

2016-05-29 3 Questions Regarding Fear

Fri, 9/25 3:41PM • 40:54

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fear, people, afraid, mindfulness, anxiety, important, feel, stress, wise, world, sharks, ability, lost, arrows, question, emotions, act, mind, self mastery, situation

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Morning everyone. And to follow up little bit with the announcements that so we do have this, every June, we have what we call intensive day long, and it starts six o'clock in the morning and ends at nine o'clock at night. And some people come and join us various times during the day, some people come for the whole day, it's quite nice. And it's been accustomed to offer, have supper available for people who come. And this year, I think we're a little bit behind and finding a volunteer who would like to make that part of that offering. If anybody like we'd like to make a soup or a salad for some 40 people, 50 people, you could talk to me afterwards. lovely thing to offer the community to do people spend the whole day can stay and have supper.

Okay. So there's a little saying, in the past in the world, and maybe in Buddhist world, and that is that if there's a gap between the actual and the ideal focus on the actual that's where the practices, ideals have their role. They inspire and direct and guide us for sure. But they also we can get lost from paying attention to what's actually happening. So in practice, if there's a gap between the ideal and the actual focus on what's actual. And so one of the things that actually happens for a fair number of people is fear, fear and anxiety. And I thought I'd talk a little bit about fear and anxiety, highlight it for something to pay attention to. It's quite pervasive in our society, that people have fear and anxiety. And not a few people discover, when you start meditating that there's a deep underlying layer of fear, anxiety, which is always there. They didn't know it was always there. But when they start paying attention and quiet down, they say, oh, there's a little voice or thoughts or feelings, emotions. And it's always a concern or worry, a fear, operating. And learning to become wise about fear is, you know, one of the ways to becoming wise important way, it's also a gift to our society. Because people tend not to make their best judgments, best decisions when they're afraid. And so it's for us to not to be caught in our fear. And to be more wise is a gift for the world. And also, because there's fear, so epidemic, so endemic in our society, as all of us become wiser about fear. I think we've become wiser as a society and support each other and are wiser how we relate to each other, understand each other better. And one of the things about fear that I think is useful to consider is that it's such a common denominator in human life. For most of us our shared human life together. We share a lot of share a lot to share a lot of feelings, and emotions, a lot of needs. There's a lot of commonality we have, and to recognize the commonality of fear that's in our lives, kind of puts us all in the boat together. Some people who feel afraid, or anxious, will often find that that that anxiety, encourage them to feel separate from everybody else. Like kind of can you live in your own little self protected world or self protecting world are sort of kind of pulls in. But to realize that that whatever fear you have is shared by other people as well as common you're not, you know, bad person for being afraid you're not wrong for being afraid. We share it we're in community together, where as a community, we're finding out how to manage and then through the practice in to begin being willing to look at fear and address it addresses one of the common human needs of being able to have some degree of self mastery. People have no sense of self mastery. So self ability to self

regulate, is even more reason to be afraid. But as we stop and take a look and kind of be able to strengthen the mindfulness so that there's a power in the mind to turn around and look at fear and anxiety that might actually be there more than the strongest things that overcomes the inhibition of fear is the fact that our ability to be pay attention to it becomes stronger than the fear and so that's important and And then as we become more wise and attentive paying attention to it, then our ability to act in the world becomes greater. And one of the important ways of not being caught in fear is in letting the fear abate is to feel some efficacy, some ability to act in the world not to be frozen and lost in the world. And there's plenty of people in society for all kinds of reasons, who don't feel to feel very alone, who feel they have no self mastery, and no efficacy, no ability to do anything about stuff. And that just accentuates the fear quite a bit. So fear is common. The, the Buddha gave a list of the five great fears. And maybe it's not one of your five great fears. There's other lists. But it's a fun list, especially because of the last one, the fifth one.

And so there's the fear of livelihood. So I think back in the ancient world, they didn't have banks, and, you know, social security and all kinds of things take care of you. So livelihood is really where your source of income came from, well being came was really important to have a livelihood. And more than today, probably, and then fear of loss of reputation, that people are not going to like you, they were not many people in the modern world don't think about the reputation as much as maybe they didn't the more classic world. But a lot of people are concerned that people like them are fear of being rejected. So maybe all have to do with reputation kind of, and then fear of losing one's mind, fear of abnormal mind states. And fourth is fear of death. And then the fifth one fear of public speaking.

