

2017-09-04 Tranquility A Lake of Wonder

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I wanted to talk little bit about the quality of tranquility and the role of tranquility in this practice that we do. Set the volume loud enough for everyone to get a little louder. Let's see. So is it loud enough now for me to talk about tranquility. Okay. So it is a little bit loud for me, can we turn it down a little bit? And let's see if everyone else can still hear. How's that for you? Now, if you still work, you're good. Okay, okay. Okay, so I want to talk about tranquility. And its important role in doing Buddhist practice doing meditation practice. And I want to talk about it first by telling you a simile, or metaphor for it. And maybe the metaphor simply doesn't work quite for you. But maybe you can get enough of the idea that you can think about some experience you've had in your life that's comparable that may be in made come alive for you. So imagine that you go into a nice day, you go into a nice, beautiful, safe, wooded area where in the woods someplace, there's a wonderful Lake, large, small, small lake, with the sand edge on one side of it, and trees around it. And it's a day, maybe in the summer, and there's lots of kids and families coming to this lake and their kids are playing with it. But this is due in the water and the sand and lots of kids commotion and happy yelling sounds and running around and a lot of things being stirred up and splashing in the water. And it's just like it's a wonderful happy scene. And but then you sit there under a tree in the shade watching the scene, and maybe you're content to watch it. At some point, the kids and the families all leave. And after a while you're the only one left there. And as you sit there, you see that the lake water which had been stirred up and splashed in the sand, maybe stirred up. First, there's no more waves on the surface number of ripples. And then you see that this the sand and the mud settles and the lakes gets clear. You sit there and just watch this. And then you start noticing after a while it seems to get really quiet. It had been so noisy, and now it's really quiet. And then you're sitting there watching and the still water and the quiet atmosphere. And then after a while you'll notice something you notice a bird sounds, whistles come into the ear. And you realize oh, they're hiding it couldn't hear any bird sounds when the kids are making all this noise and all this activity. But now they hear the singing of birds. And then after a while, you see that there are little fish in the lake and they break the surface. It's kind of fun to watch them break the surface and those ripples of little waves have come out after they've surfaced and come back down. And then after a while you notice that great white heron lands on the edge of Lake and near where the kids were just playing and making so much noise. The white Heron lands and stands there majestically and still. And during this time, you're completely still in quiet, you don't move you Don't make a sound. And maybe that's what's needed so the wildlife begins to come back. And then after a while there's a you notice that some of the little rabbits come poking out from underneath the bushes. And after a while a turtle comes along and pops its head out of the water and kind of kind of kind of looks at you maybe and kind of walks around and all this life comes back and then at some point, you decide that it's time for you to go home. So you stand up. And before you go, walk away, you walk over to the edge of the water. And you look at look into the water, and the water is so still and quiet, that it reflects your face, and you see yourself. And maybe what you see as a surprise, maybe surprise in many ways. And then you go home and you go home, you carry with you a

certain sense of stillness and tranquility, that you felt in that quiet place that you hadn't felt when the kids were splashing and making all this noise, all this commotion.

