

# 2016-04-17 To Be Buddha

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

For this week, I'd like to say something about the Buddha. The Buddha is an introduction to this talk. And the Buddha, you know, is the founder of Buddhism. And he's for many people a quite a revered figure. Some people feel quite inspired by the Buddha, the Buddha is used in the image of the Buddha, Ernest meditating is often a worldwide symbol of being peaceful or calm, some people have very strong connection to the compassion of the Buddha. And the Buddha is a kind of important figure and the question is, who is the Buddha and, and more importantly, what kind of connection can we have with the Buddha when sometimes when I have been particularly centered and calm and present, I feel very much in touch with something that I call the timeless presence, and timeless now kind of, and time continues, I can tell you, you know, at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning, I experienced the timeless present is so you know, the sort of Time keeps going on can be measured that way, but kind of the experience experiential sense of time for the moment kind of time stops. And when I have that experience, I have reflected sometimes that the distance between myself and the Buddha is none, even though he conventionally he lived 2500 years ago, that time, time, distance doesn't matter. In the timeless present, it says, distant does my breakfast this morning are, you know, it's just, it's all kind of almost like all here. So I'd like to read your story. And, but it's kind of stories a little bit like a guided meditation. So I think what I'd like to do is to ask you to sit quietly for two, three minutes, and kind of kind of get re centered in meditation. I know you've been sitting for a while, but I won't be long. And then, and then I'll read the story into the meditation. So hopefully, with your eyes closed or sitting calmly you can hear it a different way. So taking an upright, alert posture. And take me a few long, slow, deep breaths.

And as you exhale, relaxing, settling in.

And then letting your breathing returned to normal. And then continue for a few breaths as you exhale, soften and relax. Relax your body so the gravity can help you settle you, ground you into your body and into your chair and your cushion.

You also might as you exhale, see if you can relax the thinking muscle. Relax, whatever pressure or tension there might be connected to thinking and allowing the mind to spread out. But now it's like a surface of a lake where the waves quiet down.

And then to sit here quietly in the particular qualities of the timeless presence that is here now.

So to read this story, the title is to be Buddha, a nun, one set asked the Abbess who was the Buddha? Really smiling and leading forward mischievously. The Abbess said, don't you already know? confused

by this answer to her question, the nun felt overwhelmingly self conscious. She couldn't find the words to even say she didn't know. The Abbot then explained. To know who the Buddha is, you have to start with something simple. Take breathing, for example. Like you right now, the Buddha breathed. When you are aware of your breathing, you are aware of physical experiences the Buddha knew as he breathed.

When you see how your breaths arise and pass, it is just as the Buddha saw his breaths, Arise and pass away.

Like you right now, the Buddha experienced physical sensations in his body. When you see that the many sensations you experience through the day, Arise and pass away, is just as the Buddha saw his sensations arising and passing away.

Like you right now, the Buddha experienced pleasant and unpleasant feelings. When you see directly how your experiences of pleasure and pain, Arise and passed away, it is just how the Buddha saw pleasure and pain, come and go.

Like you right now, the Buddha had thoughts. When you see those thoughts come and go. You were experiencing how the Buddha saw thoughts arise and pass away.

Like you right now, the Buddha experienced particular states of mind. When see when you see your state of mind arise and pass, you're experiencing how the Buddha saw his mind states arise and pass away.

Like you right now, the Buddha was aware of himself. When you see how your ideas of who you are rise in a pass away. you're experiencing how the Buddha saw his ideas of self arise and pass away.

Hearing this, the nun became aware of her experience as it was happening in the present moment. In a way she never imagined possible. She felt physically close to the Buddha, rather than someone who lived thousands of years ago, she sensed that timelessness, in which no time separated her from the Buddha. I understand said the nun. Is this all I need to know? In reply, the Ibis said, No, there is one more thing. When you see clearly, that clinging to breathing, sensations, feelings, thoughts, states of mind and self also arise and pass away, then you will know who the Buddha is. When you know that clinging, Arise and pass away, then you will be free.

