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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So the topic of today is thinking and I enter this topic is, with some care, some reverence for each of you, that when we start talking about thinking and mindful thinking, it's easy for it to touch into something, it's very something that's very intimate or very personal in people's lives. Sometimes thinking is just pure nonsense. But it's sometimes it's, you know, it's connected to something profound within us or deep needs we have and connected to our life story and history in many ways that if we start looking at thoughts, we start kind of touching into something so to look at, to be aware of thinking and be mindful thinking is a very important part of this whole practice. And for some people, it's really key. It's really the kind of one of the doors towards becoming freer and wiser and more and more present in their lives. So having said that as introduction, what I'd like to do is to tell you a little kind of analogy that I was told this last week, and I'll tell it to you the way that I was told, and then I'll change it slightly. Because it has to do with monkeys. And monkeys sometimes get, you know, use nothing always great ways these stories. Because in Buddhism, there's this idea in Buddhism of the monkey mind, and the monkey mind is the mind that apparently monkeys when they swing from tree to tree branch to branch. The idea is that they grab a branch or swing and grab a branch. And just as they're grabbing that branch, they're already getting ready to grab the next branch. And just goes on and on. So, monkey mind is our mind just the time we have one thought, we're already grabbing for the next one, or you're swinging between them. So in this analogy, there is six monkeys that are living in a house. And one of them is sitting deep in the living room, kind of nice chair. And the other five are at the window looking out. And, and one of them says, Look, there's a nice red car driving by. And so the one sitting a chair hears that and says, I want that. Another one by the window and here's music Down the street and says oh, there's nice music down the street. And the one that cheer says I want that other one by the window smells the neighbor's septic system. It says you know, there's a kind of a not very pleasant smell. And then one sitting in the chair who doesn't smell it, but here is that report set gets all upset that neighbor and it's always neighbors and you know, he's always doing things wrong and this is the worst neighbor. And, and so it goes. And so this analogy is supposed to be metaphor analogy for six different aspects of how we live in the world. So we see, we see the red car, we hear we smell it Your tastes because I don't know how these monkeys tastes what's going on out there. But the taste and also we have tactile senses we do. And, and these report to the mind the experiences we're having. And the mind by itself is in the dark and but because it's reported you know it gets these reports from the census it finds out what's going on. So it's kind of like deep in the living room and it's easy chair and then it reacts. It wants it doesn't want upset. It delighted. It starts making stories, it reviews and thinks about things. The neighbor who has this septic tank, you know, remembering all the all the different things that the neighbor did that was wrong over the years.

You kind of go through that, you know, endless list. That's wrong. That's wrong as wrong or All the data that goes through and thinks about all the things it wants, you know, not only a red car, but a blue car

and a pink car, and, you know, having lots of cars would be great. And just whatever just kind of spinning its wheels in mind. So that was the analogy that was given to me today this last week. And rather than saying monkeys, I think of, I kind of think of more of as six children and, you know, five by the window who report to the one who's not by the window, but the one who's not by the window, hears reports and spins a whole cognitive universe reactions and thoughts based on what it hears. And the reason that why I like to use the word children is that children can grow up. And also the idea there is a parent in the house. And the idea is for the for us conditionally for the parent to show up and bring Some wisdom to bear on the situation. And, and so the child can grow up. So in our minds, we think, and thinking is supported by what the sense doors provide us. And the and there's different kinds of thinking. So as we begin this exploration of thinking, I think we want to look at the different kinds of thinking that we do. And you might see if you recognize any of this in yourself on a very kind of, kind of general level, there are two kinds of thinking. Some people do both. But there's people some people think in words, some people think in images, and not one is not better than the other just to how different minds work. But some people haven't really, really recognize it, this is what they do. The people who think in words thinking takes a different particular shape, it operates somehow in the mind differently than the people who have images. And, and so to recognize, you know, what kind of thinker you are, you can make these kinds of recognizing where the impact of the images you have, how do they work? What's the emotional impact or, or how do you participate in them? And how are you a player in them? If you think in words, then the same thing you can kind of whose voice is it? How you know, who's who's the one who's thinking, What's the tone of voice, there's a lot of things can be seen in the voice that's doing the thinking. Either way, as we think there are different levels of thinking. And one level is the one that's most active. Busy, that is sometimes called discursive thinking. And that's when we think and we have conversations, we actually sometimes we actually have conversations with their people, or we imagine we're seeing a vision of people having a conversation and talking to each other. And, or we're having commentary. So it's discursive is, you know, discussing something in your mind. So it could be commentary could be that you're reflecting on something, you have to plan something, and you're looking at all the things that to do with the plans, imagining and thinking about all the things that can go wrong, and know and why this is a bad idea and why you can't do it. And you're, you know, or it could be that you're discussing what's happened in the past, and you're reviewing the past and going over it and over and over again. And it's amazing, sometimes how repetitive discursive thinking can be. Then there's a simpler layer of thinking Which is very simple recognition of what's happening in the moment. So we could have recognition, no, there's a cell phone that rang. It's very simple. That's it.

