

2016-06-27 Gratitude Inner Wealth

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

As a there's an introduction to this talk. And then introduction involves you all having a little conversation first for about five minutes. So hopefully you're willing to do this coming right out of the meditation. Very simple. So what I like to ask you to do is to find two or three other people near users groups of three or four, and just sit close together for a moment. And then I'll tell you what, exercises. And if you don't want to do this, you can just sit quietly and wait.

Groups groups are three or four.

Yeah, the groups are too big, it doesn't work. So groups of three or four.

And I'll note, I know that you found your groups when you got them quiet.

Okay. Great, thank you. So the idea is to go around, clockwise, starting with someone, and each of you will speak on this particular topic I'll give you and, and that is don't speak for very long, just just enough to kind of make the point. And you might have enough time to go around once. Or if even better, if you can go around these five minutes, two times or three times around. Because as you hear other people, it might stimulate other new ideas for you then, rather than the usual things you might say, you might be surprised, but what comes out because you're influenced by what other people say. And so the topic is, could you share with your group some description of some act of kindness that you have received? It's it could be something small or big. It could be something today, it could be something long time ago. Just kind of share some act of kindness that was meaningful for you that you received.

Go, you can go yes, you can go

Welcome back to joy. kamma

Bhante I want time.

So great, well, that felt like happy room. And I hope it was nice to meet some other people here. And often people come here and they sit quietly don't have a chance. Hopefully that was nice. So that was introduction to wanting to give some words about gratitude. And gratitude is part of the wealth that a person can have Inner Wealth. And one of the great things that I discovered through this Buddhist practice I did was a set of different qualities of heart that I didn't really know about before I practiced, but God awakened in me. And the tradition itself considers these things a form of well, and that important, and one of the things is gratitude. And I think I wasn't really something I thought about

growing up. I mean, I'm sure I must have been grateful time to time and said thank you and things like that. But the idea that it could be an enduring, feeling, or vision, or way of being in the world, was something I'd never conceived of. And it crept up on me out of the meditation practice. And one of the reasons that I like to bow at the end of the sitting is as an expression of gratitude, and sometimes I do it out of habit, but that's where it has Genesis where I really like to do it. It was, there's something about meditation at the end of it, that I often feel very grateful. And it's a little bit hard to point to what I'm grateful to exactly. It just I try to say something, but just I'm just grateful to be breathing to be present. And but if you look and look little bit at what goes on in the in this that brings on this state of gratitude, identify it with is settling into a simplicity of being, where it just just being present, being breathing, being present, feels very simple, but very full, very whole, integrated presence, like everything that I need is here, in the quiet, quiet mind, still mind, my mind might still be thinking a little bit, but it's gotten quiet and, and that kind of spinning and wanting and afraid, and all the things that goes on. And if you look little bit at what gets in the way of gratitude, it's often things like you know, your activities of the mind that are active, that kind of don't make the room for gratitude to be there. So for example, if there's a lot of sense of fear, the attitude in relationship to the world is fear and anxiety, then there's not much room for gratitude. But fear is an activity of the mind. It's a doing. And it's not inherent to the mental, physical heartfelt system that we have, maybe we have an inherent capacity for it. But it's an activity to doing. And as the mind gets quieter, the tendency is to let the doings of the mind settle away. And so rather than needing to be stuck with something like fear, the fear quiets down as we sit sometimes. And so then there's room for other things. or there might be resentments. And resentments don't really make it possible to feel much gratitude.