So if you read in the ancient records of the Buddhist teachings, you'll see that one of the primary purposes of those teachings is to experience liberation, a certain kind of freedom to become free. And primarily to become free from the shackles or the risk or the limitations, or the constraints that we put ourselves under, through attachments and clinging. And that it was a remarkable thing to kind of set the heart free. And the primary way that this freedom was catalyzed was kind of oak people open to it was by a deep seeing perception of impermanence. And one of the primary insights of Buddhism is insight into impermanence. But the way that impermanence was experienced as a catalyst for freedom, the wisdom the insight that was needed, was not the impermanence in the abstract, the word English word impermanence, for some people implies that things are not going to be permanent, they'll still end at some point, sooner at some point. delanda not going to be here. But the kind of impermanence the Buddha, more often emphasized, was the inconstant nature of our experience, that they arise and they pass. So the, you know, for practical purposes, the sun is pretty permanent, it's going to be around probably longer than you. But the days and the nights are in constant. They're not exactly in permanent, because they're going to keep coming around days and nights. But they're in constant there for a while

they arise, daytime arises and it passes. Nighttime arises and it passes comes and goes. And there's something about seeing things arise and pass, which is the particular insight the Buddha emphasized that was most useful for helping us release the hold or the clinging or the resistance we have in our hearts, the hearts clinging the hearts holding the grip in the mind that we might have. There was something about seeing arising and passing, which was freeing. And this was the experience that the Abbess offers the nun. If you want to know who's the Buddha really was, you want to not read great big books about Buddhism. You don't even want to learn about the history of it. Is life. In fact, from the records we have with the Buddha, it seems like he was amazingly interested in letting people know about himself. And he did tell some stories about himself mostly about his practice and how he practiced. But I wasn't particularly, we don't even really know what his name is, the Buddha is just a title. And we're not sure you know, you know, we don't know so much about the humanity of the Buddha, actually, I think, because he wasn't so interested in, he was interested in people's freedom, and what was needed for that. So there's not there's Abbess, she guides people to know who the Buddha was, through the kind of direct experiences we can have in the present moment in our life right now. And so part a lot of Buddhist trainings, but coming back and really being here in this moment, this time, this experience here. And you can certainly think about things in the future and think about the big issues of life in the abstract. But that's a very different experience than kind of riding or resting in the present moment, as it rises and passes, it says right here. And so in our direct experience, the closer closer we get to direct experience, there's something about how we see things, then more is arising and passing, coming and going, coming and going. And the Buddha said that one of the reasons why this was useful, is that when you see things arise and pass, then you know that they aren't permanent, they're not constant. They come and they go. And so they do that it's always this way, is not quite there. And if you see things pass away, if you see things pass away, you know that they they're not permanent. If you see things arising, then you know that they're not annihilated, they don't extinguish. It's not like nothing matters, and everything's gone. But if you do things arise and pass, you can neither be in a Buddha said in eternalist, who believe that things will always be that way. Or an annihilationist who believes that things are annihilated, they're gone once and for all.

And somehow, the inside the Buddhism is somehow between those two, between things existing forever, and, and one side and the other side, that things don't really exist, that they're gone forever, there is something that continues a process of arising and passing coming and going, that goes on. And I know that in my own personal life, that knowing this sometimes is very helpful, because I have something I called the delusion of permanence. That my system, I don't do it. But my system somehow easily falls into so it seems to me that so it's going to be this way forever. You know, I mean, so mostly has to do when something's challenging, and difficult. when my kids were young, it was, you know, we had some difficulties at home. And my mind would operate on Oh, no, this is forever. You know, and, or when I was, my kid was really young, like, he was a little baby just in from the hospital, something. I was amazed that to see how babies operating, submit, he couldn't hold anything in his hand, like his hand had wasn't working, and Will he ever learn to hold anything? It seemed like such a difficult task, you know, will it ever, you know, and they ever be able to dress themselves? Probably not. And so that, you know, or being depressed, it's always going to be this way, you know, sometimes discouraged, and so fall into this illusion of permanence. And, and, you know, I've had been fortunate to have people come up to me in those circles sometimes and tell me, it's just one of those kind of days. And just hearing that it's one of those kinds of days. Oh, and that kind of wakes me up from this delusion. It's, this is the way it has to display this. So it's kind of freeing at that time. So the insight into the things are arising and passing in constant is one of the one of the central insights of Buddhism. And so why do you think it was so what what what happened to you, listening to this story? What happened as you follow the story, if you did, you know, the impermanence of breathing body sensations of thoughts of mind states, even impermanence of ideas of self, who I am. And then finally, the impermanence the arising and passing of clinging, all the things Buddhism, clinging is kind of like a shorthand for all the