So what this simile points to, is the idea that some things only appear when there's tranquility, some things will only show themselves, if there's enough stillness and quiet. Or some things only appear if there's some modicum of stillness and tranquility, some modicum of quiet, somewhere. And the somewhere that we most kind of look for it in this mindfulness practice, is in the act of mindfulness itself, in the awareness that is aware and awareness that knows what's happening, because we're bringing attention to whatever's going on. And then that act of attention, how's that, like, sometimes the act of attention comes along with a lot of noisy kids. There's a lot of commotion and a lot of reactions and a lot of maybe silliness and joking or, you know, sometimes kids, you know, it's kind of kind of fascinating to watch. Kid dynamics, sometimes they get the whole range. And so maybe the whole range of things comes with paying attention. So you don't like what you're seeing. You're like, you want more of it. There's judgments, there's evaluations, there's all kinds of things goes on. But to learn how to have the mindfulness, the awareness, be without all the commotion, just a very simple tranquil knowing, oh, it's like this right now. It's like this. This is how it is? Oh, I see it, I see it, as opposed to, I see it Oh, no. You know, oh, yes, you know, all kinds of you know, and all kinds of other things. Just Oh, it's like this very peaceful, quiet. To bring some quality of tranquility or quiet, you might be agitated. But maybe you can find a little corner of the heart of the mind where, you know, peacefully and quietly. And that quiet or tranquility can grow. And it can be a very, it can be a physical tranquility. And one of the reasons we sit still in meditation is that for some people that sometimes that the body has a chance to relax. And it might not feel tranq pulling for a sit down, and sometimes people sit down to meditate. And it's the opposite of tranquil, it can feel like you're in the rodeo, you know that you're riding a bronco or something because there's so much energy of restlessness and agitation. And so it's sometimes you can just do this real physical sensations in the body of wanting to bolt or do anything, but be still. But if you're able to stay, sometimes just simply staying on your cushion, and not getting up staying in your chair and not moving even you might feel like you do, something begins to settle in quiet and dissipate. And after a while the body can feel tranquil. And it's a beautiful feeling to have a tranquil, quiet body because of the absence of agitation. And sometimes the mind can get profoundly tranquil and calm and the threats of tranquility that's associated with a lot of clarity. It's not a tranquility associated with becoming sleepy, no, just kind of, you know, like you've taken a tranquilizer, but rather, it's the tranquility that we're looking for as quality of great clarity to really see what's there because we're not agitated or ruffled or, or the mind is not stirred up. So it doesn't have a lot of, you know, stuff that gets in the way of seeing.

And so but what happens if you have some degree of tranquility then the wildlife can finally come out. There's a lot of things within us that are shy or afraid, or simply ignored or because there's so much commotion, there's so much activity, there's so much preoccupation, there's so many thoughts and fantasies and desires and aversions and agitation and busyness of the mind that can go on. There can be so much sometimes meanness, so much animosity that exists within people, so many people, many people can be in conflict with themselves and the inner war that goes on. Some people have so much fantasy, and they live in their Fantasy Life, and they don't see what's going on. And somehow this, these fantasies, they enter wars, the conflict, the agitation, what, when they're present, it's kind of like having a lot of commotion on that Forest Lake, and the wildlife is not going to come out, the fish are going to stay deep in the water, the turtles are going to go under some rock and the rabbits are going to disappear into the bushes and the birds are going to stay away. But if we can get quiet enough, we can start discovered we can make space for something to begin to emerge. So we begin to appear. And one of the things that's required for things to appear is for us to stop fishing, or stop stopped looking and wanting and grabbing and trying to pull things out or probing or making things happen, I find that the what's needed is to be very respectful of this inner life of ours. And trust that the inner life knows

what needs to come up, if we can kind of get out of the way. And so one of the reasons why we're practicing things like concentration, becoming still practicing mindfulness, having some modicum of tranquility is so we can kind of leave ourselves alone, in that stillness, to see what wants to surface, what wants to arise come up. And sometimes people sit down to meditate, and they're surprised at the unintended emotions that might be under the surface that they didn't know were there because they were so busy, you know, running around doing things. And there might be all kinds of things just under the surface, some of them might be uncomfortable. Some of them might be very comfortable, very pleasant, but they they didn't have a chance to be felt, and seen and known. And the it's not uncommon for people to come to me on retreat, especially where there's a lot of quiet. They come in notice that there's an underlying emotional emotion, which seems to be the baseline or the background, kind of background flavor, the background kind of field within which they've been living their life. But they hadn't, they were so busy with living their life, they didn't notice it. One of the common very common ones is fear. There's a lot of people who carry fear. And but you know, they didn't realize how people didn't realize how pervasive it was, until they got quiet, and could see it operating all the time. And in this, you know, unusual way in which we evaluate things in mindfulness practice in Buddhism, noticing that you have an underlying pervasive layer of fear is good news. It's not bad news. Because if you have that, it's really good to finally bring it to the surface, finally, have it come before ground. And then we can address it and to do something about and work with it. But if it stays hiding away, or stays covered over or it's not, you know, then we can't, there's still going to be they're still going to be influencing us. But it'll be more part of the unconscious or subconscious.