But resentments also are an activity of the mind. And as those activities of the mind quiet down, then, you know, sort of for something else, the attitude that I don't have enough that we need to have more, more more stuff is usually goes, it doesn't really make much room for gratitude. They often say gratitude is to be grateful for what you have, not what you could have, and not what you want to be happy with what you have, not what you want, wants what you want. So there's a lot of wanting, and a lot of desire. That's also an activity of the mind. And even if you don't want to give up your desires, but you'd like to just get the quiet little bit, even have a vacation of your mind. And the mind gets quiet. Lo and behold, the activity of desiring will take a break. And you'll experience yourself in a different way. So there's a whole bunch of states of mind that quiet down. And the states of mind that tend to be a little bit more unwholesome, or unskillful, or agitating, or cluster phobic, tend to be the ones that are seem to be much more agitation with them. And so as the agitation of the mind quiets down, it's like, you know, it's a lot more room in their mind, there's so much more space. And one of the things that happens is that there's a greater sense of wholeness of being here in a complete way, in a self satisfying way. To feel that we are have this idea that I'm inadequate, I'm not whole, I'm alone, I'm lonely, all powerful feelings people have, I don't want to diminish that the role they have in people's lives. But they're also activities of the mind. If those feelings, they're not inherent in our hearts, or in the situation. And so many times we go around with his attitudes about who we are, and our inadequacies. And we kind of assume this is like, you know, built into our DNA or built into the structure of the universe that we are this way, it's like this a done deal. But we have to be thinking and cognizing and believing and there's a certain degree of mental activity going on, to have these ideas or I'm lonely, I'm insufficient and not getting enough. My life isn't good enough is challenged. Again, I don't want to diminish that those things exist. But they are still to live in them be concerned with them to be operating with them to be impacted by those isn't that there has to be an activity the mind the mind is busy. Having those thoughts telling ourselves these stories, recognizing this may be the case somehow it's possible without fixing those problems, it's possible to give your mind a vacation from them by not having to think about them. And this quieting of the thinking mind. And having the those those be the reference point those be the filter through which we see our lives is a wonderful break into what happens when the thoughts say to say that you have the thought that, Oh, I'm living an isolated life, and

no one likes me. Which was a thought I had before I meditated. So this is very familiar to me. That's the No, it's easy to have. And this happened to me when I started meditating. That the this kind of feeling of being isolated, and no one liked me and didn't really fit into the world very well. I, I thought meditation was going to help. And, but I thought it was gonna help him make me making people like me more. But instead, what happened to my surprise, is that in meditation, that problem that concern that ideation, that way of thinking about myself, kind of just dissolved, faded away, during meditation. And I had a feeling of integrity, that was the word I used back then, but a wholeness of feeling complete and settled, in this simplicity of being, without having those thoughts spinning around and telling me the story of you know, what was what, what, what's going on. And even if those stories are true, we're sometimes better off not telling them to ourselves, you know, it just feels good to kind of have a break a vacation from them, right? It's quite down. And then in that quieting of the mind, there's room for something else. And one of the things there's room for is, I would suggest more inherent feeling of wholeness, of completeness of just being settled and whole, nothing lacking, there's no very little sense of lack. Because a sense of lack, is turns out to be an activity of the mind. And activities of mind get quiet, then the feeling of lack goes away, in this remarkable, so you don't have to fix any of your problems.

Are some of them, you know, I mean, the psychological ones, they can kind of, you can quiet the mind, and then have a very different experience of yourself. And that different experience yourself isn't is a re education of ourselves, re education of our heart. And we start feeling very different about Oh, it's possible to be in the world this way. Wow. And so you might feel it in meditation. And for my early years of meditation, I was content with it being just a meditation didn't occur to me that that could be outside of meditation. And then one day, it dawned on me. Why am I picking up my neurosis right away? My meditation was over, I felt kind of settled and calm. And why why don't I just leave that up on the shelf for a while longer, rather than the automatic kind of reflects that kind of start it up again. And I learned that I could start my day and go through my day a little bit longer without, you know, putting on that, those thoughts again. So in this feeling of so the proposal here to you is that the feelings of lack the feelings of insufficiency, the feelings of resentment, the feelings of that desire, and wanting something different of expectation, all those things, all those things, our attitudes, feelings, desires, that help keep us separate or kept dividing our world between what we want when we don't want. And as those activities of mind quiet down, and there's no sense of lack, then the world doesn't become divided, we don't become divided. We don't become divided between the part of ourselves we don't like and the part of cells we do like and the war between them all quiets down, and what replaces it, which I think is what I what I think is more inherent, because it's not dependent on particular thoughts or ideations or situations. And that is a feeling of wholeness of completion, or subtleness, or peacefulness, or evenness, in this world. And when I started feeling this, it felt like a gift. And I kind of then I started feeling grateful. Wow, how did this happen? This is pretty nice. And then the idea of putting my hands together in this you know, gosh, not Anjali, and just kind of like just kind of acknowledging this Wow, what a gift. This is pretty cool, became kind of second nature for me to do. the mythology of Buddhism After the Buddha was enlightened, he spent seven days enjoying the bliss of his enlightenment sitting there under the tree he was enlightened under. And then the next seven days, he stood up and walked some paces away from the tree, turned around and stood for seven days, looking at the tree and gratitude, the tree had sheltered him or, you know, somehow their connection to nature, I don't know what it was. But this idea that, that coming out of some spiritual experience, there's a feeling of gratitude, as a consequence, I think is experienced with many people that were grateful. Gratitude is a very interesting emotion, attitude, feeling, the vision understanding that we have. Because gratitude doesn't cost us anything. You don't lose anything when you're grateful. generosity, which is a great thing to have to be generous, you kind of end up losing things, you feel generous, you give something to someone, and they have it, you don't have it anymore. But you want to be generous, you want to give it so it's not a problem. But still, you're without it. With gratitude, you're not giving anything away, you don't lose anything, is that

