

2016-09-04 Kindness And The Ecology of Clinging

Fri, 9/25 6:54PM • 37:59

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

clinging, people, kindness, stories, zen, heart, pleasure, buddhism, sensual pleasure, ethics, religious practices, world, life, meditation, comfort, suffering, attached, person, wisdom, practicing

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

There is a foundational book teaching book and zen, called the Platform Sutra. And it's attributed to the six patriarch of six, teacher and visit lineage of Zen in China, who kind of from him that told Zen tradition and China's exploded into Chinese. And they had this book called The platform sutra. And in there, there's a lot of teaching, which is kind of profound, I think, are interesting. And that is very simple. And in various ways. It says that wisdom and meditation are the same. Don't think that wisdom meditation are different. They're one in the same. So there's kind of equality. So when you practice meditation, you're practicing wisdom, you're practicing wisdom, you're practicing meditation. That's how it's translated into English. So once upon a time, I mean, really, I, I looked at the Chinese text, to see what it actually says for itself. And it turns out, it doesn't say that wisdom and meditation are the same. Because the word, the actual character there that translators wisdom, is the character for kindness. And so it says, wisdom and kindness, and wisdom and a kindness and meditation are the same. Don't think that kindness, meditation are different. There's the one in the same. If you're really practicing meditation, there should be an element of kindness in it. And kindness is, I think of as a form of love. That is, doesn't involve personal desires, something wanting ourselves not about the transactional love, where we love someone and want something return. It's just kind of very generous spirit of the heart that loves without anything, eating anything back, just a genuine simple kindness.

So I thought that was pretty cool to see that kindness meditation are the same. So then I went to my, one of my professors of Zen, who knows, you know, these texts very well, experts in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, and Zen Buddhism, and, and the language, the characters and all that. And I said, Look, what I found that English translations say, wisdom and meditation, but the Chinese actually says, kindness and meditation. And he said, all the word for kindness, the character, and the love, and the character for wisdom, are Han homonyms. They're have the same pronunciation and Chinese. And so and the characters kind of look the same. So he just said, Oh, it's a scribal error.

Do you think? Maybe there was an error? But Which way did it go? Did it start with kindness that was the original, start with wisdom, what was it? So this idea of kindness, maybe being foundational, maybe kindness is the highest expression of wisdom, that kindness towards oneself, kindness to others, kindness to the world, is to help create benefit, the best highest benefit for everyone, how to care for ourselves and others. And one of the primary ways to benefit self and others to care is to help alleviate suffering. That all the different variations of, of Buddhism we call suffering, whether it's mild, you know, irritation and stress, or whether it's 10, the major of big issues of suffering in our lives, sickness, elevation, death and tragedy of all kinds. That to live a life of kindness is not just simply to be sweet, the

nice to round some but but rather to be have a life where they're coming out of your heart is a general, you know, is a a movement of love, of caring of generosity, to oneself and others, where we the heart's desire is to consider the what's best for everyone involved, what's best for the world and what they support and help. very different than, you know, does. operating from it's all about me I want what I supposed to get are my people, yourself or my people, my family, whatever. But to actually have a heart that's open, full, and has space for generosity to come. And I kind of believe it's an article of faith because I can't give you the scientific, clinical proofs for this. That our heart which is deeply settled on itself, relaxed, not attached to things, we see the open present for the world and others. contented deep way, satisfy certain kind of deep. Why satisfaction, just hear that the expression of that heart is takes the form of generosity takes the form of, of kindness, as kindness, being a form of generosity takes the form of love. And that love is one of the primary treasures of human life of the human heart. And maybe love takes many different shapes and forms depending on the person. So I kind of like the word, use the word kindness, if we're generous to the word, if we don't see kindness as being kind of like, you know, just kind of superficial. But see, kindness may be as a word like love, but more people can find themselves in with the word love, you know, it's such a powerful word. And maybe, but kindness also is very simple and straightforward. So this idea that we can have a heart that is at peace of mind, which is at ease, that we can go into any circumstance, any situation we've tragedy we find ourselves in, and be able to somehow keep the heart open, keep the heart calm, settled, so that the best qualities can come from it. So we're not afraid, we're not angry, we're not contracted, we're not so pulled, pulled in or controlled, contract it around our pain or suffering, or what's what's painful, that those areas of kindness Don't, don't flow.