There could also be on the other end of the spectrum kind of, there can be very quiet feelings of love, and kindness and compassion. That also will not be there if we're too busy wondering about doing for constantly concerned about work and relationships. And who likes me Who doesn't like me and our resentments and our hurts that we have. All those things might be reasonable to be concerned about. But if we're constantly concerned about them swirling around the mind, we might actually be not tapping into the wellsprings of our capacity, capacity for love, for compassion. So we sit quiet the tranquility to see what's there to where there rises, and giving space to let it show itself the shy voices of the shine movements within us. It's it's, I think it's more powerful to do this than that. To say, I'm going to make myself compassionate. Okay, this is the time to be compassion, it's important thing to do, it's worthwhile to do, you know, to cultivate compassion. But it's also something whole different, a whole different kind of game, to let yourself get really still and quiet and open and clear. And then see what is it that wants to bubble up. And if what's bubbling up is compassion, it has a very different flavor than a compassion that's been cultivated and has a sweeter quieter quality, or, or something else that we learn from it, it has a non obligatory feeling to it. It is just it just compassion, it just you know, sweet as a sweetness to it. Sweet compassion. So who knows what lives inside of you. Sometimes it's, it's, it's your demons. Sometimes there's all kinds of difficult emotions and states and experiences that had been repressed or ignored, covered over for a long time. And they need their time in the sun, they need that time to come out and be seen.

There's a wonderful story of a Tibetan Buddhist monk, and many, many centuries ago named Milarepa. And there's a story that's told about him of he was lived in a cave meditating lit cave for many, many years. And he was out gathering food one day, and he came back. And there were three big ferocious demons in his cave. And they had big fangs. And I guess there was blood dripping from their fangs, and red eyes. And they saw what good luck they had that this monk and showed up in their cave and like, Huh, they probably lick their lips. And so Milarepa, who is a very experienced meditator and Buddhist practitioner, and he didn't run away, he he did a variety of things. He said, I see you you're a demon. I'm here you're there and just kind of get knowledge of what it was in one of the demons went away then for another demon, he practiced lots of compassion and kindness and just and respected it and bow to

it and brought up all the compassion love, he had directed it towards the demon, the demon was softened by that then the demon bowed and left. But there was one demon that the all the tricks that he had all the ways he had practice all the ways he did, just, you know, it was approaching and getting closer and closer and his mouth is getting bigger, and his claws were getting sharper and it was coming up and like nothing you can do, could you know can make it go away. So when the demon opened his big mouth Milarepa and jumped into the mouth and lay down and then we did that the demon vanished. A friend of mine many years ago was at a dream. And the dream was, he was holding us a poisonous snake. By the by the by the neck kind of up by the mouth. Do snakes have necks? Anyway, just near the one where it should be a neck.

And, and so it's, it's safe to hold snakes that way, because there's not enough it can't turn his head to bite you. But it was a very poisonous snake. So in the dream, he realized he couldn't let go of the snake. Because if you let go of it, he would bite him. So he was kind of like stuck. What does he do? He didn't want to keep holding the snake. So what do you do? Do you hold the snake and you can't let go of it. So after some time in the dream, he finally let go the snake. And when you let go the snake, the snake vanished. So those are nice stories. You know, wish it was always that way. But these are stories of people who, especially Milarepa, who are fit when to face their demons rather than running away from them or rather than denying them or, but rarely, it, you know, gave themselves over to them in the end for Milarepa only by giving himself over to it. So we had some people have you know, we probably all of us have difficulties inside difficult emotions, difficult memories, difficult thoughts and ideas, all kinds of things that go on that maybe some people have been ignoring or repressing or denying or for maybe decades, and I can't look at that. And I want to open to that. If you do a lot of meditation practice, when the time is right, you'll have to open to it when that time is right is not so clear. But the time is right, because you can't if meditation doesn't work if we stay closed. So I've known people who sooner or later had to open to overwhelming grief. I've known people on retreat, who've been seven days crying. And it's what they needed to do. Because what happened, what had happened to them in their life was so big and so huge, what they held themselves. And they'd never had a chance to grieve, it never had just let the tears flow. And so that by the time it was finished, they felt cleansed and clear and felt like a weight had been taken off their shoulders. I've known people who come to retreats and begin to feel the first movements are wanting to cry, and are so self conscious and so embarrassed and feel like they're not supposed to in meditation retreat, cry, and so they hold themselves back. And we often encourage them to please do it, to let this kind of bubble up. So that might be one of the demons so called demons, you know, this the grief, that is sadness is there, there might be anger, there, people have lots of good cause for being angry. And so where can we experience that anger and finally allow it to come out in a safe place. And the safest places for that demon to come is in meditation. Because in meditation, one of the advantages of sitting in meditation is you're kind of committed not to act on anything. It just sit still and quiet, and give it space and let it come. And it's quite remarkable, if it makes space for what's there, and let it come and surface and move that it moves through us it processes it, you know, does something. And then, you know, I've there are people who have discovered that within them, they find that there's tremendous capacity for courage and inner strength that they didn't know was there. And so that can come up and support them through something. Or people discover a capacities of love and compassion and joy, that they didn't know were there. But by being just still and quiet, they kind of felt Oh, there it is. It was denied me when I was young. Every time that that part of me came up, I it was pushed away. And there's lost that can happen growing up where people close down and close down some of these nice qualities they have. I had you know, I just there was a number of things that happen big growing up, where I can still remember the moments where I decided to close in close down and not show that to anybody anymore. Because that was too painful for me, What happened to me? And what versus you know, we made no big example, maybe what can happen, what happened to me various things that happened to me, but give you one example.

