

# 2016-05-30 Studying Desire

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Nice feeling sitting here, I don't know how it is for you today, it's a smaller group than usual. And the feeling, I have a feeling tone or something inside sitting here with you is something more like having a fireside chat or something can be cozy and just relaxed and easy. And I hope that that's, you know, that's in harmony with how you are enough that I should feel that way. And so the topics for this little fireside chat, and then our summer heat is to talk a little bit about desire, desires, a really important thing to look at, to explore, to get to know. And in fact, one of the hallmarks, one of the characteristics of mindfulness practice is to be interested in whatever's going on to be curious about what's happening, to investigate. And sometimes it's nice to take a particular topic, the theme, some aspect of our life, and make a more concentrated study of it for like, for a week for a month, to kind of look at this particular topic that and look at it more deeply and get much more familiar with it. And that's very true with a topic of desire to really spend some time looking at it, and how it works for you. And also you can do some people watching, you know, and see see how it works for other people. The manifestation talked to friends about desire and what they've learned about it. And part of the reason for this, and the value of this investigation is that desire is, is phenomenally ubiquitous in human life, it's like, it's so much big part of human life, that we probably shouldn't be called human beings, we should be called human desire links. so rare that we just be. So the being part is, you know, and, and so. So to just, you know, so common. Now one of the very interesting places to study desire, is in some doing something like meditation, regular meditation practice, if you keep doing it, you get this kind of encounter a whole wide range of what goes on inside of you, your thoughts, your wishes, your desires, your aversions, your emotions, and a lot of things will come through. And that's what we want, we want to use the full range of our life to come through meditation. So we can see it in a fresh way, see it in a new way, that's maybe more useful. So rather than when things happen in meditation, that you might think, is a distraction or other unfortunate, the mindful approach is to say, yay, great. Another thing to study another thing to get to know. And because as we get to know, something, things begin to shift, usually for the better. And I'll talk a little bit about how it works for desire. And now, some of you, you know, probably I'm a kind of a desire type Buddhism puts people in different types, what Buddhism doesn't do, it doesn't do it, but they describe it. And you can put yourself in one of these types if you'd like, if you don't like to be typed, don't bother. But there are, sometimes could be three major personality types. In Buddhism, they keep it simple. And there's the desire type, the aversion type, and the confused type. And so as you know, most people say what, I didn't fit in all three, but some people you can kind of feel Oh, yeah, more of that type than any other. So for me, I'm, I think it's fair to say that I'm a desire type, but the version is not a very strong characteristic of mine. But I can have, for me desires are a dime a dozen. And they just kind of, you know, just easy just like, and so I've had lots of opportunities to look at desire. So when, when we look at desire and meditation, we start seeing that there's a lot of desires. There's his desires for good meditation, desire not to be caught up in your thoughts, desire to go out

and have a good meal. desire to not be there desire to move and shift desire to scratch, desire to have quieter people around you meditating, desire for less train sounds, desire for the right temperature.

