

2018-01-21 Heartwood

Thu, 9/3 5:45PM • 41:34

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, heartwood, concentration, virtue, simile, practice, virtuous, buddha, pain, meditation, complacent, tree, fist, life, dharma, contracted, freedom, concentrated, narrow strip, deep

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So we'll see how it goes. Okay. Okay, so welcome to IMC and happy to be sitting here with you. I would like to start with a little saying or slogan perhaps, that goes this way. The Dharma is onward leading. The Dharma is onward leading. And that little saying, comes along with a wider or longer quote that's part of. It's so popular in Theravada Buddhism, Buddhism that we come out of, that it's used as part of their liturgy. And so the people who chant like monastics who chant every day will chant this particular passage, and it goes, something like the Dharma is visible here. And now it's immediate. It's onward leading. It's to be experienced for oneself. It's invites inspection. And it's to be experienced by the wise. So it's visible here now. It's immediate. It's onward leading. It invites you to come and take a look. And it's to be experienced by the wise. Now, the word Dharma has many meanings. And kind of the simplest meaning is the teachings of the Buddha. But it has other meanings as well and these other meanings, reflect each other or overlap with each other. In form, inform each other. They're not like completely separate from each other. But in addition to meeting the teachings of the Buddha, it also means it can mean the truth. It could also mean the nature, the nature of how things are, kind of, sometimes people even try to have translated as law, the laws of nature, the laws of psychological spiritual nature. It could also refer to qualities of the mind, the way it kind of particular factors of mental processing and psychology and, and just simply the way things are. So, somehow the way things are the way the truth is the way that the patterns of reality, the laws of reality, or maybe the ways that our qualities of our mind and heart work, have these characteristics that we can see it in The present moment here and now there's some way to see it. There's some way in which it's the Dharma is immediate, that somehow we're the focus of the teachings, the focus of the truth is something that's doesn't belong to time. Exactly. But it doesn't take time to learn, it can be seen immediately. And it's onward leading, which means it leads us someplace that goes goes in a direction. And it's in I love this expression that it's an invites inspection. Like, come take a better look here. So when's the last time reality told you? Okay, come, come take a better look. Maybe the last time that you stubbed your toe or something? Hey, pay careful attention. So, and then too experienced by the wise now, I think this is kind of like a little promotion, peace because I think this suggestion is that you're supposed to be wise and if you're wise then this is what you can experience take some wisdom. So, but I want to focus on this onward leading. And I want to do it through a simile that the Buddha gave. And the simile and then I'll explain it the teachings how this simile is applied. And the simile is called the simile of the heartwood. heartwood is the core hardwood core of the tree which you know people who are going to build something often find the heartwood to be the most useful because so solid and hard and so assembly or the heartwood and it similarly use utilizes three different four or five different parts of the tree. There's the leaves and the twigs They're kind of the outermost edges of the tree.

And then there's the outer bark. There's the inner bark. And then there's a sapwood. There's a very narrow strip of the outer edge of the tree just before the bark just inside the bark, that we're all the fluids