I was, I think I was about 15. And I was walking in the high mountains with a friend who was 17 beautiful place in the high mountains, just the two of us in kind of dirt road. And there was snow capped mountains and greenery and valleys below and it was you know, it couldn't give you kind of kind of couldn't be more kind of Alpine-ish, idyllic in kind of scenery and in the great sky above us. And I kind of felt in awe of all this. And I said some question like, like, why are we here? Or where did all this come from? I forget exactly the question I had, you know, kind of in this what was great all I had for this whole creation. And my friend just said to me, don't be silly. And I could feel the door closed inside of me. I was gonna show that side of me to anyone again, the sense of wonder. So there's, as I started doing meditation practice, over the first years, slowly, these things started to reappear. Those memories of those events that had that what I closed my doors began to surface again show themselves and the appearance of memories in meditation is certain kinds of memories is actually a very important part of this inner process. You know, when they do the rhetoric of mindfulness just to be in the present, and if you have memories, you're not in the present. It's kind of true. If you get lost in the memories or if you're keep, you know, indulging your memories. But there's a way in which memories when they there can be deep memories that are part of this inner wellspring of things that need to be Processed are need to have time to come up and show themselves. And sometimes some of the memories of earlier life need to come up. The Art of it is let them come up, but don't get involved in them. Don't get caught up in them. But, but trust the process of them welling up. And so just quietly being there, and letting them surface. So for me, all these memories started coming for them in the early years, my practice is Oh, look at that, I'd forgotten about that. And as I did these things, I tapped into your qualities of well being, qualities of love, qualities of being of at homeless feeling at home, in this universe, in this body in this life, that I hadn't had lost touch with, growing up. And along the way, there was all kinds of emotions that went through and processed with me. But what it took was having some degree of tranquility of stillness, some degree of non agitation, non commotion, non reactivity in this mind, body as I sat in meditate. And so, one of the things that is commotion, is trying to do too much more meditate, try to attain something or get something. Certainly, it's good to practice mindfulness and concentration and to settle down. But to do these things, to practice these practices, not so much to get concentrated. But to do these practices, to create a space of tranquility, a space of non reactivity, a space of stillness or quiet tranquility, that can allow things to show themselves, the wildlife to come out and to be there. And it doesn't have to be a lot of tranquility, it can just be, as I said earlier, you might not feel tranquil, but maybe you can have tranquil mindfulness, maybe the way that you know what's happening. Oh, there sadness, that sadness. Sadness is like this. Here's love. Here's compassion. This is how it is. Here, here's anger, here's boredom, here's impatient, here's agitation, here's being not tranquil. It's possible to tranquilly know that you're not tranquil. Isn't that great. So there, it's a powerful refuge, to learn to kind of find how to be mindful How to Be aware, where there's some inkling of tranquility and non reactivity, in the act of mindfulness in the awareness that knows. And then stay in that just stay in the middle of it, and look and be present. It's almost like whatever happening say that you're feeling agitated. You're non tranquil, not tranquil. It's kind of like, you're going to know that a tranquil way, in a way that respects it, and allows it to be there. It's kind of like not not seeing anything as a problem.