So can I go home now.

And of course there I bet it's a huge one. Some people are, I've had two close friends of mine family, people who have been really paralyzed with the idea of public speaking. And it's one of the greatest horrors they have is to stand on a stage in front of people just they would freeze up. The, but there's all kinds of fears, you know, and so we have fear of insecurity, fear of loss, fear of rejection, fear of violence, some people in our communities have fear of the police, fear of strangers, fear of the dark, fear of heights, fear of, you know, all kinds of phobias and a whole long list of phobias, and fear of foods. I think there's more fear of foods now than there was when I grew up, that I didn't know people could be so afraid of foods. And then what they're afraid of changes over the decades, I've noticed, They're so afraid of it, something like that back in the 70s or 80s, butter, dairy. People are so afraid of butter. You know, I'm Norwegian. So it's a little bit, you know, it's a radical thing to be afraid of dairy. And the whole country runs on dairy. And then, but now it seems like it's back in, you know, dairy and butter is kind of back in fashion little bit. It sounds more healthier than it was before so. So am I supposed to be afraid of it? I'm not supposed What am I supposed to be afraid of. And now since it's so ambiguous, what's supposed to be afraid of mice will be afraid of all of it. So the fear of food, you know, it's become really big in our society. Maybe it's a society of privilege with people it's kind of a privilege to be able to be afraid of food. Many people you know, even in our society, I have very little choice but what they eat. And so what other great fears are there that should be at least mentioned if we're going to go through a little list. Anybody want to know not necessarily yours, but maybe some of you know someone. What are some other great fears? Yeah. Being debilitated, being incapacitated? Yes. claustrophobia, fear of crowds? Yes. fear of abandonment. Yes. Fear. That's a different category than food. Yes. Fear of people different than ourselves. Mm hmm. Yes. Fear of our political system. Yes. Fear. Fear of people like ourselves. Yes. Yeah, fear for healthcare professionals. The big one right now is fear of climate change. Yes. fear of the future. Well, that's pretty, very big. But yeah, fear of the unknown future is huge. Yes. Fear of Zika. Yes. Fear of pain. Yeah. And as some people are in the fear on death is not death itself, but it's maybe the pain, the fear of pain as they die, but the fear of pain. And so there's, there's plenty of

things to be afraid of. And so one of the interesting things about Buddhist approach to fear is a recognition that there's healthy fear and unhealthy fear. There is wise fear and not so wise fear. And so part of the reason to pay attention to fear and be respectful of it, is to be able to have the ability to discern is this wise, it is not wise. And certainly, if there's a real threat, I think it's a basic, valuable human functioning, to have fear, fear of that threat. If you find yourself in a very dangerous driving situation, to have some fear, maybe helps you to drive more carefully, have too much fear, and you freeze up and maybe it's more dangerous for you.