of the tree, the food goes up and down, water goes up and down nutrients. And then just inside of this very narrow strip is the fifth part, which is the heartwood and it seems like many people live their lives out on the end of the twigs, or even on the leaves and even squirrels know not to go too far out on the end of the twigs and on the branches. But many of us are so focused on kind of the outermost edges of our ideas and concepts in our plan. Our plan And our regrets and our memories. And there's something about kind of living kind of far from home for from what's really cool or essential. And the word for heartwood, in the ancient language also has a meaning of essence or core. So to make a journey, onward leading from the branches from the twigs and leaves, and really find what's most important, if you spend too much time focusing on the leaves, you can even you know, if you don't like a leaf, you can take guessing and pluck it off, and just more or less will grow. But to really kind of take a journey from the outermost edges of the tree and make your way inwards first to the outer bark, the inner bark, the sapwood. And finally find what's most essential and core. And that's kind of one one that symbol is used for one s one description of this journey of practice. is the symbol is used in a teaching where there are five steps in this journey. There's first in the Buddhist talking to his monastics. So he says, First there is going forth, being ordained as a monastic. Second is cultivating are the virtues that a monastic is supposed to have to become virtuous because their expression is accomplished in virtue. The third is to become accomplished in concentration. The fourth is to become to attain what's called knowledge and vision to have really deep, transformative insight. And the fifth is called is to have ongoing liberation or more continuous Freedom. So these correlate to the simile of the heartwood. So, becoming ordained, as important as it is, is kind of is kind of like a little bit, you'll see slightly different but a little bit like the leaves and the twigs being virtue of being virtuous is discovering the bark, outer bark of the tree, getting concentrated as the inner bark of the tree. The having a first experiences of insight, real insight is to be the sapwood of the tree. And then this more ongoing freedom is the heartwood of a tree. Okay. So this is how the Buddha, the teacher saw this puts it all together. He says that, if someone goes forth, becomes a monastic order My guess is and most of you are not going to become monastics anytime soon. But it's quite profound and meaningful to set forth with a sincere intention. And in this practice of Buddhism, that practice of liberation of freedom is really what I'm wanting to do something here that's really significant for me important. And I'm going to place this maybe close to the center of my life or at the center of my life, to take this path. So someone sets forth on this path as a monastic or not.

And if a person does that, especially if they're monastic when they're wear robes and shave their heads and have kind of a public persona that is very highly respected, the person can receive honor, gain material gains, and fame for that And you'll see that they go to places like Thailand, that you know, people are just, you know, some of my friends I've known who've been ordained as monks in Thailand, say, you know, they're poor, they're a day and they're just walking around time, you know, and, you know, they don't know and pays attention to them in Bangkok. And then the next day, they get ordained, and the next day, they go out into Bangkok. And suddenly they're getting tremendous amount of respect, not only there and people are ready to give them donations here and we put things in your bowl and, and, and they're kind of your kind of fame, especially if you're, you know, if you're a Westerner you're famous Wow, look at that. And people want to come and see you and respect you and think people think you have infinite wisdom that they didn't think you had two days ago. And the people are ready to listen to your teachings and you're like, What's going on here? I just got, you know, I just started this whole thing. And so it's To the quite dramatic, you know the people. So Buddha says you might get honor gain and fame. And some people feel like that's enough. And not only that, but they get addicted, infatuated with the fame and gain and honor they get. And if they do that they become negligent in their practice. They become complacent. They kind of think this is enough for me to content. And this certainly happens to people. And then the Buddha says, and they'll continue to suffer, their deeper suffering that they wanted to address. the very purpose which they set forth, isn't really

addressed, and they'll suffer. So for them, they're like they've discovered by focusing on the gain, honor and fame. They're like relating to the leaves and the twigs. But then if someone is not satisfied or not get doesn't get complacent or satisfied content with gain fame and honor. And decide that they can, they're going to continue to practice. The next stage of practice traditionally, is to cultivate virtue to become virtuous or to live a life. Virtue means primarily to live a life that doesn't cause any harm to people. And a lot of the specific ways that virtue is characterized, is refraining from doing things that cause harm. So one of the primary virtuous Things to Do you want to really want to be virtuous is please stop killing people. That would be good. The second thing would be to stop stealing from people. The third thing would be to stop being engaged in sexual misconduct, harming people through sexuality. Before it is, it's really good if you'd stop lying. And then it goes on from there. And there's different lists and stuff that goes on. But so a lot of a lot of the definition of virtue happens to be not causing harm, which is a wonderful thing to be concerned about that and dedicated to that and really kind of clean one cleans one's actions up, so they're not harm producing anymore. So someone might do that. And, and it actually feels quite good to do that people who really feel like they have a high level of integrity and, and it kind of becomes who they are not something that they force themselves to do. There's a kind of inner cleansing that goes on, and it feels really good and very satisfying. And some people might become satisfied with that content might think that's enough, because they've kind of gotten something good. And so and they get a little bit infatuated with their virtue and their Pure kind of ritual, you know, purity spiritual torture, virtual, virtuous, virtuous, pure virtuous purity. So then they are negligent, complacent, and they stopped practicing. And if they do that Buddha's continues to say that, then they'll continue to suffer, they'll suffer. But if they're not complacent if they're not negligent, if they don't think that's enough, and they continue their practice, the next stage Oh, so the virtue is like the outer bark. So they continue the next stage is to practice concentration.