And so in the, in the Buddhist tradition, one of the primary form aspects of this practice that we do is to not necessarily go directly to understand how to be kind, how to be loving how to be at peace, but to really understand realistically, and honestly, how we're not what gets in the way, what's actually going on. There's a, your wisdom becomes very practical, if you understand how you cover over your good heart, how you get caught up how you get attached. And so Buddhism has a lot of teachings about how you get caught, how you get, you know, the heart gets covered over your freedom, awakening gets covered, the word hindrances literally means a covering in the ancient language to cover over. And some people feel like maybe sometimes the Buddhism is kind of like, I don't know, a dour religion, because of how often it talks about not clinging and overcoming the obstacles we have. But I think it's the opposite. It's like it's, it's really understands the tremendous potential of the heart to be free to be loving, to be kind to be open. And it wants us to be able to access it realistically. And in situations where it's often very challenging to do it. And so we want to understand how it's difficult for us how we pull away from that how we close down to it, we lose it, how we get it. And the and just like we use the word in Buddhism, suffering is a kind of universal word, universal word, for all the ways in which we get caught and then it hurts. The Universal word for the for the category word for all the ways that we get covered over good heart gets covered over is the word clinging. And clinging takes many, many different forms. It's not just like one thing just to cling, but all the ways we get attached that we get obsessive, we get compulsive we get somehow caught, our buttons get pushed, you know, all kinds of ways of maybe saying the same thing. And one of the I think, nutshell kind of explanations of Buddhism, the heart of it is the little saying that, if you cling, you will suffer. And if you let go of that clinging, the suffer that suffering will go away. The first half if you cling you will suffer Well, maybe some of you will recognize it. Oh, yeah, that's right. There are times where I cling and it hurts, it's difficult to make my life harder. And it's a drag. No, that's the way it is. Thank you for telling me. The second half is the good news. If you let go of that clinging, then that suffering will also go away or fade away. And that's the good news, it's possible to become free. And some people are not very satisfied with the religious goal that just the end of suffering, the end of clinging, because it's not, you know, it's, you know, your neighbors down the street, they have much grander, spiritual goals, and they commune with the absolute, you know, they have oneness with God, they, they, you know, all kinds of great things,

they talk about it. And they say, oh, how about you? What are you up into? What are you up to? I mean, to the, you know, you know, not clinging? And they kind of Oh, okay, well, it doesn't seem like it's so grand. But in fact, I think it's one of the grandest things, the consequences of not clinging, because clinging is so and so. So what's the word, you know, pervasive in the heart, so deep rooted, that to really do the deep work to free yourself of that provides some of the most sublime and wonderful states of mind and states of heart possible. And more importantly, it clearly gives freedom to the heart to some of the best qualities of heart to have that have a chance to come surface and to be there. So clinging, so part of the task of Buddhist is to understand clinging, to understand how we cling what we cling to, and, and so, the whole so part of Buddhist teachings is to understand the ecology of the mind, the human mind, or focus on there.

And so there's a list of four species of clinging, that, you know, are kind of in there, usually, maybe they're kind of sometimes they're considered visitors. So we can call them like an invasive species, invasive species, you know, because they don't really, you know, part of the native territory at the heart, but and so, sometimes you introduce kind of invasive species that kind of messes things up and then ecology. So, the these for invasive species are clinging to essential pleasure to comfort, clinging to views, opinions, to stories, clinging to, to self, self identity, self definition. And then clinging to what's usually translated as a rites and rituals. And we can understand maybe is clinging to all kinds of religious practices. So the first one clinging to sensual pleasure, sometimes when it's presented, presented that way, it's people hear it and say, oh, that means like, you know, that means like, people who are, you know, have a big problem with, with, you know, maybe alcohol or sex or, or, you know, these are people who are addicts are kind of the most extreme people doesn't relate to me. But in fact, most human life and actually, in Buddhism, human life is kind of defined as a life connected to sensual pleasure, to pleasure or to comfort. And if you study yourself, honestly, through the day, through the week, how many decisions you make, that are based on your comfort and your pleasure, and avoiding unpleasantness and discomfort, you probably find that it's pervasive, like you're making choices all the time. And some of them many of them probably are innocent, and no one's saying you shouldn't do that. But it can be surprising, how much it drives a person's life. You know, the food you buy T by T the way you cook what you do, how much time do you spend, how much money do you spend? How much effort do you make, to have to do something which is more than what you basically need for your sustenance, but you do it because you want more pleasure. You know, some of you have cars and, and you know, there's a certain degree of pleasure and comfort in having a nice car, whatever that is. And probably my suspect suspect most of you could downsize your cars, the most of you. And if you have a car and get perfectly get along just really well to getting getting to work as transportation, and, and just, you know, car that cost less, get a nice little use car, sell your car, and, and give your extra money to charity, the world could use it. But oh, but get them but you know, but you know, there's certain degree of pleasure and comfort, and the light and status, all kinds of things that come along with the car. And so we make choices, you know, and then when people calculate, well, I deserve it. I remember, the first time I went every went to a car dealership, to test drive a car. And I think it was a little Honda Civic. And the and the dealer who was, you know, at the gave me a test drive. As we were driving around, he started talking to me about getting an air conditioner for that car. And he said, he said to me, You deserve an air conditioner. You deserve it. It wasn't like it's practical, you'll feel comfortable. You'll get older someday and you know, and temperatures more severe, more sensitive to it. You know, it's like, No, you deserve it. So this is the justification for pleasure. So if you look, and it's not supposed to be a bad news that you're looking at, you know, make an inventory of all the choices you make that have to do with pleasure and comfort. It's not a criticism.