So in the metaphor, there's simile of the suit of the going to the lake I talked about. At the end of the little visit, the person stands up, and looks into the surface of the lake, and sees reflection of the person's face, person's own face. And it turns out, that if you want to, if you want water, to be a mirror for yourself, the water has to be still and quiet. If there's a lot of waves, and agitation and, you know, then you don't see yourself. So the same thing about ourselves our mind. And you know, I think I my impression is that in a lot of cultures, water is symbolic for consciousness or for the mind. And so to have an agitated mind, you can't see yourself very well. And so if you really want to mirror yourself or see yourself and really what's going on, that's part of the value of tranquility, of stillness. And so how do

you become more tranquil? And how do you become tranquil? So it feels like there's vitality to it or a life to it as opposed to it's soporific or your makes you dull And one of the ways is to live a balanced life. You know, if we spend too much sitting all day sitting or doing something and don't have enough movement in our life, we need some movement and exercise. We spend too much time a day running around being busy, we need maybe a quiet for a while to unwind. If we have, you know, if we don't eat well, it's hard to be settled. And so to be careful with our diet, sometimes, you know, all the kind of things we need to do to have a balanced life helps a lot. Sometimes it's helpful to put yourself in tranquil environments. If you feel like you need to be tranquil, go someplace that's tranquil. And it would be nice to believe that coming time, sea is a little bit of tranquil place. So you come here, and it's more settled than maybe some of the other places that you might have been in been today, like on highway 101, trying to get here. And so, you know, cultivating intentionally tranquil, calm places, if that's what you want to cultivate and develop. And what some people will do is go to places that are particularly tranquil, and said, sit there and bathe. And that's experience to kind of really take it in and deep way. And there are occasionally there are some places in the world that are powerfully tranquil. Sometimes there, some people call them power spots are some you know, it's kind of very sacred spots or something. The first time I encountered something like this was a little chapel in France when I was 18. And it was like just the tranquility of that peacefulness in that train. That little chapel just stunned me, I just tried to linger there as long as I could and take it in. There's been places in nature, some of the wonderful Redwood groves here in the peninsula, are very peaceful and quiet. And so to, you know, to go for some kind of place, so that if the if you know, a tranquil place to let that bathe in it, take it in. So you get a visceral experience of what that tranquility is physically and mentally, kind of bathe in it, drink it in. So it becomes a living experience. And then all the kind of living memory of what's possible. It's like opening the channels, to a possibility of tranquility and peace. And it's a wonderful thing to cultivate. But we're not cultivating tranquility for its own sake. I think that's dangerous, to be tranquil, just to be tranquil. It had maybe that involves attachment. And also to to ease and then to hold on to tranquility, that you're supposed to be tranquil. That's dangerous. But whether it's cultivating tranquility, not for the sake of tranquility, but for the sake of insight, for clarity, so we can see more deeply. And so the things that are most shy within us are things that have been hidden for a lifetime, perhaps can finally begin to show themselves. And as they show themselves, then we get to see and experience the whole ecology, the whole ecology of the lake. You know, the lake, the ecology needs all the different creatures

to be whole. And so you maybe maybe you need all the parts that are hidden or been shy or tucked away under your bushes, you need them as well. And so to sit quietly tranquilly and see what bubbles up, see what wants to surface. next bit make that space. So those are my thoughts today. And we have about 10 minutes. If anyone would like to ask any questions about that, or comments or about salt or something else, you're more than welcome to ask.

Thank you, your talk really struck me.

Last week, I went up to the mountains to an Alpine lake and I spent the first by myself and I spent the first day meditating for about six hours. And I felt like my mind was so clear and so calm and everything was at peace in my life. And that night I had this ferocious nightmare about a person who's been in my life very much for the last year and has brought a lot of turmoil, but it's a family member. I love deeply And dearly and every time things settle down, I experience complete forgiveness, I forgive and forget completely.

And the dream was this powerful Warning.