And, and this, not only to practice it, but to develop it so there's some accomplishment and concentration people can get settled, stable, unified, grounded, peaceful, tranquil, focused, you know, didn't Words that can be synonyms for concentration. And it's a wonderful thing. And, and here, this is something that a lot of meditators have to be, be careful with. Because the kind of subtleness and calm and tranquility that can happen in meditation, the ease the relaxation, some people that can easily become complacent. I became relatively complacent for many years where that and I just would sit down I would feel so comfortable and good and, and I just kind of like just kind of, I wasn't so conscious about it. But I think in this subconscious way, I just like myself kind of coast in this kind of nice place. And so, some people not only think it's nice and get content and complacent, some people the Buddha said get infatuated with with their concentration. And, and oh, there's one thing I forgot to say each of these stages Say it now for a concentration in some people will praise themselves for being concentrated and disparage others. And I've known people who kind of like do competitive concentration. Or they compare themselves and you know, my really, you know, my concentration is good as other people. I'm so good and proud and other people, you know, but the same thing can be her virtue. Some people get caught up in praising themselves for themselves for their own virtue and disparaging others. Some people praise themselves for their intention to practice and disparage others. So this is one of the traps Buddha be careful for. So if a person is content and complacent where their concentration then they become negligent and negligent. If they're negligent in their practice, then their suffering will continue the core suffering the deepest suffering even though it feels so good. That's part of the reason people get complacent. Concentration is it can feel so good that the ordinary constant suffering people have is put aside is not really present. But it's still there, kind of it's this kind of deeper down or it's, it's there waiting to bite you and given half a chance. It happened to me when I was example of how concentration practice can be a kind of a dead end little bit or kind of get caught up in it is when if some of this long retreats I sat, sometimes I'd have physical pain or the sitting I did. And I learned after a while that if I got concentrated, the pain would recede, and it'd be substituted by a

feeling of joy and well being. And I think that for many people who get a little bit adept at concentration practice, will sooner or later use the concentration to avoid something, avoid something uncomfortable, and so I would avoid the pain and there are relatively good at it for several weeks in the retreat until I wasn't and until it didn't work and that was kind of disappointing to me. And you know a little bit I've congratulated myself Gail, you're doing so well you can get concentrated look easy, get rid of you can just get rid of your problems. And, you know, I thought that was you know, pretty good. So maybe praising myself, and then you know, but then I thought everything had been put aside and but in fact, we're just sitting there waiting for me and the conditions changed and the pain that I had physical pain I had returned and then I had to address it and then I didn't feel so proud of myself in this for my concentration or something. So concentration is like the inner bark. So the practice continues and person.