ways in which we operate compulsively. We can't put it down like really great have thoughts, ideas, feelings, resistance to things. So anybody should want to share a little bit what that was like. Anything interesting can happen to you. nettle sitting. quitter. Yes, please. Did you can use the mic, please.

I think at one point I became this working, I think I become became aware of right now. I wasn't conscious of it initially. But I suddenly tuned into the fact that right now, and then whatever followed was right now.

And so it was very, very grounding.

Hmm. There was something freeing also about being right now.

Yes, because I was being right now instead of somewhere else.

So you're freed from the other distractions? Great, thank you.

jirt. I have no idea if the lights on it's honest, green light, green light.

During the meditation sittings earlier, I could not get centered, I just kept having to return to the breath. And I was gone. And I was back to the breath. And I just was kind of frustrated with the whole thing. And in this process, I was actually able to sort of calm down and sit quietly, which was lovely,

nice, wonderful, and probably a little bit freeing to Yes, thank you.

So when you're talking about what it was like to be, like, like the Buddha had an experience of being human, just like I'm having right, right now. It occurred to me that everyone has that experience, I'm kind of flashed through just some interactions I've had over the week. And realize that the people I was interacting with, or experiencing basically the same experience of living, as, as I do, and it just, it seems very, it's in very, very different, very open and

freeing, freeing and freeing incense. And so thinking about your relationship to them. Yeah, I mean, it was.

There was just less, there's just less story, less gravitas to everything. It was just people kind of doing their best and coming up with whatever was coming into their mind at the spur of the moment, just like what's going on inside of them is very chaotic, and almost random, just like what's happening inside of me. It's not like they're stuck to these well thought out characters in a novel. You know? they're just, they're just like me.

And me immediacy of the present without any big story about them. And what right, yeah, just a bit. We all kind of connect in a more basic human level. Very basic. Yeah. Next nice, thank you. Someone else? Under my cover, and that's how I know.

I also found it very relaxing. And sometimes I think I overcomplicate Buddhism. You know, I read the books and I go to retreats. And I think there's so much to do, but there was so simple and the message was just so simple and said, just, you know, take it for what it is and relax.

And to me, it was very freeing.

Nice, very nice. Yeah, I don't think Buddhism is meant to be complicated. in passing, like, right down straight down the aisle.

Well, some time ago, I released the concept of a personal God. And so this idea of a timeless presence felt I had no words there are no words for it but it felt so big and so engrossing and so intriguing and beautiful.

Nice, very nice. Thank you.

First time here and I'm also Muslim. Very glad to be here and I learned something which is a never learned. I never know how to do it in my life. It was was I know a lot of bad things happen to people but how did Look, a lot of bad things happen to me or happen to people. But I know, I only know it's coming. It came to me, but I never never know how to let it go. So I find out that today I learned a lesson that I can be truly free from what happened to me. So I was very, very enlightening. Nice. That's a joyful thing. Thank you.

I kept thinking that ultimately, the story was gonna go to roll the Buddha, where what we are all the Buddha, hmm, all of us are the Buddha, but didn't quite go there did no.

But I didn't, my thinking mind was heading there.

That's the next chapter. Which you're gonna write each of you.

So I found it very moving. I found it very moving that shoe inside, invited us into a meditation and read it into that. And I found everything everybody has said Russ has now resonated with me that I was struggling in my meditation. Before we went into this, I was sure it was going to end and we were all going to be. And I'm so grateful for the voice from Islam and for your insight. So this, this coming together in this moment you've created Gil feels very powerful and very moving. I thank you for it.

