

2016-07-18 Lessons From Gandhi

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Thank you. So Good evening, everyone. So Good evening, everyone. Welcome to IMC. And it's kind of special that we have this day along on Saturday with Lee bracing 10. He's one of the preeminent teachers in our lineage now because of his emphasis on teaching, concentration practice jhana practice. He's one of the early teachers, Western teachers who's kind of a specializing in teaching that. And he's a friend of IMC and lively man. So he's coming here to teach. He's very deeply steeped in the suttas, the Buddhist teachings, and he's going to give a teachings on describing the, the, the progressive path grew what's called the gradual path of practice that the Buddha taught. So, how's the sound? Is it good? This used to be To me, it's a little bit too loud, you want louder? So, okay. So okay, so.

So, for those of you who weren't here, last week, I gave a talk about the ease. And the tremendous value that ease has, as a teacher, that if you establish a modicum of ease, a sense of peace, calm well being. And then you notice what takes you away from that, that you'll learn a lot about yourself. And the idea of learning about how we lose our ease, we get anxious, we get caught in attachments, how we get resentful, we get afraid, how we get desirous. And one thing so much how we lose our mindfulness is a very important thing to understand. Because the more you understand about how you get caught, the less you'll get caught. If you don't see it and understand it, then it's easy to get swept away. So that reference point of having some ease, not that you have to be at ease all the time. But that reference point is a powerful teacher. And it's nice to be able to live more at ease. And it's a nice to question the things that cause you to lose your ease. And to maybe not believe in that you need to lose it at all. So I think this teaching is a very important kind of teaching. But to put it in little bit of context, this kind of teaching is that it's very easy to think that this is a wonderful teaching for affluent people, that somehow emphasizing ease, just be at ease. Everything's good. Take it easy, then affluent people could just continue to live in their affluent world as if everything's okay. And they don't have to be concerned about anything else, just liberties. And I think that the what I was trying to point to is actually the opposite. There, I hope I hope that in and what we teach in teaching Buddhism, we teach the opposite. And that is we can learn a capacity of being at ease that keeps us open and undefensable, open and unblocked unresisting, to seeing what's in the world for really what it is. And then as we see what's in the world, we don't rest back on our heels. So we don't have to do anything eatable inaction economic complacency. But rather, that sense of ease has helped and freedom has helped free us from our fear and our laziness. Help free us for the things that keep us from stepping forward, to respond to the suffering of the world, if that's what we're encountering. So there's a kind of the ease I'm talking about is a kind of openness, that lets us experience the world and see the world and we maintain our ease, even though it might break our hearts. And also, it makes it easy, makes it freer to respond and to act accordingly. And to do something for the world to make a difference. And you know, I've kind of devoted my life, my adult life to doing Buddhist practice. And my initial call to engage in Buddhism was during the time of

the Vietnam War. So it's a long time ago now for many people. Here, but it was a time of a lot of turmoil in this country. And I was of the draftable age. And in fact, I was up for the draft, one of the last straws they had, that was kind of, you know, in the lottery for the draft. And so the idea of being drafted to go to war was very current among men in my generation, my age. And so having to really confront what it meant to be drafted be sent to war, especially with some of us into a war we didn't believe in, sent to a war, we didn't believe we didn't believe in war, I didn't believe in war, I didn't wasn't going to participate was something that we were intensely engaged in reflecting thinking about soul searching about. And I was a committed to, to not fight to not kill, that had almost I didn't know wasn't religious back then, but almost a religious orientation towards non violence.