So a person continues to the next stage. And this is where people begin having insight. The purpose of concentration is not to be concentrated, but the purpose of concentration is to have a stable and quiet enough mind that we can see more deeply into the Dharma into all aspects of the Dharma, the teachings, the truth, the nature of things nature itself, and the qualities and what goes on in our minds and hearts. And, and so at some point, we can see more deeply into in such a way that it's called knowledge and vision. It's a lofty term that usually goes along with the first taste of awakening, or the first really clear sharp, seeing meaningful and kind of noteworthy insight or seeing For the ways in which our experience of this world is in constant is changing, flowing, moving all over and over again and for people haven't really seen this kind of deeper insight. It's hard to appreciate or imagine even how seeing impermanent seeing change can be such a radically transformative experience, that it's held up as being kind of experienced, that's enlightening or gives knowledge and vision. And this is nice, but some people think that's enough. And they get infatuated with having this glimpse of knowledge and vision, this glimpse of the truth, glimpse of reality, and they praise themselves for it and they disparage others for not having it or something or having the wrong Insider. I don't know what and so they pick negligence, they kind of coast that was good enough to have that experience. And if they coast didn't just kind of that's good enough and being negligent, then they're suffering their core suffering will continue. So that's the sapwood. They've come in closer to home closer to the essence for sure. And it's kind of nice. sapwood is where the tree is most alive. I don't know if you know this, but the very only very, very teeny part of a tree is alive. You know, sent me botanists here, like How wide is the sapwood of a tree. So anybody can tell me, it's probably like a millimeter or something. Like it's big redwood trees or something, the actual part that's alive and the barks not alive. The, you know that the core that we use mostly, it's not like just compressed hard dead. Wood. And then there's this very, very narrow strip, the xylem and the xylem. And the phloem. Yes, I think you know how wide it is, it's pretty large at a high school. So it's, you know, it's very easy. Oh, and then of course, the leaves are alive. But but you know that it's. So it's very interesting, interesting to see how little of a tree in the simile is alive. But you know, how little of your life is really alive that you live, I wonder how far you're away from the place of life where it's really lived. Anyway, that was a little aside. And so then a person continues to practice. And if they continue to practice, at some point, that insight they had that experience of release or the insight, the insight that brings that kind of Freedom kind of release becomes continuous becomes ongoing. It's not something we drop into for a moment or two happens on an occasion, it becomes more who we are to be much more free liberated. And the Buddha called this the unshakeable liberation of heart, this experience and that's the heart toward the end assembly.

So, imagine that you've been going around for your life for years and years, with either your hand and a fist or your heart in a fist, or your mind tightened up and really contracted like a fist and it hurts, and it's very limited life you can live when you're have always everything in a fist so much of the richness and the capacities of the hand are not really available, if you're always this way. And so, if you're always

contracted and caught up in something, attachments are concerned or fear or regret, to me, it's a little bit like we're kind of made a fist for ourselves. And so some people live kind of scrunched up for a lifetime to a brand something or some ways. And so imagine that someone somehow you get the sense, you see someone who has a nice, relaxed open hand. And you look at that, and can I trust that is that possible? And so that's weird and, but you might want to actually, you know, that's so inspiring. I think I'm going to set forth and see if I can discover this for myself. I'm motivated. So persons just set forth to have that intention is like the little finger beginning to relax. So do we will so do we then become complacent and just like that's good enough, you know, to have more capital Have your finger you can wave and wiggle. And then, but then No, that's not an you know, let's continue.

So the second finger gets released. And that's the stage of virtue. Because it really feels good to be they do and virtue is you supposed to feel better for it's supposed to feel more relaxed, more open. Life is much more relaxing whenever we're having, you know, live in a virtuous way. But then we can, you know, we still kind of contract it still is like, you know, can you can do more with two fingers than you could with no fingers, but still, you're tied up in other ways. So you keep practicing. And slowly with concentration, concentration is a powerful way that releases a lot of attachments and clinging. They may not permanently, but a lot of letting go has to happen in order to become concentrated. So that's nice. And then there's This deeper insight, this knowledge and vision that can happen, which is in fact a very dramatic kind of release a certain kind of things. And so feeling of freedom and they say that's it, their first real sense of spiritual freedom is with knowledge and vision. And it makes sense with a hand because you know, the palm of the hand is basically available now, pretty free, even though the poor thumb is still locked in there and tied in. And because the thumb is so good in there, and pulled in, it's so easy to wrap the rest of the fingers around it, go back to a fist, it's kind of like almost like the thumbs in once company. You know, Come and hold me and I'm cold and can be warmer. You know, there's, there's a lot of justification that can happen, we're going to come down. And some people will at this point in practice, when they have real sense of freedom, will actually find themselves debating with themselves. Whether you know, do I really go further in this or you know, or other things More important Do I need to go back in and you know and try to buy more stocks before they are Bitcoin before you know, the Bitcoin or is it freedom what should it be and which which is the best investment. And, and so and so but at some point the thumb gets released and the hand is completely open, and then there's this isn't the same, maybe you kind of go along with Mitel similar here, this is the same tendency to want to collapse again our contract again, because now it's open, it's all open and relaxed. So now have this open hand and we can keep it open, it can be ongoing. So to Intuit the possibility or to have a taste from some experience in our lives, have the possibility of releasing the fist Being uncontracted of not being caught up and tight in our clothings, or preoccupations, or different things a week. And to feel that this is meaningful, this is a valuable thing to do. Not only is it valuable, but it might be one of the most valuable things to do. Because how much wonderful things can you do with an open hand that you can't do with a fist? How many wonderful things can you do in your life with virtue that you can't do with bitcoins?