nice? There's no, there's no cost. The other thing about gratitude, is it's a secondary emotion or is a secondary pleasure. There's something nice that happens first, that's the first pleasure. And then we feel grateful. And it's a second pleasure. Isn't that pretty good, too, for the price of one. So this idea that gratitude doesn't cost you anything doesn't require anything of you. The exchange of wanting to say thank you to someone that belongs to a different department, then then the simple feeling of gratitude. It might be there might be an expectation socially, that you should take your gratitude and do something with it. And so you say thank you.

That's not the gratitude. That's the thanks. The gratitude is just something different. Don't be Don't, don't confuse the two. Because otherwise people feel the luck tend to feel grateful or feel obligated because of their gratitude, or they feel like it's a little bit too much. But gratitude is a very simple, that's a, it's just a kind of a pleasure built upon pleasure. It's a, it's a joy, a delight, the love appreciation of something that's feels good. Now, there's a lot of things we can be grateful in our life. And I don't know how true it is. I haven't done the statistical analysis, but whatever they survey, but many people have said that the more complicated society becomes, the more technology and the more are supported by an infinite network of other people who make everything run and work for us. Like in our society here, the less gratitude people tend to experience, whereas people who live very simple lives, very simple lives close to nature, where they had to grow their own food and take care of things. They're much more simply and they know that people around them are kind of doing their work and supporting them, if they need something, that tends to be much more gratitude. So it's a little bit of paradox, right? The more support we get from the infinite number of beings all around, the less gratitude we have, in fact, sometimes it's a feeling of entitlement, it should be this way. When I grew up, I grew up in Italy, and, and back in the 1960s, if you ordered the new phone for your house, like you moved in, you know, it took a while, you know, like, a couple of weeks for it to arrive. You know, what would you think about that you move to a new house here in Redwood City, and you call up the phone company in this? Oh, you'll get in a couple of weeks, and the internet maybe three weeks? I mean, so, you know, would you be grateful and finally came? You know, many of us would be angry?

No, but it's a miracle. You know, we live in miraculous times and miraculous situations. And so this idea that, you know, we don't avail ourselves of gratitude, you know, is easy to point to, you know, we we have expectations and some entitlement and important things to do and accomplish and get and, you know, all this. But as us gratitude a little bit for things. What I find remarkable about meditation, in my experience, is this idea of being just discovering a sense of gratitude, a sense of well being, that doesn't require it doesn't get anything from the world. It doesn't need anything from the world to be a certain way. And partly because all the sense of neediness has quieted down all the sense of entitlement, all the sense of fear has quieted down. And we just hear breathing, present feeling. And you might have the feeling that the idea that sitting quietly minding your own business breathing is not good enough, you should be out there doing something. However, that's an activity of the mind. And again, if you recognize it as a movement and agitation of the mind those thoughts, rather than believing them, or acting on them, it's a powerful thing, to put them to rest, to not be involved in them, let them quiet down, and you keep coming back, keep quieting down, keep keep putting down these thoughts that we have, that we're not good enough that it's not, you know, just we're not, we're not, we're not, not satisfying enough to be here. Then we dip down back into the field, the ocean of satisfaction, the ocean of kind of self satisfying sense of well, being just here, here. And then we have a thought that arises and says, you know, we see what's your thought, Let it go, let it dissolve back. And then another thought, you know, I have to, you know, have to get something, you know, they, they just came out with, here, they're coming out with a new you know, you can, you can fill in the blank. And I, you know, I need to get that new, new whatever. And you see that thought come up, and you feel a dissatisfaction with what device you already have. And, you know, and you Oh, you know, my life would be so much better