And so, certainly was thinking about how if I was drafted, what my alternatives were, and, but as it was, in my year, I think they, I don't remember how many anyway, I was far down the list of lottery, they didn't draft many, they didn't take by many people from the draft that year. And then I think maybe next year, there was no draft or they took even fewer. And, but the point was, I was, you know, intensely engaged, this reflection about this. And my interest, my initial interest in Buddhism was not for my sense of ease or my own suffering, but I was looking for a way to respond, to be able to respond to the issues of war and violence in our society. And I was casting about and looking for many different approaches and ways of responding to the suffering of our world. And one of the things that bothered me a lot was that if I was going to follow through on my commitment to non violence, action, non violent civil disobedience, because I didn't feel like non violent, non violent violence doesn't mean you don't put yourself you know, put your life on in at risk, because you still, you know, fight, struggle against injustice. But I was very acutely aware of that, I was afraid of dying, I was afraid of standing there, in line with the police facing us back then they were, you know, we had Kent State and I was a college student in college students were being killed, he shot here in San Francisco State, there was, you know, in all over, you know, there was the police and National Guard were brought on to the campuses, there was a you know, as a tense time. And students were dying, many people were dying. And so I felt this fear, and it bothered me, I felt that there was a difference between my ideals, and what I was able to live. And I wanted to find a way to be able to live my ideals, and not have my inner limitations, limit me from living the way I felt I wanted to live. And that became a very important quest of mine was to find, you know, how can I bring these into harmony, my ideal and my inner life. And somehow I hit upon Buddhism as offering a practice that would help me to somehow deal with this fear that I had somehow helped me to overcome it. And that was my beginning my entry point into Buddhism. And when I decided to take that turn, you know, to practice many years ago, I decided to take this turn towards eventually teaching and that kind of doing here. It was very much inspired, not by helping affluent people be more comfortable in their affluence. And, but in have someone so someone is here yesterday, that I'm seeing and seemed like a wonderful group of professors, I believe, from the Midwest, who had gotten a grant to come to Silicon Valley and go visit a number of these big corporates like Google and LinkedIn as people to study innovation. And they were from different religious fields like there was a person from religious studies person from sociology, from economics. Came here. And they said, Rick came here because you're part of the Silicon Valley. So somehow we we had we rated You know, you're gonna study innovation in Silicon Valley, you come to IMC. So that was kind of nice. And then we had a little conversation about, you know, what the innovation and about, you know, especially a secular mindfulness that's kind of in many places and all that. And, and, and we know what I thought about it. And I thought it was great. I think the secular mindfulness movement and bring mindfulness corporations is all good. It's all great. And I know we teach mindfulness here, too. It's all good.

However, in our, in our Buddhist teaching mindfulness in a Buddhist guys in the Buddhist context, I'm hoping and mindfulness is also subversive because and what it's subversive for is for forces of greed, hate and delusion. And that's kind of vague enough that everyone nods their head, is when you get to the details, that's when it gets interesting, right. But still, greed, hate and delusion is underpinned so

much of what's problematic in our world. And if people are not driven by greed, or not driven, driven by hate, or driven by delusion, I think that things will change radically. And I hope that the degree to which our society or corporate economic side is has underpinnings of greed, hate and delusion, I really hope that we address that. And that there's a sub penis, you know, healthfully subversive approach to what we do here. If we have, that's what's going on. And so, the idea that what we do here at IMC, and maybe not so explicit, often, but is actually a response to suffering of the world. And I've kind of I teach Buddhism and I trained Buddhism, I don't say this explicitly. But I do have a one of the motivations for doing this. Because I believe that people who practice Buddhism, sooner or later, will live in such a way to better the world around them, that we heal ourselves. And then we want to heal the world. And so some people, it's in small ways, it's to, you know, their family and places of work, or, you know, it's wherever we're called to do it. Some people, their bigger places, there's no judgement and where it should, where it should be. But I really hope that what we're doing here is, supports the world as a whole, and helps her to heal and get better. And one of the ways in the current climate or any climate, is to help people understand themselves deeply, so that they can stay at ease, so they don't get alarmed, they don't get afraid, they don't get angry, they don't get lost in their, in their blaming of everybody else. But rather, they're able to kind of really see how their mind operates. So their mind can stay clear, the heart can stay open, so we can really see what's happening. And then from the best parts of ourselves, and turn to the world and find a response. One of my big inspirations when I was young, when I was doing all this searching and thinking about non violence was Mahatma Gandhi. And I think that we could never study him enough. I think he's a great example of what can be done. And but he's at one example of many examples of people who've read people and peoples who responded to the challenges of human life with in nonviolent ways. There was a book published by University of Columbia press about five years ago. Study by some professors on nonviolent civil disobedience, nonviolent resistance. And they made the claim that in, in doing kind of revolutionary change in societies, that the movements that have been nonviolent are twice as effective as the ones that had been violent. And they have better results in the long term. There's they think they intend to create more democratic societies as a result. So I haven't read actually the book, so I can't tell you exactly what's in it. But But I thought that was kind of fascinating, you know, statistics twice as effective, whereas many people's instinct is to go for violence. For guns, more guns, you know, more bombing something. And we certainly have a little a lot of wonderful examples of home movements, or countries that have been turned over. From sometimes dictatorial government to authoritarian government to democracy. One of them in recent years was the Philippines. And millions and millions of people came to the street and President Marcos fled the country. The Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia is another example of one of the more beautiful things back in the late 90s, beautiful, late 80s transformations of a country where people rose in the streets. And we have kind of a mixed mess, mixed mixed message now in Turkey, over this in the last days, where a coup was, seemed seemingly came to an end, because the people came into the streets and face to face the good leaders. And but then maybe that would they maybe it looks like maybe that was protecting, taking that movements been taken advantage of now, and other ways.