But you know, some fear is good, I'll take a different road, we already know, the roads are icy. And so I'm not going to drive that road or I know it's icy today, or I'm going to drive slower, whatever. There's also a very important form of fear in Buddhism, which is, there's two forms of fear that are called guardians of the world. That's a strong, nice thing, the guardians of our world, our social world. And the Pali words is hiri and ottappa. And these means something like, they're sometimes translated into English as very dramatically, I think it's makes, I've tried to remember what they are, but one of them ottappa is sometimes translated as moral dread. I think it's the terrible moral dread, but it's concerned about. So one of them is fear of causing harm. Fear, that's the moral dread fear of causing harm, fear of it loss of integrity, it's very important to know that it's a guardian of the world. And then it's kind of related to fear. The first one is regret, feeling regret about the harm we have caused to guardians of the world. But fear of causing harm, very important thing. fear of loss of integrity. And one of the nice things that seems to happen to many people as they practice is, as we become more self aware, in mindfulness practice, there also becomes a greater self awareness of the cost of not having integrity, and, and their greater sense of awareness of what it feels like to feel a certain kind of ethical integrity. And so we'd be in a fear of losing that feels good, because losing, it feels bad, it doesn't feel comfortable. So to just stop and consider Fear not to put it into some black and white category that, you know, all fear is bad. And you know, that we shouldn't live with no fear at all. But to learn to be wiser and look at it more carefully is very important. The there's kind of three interesting questions, to ask yourself around your fear. And again, asking questions as part of this approach to self mastery. To know this, first thing is to realize we share it all, we're in common common thread to all of us, is fear. And though we want to be caught in fear, we want to become free. And one of the first steps is to have some degree of self mastery and self control. And so there's three questions that I think are useful to ask. What are you afraid of? So some of that lists that we talked about to conclude those things, but what are you really afraid of? And if you ask that question, then just don't be don't don't check off the answer. You know, I'm done with it. But really spend some time and really understand what is it you're really afraid of? How is it you're afraid where you're learning to be afraid of it? What are the imaginations, fantasies ideas you have about the future? What goes on? This is especially true for class of fear called anxiety. Probably most of you know the difference between fear the way psychologists divide up fear and anxiety. Fear has to do with it. Usually, we're used to technically for things that are imminent, that you're afraid of, like, you know, something gets really seems clear and present, present danger to be afraid, or present something that could be present. But maybe, you know, maybe you're maybe not. Anxiety tends to be more chronic, and has much more to do with fantasy with imagination, the world of imagination is not something's about to happen. You know, you know, probably something to be concerned about is sharks. You know, you go to certain places in the world sharks. And so you know, but you go see the movie Jaws are now there's a new movie, I think I saw her but something called shallow. Anyways, a new movie that just came out there, that has to do with sharks in the water. So now people have another thing to be anxious about sharks, you know, and, and why did I have to remind you about sharks, the danger of sharks, but you know, so unless you're going to go off swimming in places, you know, probably don't want to swim in the fair, alone islands. And that's probably a good to be afraid of that. But, you know, but to have walk around in the city streets, having chronic fear about sharks, would be called anxiety has more to do with imagination. You know, something more distant? So anxiety is more like that. So what's the nature of the fear that you have?

So what are you afraid of? And what's the nature of it? You know, what is it? Is it more of having to do with the imagination? And how does that relate to what's happening in the present moment? Is the present moment actually safe? And have you lost touch with the safety of the present moment? Because you're concerned anxiously about something which is not here now. But you know, someday might might could be? show up and be here? So what is what is the fear? to spend some time sometime looking at that? That's the first question. The second question is, how do you experience fear?

And what's the actual experience you have a fear what happens in you, when you concern, you're concerned about something you're afraid of? What happens physically, what goes on your body you feel uncomfortable, you feel tight your stomach and knots? You because one of the very important reasons to really pay attention to what you're feeling like in your body is that generally fear is uncomfortable. And people have a lot of reactions to discomfort. Some people feel that when they're uncomfortable, they're somehow bad person, like it's their fault, something's wrong with them. It just uncomfortable. It doesn't have to make any kind of statement about who you are. But also, more importantly, because it's uncomfortable, people tend to recoil from discomfort, and so or afraid of discomfort. And so you might be afraid of sharks. And now that I brought it up, your stomach is in knots. I apologize. And but now you're so uncomfortable with the stomach and knots, you're recoiling from that. And that's kind of making the whole you know, you don't really want to look at it all you don't want to be present, you're kind of separating yourself from the situation from yourself. And so there's a reaction away from discomfort, which tends to produce more fear. And it becomes kind of a self perpetuating kind of process. And so become familiar what it's like in your body, feel it could discover what it what is it for you What is it? And then what happens emotionally, fears if considered emotion, anxiety is considered an emotion, but it often doesn't come alone. So what are their feelings come along with it? whether their emotions come along. There are times when fear and anger are closely connected. And sometimes the anger is a source of the fear. Sometimes a fear is a source of the anger. Anger sometimes is a response to fear, to try to put blame on something or to attack something or fix something. And then what are the beliefs you have? When you're afraid? You know, so do you? How do you experience fear? What's going on with the mind? The thoughts, the ideas? Are you that are you do you have some mastery over your thoughts, or your thoughts are controlling you? The fact that we think something does not mean that it's true. And it might be true, but it's not automatically true. And so, when we don't have enough mindfulness of our thoughts, there's many people there's a tendency for the thoughts that kind of run the show kind of paints a picture of the situation or a picture of ourselves. And so the thoughts are more in control. The higher functioning the what's called nowadays executive functioning of the mind involves the body To be discerning about the impulses we have, like the thoughts we have, which ones to adhere to which, which ones not to which feelings to adhere to which not to which to allow to, you know, allow us to act on which not to act on. So it begins is what is this experience of fear like? Now for people practicing mindfulness, this very question, what's the experience, I feel like, is extremely important, because it turns our attention back to become to focus and be be mindful of the experience. And not only so we understand the experience better, but so the mindfulness becomes stronger. And I can't probably overestimate over stress enough how important it is in the mindfulness path, that your strength of your mindfulness can become stronger than any of your personal challenges. So that your mind you don't lose your mind, you don't lose your, your self control, you don't lose your ability to function, you don't lose your ability to stay balanced, or stay at equanimous. in any situation that comes along. And but that takes developing mindfulness like it's a muscle, like these higher functions of the mind, are like muscles that get strengthened with use. And so at some point, you have the ability to be mindful is just strong enough. To stay aware, equanimous in the situation, even if you don't know what to do, you don't get lost in confusion, you'll get lost in anxiety