when I get that thing. And it'll be great. And fantastic. I remember when I was a little kid, really, really wanting a Christmas present particular present, really wanting it. And really, like there's just so important that was really into it. So I got it. And the next day I was bored and couldn't care less. So the anyway, so all these thoughts kind of come quieten down. So the question for you is, what are you left with, when you quiet your heart and mind down when you started quiet all the feelings of the Division of separation of so another another thing that's divides us and keeps gratitude for here is pride. conceit. Oddly enough emotions like shyness, which is a kind of a conceit. Again, it's a crazy, crazy separation, that I'm better than I'm worse. All these kind of creates separation, the sense of completion, integrity and wholeness that we settle into. And meditation doesn't stop with us here, but spreads out into the world. So sometimes people when they finished meditating can feel a sense of just the gratitude seems to permeate out into the world.

You know, the fact that there are these trees, that plants that produce oxygen for us, it's pretty cool. You know, it's pretty amazing that we, you know, that we exist, we didn't create ourselves. There were Think about that. You're not a self created being. In mythology, the idea there's self created beings that somehow spontaneously arise or something, but we're not that we're not self created. So your very existence is dependent on many, many things coming together and just working out just right. At the a lot of things have to line up pretty just exact to make that you're here. It's a miracle. It's pretty special. And so there can be some sense, it's possible, then that brings some gratitude, some appreciation, some delight, some love some something. So the idea of wholeness of connectedness can spread out beyond us. We don't put up divisions between me and other people, between my people and those people or between this country in that country or whatever. But kind of feeling the settled, quiet mind has space to hold it all. And now, it's not just gratitude, there's a whole there's a set of other virtues who well that can exist in that space. And another one is kindness and love, compassion, generosity. You know, there's this list that Buddhism has a long list of these kind of inner treasures that we carry with us. So maybe you haven't had the experience of meditation of the mind quiet, quieting down enough. But if it comes some time that you find your mind quieting down and all the usual ideations, concerns and processes are quieted down You might kind of take a peek under the hood or something or take a look and see how far away is gratitude. How far away is the feeling of some kind of wholeness or completion. And that's in that simplicity of being just here, nothing needs to happen. At the end, Eliot says some sites that said something like, maybe some of you can quote him better than I an experience of simplicity, that costs nothing less than everything. Somebody said, someone has, quote, better experiences, simplicity, that cost nothing less than everything. So everything that everything quiet down, not hold on, hold on to anything in your mind, and see what happens. And maybe gratitude can become a gift that you carry around with you. Because I think it's wonderful to, to kind of spread gratitude in this world. I asked a friend of mine, or my friend of mine that I was going to talk about gratitude today. And she said, Oh, there's all these clinical studies, that they explain how healthy it is to feel great grateful. So anyway, I hope that bringing this up today, you know, will kind of prompt you to reflect more on gratitude, and maybe recognize it more as you go on going through this week. So we have about 10 minutes, and anything that you would like to say about a little exercise we did or about this topic, or gratitude or questions, anything you'd like to bring up.

Can you pass this mic over?

So this is maybe a hard question. But what if you never get that hard? Hard? Hard? What if you never get that feeling? What if you don't feel like you ever calm down and get that feeling of gratitude? It seems like a lot of the Buddhist texts will always say, yeah, once you get there, that always happens. But, I mean, do people not get that feeling?

So just a very personal question for you?