So it's kind of a mixed thing, perhaps. So one of the things that inspires me about Mahatma Gandhi was his dedication to truth. And as I understand what he had to teach, the, he seems to say that no individual could really know the truth by him or herself. But that truth was discovered, together with other people, you had to be in dialogue to find out what was really true. And that's why he said, You have to be in dialogue, to your pub with your opponents. And because together you'll find the truth. But if you you know, if you think you have the only truth, then it's not probably not the full picture. And he said that if you want your opponent to listen to you, you have to be willing to listen to them. And this idea, that of reciprocity, of being reciprocal relationship with the people that you're opposed to, I think, was central to what Gandhi was doing. I think he was always ready to talk to the English when they were trying to end the English rule of India. And I don't know if he was the Gandhi was a first but

certainly, he's one of the more strongest proponents of not being opposed to people only to the actions of people. So that somehow we can stay in dialogue, stay in communication. And so the channels can be open. So that so that some kind of change can happen in both directions in all directions.

And I think this whole idea is very important. Because I don't think that peace is the absence of conflict. I think conflict, we're always going to have conflict, always have difference of opinions are always going to have challenges between people. But so peace is not the absence of conflict. But peace has to do with a lot to do with the way in which we resolve the conflicts, the ways in which we approach and meet them, and try to work it out.

So here's a quote by Gandhi. nonviolent resistance avoids not only external physical violence, but also internal violence of spirit. The non violent resist or not only refuses to shoot his opponent, but also refuses to hate him or her. So the idea that the care goes in both directions, we don't want to do violence to ourselves, by hating. We don't want to do violence to others by hating them. And this idea that I think this is one of the consequences of this deep inner ease, that can come from Buddhist practice, is that we can feel can have a real visceral experience of knowing a feeling of how we create internal violence in ourselves. If we get caught up in some of these strong inner afflictive emotions, hate, strong fear, hysteria. They're so easy to fall into, and then to learn the but not to know that and then learn how to practice without new work with it. I don't think that it's realistic to assume that you're never going to have any hate again, Never be afraid again, never have any lust again, greed, hate and delusion again. That's the promise of Buddhism. But probably it's more realistic to live as if that's part of the deal. And being human being just like is part of the deal to live in a world of conflict. But we can learn, to see it clearly enough, to not get caught in it, to meet it with compassion, with kindness, and more importantly, immediate with, with freedom, so that these forces inside of us can grow up can occur, but we don't succumb to them, we can have a practice to work with them, and see them through to the other side. So here's a few Gandhi quotes. You must not not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean. If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty. Don't lose faith in humanity. I suppose leadership, at one time, meant muscles. But today, it means getting along with people. That's great. getting along with people, that's leadership. The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems. The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems. So what are we capable of doing? And what are you capable of doing? I think that when we encounter the kind of terrible events in the world that we're experiencing the world these days, or at least what we're reading in the medium, I don't know how if it's more terrible than other times. There's a tendency and Buddha and Buddhist teachings, when there's terrible things happening the world to kind of say, you know, it's been going on forever, is not new. I don't know, we know whether it's more or less than it is now. I had a you know, I grew up in the shadow of World War Two. And when I was growing up, you know, my grandfather spent time in German prison camp. He was very proud of his time being a German prisoner, because he was sent out to a work crew to build roads, build a road in Norway, and he was very proud it was the set he claimed that it was the road that there was built the slowest in human history.