or stress, you don't get lost in problem solving, fixing whatever, it's enough, you learned this enough just to stay still, and be attentive and mindful.

And to act and to trust, that is a powerful thing to do. And to learn that trust. Because the instinct with anxiety and fears is that there's a danger right now I have to do something now to fix it right now. And in when it's when that's impulse arises out of stress, or out of just pure fear. We tend not to think more clearly, it doesn't, doesn't tend to allow the higher functionings of the mind clear thinking and decision making to operate. And the other thing to pay attention to with anxiety and fear is what comes along with it is stress. And maybe they're one in the same almost as a lot of stress and anxiety. But with chronic, chronic anxiety, or very strong anxiety tends to be very stressful in our whole system. And stress is also very debilitating. And when people are stressed out, they don't think clearly, they don't have much self control, there's much more impulsive. And so they tend not to do the things which are wisest to tend to do things which they later regret. And that caused more trouble. And so they have the ability to be to stop and just pay attention to situation. Pause is actually a very, very important part of self mastery, to have self control to have self ability not to automatically act, delayed gratification, delayed action, delayed response activity, just to be. And some people will protest saying, Well, I have to act, we have to do something. And I hope we become better actors in the world. I hope we don't go wait. We don't want Buddhists to be just passive blobs, you know, really into being economist and nothing else. But the idea is to to develop the capacity for mindfulness enough so that wisdom can operate. If we're not stressed out, there's a lot more wisdom available. So the second question is, how do you experience fear? How do you experience anxiety? What's it like for you? What's your an individual way? Or what's your signature, you know, way of being with anxiety? The third is, is how do you relate? How do you relate to fear? What do you do when fear is there? What's your response to fear? So, you know, the, one of my kind of gut responses if I don't have any wisdom, if I'm stressed out and things are really hard and I kind of lose it lost my equanimity and mindfulness. I have a brilliant response. Such as I'm sort of sarcastic here, but it's the ostrich approach. If I just bury my head in that Sand somehow. I don't have to deal with it. That is not you know, and, but that doesn't really work, right? So, and some people, their response to fear is attack, but sometimes they attack themselves. Sometimes they get angry other people. Some people pull in really far when they get afraid. Some people are counter phobic where they kind of go towards what they're afraid of, in a wise way. And sometimes people do it in an unwise way. It's a way of pushing away. Or do you are the response? Is there a wise response to fear? Do you pay attention to it? You're curious about it? Are you interested in it? Do you respect it? Do you do you have you? Do you treat it kindly? What is your relationship to fear? How do you relate to it? And it just asking that question and discovering as part of this process of becoming self aware, part of this process of me self mastery, and part of this process of learning that you have some more choices of what to do? Because responding is a choice. And so how do you respond? How do you deal with it? And there's, you know, many, many healthy ways of responding to fear. A really good one is to is to not isolate ourselves in fear. But find friends, people that we can talk to about it and share the fear. Look, this is what's going on. For me. Sometimes it takes the power out of fear, if it's verbalized out loud. And sometimes when we just kept it ourselves. There's some kind of can i think i think the in terms of claustrophobia, I think there's less room, sometimes in our minds and hearts, if we don't share it with other people are sometimes when we speak some things out with someone we trust, sometimes more room can be held more spaciouly.