Thank you very much. I saw a hand over there. Maybe move the mic all the way across the room. See, there's Yeah, maybe keep either side of the Roman.

Hi. I had a lovely experience where when you said something about the Buddha and the self. I think you were saying that he was letting go of references itself. And then for that moment, that happened to me. And it was just like a little moment. There was like, nothing.

Mm hmm. That's a big moment. I loved it.

So so in that little moment, what did you get a glimpse of timeless? Great, beautiful. And that's great, great. It seems such such such a useful thing. So important thing, that anything more, you got a glimpse of you think there was Joy, joy, peace, peace. Great. Thank you. So in the gap between the cessation of your normal ideas of self and before they arose again, there was peace and joy and timelessness. So would you be willing to exchange your idea of self occasionally for that? Or is important to keep your ideas of self really close in? And after all, it's you right? So you don't want to give it up? Thank you. So over here I saw just the past week or so I've been really caught up in making

a decision and pros and cons list and calendaring and timeframes. And this sense of arising and passing felt very freeing that maybe it doesn't matter quite so much. What I decide.

And that's really, that's a big relief.

Great. And I think it's a great insight. But if you're if it's okay with you, how did you come to the conclusion seeing a rising passing or in this meditation, that maybe it doesn't matter so much, what you decide what wisdom came along with that?

I mean, I think because either decision just maybe the consequences of it, of either decision, it doesn't impact.

The being just be. So your being persists kind of as a constant through the arising and passing of things. And perhaps the if we learn how to ride or walk, move through the arising and passing of phenomena that might be more important than what arises in passes. And we tend to get focused on what arises the what But if we can learn how to find kind of surf, ride, be relaxed about the rising, passing, that's portable, and then all kinds of things can happen, but we'll have our ease with them. Great. Here in the front.

I had a similar experience. So but a lot of people expressed about kind of it feeling very freeing the notion of like, kind of coming and going of things, as opposed to them being permanent. And I was wondering if anyone had insight in how to reconcile that with like, you know, some things that maybe are unpleasant, like, you know, you mentioned, like dealing with bad feelings, like depression and stuff. They, for some people, they can be quite permanent, you know, in a sense, and how do you reconcile that with like, Oh, you know, if you don't, if you don't think things are supposed to be permanent, but they are like, you kind of like something's you feel like you have to take action to make sure they're not perfect, do

you not, I mean, one of the interesting things to do in those circumstances, because definitely something is, you know, or can be unchanging, you know, the, and some, you know, more or less unchanging, you know, for long periods of time, and certain illnesses have that kind of quality for people there's persist, what can be very freeing, in those circumstance, is to notice all the things that are arising and passing in relationship to them. So the underlying thing might be unchanging, but our ideas about it arising and passing, our relationship to it is arising and passing, the feelings we have about it being there as arising and passing. And so all kinda it's kind of, it's kind of surrounded by a lot of things which arise and pass. And the chances are that, this way, the ways in which we suffer, the ways in which we're oppressed by are challenged by these things, have more to do with the surrounding phenomena that are arising and passing, than it is about the core thing, which seems unchanging. And so don't be mesmerized by the thing. So that we think it's there, you're stuck, but open up and see what is. And probably the way you're experiencing it is the experience itself, the direct moment, moment experience, is constantly shifting. And there's much more of that than people realize that constant shifting of attention. And if we live in our ideas, and the concepts, and our thoughts all the time, thoughts, and ideas tend to give a semblance of permanence to our life. Because after all, you know, the ideas have more or less constant, right? meaning there's a idea of the idea of I don't know what but the idea of a glass, you know, there's different kinds of glasses, but the ideas, the glass, you know, I can still have the idea of this glass long after this class disappears. So the idea has a permanence. So if I'm living with, with in relationship to the idea, I live with something constant. So the same thing with an illness, for example, the idea of being sick, is a very different animal, very different species, than the actual illness itself. And if we're constantly relating to the idea, we'll be tricked into thinking that it is