And, and he and he was there because he was had some connection with the Norwegian resistance. My father and lost us survived the concentration camps, lost most of his family in the camps. So I grew up in the shadow of war that my my, you know, my mother barely survived World War Two. Because of Chaparral explosion, German ammunition ship exploded in the Harbor Town. And big piece of the ship landed on our pillow through the window, just after she got up out of bed. So you know, stories of like I grew up with so you know, it was pretty awful. But it's bad enough as it's plenty bad enough these last weeks 250 people killed the suicide bomb in Baghdad. killings in Bangladesh and in France, the United

States we have the killings going on around here. And in this in reading these things, and learning about them. The difference difference, the difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing which suffice to solve most of the world's problems. But I think that the big beginning is, what we can do, what I can do, what you can do that if we are Only kind of are a witness to the problems or for the society. And spouting our opinions and the blame and what people should do and what they should do, and what's wrong with it, then I think we succumb maybe too easily to living in fear and anger and despair and kind of hopelessness. But I think that if if you know, each person in their own way, if we're moved, if we're really, really affected by what we experienced around us, if you're affected by it, then I think the I hope the call would be to respond in some way. And it could be in the smallest way possible. I you know, I read the news and for decades and have my heart broken regularly, what goes on in the world. And I don't think that I could go in to Bangladesh and try to do something there. I don't think I could go to Baghdad, and you know, I'm this all you know, I'm like, I can't not capable of responding to all these things, right. But one of the things I try to do, I'm motivated by to make a difference. So what I tried to do, is to try to be a better Buddhist teacher, because I feel that Buddhism, trusts Buddhist practice is trying to help people suffer less here help kind of diminish the forces of greed and hate here in this society. And I hope that that spreads from here. So I tried it. So I kind of channel that energy into responding in this situation here. Whether that's the wisest choice I can make, I don't know. But it's the one I've made. And so hopefully, I'm doing a good enough job overall. And they tried to make a difference that way. I love this quote, I do not want to foresee the future. I am concerned with taking care of the present. God has given me no control over the moment following it's kind of remarkable for someone who's trying to free India from the English. Just living in the presence. If we could change ourselves, the tendency in the world would also change as a person changes his or her own nature. So does the attitude of the world change towards the person. As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world. That is the myth of the Atomic Age. As in being able to remake ourselves. Gandhi repeatedly focused back on himself on us as individuals and practicing here taking care of here. And I think his effectiveness stemmed from the fact that he was so focused on some kind of present moment practice here with his own peace, his own ease his own attention to not hating, coming from love coming from generosity coming from a willingness to meet everyone equally. remarkable, remarkable dedication.

There's a story that appears if I read a few different places that he was asked once how it could be so effective, because apparently he worked 15 hours a day, seven days a week. And his answer was, I'm always at rest. So he didn't need to rest, I think is the idea. So the idea there is back to this in his the word rest at the idea of ease, learning how to stay in our ease, not get seduced into forces of despair or anger or fear. But but to stay upright and open and peaceful. But not but but not by shutting out shutting out things by staying open.

Nobody can hurt me without my permission. That's a powerful statement. Challenging once one of those great colons to live with for the full width for a while and see how that works for you. Nobody can hurt me without my permission.

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors, and to retrace my steps. It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might air.

Always aim at complete harmony, of thought, and word and deed. always aim at purifying your thoughts and everything will be well. Can I remark on is also remarkable Harry, this great man who was involved in political revolution, changing a whole nation up against one of the strongest countries at the time,

and is always aim to complete harmony of thought where it indeed requires mindfulness hear for yourself, don't lose touch with yourself, stay attentive and present. Watch your thoughts, watch your deeds. Watch what you say. And keep it clean, keep it pure, keep it peaceful, or keep it loving or keep it open, keep it keep mindful. always aim at purifying your thoughts, and everything will be well. That's a remarkable teaching of hope or possibility or something that everything will be well, if it begins here and yourself, purify your thoughts and everything will be well, how could that be? That How could that be? in the world, you know, burning? And I'm supposed to focus on my, what I'm thinking and everything can be well? Why would he say that? How does that work? It's a similar kind of teaching statement to the idea that you use your ease as your teacher. If you're able to stay close to your ease, they stay close to your piece. And don't succumb to the forces of unease, the forces of of agitation or even violence. Everything will be well. In what way will everything be? Well? What does that mean?