How many wonderful things in your life can you experience and feel and open to if you develop this wonderful purity, which is concentration that you can't, by, you know, having more social power status How much more valuable is it to have this release and freedom of real insight that you can't have? from reading endless books and acquiring knowledge? How much freedom Can you have how much wonderful it is to have an ongoing openness of the heart and the mind so that when you connect with people, you can connect in a deeper and fuller way. Without your neediness without craving without demanding without expecting all kinds of things in the relationships that might come when you're contracted. So this debate is considerations, intuition that has this thing about freedom really to open the heart, the unshakable deliverance of the heart might be one of the most valuable things is going it's

a worthwhile goal. It's the essence the core It's the heartwood in yourself. And so the Dharma is on onward leading. It leads to freedom. And there is an invitation. For some people, they feel it as a yearning. There is a longing, but there is an invitation. Come check it out. Come find for yourself. And if you get that invitation, I'd encourage you accept it. It's a good one. And one of the interesting things about practicing is the invitation gets stronger and stronger and bigger and bigger. He gets bigger and bigger invitation card as time goes along because it is clear and clear. That's the invitation or the direction so the simile of the heartwood This is the suit that the Buddha teaches this is called the greater discourse on the simile of the heartwood. He ends the whole sutta by saying, the life of practice does not have gain, honor or fame. As its blessing, does not have virtue as its blessing, does not have concentration as its blessing does not have knowledge and vision as its blessing. It has the unshakable deliverance of heart as its blessing. To me, you all become blessed this way. So we have a few minutes and if any of you would like to ask a question or make a comment about any of this, you You're quite welcome. We just have the here's the mic. The other one we need to have. Yes, sir. Can you bring it all the way to the car? You have one question? Yeah. And then we'll take it to the front.

Okay. My question is, so having pain during meditation is quite common. What do you recommend to deal with it? What kind of concentration or some other means?

Yeah, I mostly don't recommend that you use concentration to override it or bypass it. Sometimes that's useful. It has a place and sometimes it actually helps. That depends on the nature of the pain. There's many, many causes of pain, physical pain. And so for example, some physical pain comes from that from stress, your attention that we hold that has a psychological root, and sometimes concentration is the very thing that best relaxes that that inner psychological tension that plays out. The body, and there can be very deep physical relaxation that happens with concentration that can release some of those, that kind of pain. So that's one exact time it works. So do you but if you know that's the case, the other about the sometimes pain is there because of structural reasons. Maybe you need to, you know, you're injuring yourself, if you have any sense that you're injuring yourself, when you're sitting in meditation, don't sit with that pain, you should get up and change your posture or find some other way of meditating because the purposes of Buddhism is not to injure yourself more. But then there's a kind of in between those, there's a times when there's pain and you're not injuring yourself. And it seems like you know what you do here. And there can be value in bringing careful mindfulness to physical pain, tremendous value, actually to explore and get to know it better. And one one advantage is that you He gets explored and get to know it better. You can find out whether you're injuring yourself or not, and find out something about how it works. But when did we and some people would put a lot of focus and time to focus on sometimes very intense pain. And they can learn a person can learn a lot about themselves. We learn a lot about how we react to a discomfort, things that we don't like. And they had the version we might have the fear we might have the beliefs that are operating, the ideas of self that are coming kicking into place. So there's a lot of learning to be happened around sitting with pain that might not have the pain go away. But it's so worthwhile to have learned. It's like, wow, I learned a lot. That's great. So that's possible. We might also learn more and more deeply what's really going on with the pain and the different layers. Sometimes it's a psychological routine or emotion or they're stored emotions. unresolved issues, trauma in our body, that sometimes we go deep, deep, deep into the pain, we discover the emotions, and that that's what needs to be released. But when to sit with pain, when to really use that as a focus of attention and in the meditation requires some wisdom. Is it appropriate now? Is it helpful for me now? But one other criterias that should be used I believe, is don't do never sit if you can, you know, meditation never meditate with physical pain, unless you think there's an opportunity in doing so. And you feel somewhat enthusiastic about that opportunity. They fit, you know, you're up for it. There's no duty is no requirement you have to do with it. So say, Oh, yeah, I'm in pain. And yeah, you know, this is you know, I keep avoiding my pain. I've been doing it for years. I think this