You know, it goes on and on desires. They kind of come through, you know, they've kind of rippled through And people who are new to meditation, there's probably a lot of desires, because it can be a little bit uncomfortable when people start meditating, to sit still, for however long you're gonna sit still for. And then discomfort, there's a strong desire to shift and move and stop and do all kinds of things. That can be a slew of desires that come through with nothing to do with meditation at all, thinking about what your worth is going to happen at work, or what you want to happen, or, you know, what you want to do when you get home, or what you want to do when you become rich and famous. And what you want to do when you become poor and infamous, you know, just you know, all kinds of desires can come through wanting desire. So, the commitment in meditation is just to watch them, not to give into them, not to act on them, not to believe them, necessarily, but just to watch them. Be aware that they're there to recognize their presence. And you see, see a desire calm, I see them when they go, they come and they go over time. And down. Now that desire is back, oh, now it's gone down. Now it's the other desire is back. And maybe you have the top, your top tunes you like top five or top 10. And they keep reappearing over and over again. And then something begins to shift. When you just watch it, after a while, you see that there's a desire, and the watching is stronger than the desire, the watching shows you you're not to judge it, you're not to get rid of it, you don't have to fix it, you don't have to act on it, you don't have to do anything. But in watching it, there's space, there's a little bit of independence or distance, or little bit more ease or not, or less entanglement in it, less identification in it, less being hooked in it, just watching it. And that movement of not being hooked into desire, just seeing it as desire, the movement of not assuming that the desire has authority, because I desire it, I should have it, it should happen. It's just a desire, it's a phenomena, the mind, it's a thought, it's an impulse as a motivation. that arises. And, and, and it kind of there's, you know, it just, it kind of becomes a weaker or less compelling or less powerful, a certain kinds of desires. And we develop the capacity through meditation, of being patient nonreactive, non entangled capacity just to kind of stay spacious, relaxed and open, and just have the desires go by. It's a experience of people who don't meditate, who kind of live a busy kind of life, challenging life stressful life, might never imagine that it's possible to have a desire, without it somehow hijacking our system that somehow it pulling us along. And we want this, we want that and all this. And what's modern psychological studies have shown is that the more stressed out people are, the less impulse control they have. Meaning every impulse we have, I think it's probably fair to call it a desire of some kind, even aversion is a kind of desire, desire to get rid of something. But as we sit and we relax, in these stress, there's more impulse control, which basically means I'm not going to act on it, I'm not going to do anything about it, including judging it. So in this approach to desire, there's no need to see desire as being bad. It's just a phenomena that comes through that we don't have to get involved in. If we learn to do meditation, then that translates in to in a few different ways into the rest of our life. One way or translates, is we developed the same capacity to see a desire occur and have some distance from it or in the recognition of it, see that we have a choice, whether they get hooked in it or not talked in it. And then can be more patient or more open or nonreactive to it. And that's phenomenal. To have that ability.

The other thing we start learning is we learn to study the desire even better. Because if we have the ability not to be caught by it hooked into it, and it just there is a dire I want you know, it's not even I want something if there's just one thing. The power of observation is that at some point observation is easy, simple enough. That there doesn't have to be any I in relationship to desire. It's my desire. The desire is bothering me You know, all this, I be myself in mind. And I shouldn't have that desire, I'm better than that, or I should have the desire, I deserve it all kinds of things. It's possible to observe a desire and not hook it in tied into any notion of I and me in mind. And that allows us, and also not hooking any

judgments of it, for it or against it. So it becomes simpler and simpler, just desire, as it desire become simpler, then we're able to study it to see it more clearly what's really operating here. desires are usually a little bit more complicated, just simply the desire. So what is going on? So there's a variety of things to notice. One is, is whether the desire is helpful, or not helpful. Is it nice for you? Is it useful for you as enjoyable as it? does it benefit you? Or does it not benefit you. And chances are some of the desires you have will not benefit you. And some of them will. And Buddhism has a list of desires, which tend not to be beneficial, because and the reason they're not beneficial. In the very having the desire, we suffer. There's stress involved in having. So when a desire becomes a craving, or a clinging, there's stress involved in having that desire. There's a drive a compulsion, in the in clinging or craving, there's a climbing in somewhere in the brain or the mind or somewhere that doesn't feel good to have, there's a constriction there's a strong kind of forcefulness in it. And it just feels unpleasant, if you really pay attention to it. And so things like craving, clinging, addiction, grasping, when other were good words like that, or that, that kind of saw their suffering in having them themselves. The favorite word of Buddhism is the word thirst. not ordinary, thirsty, not, you know, you're thirsty. But like the thirst for power, thirst for status, kind of this, they know it hurts to have, it kind of doesn't feel good to have it. And that's one of the things that we can see, when we meditate. When we meditate, some people find this they begin to relax in meditation. We are we have a vantage point where have a relaxed state, relaxed state from which to notice the effect. That craving clinging, grasping, thirst has lost all these things that are compulsive, and just we feel doesn't feel good, independent of what whether you know, whether it's a good thing to cling to or not, you know, it's worthy, or it's okay, it's not gonna cause any harm to the world. It just doesn't feel good here. And that is a very important piece of information. Because it gives you a sense of is it worth it? Is it okay to do it? You know, or my worse off by following clinging and craving. There's a whole other class of desire, that kind of that are skillful or helpful, that I like to categorize under the term aspiration. And, you know, these are the useful things. And so aspiration, I love the word aspiration becomes it comes from the word spirare, and Latin I guess, to breathe.