No, no, I would say I wouldn't say that. I have felt that. But oh, I could see that a lot of people. I mean, I feel like I've had calm points, but I could easily see a lot of people have been like, I just haven't gotten that. And meditation.

Yeah, it's easy. It's easy to hear what Buddhist teachers say how they describe these things, and not not recognize it in themselves and identify themselves. So it's very important not to take these Buddhist teachers too seriously. You know, you know, it's just kind of, you know, you know, don't don't don't get don't get too caught up in what we say. And but the but, you know, as a number of things I could say, one is, I would ask that person, if you've been meditating for a while, what benefits have you received from meditation? And hopefully, if they've done it for a while, they there's been some benefits. And then I might say something like, is that a good thing? Do you appreciate that? Oh, yeah. I appreciate that. You know, could you imagine being thankful that you've had those benefits? Oh, yeah. So it might not have occurred to them. They don't have the customer thinking that way. But maybe through a little bit of reflection, as some questions you can come to that. Some people are very have a very strong faith, or trust in meditation, or their suffering is so great that they have to do something that they'll practice meditation for quite a while, but not feel a lot of the benefits of the mind, quieting down. And if that happens, then I would recommend the person go find a teacher to talk to, because sometimes, it's good to get instructions or advice, meditation advice, it's kind of tailor made for you. So that sometimes can help do that a satisfying enough answer?

Yeah, that's good. Thanks.

Okay. Move the mic the back of the room.

In little Sangha that I'm in down in watsonville, we did the Science of Happiness process. And one of the exercises that they suggested was to wake up every day and show some gratitude, think about gratitude. And I have that and it's delicious. And yet I feel like you're pointing to something a little bit different than that, that has to do with once we reach a different state of mind in our practice, and I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that. So if I understand Yes, I am pointing something different. There's gratitude for particular things that happen. So you can reflect about all the things you're grateful for. And like there's this journal practice now. Yeah, every day kind of write down five things you've been grateful for. And people makes a big difference for some people in their lives. You know, they write different things. What I'm pointing to is, it isn't great doesn't have the gratitude can arise, not because particular things happen. I'm really grateful for something. You know, in the world, we get something as it happens, but because the mind becomes so peaceful and self satisfied, that it kind of, it's part of this, that's a state of self satisfaction, comes together with a sense of gratitude. But it doesn't kind of does, you could say it's gratitude, grateful for that. But it doesn't really feel like it's grateful for anything in particular, just just grateful without an object. I think that's pretty delicious. This was a fabulous. So there's a pretty special, it's very special, when the mind quiets down, it doesn't mean that there's no thinking. But it means we're not caught up in the ruminations of the mind caught up in the, in the preoccupations of the mind. And there's a lot more room for these beautiful qualities to be there. Please,

I could see being having gratitude for so many things in the world, but, and I do. But I felt very uncomfortable during this exercise. And I'm glad I was number four instead of number one. Because what I found is that so many times in my life, when people give me kindness, I'm usually in a vulnerable position. And I feel almost reflexively, I almost have to give a thank you, or money or something along

that line. But when I don't, and I sit, and I think about it, I think the other people are doing it, just because we're all human, and we all have to get along. But I don't understand why I feel that way. So awkward. And so vulnerable. When people give me kindness, it's almost like, I'd rather not be in that situation.

I can understand that. That was very well said, Thank you. And that you understand yourself that way is a great thing. You know, that's you're in good hands if you have that kind of self understanding. And so I you know, I think I'd look more carefully look more deeply into what goes on there. And I take some risks and experiment and see what happens. I don't know what it is for you. But I know some people, they're afraid of intimacy, they're afraid of being open to other people, because it's scary. It's risky. And so when there's kindness, sometimes it kind of like, oh, oh, I've had bad things happen to me in the past, when I trusted someone, I don't know, if I can, it's okay to open up and take this in. And so then that's, that's important to take into account. And if something like that happens, and then and then it might be interesting to very slowly and small little baby steps. Try to take in people's kindness and, and relax with it. And start getting some street smarts about how to take it in. But without losing yourself in the process or without feeling like people you can feeling it you can protect yourself from people impinging too much. Just a small baby to experiment until you feel like you've developed some strength to be able to be self, self. You know, self care, self mastery, in a situation where people are being excessively kind.

bind you.

