

## Four Foundations of Mindfulness - Week 9: The Six Entanglements

**Gil Fronsdal**

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I am going to continue the series of talks that are given on the four foundations of mindfulness. And we're getting near the end. Supposedly there's three more talks—we'll see. But certainly we get to the end of the text, and it's a particular discourse, twenty-five hundred years old, supposedly given by the Buddha, that lays out a series of exercises to do, or ways of perceiving the world that help develop mindfulness, help develop a heightened kind of awareness that is instrumental for setting us free and freedom from the ways in which we get entangled in our thoughts, our feelings, and the world around us. And today the topic is what's called the six sense bases, and the particular set of instructions for how they pay attention to these things called the six sense bases. And this particular exercise section of the text is probably the one that's least talked about and least discussed, least read.

And this kind of—you read it, initial seems really boring. And however, it's probably the one that kind of best represents how the mindfulness practice is got most essential and is talked about indirectly. People cannot say the same thing is here, but it says it's very simple and direct. And I think that rather than calling it the section of the six sense bases, it should be called the Section on the Entanglements, or the six entanglements. The word that's key, you'll see in this text, this section is literally means knot—a knot, and so to get all knotted up. And it talks about how we get knotted up in the world.

So entangled is the good word. The translators usually translate it in a very—one of those kind of Buddhist, you know. There's a particular kind of vocabulary called Buddhist English, and so there's English words, but they're kind of peculiar way, and so want. The word that they usually use for the word knots is fetter. And when's the last time you used the word

fetter? Some of you used the word today—never, and so, but you might have used the word entangled. You know, got really entangled in something today.

So in order to introduce this section, I'd like to do an analogy that's a little variation of one I do frequently. So I have this striker in my hand, and I can grab—a striker can be really important to me, so important that I really want to grip it. I don't want to lose it, that I want anybody to take it from me. And I could focus on a number of things, but I can focus either on the striker and really hold it tight, or I can focus on how important the striker is to me, the thoughts, the ideas, the beliefs connected to it. And those ideas can really get caught up and tangled in those. And because I'm so caught in those ideas, I grip this striker really hard in between.

The striker and all the thoughts and things that I have is the very important thing. And that is the grip, the holding. And what this particular section says is, notice that holding, the gripping in between what you see and your seeing. So there's objects in the world, and they sometimes exist even if we're not even around. But then we see them, and it can be very innocent. You see something, and now that's nice, but in between the object and the seeing, they say, goes—come together, then there can be a knot.

And so now that I've highlighted this striker and how wonderful and special it is. Some of you now are probably kind of, you know, really starting to think about, you'd like to have this for yourself, and you don't even listen to what I'm saying any more, because you're thinking just about striker, and or you know, you're entangled with being irritated by me, by always using the striker as an example, and so you're entangled with your thoughts about it. And so what the text says is that there are objects in the world that you can see. There is a seeing of them, and then there's the fetter between them. There is what you can hear, the hearing, and the fetter. Or I won't use—forget, we'll drop the word fetter—knot or the entanglement.

And then there's what you taste. There's a flavour and the tasting of it, and then there can be an entanglement. There is a smell and the smelling of it, and then there can be an entanglement. And there's a touch—you know, what to make you know in your body. And there's an awareness of the touch, and there can be the entanglement. There's the five senses.

In Buddhism, they posit a sixth sense, and it's very interesting. The idea: there's a sixth sense, because with, like with seeing, eyes are a sense. I can see this book that's here on, and the book and my eye are two separate things. But I turn my eyes away from the book. I still can see—the book still exists, but I no longer see it. But I turn towards it, and I can see it, and I can see that it's separate from me, and I can have a relationship with a book, or I can just see it's a book, or I can get entangled in it.

So the same kind of perceptual relationship can exist with what goes on in your mind or your inner life. So you can—it's possible, especially with training, to really see or perceive that you're thinking. When you think, there's a thought, and there's the perception of thinking, and that perception is distinct from the thought, just like the book is distinct from the seeing. I can have a feeling, an emotion, and I can so clearly know that I'm having an emotion, and that knowing is distinct from the emotion. And I can have beliefs. I can have—you notice the whole—all the different things are gone in our world. So it's kind of like the mind's eye that can see what goes on in the mind—there's a sixth sense.