But I think it's very interesting to become aware of it. Because once you become aware of it, then you can kind of assess is there then in some of it, 10% of it. 2% of it 99% of it. clinging, craving, you know, how much freedom do you have in those decisions? Are you caught in the grip of it? And you feel kind

of it's just challenging that you're not to have it you have to have it? And so to understand why, what's the beliefs? What's the emotions, what's going on for you? How much are you driven by the desire for pleasure, for comfort. And dripping is a powerful word. Because driven means that you have no choice is going to acting on compulsion. And what Buddhism is looking for is an undriven life, an uncompetitive life and a life that has no obsession to it, where we certainly engage in the world. But, you know, we're not being driven, we're driving, you know, we're asked for the freedom to choose and to follow our way. So to look at sensual pleasure, and if you look beyond your life, perhaps you can see that there's a tremendous amount of harm that gets done in our world, by people who are pursuing sensual pleasure and, you know, pleasure, comfort and all kinds. And then, both for themselves, like people who have issues with addiction, but also the excessive consumption of things out of pleasure, that requires tremendous environment, environmental damage, to acquire those things, to make those things to transport those things. And some of those some of the things that some of the things we can go so casually and innocently go down to a local market or store to buy or correcting creating economic havoc for people in some parts of the world, where people have, you know, horrible conditions and where they're, you know, their life is getting worse and worse. Rather than better, as we've gone by simple thing. So, that's that's one clinging clinging to sensual pleasure. The second clinging is to opinions to the classic word is views, but opinions, stories, philosophies, opinions, and I like the word stories, because, you know, many people don't want to admit they have us, you know, philosophical views. And, but a lot of people have stories that they're holding on to stories about who said what, to who stories, perspectives about different people, perspectives, stories about themselves, what happened to them what they want to see happen, what's all about? And we have we live in a world of story making, of, of beliefs, of views of ideas of what is and isn't in what should be. And very few people I think, recognize how attached they are to their own views and stories. So sometimes if you do if you spend a little At a time studying other people, and it's often a lot easier to see why after those four, they're really stuck in their views. You know, can't believe it. And, you know, and, and sometimes it's abused about themselves, like, people want to shake them, you know, and say, No, you're not such a terrible person, peoples have sometimes a very negative feeling about themselves and feel that they're there, though, who know, they don't want to really admit to other people what's really going on, because they feel like they're already wrong, and somehow bad and unworthy. And it's a story, it's an idea that they have. And some of these ideas are very, very deeply ingrained, or, you know, in our system, sometimes they come from our society, messages from society, that you're such a person, and you're that kind of person, and you're unworthy or not wanted or you're somehow special. And you're wonderful. A bit epidemic, I think more around here, probably then, maybe other places in the world, but the whole movement to raise children who had high self esteem. And so they got all this positive reinforcement, at its least people now, the psychologists in our writing, that it was a disaster. And they kind of grew up and expected that everything's gonna be given to them, they deserve it. And so now people are thinking, Mommy, no, maybe we should not raise kids with high self esteem. And that's it. And that's kind of the Buddhist point of view, you know, is you don't raise people with high self esteem as much equally, you don't raise people with low self esteem. You don't base them on any self.

Or set not any self, but any kind of, you know, philosophy and ideas about who they are and who they are in comparison to others. But rather, you help people to live an engaged, full, kind, peaceful, maybe passionate life, engaged life. But they don't, you don't need to kind of put this on a veneer of either self worth, or lack of self worth. Maybe maybe Buddhists end up if you're looking like they have self esteem, self worth, because they're engaged, but they don't think of them that's out then tell us that way. If they just are here, responding, dealing, doing what has to happen. So the story is, what stories do you live under? As you go through the week? To look at? What are the beliefs where what are the things that you are believing are true in this situation to put yourself through, but others? And then some of those things probably are true. But how do you relate to those truths? How do you relate to those stories?