is a good day. I'm enthusiastic. I want to now finally face it and be with it. And so there's a sense of this, I want to do it and then you do it for a while. And then after a while, 30 seconds you decide. I've had enough. Okay, so then you stop for maybe after an hour or something. So is this speak to your question, or do you have any more particular? What?

Oh, there's a lot of variances. Oh, yes.

So that's why mindfulness is useful because then you can start looking and taking into account the variances and all the different ways that works. But I've known people who don't practice meditation who don't practice mindfulness. They just practice stoicism and toughing it out. And they end up injuring themselves. But with mindful people who are mindful tend not to injure themselves in meditation when they sit with pain because you get the message out to the world. This is I think, this is injurious. So if you can bring the mic up here to I'm in here in the front.

So, I took two questions over there long regarding this simile. So, in the five stages that you described, are the Buddha described this as, as being sequential in order, or is it possible to jump around? And the other question is, is in relation to what I'm interested in interested to know what the Buddha is referring to, when he refers to to heart in relation to this simile, what what is hard to, to the Buddha, so great.

So basically, if I, so the first one about the stages, the Buddha frequently talked, and this progressive way talks about there being a gradual path. So the gradual path means slowly, steadily, there's progress in development and change over time. And though if he the way he described it, Over and over again is in sequences that have more or less the pattern that I just gave him. Sometimes there's other variations, but it's that pattern whether it has to be that way or not. I don't think so. The, the a lot of people report that they jump around or some people start elsewhere, you know, like here at IMC we have an introduction to meditation course, several, many times a year. And a good number of people come if we had an introduction to virtue course. I don't think you know, so many people would come. You know, meditation. Mindfulness is kind of up, you know, kind of popular these days and therapist Rebecca prescribed it and, you know, doctors prescribe it and you know, Oprah prescribes it. So it's, uh, you know, it's, you know, it's kind of trendy, even, you know, if you want to be really trendy these days, you know, be mindful, what are trending. And so a lot of people start there. And it's very common for a lot of people in the west to start with meditation. And as they do what they fight, then they get interested in their virtue in their behavior. And so it's kind of like that they do it that way. Some people do mindfulness and then concentration gets, you know, go really far and only when they have some deeper insight, do they come back and look at the others things. I've known people who've had very deep inside through mindfulness practice. And then after that, they decided to focus more on concentration. So it's kind of like going backwards. And then I said that I don't know if I don't know anybody like this, but, but I can imagine some people after developing concentration, then they got more interested in serious about virtue, because concentrated states feel very virtuous. They feel like this feels tremendous. amount of integrity and goodness that comes across three states. And it's kind of a sense of real purity. And so coming out of that, it makes much more sense to be interested in preserving that or not violating that. And so it can, it can be any old way. And there are people occasionally I've known. I knew one person who have had a spontaneous experience of what's called knowledge and build vision. When she was maybe 11 years old, and she had no clue what was going on. It was only many, many, many years later, doing practice, oh, that's what happened. So it happens all kinds of ways. And then heart.

I can't give you a technical definition of what the Buddha meant. So you'll permit me an alternative heart There's that part of us that sings when we're free.

You content with that for now.

Thank you.

So, thank you all very much for today and I hope that you discover your heartwood