And what's very important about this distinction is that the same relationship can exist with the things that exist in our minds, our thoughts and emotions and all that. As I can have—I'm just looking relaxedly at the book. There's a book, and I'm here, and the book's not bothering me. I'm not bothering the book—it. Just see it. That's what it is.

There can be a thought, and you can see it as just a thought distinct from the perceiver or perceiving, and just a thought. And you know, you don't have to do anything with it. You don't have to get involved in it. Don't get entangled in it. Don't have to be bothered by it. Don't have to judge it. Don't have to assign meaning to it. We have to do anything. The fact that we have a thought—just a thought bubbles up, and then at some point it goes away. But we can see it that clearly.

And that's very different in how people—some people live where we're kind of identified with our thoughts or our feelings. We're not really so distinct from it. It's almost as if we are our thoughts. I think therefore I am. But you do—so like, you know, we're so closely connected or two. It might not be clearly thoughts, and might not be clearly emotions or inner feelings or intuitions. It might be some kind of a composite of all the kind of inner workings that are kind of all jumbled together in soup, and we don't quite see what it is. We don't quite know what it is, but we kind of are it.

And what that means is when you think something—some people think something—it must be true because I thought it. And whatever I think must, you know, somehow—there sometimes is not much questioning of it. Sometimes there is, or there's some kind of non-questioning of some aspect of our inner life that has to be there if we are going to suffer, if we are going to have distress or distress some way that we've gotten entangled with something in there. And so we're closely meshed with it, the ability to see the inner world, to make the distinction, to tease apart the soup. So we start seeing the particular component parts of this whole inner life, and to see it all. It's just a thought. It's just an emotion. But the just isn't diminishing or dismissing it. It's just, Oh, it's simple, just a simple thought. It's

a simple emotion, and there's no—there doesn't have to be the automatic instinct to get involved, or to pick it up, or get pushed around by it, or react to it. Just there.

So an image that's used, as sometimes in Buddhism, is when the mind is quiet enough, peaceful enough, and spacious enough that a thought can arise and pass through the mind like a cloud, a small cloud passing over an endlessly blue sky. That's kind of nice. So yes, well, there go. It is, right? But, you know, we sit here and, you know, maybe, you know, I evoke something rather unfortunate. I don't know if it's the case, but I'll try. You know, I can ask you to remember your first girlfriend or boyfriend. You are the first partner or something that you know stood you up or something, and now you don't listen to me at all, because you know it's not just you remember it. But it's not just, you know, you know, an innocent thought that floats through. It's like, That's interesting. You know, God, how could he have reminded me, I can. I am not to be stuck in that all day, you know? And you know, and you—an example of being entangled and caught, you know, with it as opposed to just a thought.

But it's a very powerful thing to understand, and to even more so to realize that there doesn't have to be an entanglement with a thought instance. We don't have to get involved in it more than just to see it going through, going by. Just as there is an emotion, we don't—it's possible to just see it arise and pass, just without being caught in it. The first—one of the first times I clearly saw this in a way that was really significant and inspiring for me to see was I was in a meditation retreat, so my mind was kind of quiet and spacious, and I was doing walking meditation. In the way we do walking meditation is we walk back and forth about twenty or thirty paces, and people usually stake out their walking spot, you know. Sylvia: Don't think we're on to sit you where you walk for twenty, you know, you have about forty-five minutes to walk back and forth. And so I had found my place, and I'd used it before in the retreat, and sometimes people—like you already claimed it for the retreat. Don't know. One else should be there, right? But I wasn't that attached to it.

But I was walking back and forth, and was at length as a long hallway, and I was walking down part of it back and forth. And this—I saw, I noticed another person came in walking slowly, you know, walking meditation, like Antrokheusent, a walk right by or something. And then he got into my lane. But I was in my—there, I was there first, right? And I saw, This is curious, not at all. Certainly his can. He just tried to get some place else. He just on his way through, and I turned round, and like the game of chicken or something, you know, like there we were, and so I got angry. So I, as some of—some of me got entangled with it. Now, that certainly did that, but the anger—I just rose, and I didn't get involved in it. I didn't pick it up, but I didn't judge it. I didn't judge myself because of being angry. It was just like the smoke or

this cloud, just—and it just—the physical feeling kind of was—it arose from some place in my torso, I guess, went up to my head where it could be do some damage, and it just kept going. And after a while, it's like Teflon Mind. It hadn't—didn't stick anywhere at all, just—it was just anger. I knew it was anger, and that's all. And that was different than how I would have been in the past about anger, because anger is pretty captivating. It has authority, and it's really important, and it's me, and you know, and I'm right, and it comes with all kinds of ideas about how you're supposed to act and be, you know. So those are all called entanglements. We get entangled. I got it, but it was no entanglement. So just there it was.