And like respiration. So I don't know what the a the, they know what the prefix a means and aspiration, and Italian are Latin for what we can get toward means toward, to breathe toward. Anyway, so somehow connected to your breathing. And because one of the things that happens, you know, as you know, people practice this, their breathing becomes more relaxed, more open more easeful. And as we get more settled on ourselves more relaxed, it allows for the deeper aspirations the deeper wishes or motivations to operate. The desire for compassion. Compassion is a kind of desire. So, compassion becomes much more available. There's a kind of desire and in beautiful, healthy love, that can operate, desire for love, desire for freedom, desire not to be constricted, not to be caught. And so these days, those kinds of desires can arise out of this relaxed, easeful breath aspiration. And you can see those, Oh, that's nice, doesn't come with clinging doesn't come. If there's not clinging to it, it doesn't have that constricting effect of clinging. Now it is possible to cling to freedom, it is possible to cling to compassion, it is possible to cling to the desire to be generous and support people. So all the good things that we can want to do in our lives, it's possible to have an unhealthy relationship to them. And that makes it a little bit more complicated because it's, well, it seems like you know, I'm not supposed to let go of wanting to be generous to my neighbors. But they're telling me to let go, because I'm craving, when we're asked to do is to look at ourselves, study ourselves and see, do I want to be generous when I'm craving? Can I be generous without the craving that would be that when we liked it, or we'd be like to do that.

So with this kind of investigation, looking at desire, just looking at it, being with it, not judging it, without acting on any of them. There's a tendency for their desires, which are unhelpful, like clinging and craving, to diminish, to get weaker. And there's a tendency for the aspirations to healthy desires to get stronger, and healthy ones get stronger, and sometimes because because they thrive in us being

relaxed and open. They thrive in having an aware open kind of space, your spacious heart and mind is kind of like, it's kind of like there's a deep Wellspring within us that has a chance to flow. If we are settled and open and have the clarity of mindfulness. And so beautiful states of mind, beautiful states of heart can arise and sort of flowing and motivating how we live our lives. And the ones that are unhelpful, tend to get weaker, and we tend to be less interested in acting on them. And the healthy ones we can be even want to act on we hope we hope you act on it. So what I've tried to do in this little talk so far, is, is if I succeeded, but I tried this point out, that the simple act of looking watching, recognizing, being mindful of desire, without judging it without any moralistic ideas about some desires are wrong or bad. Buddhism says that this about desires therefore to be good Buddhist, I should get rid of my desires are kind of avoiding all the shoulds. By just sitting quietly and looking and studying and learning. It begins to shift the inner landscape in very significant ways. And our relationship desire begins to shift and change in kind of a natural way. And that doesn't come from any shoulds. It just comes from the recognition the knowing of what's happening. How does that sound to you? That makes sense somehow. So now, now is the time for the chat part part of the fireside chat. So if you have if you want to respond or say something or share something, or offer testimonials, or anything about this, especially about this topic of desire, please

I'm really glad that you brought up aspirations because I've gone for so many years, Pooh poohing desire creates suffering. And there's no acknowledgement of positive desire in the teachings. So it just feels like a more sophisticated explanation and clarification that I've waited for a long time. Thank you. Great. Thank you. behind you to Trudy.

I think the most troubling desires for me are the ones that are hiding and they come about when I'm when I want to do something good for somebody. And then at a certain point, I may find that what I really was driven by a desire for approval or Something along and then the judgment comes in, and the disappointment and, and all of that. And it's, it's great.