permanent, it is kind of permanent. But it's, even though it's permanent, the experience of it is arising and passing. And that's one of the reasons why the insight into rising passing is more useful sometimes, than the talking about things are impermanent or permanent, because of the question the point you raised. And so your experience of an illness comes and goes, if you're right there in the present moment. So you could feel you could feel really, you know, angry, and think I'm going to be angry forever. That person, you know, just did me in and did terrible things I'm going to be, I'm never gonna give this up because, you know, the person deserves me to be angry at them. And, but then the fire truck goes by outside. Whoo, I wonder where that's going and what's happening in the neighborhood or, and a police siren goes into it, in order her alarm goes off and says my car. And if you're if you're paying careful attention, you'll see that in those moments that you're paying attention to the firetruck or the siren or whatever, you're not thinking about your anger or the person you're angry with. And it's it's led up a little bit and there's constantly going to be little things like a big things and little things. It's actually very hard to have a sustained complete hundred percent absorptive thinking about anything. But we have the It feels like we're always thinking about it. And so if you can kind of really be in the present moment, and start noticing Actually, it's not constant this way. I just have a thought that it's content, the thought is arising and passing. Then there's more ease around something which has some kind of ordinary kind of permanence, like an illness or a state. And then it kind of there's like gaps and there's more lubricate. We're lubricated, it's fluid, we're fluid, it's easier to negotiate. So that speak to it.

Yeah, it really does. Thank you.

Great. Because a couple of more over here, and then we'll stop. Right here. We're like, Yes, go ahead. I was

especially struck by the way it felt to me like the deep non deification, that we all have these things, including the Buddha, I'd never really heard something like that.

Great. Yeah, I love that you answered that you haven't made that point. And I don't want to distract from how valuable that is. But as I heard it, I thought, well, it could be the other way, too. It's the deification of ourselves. Right? Everything is special, then

there was something.

I liked your anecdote earlier about your baby and wondering if your baby would ever learn things. I'm finding the opposite with myself. Right now I have an eight month old baby. And she's learning and changing every week. And I'm noticing the impermanence are in her but also finding myself clinging at times to not wanting her to change and grow up so quickly. Wondering if you have any thoughts on how to deal with when you are happy with things, how things are you like how things are and that they're clinging to, not wanting to change?

Nice and nice. The I think two answers occurred to me one is that if you can feel how the clinging is uncomfortable, maybe you're more willing to let go of it. And if you're if you're clinging to, if you cling to things that are good, you probably can't enjoy them fully. You can't be there as fully for it. So maybe it's easier to be. So it might be you know, so one, one solution to you is just to enjoy them better. If you enjoy it, if you really have to self enjoy as much as enjoying joy ball, but this, then it might be you know, there's no room to cling to it. Because that's extra, it's like pulling yourself out of it a little bit. And the other thing is, in terms of a bit if it's setback, and have a bigger picture of raising a child. I think children, you know, they grow, they learn a lot by osmosis or by example, right. So if you can learn not to cling to

what's good, which was nice and pleasant, or cling to what's unpleasant, maybe demonstrate to the child, a way of being in the world, which is going to serve your child for the rest of his life. So it's a good thing to learn not to cling even to the joyful things. I said two more. So I think it's, if you want to try some other hands, if you want to come and tell me afterwards, I'll be here I'd be happy to hear. And so the idea of being in the present moment, being right here. And really kind of discovering what this present moment experience is in and of itself as it arises in passes, rises and passes. That is the core insight that the Buddha repeated over and over again, that one that he kind of kept pointing to. And it might not be easy to understand why this is so important. why this is so useful. If you try to understand it, conceptually, it might stay hard always. But if you could somehow begin seeing it occur moment by moment, seeing how things arise and pass, Arise and pass, then maybe you'll understand how it's freeing. And to end this, maybe partly because we're having an emotion coming next week, I'll end with what I learned was a Sufi story. where someone went to a Sufi master with a ring and said can you inscribe something on this ring that will some piece of wisdom, some wise statement that I can always carry with me and always be useful for me no matter where I go. And he said, Sure, come back next week. And so he came back next week and he'd inscribed on the ring. This too will pass

So, may you all be free and happy. Thank you