

2016-09-07 The Practice of Volunteering At Imc

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

It's nice to see you all. Thank you all for coming. And looking forward to coming together here and talking about volunteering since it's kind of a central aspect of what IMC is. And it's one of the bright, bright light experiences or bright kind of aspects of IMC is it's volunteerism that goes on here. And it certainly has warmed my heart and inspired me tremendously. All the people who make all this possible. So thank you for coming. And I hope we have a kind of, you know, friendly, cozy time together as we explore this and discuss this together a little bit. And I think the idea is to take a few minutes just to sit in silence. And then we'll have a discussion.

So Max, and I will say some words about this topic, today, and then me a chance from discussion, discussion or broadly about it. And I want to start by saying that Macomb kind of very bold, claim or statement. I don't think there would be Buddhism today, if there hadn't been for volunteers. That down through the ages, what a sustained Buddhism, what supported it, then it grow and be the time of the Buddha is the generosity of people who stepped forward to support and help people to practice or to help create practice communities. And the story of the Buddha's awakening is an example of that. He was wandering around searching without success for a path to some kind of liberation. And he came to as a kind of the end of all the different options he had. And then he decided that he would try to meditate in the way that we've now learned to meditate. And, but he was quite emaciated he'd been following ascetic practices for six years, or something, almost died. And he didn't have the strength to meditate. And someone came along and offered him a very rich form of coke, cream, milk, pudding or porridge or something. And someone else came along and gave him a bunch of cut grass. And with that, with the porridge or the milk mixture, we're not sure exactly where it was, he got the strength to be able to do his meditation. And with the grass he got, he made a kind of like a zafu. He made a little cushioning Tinos comfortable place to sit on. And so one volunteer the first place to sit, someone volunteered the, you know, the strength that allowed him to meditate. And then, back in the time of the Buddha, there was no like there's in some countries, there was no state sponsorship of religion. They weren't nonprofits that got tax exempt status. But it was just individuals who felt inspired to support what was going on. And that's continued for all these hundreds, thousands of years now 2500 years. And I think of it as kind of like the lifeline or bloodline of Buddhism, is the generosity of so many people who make it possible. And so for me, it kind of warms my heart because it's kind of inspired by the warm hand to warm hand in which Buddhism functions. And we go hand in hand, we're in it together, and hopefully all supporting each other, so that we can all practice so we can all find our way, in this life of ours. And example, of coming into a community that's run by volunteers, where generosity is at the forefront of what makes this possible here is a very different teaching. Then what happens with you know, in a commercial situation where you're paying for teachings or paying to meditate or is paying for your spirituality, there's nothing inherently wrong with charging for things and paying for spiritual life. But it provides a very different message and the message of volunteerism of offering freely. Opening the

heart opening the hand is one of you know, the real I think really supports Dharma practice because your practice has to be volunteer, you know, no one's going to pay you to practice meditate. And so it's your support of yourself, that you volunteer your time, your efforts, your intentions, in order to engage in a practice. And if you you know, the whole idea of moving towards greater freedom and greater compassion is something that we do on a voluntary basis for ourselves. And so having the whole system be one of generosity and volunteerism, hopefully inspires a kind of open heartedness, open handedness, open mindedness, where the flow of our life energy is one that flows freely as an expression of generosity flows freely as an expression of caring and support and generosity. And that's the good news, the good feeling of being able to live that way, we're kind of just offered freely.

I don't think that generosity can be obligatory. And I don't think volunteerism can be obligatory, if you're obligated to not to volunteer. So the kind of the kind of inherent kind of free offering the hopefully, it represents, you know, what we're looking for when we're trying to do here. So I think that there are two general ways of understanding the particular kind of generosity that we call volunteerism. And one is that it is a practice that we can do. And as a practice of practice, that where we get to practice means that it's a place where we grow and develop ourselves as a human being, we might not feel generous, we might not feel like we want to volunteer. But somehow in the back of our mind, or in front of our heart or something, we think, you know, I think I should deal with the challenges and my resistance and my questions and around being generous or being a volunteer. And I want to step by, step right into that and really deal with it, I have all this resistance to, you know, I want to discover what's going on for me, I want to kind of stretch myself, I want to find, you know, I want to see how I can cultivate my strength and my compassion or strengthen my empathy or strengthen my capacity of generosity or wisdom are many things that you can develop and grow in being a volunteer. And so it's a practice. And as a practice, we hope that we can grow. The other aspect of it is that it's an expression. And as we, our heart opens, as we practice matures, an expression of the open heart, the free heart, for some people, is to be generous is to respond to the world world with care and generosity and compassion, and with a desire kind of a natural, heartfelt desire to be supportive and helpful for people. And it's not the should, it's not the practice, per se, but it just kind of what arises in response to the world as our practice matures. And so it's an expression. And if, as an expression, if it's not expressed, sometimes we can feel like there's times that were kind of bottled up because like, you know, it's too much to hold it in ourselves kind of, it's feels really great to just express it outward. So those two aspects, and then it's possible those two aspects are mutually supportive of each other, that none of us, probably for none of us. It's a pure expression. And we don't never need to practice again. And, and, and for none of us, it's only practice. And it's not some kind of expression of some goodness that wants to come forward. And so that interplay between practice and expression, as practice and manifestation is a wonderful arena that can happen in the work of generosity and that we have together. Next,