That's a great expression of the hidden ones that, you know, the ego, ego needs or ego desires that you know, approval or love or comfort or for, you know, all kinds of things that can come along. And I think, again, that to go back to, I think, you know, meditators, we are kind of a meditation tradition here, it's okay, I think, to go back to that as a reference point. And that is that, as we learned to see how this operates in meditation, you know, watch, watch the hidden desires. Because we got acquired acquired meditation, we tend to notice things that are more more hidden things that are kind of in the background. And then to learn not to judge them. Not to be quick to say, how bad I am a terrible person, then it's possible in daily life at some point, to see the hidden desires arise, and not be troubled by them, not not use them for another reason to beat yourself up. And just kind of just see, oh, there's that desire for approval. Again, this is probably the 302nd set is 72nd time today. And then maybe less happy to have a little more humor about it or hold it lightly. Or what more importantly, learn to, to let it be to not get involved, to not get hooked by it. And we get hooked by it, when we're troubled by it, we don't like it. And we're hooked by it when we act on it. But there's something very powerful pressing Oh, there it is, there's a desire for approval. And when you when you see it clearly and mindful enough, then it's possible to not no longer act on it. Oh, there it is. If it's compulsive to act on it, then you might want to, you know, sit down and with yourself for a few minutes and just kind of meditate and be present, explore it and read with it and see what happens. If you don't have the luxury to sit down and look at it and read with it for a few minutes. There's a wonderful technique to help kind of pop the bubble of its authority, and it's, you know, ferocity, and you know, that, and that is admitted out loud to someone.

And, you know, hopefully you have people around you that it's okay to do that with. And, and, you know, once you say it out loud, to someone, you know, I'm just looking for approval here. Chances are, you're not going to be so enamored with that desire at that much at that moment anymore.

And if it sounds like a too high a bar to admit it out loud to someone, maybe it's enough to him that maybe it's enough to imagine that you're admitting it.

So when I think of the word aspiration or desire, no, I also think of the word goal, yes, and no wet. And sorry, I'm new, very new here broke and, and I've heard that some times people when people meditate. You also think of a mantra inside a house, which is connected to the goal. And I wanted to hear your opinions about that. Thank you.

The Well, just about meditation, there are there probably more kinds of meditation, and there are sports. So if someone says I meditate, you know, it's like someone's saying, I sport you know, so you know, it doesn't tell you much. And so there are all kinds of techniques, meditation, mantras, one of them and, and usually, usually meditation is done with a goal. And for mindfulness meditation when we do here, one of the first and foremost goals is to see clearly what's going on. And then a secondary goal is to learn how to be at ease to relax to de stress. And then other goals are like getting concentrated, getting insight, a variety of things. And it's wonderful to have goals, and goals can trip point up as well. Sometimes people have a desire for the goals are too strong. It's tied to the hidden ones that truly talked about it there can be sensitive expectations ensured we can be measuring ourselves You know, am I there yet, and, and just kind of kind of get all tangled up with the idea of the goal. And we're looking so much into the goal, the future what we want, and that we're not really relaxed, and learning to be present here. A little, not a mantra, but a little slogan in our tradition is the fastest way from A to B, is to be fully at A. So there might be a goal that got you to the meditation, you have you want something you want to meditate, do meditation for a reason. When you sit down to meditate, put aside the goal. And but you know, just enough that you're doing it, and because otherwise the goal will trip you up to make sense. Thank you.

Hi, my name is Bob. I'm visiting from Scotland. Thanks so much. I'm not just came to you, girl in other things in San Francisco. And I have a desire to give money to all these countless beggars. I've never seen so many people on the streets. Scott and you said no. in San Francisco.

Yeah, but you're from where? Scotland? Glasgow, Glasgow, and there's many more here than in Glasgow? hugely.

You tenfold maybe more? Yeah. And it's just actually walking Market Street or whatever that was today. And, you know, there's a few crazy people as well, you know, guys doing all that sort of stuff, you know? Yeah, that's terrifying. Dude, we don't we do not we have proper socialized medicine in our country. And people don't get the normal eight to do that. Give you a bit 80% tax, but that's okay. We can work it out, you know, as long as people are looked after, but there's a desire to, you know, to help them you know, it's like, yeah, you're avoiding beetles in the street. scenting beings are numberless I vote to save them all. And there's all these guys just over. So frustrating. You want to go in empty your bank account Oh, and give him more money? Or maybe we should speak to Donald Trump and get him to empty his bank account, you could give them more money.