So I believe that if we really want to find a way to live in a world with so many challenges, as we have if we want to find a way to really find a sense of peace, or to find a sense of purpose, a sense of hope, that the only way to find it, is through our own actions. If you're expecting someone else to be the answer, then I think you will also come to despair, over and over again. But if you have faith in your ability to, to make a difference, even if it's a smallest difference, but that you like you, you can do something that you do count, you do make a difference for your neighbors, places of work for your local communities, for wherever it is that you can make a difference. If you know that's the fact and have the experience of that being the fact then you can have confidence in yourself, you have confidence difference you make. And you might not be enough to stop wars around the world. But it does make a difference. And then you want to come to the same level of despair and hopelessness that you succumb to if you have no experience of making a difference. No experience and making a difference in the world. If you don't have any if you don't feel like you have any efficacy, it's much easier to succumb to deep discouragement and such things. And perhaps making a difference in the world. Your response can begin by finding ease by finding peace by finding ability to stay in a healthy wonderful way balanced And in that place, then, and from that place, stepping into the world, and making a difference. And perhaps the biggest difference you can make is not what you do. But by the fact that you did it peacefully. Maybe it's contagious. Maybe other people see more how you are, then what you do. And they see Wow, to be that way, that's quite something I'd like to be, I'd like to be like that, more than I want to be able to do with that purchase doing. So maybe your ease is your gift. So those are my thoughts in response to what's been going on in the world. And we record these talks, so maybe just every six months, we'll just replay it.

This is probably going to be you know, relevant again, and again and again. So do you have any comments you'd like to make? We have about five, six minutes. Any comments or questions?

Thank you, Gil. Last week, you talked about what draws us away from our ease, and that perhaps, it's due to a lack of confidence. And that confidence comes from doing but what if, what if the thing that that draws you away from your ease has more to do with say, your inner life like, you know, an irrational fear, like a fear, say, a fear of being left behind or, or some other fear, that's more just an internal way of thinking. So how, how does one, develop a sense of confidence in that, in that context, that seems to have less to do with doing

and I don't see it so different from the world outside in the world inside. So there's many, many ways in which you can do something about the inner world. So if you're afraid, you can take small steps to make a difference, to support yourself to heal yourself to work on that. And in the mindfulness practice, one of the one of the ways to do that is to turn towards your fear. And study, it turns towards the fear and help your fear, feel safe. And so if you can turn towards your fear and see it, to see it, and not be

caught by it, step away from it in a sense, and look back at it with a gate and gaze appointed with compassion, and have a different relationship to it. That's and have confidence, that being mindful is effective. It makes a difference, then you start shifting the balance from fear to confidence. That makes sense. So that's done in small steps. It's not like overnight, you suddenly can do it. But this little, this little slogan that can be helpful, that you want to look upon your fear. So your fear feels safe. So you're not making it a problem. You're not trying to attack it or trying to fix it because then it doesn't feel safe. But if you can hold it in and then you can feel certain inner strength that comes that you can just hold it and be with it at that company and then something begins to thaw. They find you there

are other things that we can do for friends who are searching for ease or who have been experiencing a lot of anxiety or issues with self confidence lately.

I think that one of the first approaches off always is to help them feel understood. Listen to them, the company may then be with them. Don't be in a hurry to fix them because most people what they most wants to be understood and to be seen. And, and, but if you can do if you're not alarmed if you're not kind of trying to fix them because you're uncomfortable, and they see oh is this person sitting next to me is that she's comfortable with me being uncomfortable. Maybe I can relax. That's the beginning.

The end with I'll end with this that I've been now for, I guess, 15 years on. On an ethics committee, we deal with ethical challenges in a community, conflict in the community. And that the thing that I've seen most often that makes a difference is when everyone involved, feels understood. And if everyone feels understood, then generally things start moving and opening up. And then it's possible to look for what's the what's the greatest good for everyone, with benefits everyone in that conflict, rather than, you know, first and foremost, and looking at, you know, who's right and who's wrong or who's bad, who's right or something, but what is it that we can do to make everyone become better people and grow and have everyone heal. And generally, when there's conflict, I've seen that there's a lot of suffering in all directions. And so to kind of find a way to listen, to hear to have people be understood, to be understood, to be listened to, to be understood, and to be respected, are the really powerful forces of healing for everyone in our society. So to offer that to our friends, to listen to understand and to respect this means you have to agree. Okay, so I hope that this talk was okay. It was partly my attempt to speak about in response to what's happening in our world, and I hope it makes some difference for you. Thank you.