle. And so as your ability to get concentrated, be mindful and make effort gets stronger, then it becomes stronger than the need for sleep. So it has to you have to make it you have to apply yourself.

You might do that one night. You wouldn't do it continuously.

Well, when I was in Burma, I meditate They're on retreat. The expectation was that we would sleep for four hours a night and, and it turned out that we had some leeway when when we went to bed. So, and it turned out for me that four hours didn't really work. I needed four and a half. And to make it really the whole thing work, and, and so but what I did was, I went to bed early, I was a little bit lazy, right? So maybe so I went, sometimes I went to bed as early as 830 and then I get up at 1231 two

and he did that how long?

Eight months, eight months.

It was the best one of them. One of the very best times of my life. It was great,

but you weren't paying bills taken care of Kids, for for animals. mortgages. Right? I wasn't

right. That's right. I wasn't.

But what's really important for me is the building the bridge. Yeah. Between the day to day life and the peace. Yeah. Yeah, you

don't have to do that that means so that everyone has that opportunity and that you know, are interested in that way. But we it's possible to go well along those that direction. And I've know I've known people who have busy lives and kids and all that, who have started to meditate and what what, once you learn to meditate and do it regularly and get kind of a little bit proficient at it, generally, the sleep thing goes down. You need to your person needs less sleep, might not be dramatic, might be an hour or less, but probably get a bigger return on the time. And you know, so it's a kind of a gain. You know, if you if you meditate well because meditation is can be very, very deeply restful and rest. Sometimes meditation can rest parts of the mind that don't rest when we're sleeping. That I often find myself more rest more rested after my morning meditation than when I woke up from sleep at night, because of the kind of deeper or deep relaxation that goes on.

Thank you.

One more, pass the mic down there.

So this is a super basic question. But how is there a way to meditate, like what is supposed to be going on in your mind?

Or not?

So it's a good question. And there are a variety of different kinds of meditation practices. That practice we teach here is called Mindfulness Meditation. And we in January, I'll teach my next mindfulness. I do a five week introductory course where I kind of lay out how we teach you how we do meditation, how we teach it here, and, but the primary way, we do it here. By having a focus of attention in the present moment on the breathing, and stay in the present moment, the breathing, or with whatever else experience has experienced, the present moment is most predominant. So it's a way of paying careful attention to anything that's happening in the present moment. But that attention is attention, which was relaxed and focused. And because it's relaxed and focused on the present moment experience, the idea is we don't get lost in thought. And usually, it's thought that's tires us the most. And so if we don't get involved too much thinking, then on one hand, we don't get so tired. We don't. We don't torture ourselves sometimes. And the other thing is that, if we don't get involved, so much thought, then it's easier to really start seeing what's happening in the present moment. So the kind of meditation we do here is meant to help us to see clearly what's really going on in the moment as it's happening. So I know it's a little bit of a thank you and if it's your first time here

no second, okay

because you're welcome to take copy of my book which is on the on the calendar as your lead because that describes what we do here. Okay, so remember maybe a few of you will stay up tonight even just a little bit and remember that the idea is not just to become calm, but to become confident as you sit there. What does it look like to sit confident and upright? Good night.