So a couple of things about this is that there's a common phenomenon, this area of what do we how do we respond to the people in need, like people are homeless. And anyway, especially when the need is so huge. I think it's good to be generous and be support our community and people around us. And so,



but I think when at some point some people feel is that this is a time for wisdom to operate as well. And so it is one thing to have a desire. It's not by not being, by not feeling being being compulsive about the desire, or being complicated about it, then the chance to be wise or more discerning. So with the people who are homeless and struggling on the streets, sometimes the desire to give is generous and compassionate. Sometimes the desire to give is somehow push the problem away. If I just give them something they're not, you know, I, you know, I, I kind of quiet my own guilt, or my own, you know, discomfort with it all. And then maybe it's not so healthy for you. But then be discerning, and sometimes it's clear that that one of the best things you can do for the person is to offer them some money. Sometimes what I've done is I've offered them a meal, like if I'm going into eat, you know, so, you know, I know, can I bring you can I bring you along? Can I? I did it here. So some years ago, I went and got a I was going to get out with my young son to get a burrito in a restaurant. And this guy was asking for money outside and I said, Well, I'll buy you lunch. And he said, Well, thank you. And so we went in and, and he was rather rather modest, what he bought, I thought it was you know, there was no I was buying him lunch. And I said you wanna come and sit with us? And he said no, and he went outside and, and so we finished our lunch and went outside. And he was waiting for us. And he said, I'm a poet. And I want to thank you but reading you one of my poems, and he took out of his bag. He had all these brown shopping bag, pieces of paper, they're torn up, and on the whole bunch of those he'd written his poems. And he read a beautiful poem. I was really touched. So that was a really nice exchange I thought and other time I tried to offer so I offered someone there was dinner then I said You know about your dinner, and you're sitting on a sidewalk looking up at me. And he said, he looked at me like, looking me up and down, pause for a while. And then he said, Okay, I trust you. And that was great. It kind of shifted me inside to kind of maybe hold more humbler? You know, I thought I was, you know, I had to trust him didn't bite him. But he was trusting me at that I was so happy with that, to kind of, it kind of kind of brought us up at the same level, you know, if I had any kind of sense of pity, or any sense of like, I'm the one who's going to help him. He was helping me, I guess. And so the other the discerning thing is, is this the best way, the best time when there's so much and some people find that it's, maybe it's more effective to save your money? And maybe give it to a charity that's really doing good work for the people who are homeless? Maybe that's more effective in the bigger picture. So all kinds of things. But it's a important one. So you had one to do someone else?

So

he look closer.

Want to repeat? Yes, please. All right. So I feel that with past few months have become a lot better having more space between myself and thoughts or feelings that manifest in usually in some curry, but constant out of body sensation, usually heat. And so I kind of like that, that lack of dependency or attachment. But at the same time, I'm now looking at these things as kind of an output of the nervous system. And I can't look at it and say, Well, this is stupid, like this nervous system intellectually, just looks just doesn't make sense to me anymore. Like, why is this keep? Why does this keep happening, basically.

So we have enough distance not to believe it's useful anymore, but it's still happening.

Exactly. And so intellectually, I feel like I'm compassionate towards myself, whatever the self is, but I'm really upset at this nervous system. basis, right. So yeah, so I'm wondering if you have some thoughts you kind of touched on this is, in terms of this being a process that kind of gets better with time? Yeah. But I'm wondering what you have

done, the approach that I'm offering this evening, is that the value of just looking at it, which as it's a radical and powerful thing, to, to really turn yourself over to really look deeply at what it is without judging anything. So then you would turn and look very carefully at your judgment, as if it's okay to judge. But look at that carefully, in the same way. And then probably, you'll be a little bit more free and distant or less poked in by the judgment by seeing it as judgment. And then you'll probably begin to shift at some point. Does that make sense? Yeah. Is it satisfying answer? Are you dissatisfied?

It's not used nervous system?

Yeah, I'll try to experiment with it. Yeah.

Great. Thank you, thank you. Hopefully, here, you can pass it.

I think, kind of brushing off what he said, Sometimes, I feel I feel like I'm trying to look at a certain desire or something. And it's kind of hard to just look at it. And like, I know, like, you know, the question that you said, you know, asking yourself, Is it something that's helpful to you? and wondering if you have like other similar questions that can help you kind of assess your desire or whatever you're looking at, in a more objective way. So you don't like automatically go to like, kind of like, imposing judgment or things like that?