So how do you respond to fear?

So here's a, so I want to offer these three questions. Mostly without trying to tell you what you should do or tell you, you know, what your response should be just so they're kind of part of the exploration to explore this. But I would like to offer one thing, approach to fear that I think is really useful. And it's a

little bit of a you know, it's a little bit it's meant to be really important approach, but also has kind of like a twist to it. That kind of catches people by surprise. And one of the most important things you can do for your fear is to help your fear, feel safe. Help your fear, feel safe. If a small child is afraid, you don't beat the child up. Don't be afraid, you know, yell at job, don't be afraid. You You know you come for the child, you have to help the child feel safe. You don't shame the child for being being afraid. You said you come here, come sit here, it's okay. I'll be with you. I'll company you. Okay, I'll be here with you help that you have the child feel safe. And then something relax and think softens. And one of the one of the things that happens when people relax, and soften and feel the warmth of another person is that their mental functionings work better. Their mind works better, their wisdom is more available. They have clarity, more clarity about seeing what's going on. So we can do that for ourselves as well. And that's part of the power of mindfulness is to turn and be mindful of our fear. But the approach of the mindfulness is to help is to hold it in awareness. Like we're accompanying it, we're holding it to gently kindly, we're helping our fear feel safe. And then the fear has a chance to begin processing itself moving itself shifting itself. And this is another aspect that is I think, I think has been very important about what's possible to learn through mindfulness practice, is how much of our what degree our emotional healing or degree our emotional processing doesn't require us to fix anything, but rather if we just make a kind supportive space, mindful aware of space to be aware of it to hold it in awareness. And not resist it not get involved in it, not feed it with stories, not feed it with judgments, not feed it with, I gotta fix it, but just kind of learn Chen play softly Be quiet, be still hold an awareness. Relax. Then the movements that process the healing the unfolding, the evolving of the emotion begins to move towards a healthier situation. And, as I like to say often that the emotions are where the emotion comes from the Latin, prefects II, meaning out, and motion, meaning motion, all emotions want to move. And so can we make spacemen to move rather having bottled up. And so fear and anxiety are very real, and very significant issues for many people in our society, maybe for many of you even. And so it should be something that I feel, I think should be respected. And given time, given attention, given support, to explore, get to know become wise about. Even if fear is unfounded, and like imaginary fears, I think it's, it's good, good approach is to treat it as something that should be respected. Because it probably represents some deeper need, that a person has. And if you learn to be still and hold the awareness, hold the fear in awareness for some time, things might have a chance to settle, to relax, and might see, you might discover what the deeper need is, or the deeper fear is that's kind of prompting that fear. The food fears that people have, sometimes are not really about food. But here's something deeper and deeper and deeper. What is it?

And sometimes it's very important to address our fears, socially, as a nation, as a society, as a people, as you know, with friends, sometimes it's so important to create a social environment that feels safe, so that we have the ability to really kind of process our own deeper feelings. And without a social environment that feels safe, it's very hard. And one of the important aspects of a Buddhist community is to is for the community itself to be a refuge. And ideally, would be a refuge that feels safe. So people can come and relax, be themselves and allow themselves to really begin to feel like they can safely explore some of the more challenging aspects of their psychology that might come up on here. And that's certainly what our aspiration here is IMC is to hopefully be a safe place where whatever people have can be supported, held, and there's space for it.