So the instructions for this exercise in the text is to know that when you're in front of some object that you're seeing, to know there's the object, and then to know that there's a seeing of it, and if it's there, to know the entanglement, to know the fetter, to know how we were caught up in it, involved in it. We picked it up. We're somehow ruminating and thinking and wanting and not wanting, and now, you know, involved in it. And you know, you can do that all kinds of things, right? So there's sight objects. You know, you could see an object, or see a person that looks very desirable, and you know, you could just see a desirable person, attractive person, attractive thing, and just, you know, goes right through. You know, people are like a dime a dozen around here. They come when they go, and, you know, just, you know, there's a person, and then there's the entanglement. It's like, Oh, you know, let's see if they have a wedding ring on. No, you know, and then now I wonder, you know, the person free, and what? So yes, would you do? I know. So and so, you know, it's entangled, right? So instead of that, to just, Oh, look at that.

So I did a koan practice with an American Zen teacher named Ekan Rōshi. He's deceased now, but fame of his time. He's very famous and teacher, and a koan practice is you're given these enigmatic kind of enigmatic questions or statements that you have to respond to, and sometimes you go over back with answers and meetings with him. The interviews sometimes last thirty seconds, you know, because you give your response, and he just points to the door, Come back, come back. Next time, try again, like the key one, the really the entry point koan question, and his tradition was the question, Does a dog have Buddha nature? But you're actually given the answer as part of the question, or rather, and the answer is mu, which in Chinese means no. But that's almost seems almost likely to be almost irrelevant to your answer. So people will try for months and months and come back when how you answer this question, you know, have the statement, Why do you respond to it? And then once you pass that, then you go through a series of other ones. And as I remember, was many years ago now, but here was one that it has something to do with seeing an attractive person, and as

attractive person is walking down the street and smiles at you. So how do you respond? So I passed that one quickly, and he was happy with my answer. I said, You smile, and you keep walking. I, at any rate, that's what I thought. What do you think of the answer? But got me on to the next question. And so this idea that, you know, we don't have to get involved. We can just appreciate it and continue and let things be.

So we can see some sight object, see that it's an object. We can know that we're seeing it, and then we can know the quality of that seeing. How are we involved? Are we contracted? Are we tight or distressed? Are we resisting with our eyes? Are we, you know, eyes popping out of our eye sockets, you know? Or what is going on there with our eyes and a kind of mental kind of phenomena? And then there's sounds and smells and tastes and the physical sense world that we can touch, kind of. And it's possible to kind of see these three component parts. And the most important one is the entanglement. Then another week, that's extra activation that goes on, extra kind of in of swirling or agitation or involvement. And how you know that you are entangled is if your thoughts in relationship to whatever the object is, you can't easily put down. You can't just let go of it and go on to the next thing. So an attractive person walks by, and maybe you smile in a nice friendly way, and then you continue to think about it and think about and think about it.

So then there's a story, I tell you, the famous Zen story, two monks, two Buddhist monks in ancient China were travelling to across the countryside to a new monastery, and they came to a river, a shallow, somewhat shallow river that he had to cross. But there was a woman there who somehow wasn't able to cross it by herself without maybe getting her dress wet or something, and so she was a bit distressed and so one of the monks, I've just picked her up and carried her over and put her down and continued walking. And so the two monks made it to the next monastery. And just before they got there, the monk who didn't do the carrying kind of finally couldn't contain himself any more, and said, How could you have done that? Because one of the rules that we have as Buddhist monks—we're not allowed to touch women. How could you have done that? And the man who did the carrying said, I put her down by the river. Why are you still carrying her?