How do you relate to the memories, and as as I'm fond of saying, every once in a while I have a grudge against someone. And I have learned that Mike Rogers are usually not reliable. That there's a story and idea that I'm holding on to that, you know, somehow, my little mind, I've kind of kind of got little wrapped around. And so what I've learned, I've learned that because I make a habit, whenever, whenever often whenever grudge is to go find the person and be in their presence and talk to them. And as soon as I'm in their presence, the story that I've been living under doesn't have much, you know, much power anymore money, much legs, kind of like, you know, I can't help I can't sustain it. So many stories are most sustainable in the privacy of my own mind. And so it's important for me to get out of my mind. And one way to get out of these, you know, the stories of my mind is to be with a person having challenge with and see them and see, you know, and then I said I have a difference. Because in my mind, I see that person only through the snapshot, I have them. When I'm with a person directly. They become it's not just a snapshot, they're become more dimensional. And so then it's you know, it's usually then I kind of think soften up in, my heart softens. And then you know, we have a conversation. So being caught by stories. So the third form of clinging, is I think of it as a variation of this views and stories and opinions. And that is self clinging to self. And I've already talked a little bit about some of these things just now but it's a seemingly very innocent thing. To locate oneself here. I'm here and you're there. And since I'm here, we can kind of start dressing here with stories and views and have all kinds of And we can also kind of start feeling very defensive or about the self, I'm here. And so it can seem very innocent to have this sense of eye. But the eye when we have me, myself and me and our mind, we have I, it's a magnet for stories, it's a magnet for beliefs. And the more more beliefs and stories we have around the eye, the more we tend to cling around the eye. And there can be a tremendous amount of clinging around I. And one of the places to see it, many places to see it. But one place to see it is when there's when there's fear. Next time you feel anxious, look and see what is the nature of the AI that's anxious? what's the what's the beliefs around self, that are operating? When you're afraid? Chances are that most people in our kind of environment here, when you're afraid and anxious, it's not because the mountain lions are about to pounce. It's not because, you know, you're in a war zone and people are shooting.

And it makes sense to be afraid. But often it's anxiety about the imaginary things in the future, what might happen. And so it's a story, this imagination of the future. And so what is it that what sense with the sense of AI that's going on? What's operating there? What's the beliefs, the stories we tell ourselves? It's hard to see. But that doesn't mean it's not useful to try to uncover what it is. And sometimes you're having a conversation with a friend, and saying, you know, I'm anxious, and I'm wondering, what is the notion of self that I'm operating under? I wonder if we can have a conversation, you can ask questions, we can explore what's going on here. You know, that I have a set, I have an idea that, you know, to be a good self and successful self, I have to show this side of me or I can't have this happen, or, you know, I'm afraid of being rejected. That was a big thing when I was young, in my early 20s, is that I was I had a tremendous fear of being rejected by people. And so there's a story about self that I was unworthy, and that would do something wrong. And I'd be excommunicated from the Church of human beings. And so there's a lot have a lot of a lot of selfing going on there, let itself radiation, this whole way we identify ourselves define ourselves. And it can be a place people cling, and one of the very important kind of directions that Buddhist practice goes, is learning not to cling to self definition, not clinging to self identity, not clinging to me myself in mind. And not so you become invisible, or you don't count or become an you know, kind of because you're not supposed to be anybody's supposed to be like a couch potato or I don't know what, but because we actually limit ourselves by the clinging to self definition. And there's something about freeing ourselves from self definition that clinging to it, that actually makes us much bigger, enhances us makes us much more available to the world in a much more creative dynamic way, than if we have to be always just one way. And then the final clinging is clinging to, in Victorian, the Victorian English translations of Buddhist texts. It was called rites and rituals. And I think a Victorian English who made these translations, they were

kind of reacting against Christianity and Catholicism and, and, and, and priesthood and rites and rituals and superstition. So, the word the two words are sila, and bata and sila in Pali means ethics or precepts and Vata it can be convenient variety of things, but it also just means, religious practices. And I like to inter interpret these two words, see what about the, in the most broad way possible, it's being attached to ethics and spiritual practices of every kind. So, so, for those of you who kind of troubled by ethic, having ethics and precepts, you know, and you know, happy to hear this. There, the aversion and resistance and reaction against ethics and precepts is a kind of clinging So, you know, don't don't be too much into being against that. But religious people all over and I've seen it in Buddhism, plenty of times, they tend to cling as sooner or later to their practices into their ethics and their behavior. And you. And it makes some sense, because you're doing something you think is very helpful and valuable, something you love. And so you kind of want to preserve it or be into it. Or it's very important for you're doing it for important reasons. It's, it's like your lifeline, the practices and so you want to hold on to that Lifeline because it's so important. But often, clinging, which is really dangerous is the clinging where, where the religious practices and ethics are entangled with clinging to self. So this other third clinging, so self identity, trying to prove oneself and show oneself as being someone special. And I saw this when I first was involved in Zen.