just just to also

express my

deep gratitude and appreciation for you that I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that IMC

would not exist could not

exist without

without you Without what you do. And for why this, this place This community has meant for me in my life. I just want to bow to you over and over that.

I feel Came here, when here
was over there somewhere else
when I was 21 years old,
and now I'm a ripe old 38. But
I,
and one of the, one of the things that
that drew me in
was sort of the, the understatedness,
of the place of Gil,
of the community there was, you know, it was
you can probably relate to this. It was, it was,
it was
simple.
It was simple. And it was
it was quite an awakening to one day say, oh,
how does how does that work? Or
how does? You know? How did? How does that just come together? How does? Oh, I remember I was
in another. I mean, years later years and years later, I was in another situation with a teacher and the
Dharma teacher and the subject of money came up. And he had just met and he said, Oh, well, you
could write me a check or what
I've been, I thought,
I wonder who writes guilt checks? Because I never did.
You know, and
it was,
anyway, most of you are probably not as oblivious as I am.

But, you know,

there's, there's something beautiful about that we can each sort of find our way in and discover, you know, discover our own heart of generosity, you

know, through the teachings through the practice

through the sort of gentleness,

of the, of the community. So that was just one thing I wanted to say. I was remembering when one of my teachers

was asked

in a sort of public forum, there's some, you know, this is a little more common in zen, when the teacher stands up and takes public questions, you know, in a sort of challenged a little bit or you know, something like that in a little bit of a Dharma

encounter. And in someone,

someone asked, How can I help others?

How can I help others? And the teacher said,

Forget about others,

help yourself.

The student said, took the bait, he said, Okay, how can I help myself

take care of others.

And

I think about that

something about

something about the way practice can can unfold, we practice can develop the sense of self in the sense of other what is what is, you know, what is myself and what is the other what is inside what is outside, you know, these boundaries start to become more soft. And maybe the sense of who I am and what I care about, and what I take responsibility for, starts to grow. You know, so I just, I noticed that in so many people who, who undertake this practice,

and

in for myself, I would say, it's, it's been a journey, and I think like a lot of us, you know, coming here due to suffering in one form or another, and there can be times that, you know, we're very much caught up in my suffering, you know, my suffering, my problems, my experience, my sort of inner

and then the only thing with

as one of my teachers has the only

the only thing worse than being caught up in your suffering is being caught up in your enlightenment. You know, and then what is it like, you know, the Zen master who's just kind of circling around my own light or something

You know, with this sort of,

you know, we all notice, and this is why we come to practice. And through the

magic of this, you know,

of being in community of developing mindfulness, something can start to shift. And it's not so much the world according to me, and what I want and what, you know, I need and

what's, what's a great experience for me.

But more so that we're open to being

shaped being made being changed by the world, by by others.

And

so something about that the world according to me, and me, me, according to the world, and me, according to see, to life. And I see in one of the ways I think that can take form is a greater awareness, a greater interest in others in community in the practice isn't so much about just, you know, what's happened on the cushion, as beautiful as it is, as as important as that is, but how we greet people, when they come into the center, how we, you know, take care of

the building, how we take care of,

you know, all the little things.

And somehow our Express practice can be expressed

through that.

And then, and then in some way, it's like,

better barometer of my practice is not so much, how many breaths Can I stay with? Is as sweet as that can be. But, you know, am I an easier person to get along with?

So something about that shift.

And then I would say,

some way,

both

that goes beyond

self and the world, me in the world, is something that's, that's closer, that's more intimate, that's more immediate. This is like the kind of helping with no idea of helping just just this, as Gil was saying, this natural response, you know, you see some things on the floor, some rappers pick it up. And it's not really like looking around to see who, who saw how

good I am.