So the second monk was entangled, maybe out of a sense of self-righteousness or his attachment to the rules, and regulations, or I don't know what, but you know, so that yet you can't put something down easily. And that's something that a meditation can reveal pretty dramatically, because if you sit down to meditate and you have thoughts and concerns that keep persisting through the meditation, maybe you can let go of them for a moment, but they come right back or maybe you can't let go them. That's—as soon as you can't drop something, put

it down easily. That means that you're somehow or other entangled. You're caught in it. And when you're caught, you're not free. You haven't found independence. When I had the anger arise, I was independent from the anger. It arose and it passed. If I see the book I can see the book. I know I'm seeing it. I see there's no entanglement—independent from the book. The fetters keep us chained or locked in. So that's why the advantage that inward fear kind of means, like a chain that we're tied to.

The Buddha used the analogy of two oxen that are connected with a yoke, and it is not the either oxen, neither oxen isn't entangling, or are yoking the other ox. But it's the yoke between them that keeps them kind of bound up. And so it's not the book. It's not the seeing of the book. But it's the yoke that I put between them, the entanglement. That's where we lose our freedom. And so the exercise is to see those things, understand how these work, disentanglement, and to learn to drop the entanglement. And that doesn't mean that we have a judgment about the world that we live in. We see, hear, do all that. The book is the book, and I don't—fact that I'm entangled in the book doesn't mean that the book is bad. It just means that I'm hurting myself with being caught up this way. If I throw away the book in order to get rid of my entanglement, that's like throwing out the baby with bath water. It's a perfectly good book, and I just can't deal with my entanglement, so I just get rid of the object and not. If quite a few spiritual people or Buddhist practitioners sometimes take that approach: Just get this thing away. This thing is bad. To get it away from me. And one consequence where some people occasionally is they want to be hermits because the world is bad, and they think they have a very negative valuation of the world, not recognizing that the world, in a sense, is neutral. But it's our entanglement that causes trouble. And so ox one doesn't blame ox two, right? That would be kind of silly. Just it's the yoke that's holding between them that keeps them, you know, locked to each other. So we don't blame the world. We try to understand what we're doing in our relationship to it. And that's where we find—we find our freedom.

And that's easily enough said if we talk about books and things in the world. But it's much more difficult when we look at the mind, right: our beliefs, our opinions, our ideas, our memories, our conditioning, our habits of mind, our emotions. These can come with tremendous force, tremendous sense of authority, sense of rightness. This is the way things are. We negotiate the world, and find ourselves safe in the world, and get what we want in the world of and through the vehicle of our ideas and thoughts and perceptions that exist in the mind, our emotions and feelings. And so we have a long habit of really relying on those, and kind of getting them right, and fixing them, and working through that filter, but often that this is kind of what the primary kind of locus is of our suffering, the way that we get entangled with this

inner landscape of thoughts and ideas. And so it is possible to relax, to calm down enough so that we can start seeing clearly what is actually happening. We can see the arising of a thought and we can see how we get involved in it or don't get involved in it. We can see the arising of an emotion, how we get involved or we don't get involved. We can see the arising of a perception is a very simple concept of what is. And we can see how we get involved or how we don't get involved. And as we learn to see that this involvement, the entanglement, doesn't—not required. It's possible just to let things be very simple: a thought, a thought, and then our feeling of feeling. Then it's possible to discover there's freedom in that simplicity. And I like to say there is also a lot of respect, because there's a kind of deep respect for the things as they are, independent of how we start manipulating and working it and reacting to it, just letting it be.