And there was this independent of the Zen kind of robes and stuff that people wore at times that the Zen center, when they walked around kind of life, just in general, a lot of people had a uniform, this was back in the 1970s. And the uniform was a kind of like, I think it was an Amish vest, a Danish school bag, mala beads around your wrist, fat pants, they were called back then there is a very broad, wide kind of pants that you could meditate in easily, and Birkenstocks. And I think that the first person who worked here found it found the particular items and wore it that made sense, you know, it's kind of their practical and nice, maybe a nice way. But, you know, after a while became like the, the uniform of people, all these people wearing these same kind of things. And I looked what's what's going on, and I think it had to do with certain kind of identity or certain kind of, you know, attached to attachment to what this, you know, ethics, morals, behavior, attachments to the practice to the religion, and wanting to show, um, you know, look who I am, you know, you know, I'm one of the crowd because like, we're Amish vests, that our habits a Zen kind of flavor to it. And so even though ethics is a very important part of Buddhist practice, even though religious practices are very important part of it, there can be a lot of clinging to it. And clinging to meditation, clinging to our books, and our Dharma talks, and wanting comfort and wanting this and wanting to just right, and part of all that is wanting, clinging to spiritual experiences, meditation experiences, if I just do my meditation practice, then I'll get you know, I have to have this experiences and experiences will define me and then I'll be okay, if I have that experience. And it becomes a chase after, you know, more self. And it was wonderful for me to be at the end my Zen training, because it was always unexpected, when they would ask you to stop meditating to do something else. And you could be sitting meditating in the early morning meditating. And someone come and tap you on the finger on the underside of the finger on the on the shoulder and say, We need you in the kitchen. Now. And, but but I'm just getting concentrated. I was just on the brink of enlightenment, you know, it was it was so fun, you know, my sitting, you know, this is where sitting is where it's at. Kitchen, you know, where we, you know, somewhere, you know, some some toilet was, you know, toilet was flowing and leaking, and we have to fix it now. But there's more important things than fixing the toilet, my meditation, my meditation, I'm going to lose it, I'll never get back to it, whatever. And so this. So Zen zen, Zen training had a fantastic way of point helping you understand how you were clinging to your practices, and your religion and all that. And it was really marvelous, for me at least, to get to see that clinging and then discover something that is the secret of this whole emphasis on clinging is that it actually feels better to let go of clinging than it is to get what you want. There's something very profound and significant about the release that happens. So if I'm clipped by cling to something, it's kind of like having a tight fist, you know, gripping onto something and you know, I might

still be able to do it. I want to accomplish or get, but I want to do when I have the hand and it's tight grip. But it feels so good to release the grip and be free. And that's part of the wonderful secret of Buddhist practice is how wonderful it is to be free, how wonderful it is to let go of the grip, let go of the clinging. We let go into freedom when I go into ease and peace and openness, and to begin to value and appreciate and be delighted to feel attracted to the pleasure, the meaningfulness, the openness, the satisfaction, the peace of a heart and a mind it doesn't cling to anything, is kind of the, you know the direction we're going. And what's marvelous about this non clinging is that as soon as you cling to even that you've lost it.

So you can't quite have it in the conventional way of having something that you're used to having something by holding on to it and defining yourself by it and being it and, you know, making a strange story about it. You have to kind of keep opening and keep opening and you kind of in a wonderful way, you're kind of left with nothing. Because as soon as you make it into something, you begin tightening up. And in that not having nothing, which is a which was an ancient Buddhist idea that you have or having nothing, not because you have physically nothing but you're not clinging to anything. And then what can flow is the best qualities of our hearts, and be available to ourselves be available to the world. And I think that this is where our kindness has a chance to flow. And whatever kindness might mean for you love, kindness, care, generosity, goodness. And then the notion of kindness and compassion and love can be a helpful reference point to help you understand when you start clinging again, because when you lose the kindness, lose the compassion, lose the inner peace. That's a fantastic, wonderful, important place to stop and look and see what's going on. So paraphrase and other people quote that I like. a bumper sticker for Buddhists is I stopped for clinging.

So as you go through this week, stop for clinging, look at it, get to know your clinging better, and to see if you can discover what's on the other side of clinging. There's another side of it. So thank you