And, and for me, that is that what I see so much here, it's like, is that unselfconscious,

enlightened activity,

you know, over and over again. And often we can't see it, you know, we can't see our own light. But we see each other, you know, and so it's like, you point to me, and I point to you, and this. And so we wake up together, it's beautiful. It's beautiful dance. And so in that way, it's like, and one of the, one of the as I was just talking to you, this, this feeling I have more and more that this quality of surrender in practice, there's something about deep acceptance, deep surrender to things as they are to life as it is, and, and the joy that comes from that. And,

and so in a way as Gogh was saying, this

expression, it's like,

it's really a celebration. You know, it's like, I think about it. The analogy that comes to mind is that we could all be at home eating,

eating our

TV dinners, or no,

in front of the TV dinners anymore. McDonald's in front of the TV. But why do we go out to dinner together? Why don't you know, it's to celebrate, it's to celebrate and to come here to be together

to share the Dharma is a celebration.

So I

that's sort of what I wanted to say. And I just look, I appreciate you and appreciate Gil, for everything he's given to all of us and I just look forward to celebrating this wonderful Dharma together. For for a long time to come.

So I've certainly come to appreciate all the volunteerism that goes on here at IMC and one of the consequences of living in this volunteer world that we're in, and feeling gratitude and appreciation and love and inspiration by at all, I feel support from it all, is that I've also come now to appreciate how much of it goes on in the world outside of here, there's actually a tremendous amount of volunteer efforts that people make all over some small things, big things. You know, I think that our culture would probably collapse, if it wasn't for people who offer fallen voluntarily to support and help people around them and their community around them and their family. You know, I mean, imagine if a mother says, you know, I'm not getting paid, and, you know, I didn't, you know, I think I've volunteered long enough, I'm gonna go for a real job now, and you guys take care of yourself, in a certain kind of, I don't know, if it's exactly volunteerism to be a parent, but, but there's a lot of volunteering, that goes on a lot of extra, a lot of stretching. So anyway, I just appreciate so much of it in our society. And so one of the hopes I have is that IMC is also an inspiration for people who never come here, that the fact that there's a organization, that's all volunteer, that's everything's freely given, that shows a model for what's possible. And that, and that, maybe people never going to create an IMC somewhere else. But they are going to step into their community and offer their good energy, they're good thoughts, they're good smiles, they're care, to the communities and the world around them. And so that, you know, we're an example of what can grow in our society as a whole. So, volunteerism as a aspect of generosity, generosity is a core foundational aspect of Buddhist practice, volunteerism as a practice that you can do that you benefit from yourself. And then one of the benefits as Max is pointing out, is, as you say, a wonderful place to give yourself over to a community to others to support others. So you can forget yourself, you can kind of disappear in the process and, and the experience of not just being concerned about me myself in mind, but offer. And that kind of picks, to grow growing and practice in self forgetting is a wonderful thing. And then as an expression, expression of our goodness. And for me, it's unimaginable that people mature and develop over time and practice, that there is this shift that what practice becomes is caring for others caring for the world. That's kind of kind of, in its own time and way in a different ways, different phases of practice, that it morphs into, that intersects with beautiful expression, and manifestation of our good, good heart. Those are a few words about volunteerism. And my assumption is that every single one of you is a volunteer somewhere in your life. Many of you have volunteered here at IMC, some of you might be thinking about doing it. Some of you maybe are not, haven't done so much here, but have experiences in your world, in your life outside of here. And your own each of you have your own relationship to generosity, volunteering, and it might be nice to for you guys to hear each other. Talk about your experience. And so what experience Have you had of being a volunteer in some form or other where you felt that you grew? In consequence of it? from doing it? How has it been a practice or growth area for you to step forward and offer something freely into the world? Here at IMC, places of work in your neighborhood and your communities and your family? Wherever, wherever kind of is a good example? Or where has it been? You have you have you? What have you learned or what have you seen in yourself about how volunteering offered freely, your efforts, your time your your labor

has really been an expression that flows out of you. And you're not interested whatsoever that it's a practice for yourself, you're not you know, you're not doing it because you want to grow and develop in the practice. You're doing it because it's just like, you know, pouring out of you it's like or, or you feel inspired. I just need to do this for its own sake. To be generous to be supportive to care. You know, it's not about you at all. It's an expression. So in those those areas, what's been your experience? How's it been for you? What have you learned? What have you felt whatever what's happened to you? What do

you recognize in yourself from what backs and I have said so far? So hopefully that's specific enough and vague enough that that you can find yourself in that topic and whatever, whatever is evoked for you, is great. Thank you.