And so one of the texts that in our kind of Buddhist tradition, this kind most like the liturgy of our tradition, is a famous text that goes called The Buddhist Teachings to Bāhiya. And it was a man who asked the Buddha to give the teachings in brief. And so the Buddha said in brief: In the seen, in what you see, let there be only the seen. In the heard, let there be only the heard. In that, in the sense, all the other senses may be—let there be only the sensed. And in the cognized, what you can know in your mind—let it just be the cognized. So nothing extra, nothing—no added layers, no entanglement. Just let it be very simple—in the heard, the seen, the seen, the heard, the heard, and the sense, the sense, and the cognized, the cognized. If you can do that, then there'll be nothing in it for you to be caught up in. And if there's nothing in it for you in that, then you won't locate yourself in it or separate from it. You won't, you won't find yourself. There won't be there, and there won't be here—in the seen, just the seen, the heard, just the heard, in the sense, just a sense, the cognized, just the cognized. And when you rest in that, with no other relationship to it, then there won't be a you in it. And because one of the ways we get entangled, that we add extra two things, is we, as it is self, we identify with it, and that it makes things more complicated. So, you know, there's the book. I see the book, and then I can say, It's my book. Now, that's relatively innocent, except, This is not my book. It's the library's book. And it'll be a problem if I start saying, It's my book, and so it's possible to see it without me in relationship to it. And part of the movement to freedom is to discover how to have the simplicity of not placing ourselves, finding yourself in the middle of all our experience, all the time. And there's no here nor there. And there's no—you won't find yourself in it. And there you'll find freedom. So instead of finding yourself in it, you'll find freedom. And one of the great koans is, What would you rather have—yourself or freedom from self? Well, fret. A beautiful thing about the sutta is you choose self, you get nothing. If you choose freedom, then you're left with whatever is



great about you, so you don't really lose anything. But you wouldn't think about—there's not this self-sent, self-referential movement that often happens. So those of the six—call this exercise of the six senses. I prefer to call it the exercise of the six entanglements. And they're supposed to be meant to be comprehensive, because when, in terms of the world that we live in, like the external world, the only way you can know it directly is through the five senses, so you know. And then for the rest of the world, which is not part of the immediate world, it's all through the vehicle of our mind, our memories, our thoughts, or our ideas of what goes on. So the idea of the six senses is supposed to cover all the possible ways that you can be involved in the world in its very simple, elemental kind of simple sense level. And if you can direct, relax, and settle back, and begin kind of being there at its primary place where it's the beginning point of our complicated world before it gets complicated—seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, hearing, and the mind. Then it's possible to see how we begin to complicate it, how we get involved, how we get entangled. And it's that. It's a place where one of the ways to learn how to be free is to just let each—each of the senses operate in a kind of radical simplicity.

So we have about ten minutes. Do you have any questions, comments, protests? Yes, and all in the back coming. Jim: It, or it's coming to her another way. OK, I guess you might call this a little bit of a protest. I want to go back to the book. I look at the book, I want to read the book. And the reason why I want to read the book is because I need to escape, or I need it to go to sleep at night. And so I guess I'm struggling with a definition of entanglement. I read the book, I put it down and put it away, or I take it back to the library, so it's not an ongoing thing. And then sometimes I read it because I want to avoid work. So I guess are the first. So am I entangled by simply reading, wanting to read the book? You're already entangled before you even start the book. Well, I guess I'm struggling with. Do I put a judgment on that—the or judgment is, you know, is a word with—be careful how we use. We want to be able to see clearly what's going on and evaluate whether it's useful for us or not, whether it's helpful or not. And if it's helpful, you know, you need to sleep, and so to value it. Yet it's useful to read this book. I think I need some kind of distraction from my—all the things I'm entangled with, so I can kind of put those down so I can fall asleep. So I'll read a book. That could be—that's a wise decision. It could be a very wise decision. And is it a judgment? You know, it's kind of a judgment. It's kind of evaluating and deciding what it's useful to do. However, it's all supposed to be possible to be entangled in that desire to read the book, to fall asleep. And one way to be entangled is to really be worried and afraid about what's going to happen tomorrow and how I'm going to not be able to do my job and what people going to think about me and my future, you know? Get caught up in all these thoughts about the