One more thing I'd like to say about fear. That fear is can be debilitating anxiety can be debilitating, and hinder people's ability to think clearly act clearly what kinds of things and that one of the ways to help us think more clearly. And be wiser about fear is not to be stressed out by it is more stress we have the less we're able to be wise about the fear. So like global warming, some people are quite stressed by it. But it's kind of productive to be stressed out by it, oddly enough, seems like it's a huge foot thing, issue. But the more stressed people become the more they're in their imagination about it, because it's kind of imaginary. It's mean there's all the science behind it. But you know, it's and, and, but the more stress,

the less you're frozen people become. But one of the ways of thinking more clearly and being more wise about this and not being caught in the stress of it is to act to do things. And so sometimes with certain fears and anxieties, it's important not to not to be passive, but to take some action, even if it's very, very small steps. So you have some sense of personal mastery, some sense of ability to do something. And it Don't be dismissed, that what you're doing whatever it is, is too small, doesn't count, and all kinds of not just a global global warming, but in all kinds of situations. Because as long as you're doing something, it supports your brain functioning more effectively, more wisely. When you don't do anything. It just supports the idea that it's hopeless. And when you feel it's hopeless, it turns out your brain doesn't work so well. So you want your we want your brain to work well. And so the way to make it work well is to ever you can do do some things where you feel like you have some mastery, some controls something to do. So if you're afraid of sharks, at least go to the local YMCA pool, you can see that you can see the bottom. You know, it's a silly example. But you know, in a sock, you know, don't don't underestimate to something that somehow touches that fear. And that becomes a self reinforcing activity, which leads you to have some sense of feeling, you can do something. And when you feel you can have something, there's less stress, and then you're able to your mind is able, your brain is able to think more clearly respond more clearly, it has greater self control, it has all the kind of good things that we want to have. So that when really becomes important, we're in the best possible situation to respond and to deal with things. So fear, to help your fear feel safe, is a great little motto. So we have a few minutes, because if you have one or two questions or worries you would like to bring up. Yes, please, as you accuse the mic, please, it's over here.

So fear is like kind of arrow, which appears, our mean creating suffering. So even Buddha, when he was getting enlightened, there is a story The Mara was creating fear in his mind. And he was shooting arrows of fear. And he translated that to Yeah, I mean, flowers, something like that. So I feel how to transfer the fears into flowers, like the arrow is very sharp and solid. And by mindfulness, it may be possible to make it a metallic flower or something.

So dissecting the arrow to a flower is the transformation.

The mindful nurse can help in doing to make it more or less solidified. And great.

Okay, great, great, great question. One of the ways to turn the fear into flowers, rather than fear is to not shoot the arrows back. So some people will shoot their eyes back with the rock, you know, add more arrows on top of it. So that's one thing, just to refrain. And the ability to refrain to abstain from causing more harm is a very powerful thing. So it's enough to be afraid. Don't add anything to it. And some people with their primary fears there, there are more important fears, a fear of fear. And so that adds more arrows. So how not to be afraid of fear. If you're not afraid of fear, then you maybe have more control over it. The other is to ask yourself, the three questions I'm proposing today. You know, what are you afraid of? How do you experience the fear? And how do you respond to the fear? As you'll start learning that better and better than your own answers to those questions, I think the fear will have less control over you. And then the ability to be mindful to people metaphor this metaphorically. And maybe, sometimes, for real, to be able to sit really still quietly and have mindfulness Be strong, is a lot about very strong awareness. But no reactivity, no response, no impact, then the arrows won't hit you. So this mindfulness is very powerful. So develop that capacity. meditative, you know, meditation is a great way. Okay, thank you. Okay. So we do have a potluck today. And I source of tremendous anxiety and fear. Because it goes you have to know and especially Buddhists, who like to sit quietly by themselves, and you know, because this means people are talking. So you can practice everything I've talked about today by staying. And everyone's invited to stay and whether you brought something or not, and I would like to set this is a pretty friendly group. And if you're don't know anyone here, you

could just sit down with people and they'll talk with you And, but to help break the ice a little bit, we have a couple of minutes before the official end of the Dharma talk is, it would be nice if you introduce yourself to someone sitting near you. And even if this and everyone, this place belongs to anybody, anybody who comes. So welcome each other. And even if this is your first time here, I hope you feel welcomed. But also, I hope you feel a little bit like it's, you know, that this this special, unusual place. So you're now and you can also be in the role of welcoming them, even if they've been here for 10 years. And introduce yourselves and maybe that's all you do, or maybe have a little chat we can get to know each other and I hope to talk to some of you at the potluck. Thank you