I listened to your talk online, I believe, from yesterday, and you discuss thoughts and thinking about thoughts. And I noticed something you said you said that we're not responsible for

our thoughts emerge from

Could you talk about I don't understand what that means. Exactly. What What does that mean?

So I said, Yeah, we gave a talk last morning about thinking. And one of things I said is that when when the mind gets quiet, to remarkable when the mic is quiet enough to watch the genesis of a thought the arising or thought the vanishing of thoughts and And thinking when and when you're in that quiet watch that, then thinking begins offline. And yeah, and so thinking arises, and thought can arise from this offline place, this kind of subconscious mind we have, and it just bubbles up. Now, you're not responsible in the sense that you don't have to identify yourself by it or believe it, or use that thought to define yourself in any way. You do have a responsibility to it. And in the sense that, or response ability to it. And that is you don't have to do anything with it. So you're not responsible for its arising, but you're responsible for what you do with it once it's arisen. So you can all kinds of the mind is kind of like, you know, I don't know about your minds, but your mind is probably, you know, more sane than mine. But my mind is capable of all kinds of unusual. I had a great father son thing when I was about 13. My father, you know, I don't know what he did. He took me side had a little talk with me or something. And he said to me, Gil, as you grow up, from time to time, you're going to have bizarre thoughts.

And he said to me, that's normal. Everyone has that. And so don't worry about it. So though, you know, retrospect, that's pretty remarkable. What was going on in his mind? And sure enough, sooner or later, I had unusual thoughts. Wow. That's, that's unusual. So the thoughts can arise. And, and, and we don't have to, we don't have to feel responsible for it. I'm not a bad person, because I had bad thoughts. I'm not a saint, because I had good thoughts. It's just a thought that arises. But then the question is, what do we do with it? So one of things I ended yesterday with, with a said, very important power that we

have is the veto power, that no thank you power. And that is a thought arises, and you don't have to go with it. You don't have to get involved and you don't have to believe it, you don't have to act on it, because it arises, it just a thought that arises. If it's useful, then you can be involved in it, pick it up and think about it. And one of the things that can come learn through meditation practice, is the ability to leave thoughts alone. And one of the great things about doing that is that that subconscious, we have, if it's relaxed, is wonderfully creative. So we learn not to pick up and get involved in thoughts, we actually have more access to a deeper places of creativity. That make more sense of it now, or it's just,

yes, I've always thought conceptual thinking is the supreme quality of being. But, you know, it also happens to be the root of all evil in Buddhism,

I'm very, I have very friendly attitude towards my thinking, I think thinking is pretty awesome, pretty amazing. You know, most of the things that we see in the world are a product of, you know, human world society, a product of people's thinking, and, and so I think thinking is pretty far out. But and, but we want to, it's good to honor it. And, you know, and put it up on the pedestal and you know, maybe it's insecure, so we kind of put it in pedestal. But but we don't have it's not the full story. It's only a piece of the piece of who we are. And so to not kind of live only in thoughts and only believe in the world of thoughts. But to have a bigger sense of worth more much more than our thoughts inside the psychophysical body. There's much more going on than just whatever what's capable through this higher level of thinking. And in fact, the higher level thinking is, works best when it's supported by the rest of who we are. So again to this idea of being settled and relaxed and becoming whole, so that the so much more can participate in our thinking. It becomes a you know, it becomes much more dynamic and interesting. But if we only live in our thoughts, we become top heavy if we only live in our thighs, it gets claustrophobic and tight and someone once said the epitome of the human human life is a traffic jam of discursive thinking. That makes more sense. Yes. Thank you. Thank you. Great so so. So I come out of meditation. I feel grateful for just sitting here and being here. But also so at the same time feel very grateful for the opportunity to meditate with other people. And to be together with people who are interested in same thing doing the same thing and, and so I'd like to end this evening with my expression of gratitude to all of you and for being here and practicing. It's a wonderful thing. I feel I feel supported or void by it. So thank you all.