future, and the book becomes so important and symbolically so important. And so then, for some reason, the book gets misplaced, and we wander around the house, and we get frantic. The book, I have to have the book. You start tearing apart, you know, the couches and you know, upholstery, and you have to have the book, and you know, and so we're entangled. But it's like, Oh, it's a good thing that I should find a book to read, and I can't find the book that I thought I did. So I think I'll find something else to read, whatever I have in my house, a telephone book, if you ask the light one. So, but the example you gave, I say, you know, respectfully, you know, caringly. It's an example of already being entangled, and already being entangled because you want to escape. If we know, we have to be wise about what we do. And I think your choice to read to help you fall asleep might be a very good choice given it—how you're entangled in the world and work and all that, and maybe a wise thing to do. But with this practice, the hope is that at some point you would actually turn your attention towards what's going on, for example, with work, that you get entangled with work. So you get stretched out, and you can't put it down when you get home. And that's what this exercise is. It exercises turned towards. So you can see a work, the knowing of work, and the entanglement I have with it. And I think it's a very responsible, it's got a way—not a very adult-like or very responsible approach to life, we were actually interested in turning towards really more and more deeply. What am I actually doing here? Can I see how I get caught up in experience? And what is the nature? It's not easy, but we begin teasing ever slowly. Over time, we can start teasing it apart, and start seeing what is the underlying values or underlying beliefs, underlying reasons for why I'm so preoccupied with what? Preoccupied—why I am so driven by this, or am so afraid that I keep you to doing what I do. And so it was—you—what you describe, I think, with the book, sounded like it was, you know, it was removed from the primary source of stress for you. And so with this practice, ideas, you go try to come back to the primary source and really see where the beginning of all this lies. Thank you. That is very helpful. And I am tearing my health apart trying to find a lost library book. Maybe that's out of care for the public library. Maybe confess it. I think yes.

In the example you put about—you walk on the street and you see an attractive person and you're smiling. You keep walking. You know, if everybody did that, how would people find a partner, a partner? Yes, I wonder. I mean, since Buddha said that desire is the source of all suffering, can we really be free and have a partner, or that—Yes, but the Buddha didn't say that desire is a source of suffering. He said there was a particular kind of desire, because desires are all the time, right? I mean, we can't have human life without desire. You want to go to the bathroom, you know? So it's a good thing to do, you know? Please don't do it in our chair. But the desires are normal and could. But it's a particular kind of desire, which

in Buddhism we sometimes call craving. It's the kind of desire which is so driven and compulsive we can't put it down. It has us by our nose or by our throat. Very strong, compulsive desire. Not all desire. So it's possible to have the desire to talk with someone, you know, is not saying—I was looking for a partner today, but I went to watch my thirteen-year-old son's basketball game, and I sat on the bleachers, and I sat near a woman who seemed like a nice woman. I saw—I said I just sat up because she was nice, because she was sitting next to her. I sat low, and I sat down just, you know, I wasn't attracted to her particularly, and just a nice person. And so we sat there, and, you know, and she asked, And as one of those, your son, and I said, Yes, and I said, Is one of yours to your son? Oh, yes, and she pointed other team, Oh, and so then we started talking a little bit in very nice and nice conversation, and there we developed—are started to develop a relationship that innocent, ordinary way. We aren't always and are always walking on the street, right, never stopping. We're sitting down, we're doing things, we meet people, and we start talking and having conversations, and to meet someone who there seems to be some chemistry. It seems like a very nice thing to hang out with, and nourishing and nice. It's fine to, you know, have more contact and more involvement, and get to know the person more, and get more involved. And it's fine to then ask if they want to become partners, and it's fine to, you know, that can be a nice thing, very nice. But I think that the track record of a fairly high percentage of intimate relationships is it—they do involve some entanglement, some getting knotted up. But if we avoided getting into the relationship because there are entanglements involved, then we might never get involved. And I think that, then people ought to make a choice. And some people make the choice to avoid them entirely because they are afraid of the entanglement. And other approach is to evaluate—cost benefit analysis a little bit, or something that seems kind of cold, but you know, and realize, you know, yes, there's this, this seems like a nice relationship. There's bits of nourishing. It's meaningful. It's supportive. It's helpful. And I feel like a better person. I feel it makes my heart sing. This is really good, and I like being with this person. Just feels like it works, and I know I'm attached. I know I have some entanglements in relationship to it. But let's put it all on the table, and let's practice with it. And let's kind of turn towards those entanglements and those complications, and try to work through them and find our way through. And if the other person is willing to include the entanglements, include the challenges as part of their relationship, and part of what they do, and being nice about it, then you got yourself a good partner and if they don't, then you have to do some work, a valuation and consideration of what's the wisest thing to do. How does that sound? Go wide, El. Like what—I address your concern? Yes, so you're ready to start now. Say so. You know, I don't want to keep you all captive here for longer. It's after nine. It doesn't seem right. I'll stay up

here if you want to come and ask me directly, and we can ask that way. Atoka, everyone is for it at least. So thank you all, and may you study your entanglements and become wise. Thank you.