Warning

Warning. Yeah, I mean, clearly there was a part of me knowing this person's, you know, making some of this happen, this person isn't always trustworthy. And particularly that with my kids sometimes. And it was shocking to wake up to this, I mean, I was shaking, my heart was pounding. I'm in this camper van of mine is like freaking out in the middle of the night. And I realized how valuable that was. And I had to sit with it and remember it, because if I was going to fall back to sleep, I would have forgotten the warning. And it became incredibly valuable for me to put these dissimilar pieces of this person together and see them and compassionately, but as one hole, and to respond more appropriately,

nice. So on coming I can make is that it's not uncommon for when people come to some profound level of well being and peace and subtleness that sometimes that kind of prepares us creates a sense of safety or critics, it's a clarity or openness, that allows something to surface that otherwise wouldn't have surfaced some deeper concerns and deeper understanding something else. That If so, you talked about the nightmare that happened with part of it. And so sometimes people will, like, for example, a meditation practice will practice for quite a while. And then they settle into some finally to some deeper states that they've never had before. And then what follows after that is is periods of more difficulty again. And then people will say, well, gee, I'm going backwards, I was going really well is going forward. Now I'm going backwards. But actually, you're going, you're going. It's still forward. It's just that you're coming into a new layer, it's kind of opened up to a new dimension. So it's possible that going up there allowed for that to happen.

tranquil group.

I have a story about that. When I came here to IMC, I hadn't been here all that long, maybe a year. And it was a day long. And I was sitting in here. And I was meditating. And tears just started rolling down my face. And I thought, well, this is interesting. I wonder what this is about. And the only thing that I could seem to catch was, was some kind of childhood deprivation or need. And that it was I was experiencing and feeling it. Like, I didn't really have words for it. But I was very grateful for the experience.

Nice, thank you. Yes, there. I've had that similar things where I started crying, and sobbing, but I could never, I never understood why. So the idea that you need to understand why, you know, is kind of can be a dead end and not so useful. And I find it more useful just to trust the process, and keep getting out of their way and say what's this is interesting. And see where it goes. Yes, if you can bring them up.

So, I found myself also crying. And I thought there isn't really anything there, but it was a deep gratitude. So it's

nice, yes. To crying with that, yes. That nice to sit nice. You say that because sometimes, you know, I think sometimes tears are associated with sadness or grief or something like that. But sometimes, tears are associated with deep gratitude or deep joy or deep or sense of wonder or, or, or, you know, and sometimes, these deep wellsprings of tears can come like in the meditative process. I don't know what the right the I don't know if there's a English expression for this, something similar to bittersweet, but I don't know what not bitter, not sweet, but it can feel kind of, you know, it can feel both sweet and nice and wonderful. And a little bit kind of raw. I know. No, there is a range of things, but there's tears of gratitude can come. And it's quite beautiful. It's part of these wildlife, they can finally surface. Yes, you could put the mic straight back there.

I felt sad today.

And I know where it's coming from.

And your

message

gives me hope.

Hmm. It tells me

just stay still.

And not to wonder.

Just stay still.

And the answer will come. Beautiful. Thank you. And thank you SPS, maybe you said it so well and so succinctly. And maybe it's adding more than needs to be added to this. But as you feel your sadness this way, and be still and see what comes, it's good to have a sense of respect for it. So it's not a mistake, but to respect its presence, and then see what comes. And sometimes what's inside of us needs to feel respected. As opposed to dismiss, they're seen as a problem or it's wrong or something. And there's a history, recent history of parently in the West and known of people going to get medicated when they're sad when they're depressed. And sometimes that's necessary and very important to do. But sometimes depression and sadness is not a mistake. It's not a problem. It's actually part of the deep working of our inner life, that surfacing and transforming and changing something important. And so very few places in our world where sadness is given it to do a good a good place. And so my hope is that one of the places where it's safe to be sad, is right here. Yeah. And

Buddha sent me here.

Great. Yes, Said, go here. And you will find me answer.

And you gave that to me. Thank you. Thank you so

much. Thank you. So thank you. And so you have inside of you. A lake of wonder. If you go sit by the lake, you'll see wondrous things. You have time at your like thank you. Thank you