Yeah. So I mean, if you want to hire a higher kind of cognitive kind of exploration of it, you could ask yourself, why do I want this? And then don't sit. Don't be sit, Don't settle for the first answer. Assume that there are multiple ends answers. Like there's layers of answers. And like, I want to go shopping, why do I want to go shopping? Because we need food at home? Why do I want to go shopping? Because I want to show my family I'm a good shopper. Why do you want to go shopping because I want to get what I want. You know with my wife, she gets different things, you know, so you know, you know, so it gets with multiple might be multiple things going on. So as in question, why do I want this and keep asking and see all the different dimensions of it that come up. The other thing to ask and this is one of the things we start to learn to see, when we sit quietly and look at desires is at some point becomes, we start noticing what's prompting the desire, what's motivating it. So we might feel a certain way might feel uncomfortable. And so we have a desire for food in the refrigerator, not because we're hungry, but because we want to kind of, kind of avoid feeling uncomfortable, distract ourselves from it. So we start seeing what's underneath it, what's the motivating impulse. And that's really, really important without understanding something of that, then desires can keep coming back. And we don't understand why. And so I want to end the evening with another perspective on desire. And that is that there is tremendous benefit in wanting what you have. Rather than wanting something you don't have, it's okay to want what you don't have sometimes for sure. But we could spend more time I think appreciating and feeling and wanting what we have, so that we feel the pleasure, the joy, the satisfaction, the ease of that. And so it can be very simple things. You know, like if you're out for a stroll in the neighborhood for nice evening, and you're just out for a stroll. There's a desire in that strolling. And then you keep scrolling, because you want to scroll. But it's a desire that's being fulfilled in the scrolling. It isn't like you're sitting at work thinking when I get home, I'm really want to stroll, then then it's thinking about something, you know, later in the day. But there's a very simple, almost invisible desire that's operating that certainly wasn't so invisible, that got us to stroll, I want to stroll, so you could leave your house and go for a walk. But, but as you're walking, there's still kind of in the background kind of a subtle desire to keep strolling. And so what you're seeing there is in the strolling, you're fulfilling the desire, the desire and the strolling are occurring at the same time. So there's a class of desires, that have to deal with what's happening in the present moment, that are self fulfilling. And those self fulfilling immediately fulfilling desires, sometimes can give us a deep sense of well being, that's my, that's my suggestion. So

for example, if you if you'd like to eat, maybe you're hungry, and you'd like to eat. So while you're eating, you're still want to eat, I suppose. But to recognize that your desire is being fulfilled in the eating. And then maybe it's possible to kind of settle back and not be ahead of yourself and just kind of be in the experience of eating. If you want to have company with a friend, maybe you like keeping the company appreciate or the company that the desire for a company is being fulfilled in the conversation of my friend. It's also possible to find yourself in situations and, and look at what's happening, to appreciate appreciate what's happening, be content with what's happening. And then also in this in a quiet simple way. Not only appreciate it, but have a slight desire for it. This is good. So, memorial day, Monday today, I went to swimming and little lake, a lot of people there. And I was swimming out in the middle of the lake. And it occurred to me that it'd be really nice if there was no one else here.

This would be so peaceful and quiet and peaceful, quiet. Like you know, it was kind of like a wonderful thing. Oh, this would be nice. So I saw I saw that happen. That thought goes through my mind. I don't feel responsible for all the thoughts that go through my mind. All the desires that go through my mind a dime a dozen thoughts and desires. So it came through. What I'm responsible for is what I do once it goes through. Do I pick it up? Do I get involved with those? How do I react to it? So I saw that thought go through. And I said well, what is here? Well, actually there's all these kids playing in the water and yelling happiness. Yet have kids yelling and adults talking nicely and throwing the balls across the water to the kids and, and it's like this is a happy sound. This is a happy day happy thing. And so why don't why don't I instead of wanting a peaceful quiet lake with no people? What if I just appreciate and want this and I could see as soon as I can that went through my mind. So I did that reflection, then I actually felt really happy being there happier than I had been before. And then I just I mean, I didn't linger with that thought but then I kind of lightened me up and I feel kind of happy and carried me that happiness carried which stayed with me until I swam to shore. simple little thing. So wanting what you have is one of the great secrets for a happy life. It's okay to want other things. It's okay to work for other things for sure. But if you want to have more happiness and more well being learn how to want what you have, even if you don't have much.

I hope this talk was what you wanted tonight. And if not, you'll know what to do now. Thank you