Discursive thinking is where we get much more involved. And we had this meet, this means something and why don't they have more policies here or, you know, or this is great sound, I wonder I can get that sound from my phone. And so this idea of, of, you know, it can be very simple and kind of neutral, the ring of a cell phone to start at that neutral. That's the kind of thought that exists. And it's a kind of a sentence there. It's like number of things that come together, and is a kind of cognitive move. Some people won't recognize it as a thoughts as a moment of cognition. But there is kind of thinking because we're relying on concepts that we've learned growing up thousand years ago, someone who'd heard that sound, and I don't know what they would have thought they probably would have thought it was a bird, you know, and looked around for the bird and feathers or something. But we've learned that that's associated that sound to certain technological gadget. And, and so would it be cognize. That's where it is. So kind of simple thinking. And then there's even a simpler layer of thinking, which is not cognizing, conceptualizing what it is. But just being that's a sound. You're hearing ringing and it's that simple. The mind hears the ring, and it doesn't even go up to the next layer that's ringing phone. So these are different layers. There's other layers, but that's what kind of three I wanted to highlight and People live in the layer of discursive thinking. Wisdom begins to operate, when we cannot be caught in this in the

in, caught up in discursive thinking, discursive thinking, thinking analyzing contemplating is an important part of human life. But eating is important part of human life. But you're not expected to be eating all the time. discursive, you know, is discursive thinking contemplating reflecting is important part of human life. But if that's all you do, if that's the only vehicle by which you understand yourself in your life, it's actually quite truncated, quite limited. So, first, so the first one of the first one of the terms of thinking one of the first tasks and mindfulness is to start appreciating the kinds of thinking that are operating for opinion and to realize there are different different capacities, different ways of thinking cognizing our experience. in meditation people can learn how rewarding or satisfying it is to cease all the discursive thinking, to stop all the kind of distracted thoughts, imaginary thoughts, thinking about the future, think about the past, figuring things out, and how peaceful it is to settle down to just a simple recognition out, there's a sound. There's a sound of a car, you know, just a very simple, here's a thought, here's an itch. And part of the reason it feels so satisfying, is that with discursive thinking, we tend to get involved with it. We get involved with it energetically, we get involved emotionally, there's a reactions, the world tends to get more limited and narrow and contracted, the more tightly wrapped up around our discursive thoughts as we as we begin to free ourselves from this strong gravitational pull into discursive thinking, the mind tends to have more space more open, and the feeling of spaciousness, openness, ease, peace, of thought just kind of being there without any hook to them just very simple a thought arises, an idea arises and memory arises, but nothing nothing's done with it, we don't pick it up, we don't react to it. We don't make conclusions about it, they just there and, and in that simplicity, there's a lot of ease, much more satisfying. And it's also then we can see more clearly actually what's going on. So, to want something to want the red car to have a thought let's I want a red car. And if the next thing you know you're in this car dealer, buying red car, and you didn't see anything in between, you know, remember what happened in between, you know, then the discursive world in this desire kind of took over. But if you sat there and saw that, desiring a red car bubble up in the mind, and you recognize it, there's a thought of desiring a thought of red cars.

In that simple layer of just recognizing what it is, there can be much more space to leave it alone, to not get involved. And then the wisdom of the mind can operate. And there can be a recognition in the mind. You know, I don't need to have a great car, I have a perfectly good car. I bet that desire for a car had more to do with not the red car, but something else about it. So to simplify that, to be able to kind of be in recognizing, and that's where the parent comes in. Or that's where the growing up can start happening is, if we can begin to say names and see whether that's what's happening now. That's what's happening now. That's what's happening now. And that's a hard skill to learn because of the tremendous way that we pulled into discursive thinking. If for some people, if you look at your mind, churning away in its thoughts and concerns, you can ask yourself how much authority Are you giving your thoughts? Or how much authority are they claiming? This is important, this is true. This is like, you know, the place to be with your life energy right now is to be with these thoughts. How much do you invest in your thoughts? And your discursive thinking and thinking about things? invest because we often have a said there's a sense of sometimes it's a promise in these thoughts. And so we're chasing that sense of promise or hope. How much do we do we credence do we give to the worry? That's part of the thinking, the fear. And we really believe that fear and the worry that's there. This is a very important issue to look at how we relate to our thinking our discursive thoughts, because there's some some psychologists who think that the some of the leading causes for things like depression, anxiety, despair for many people has to do with the nature of their thinking, the discursive thoughts, and that kind of thing. Some people use it as their language of rumination. We the ruminating over and over again, over something. And to start, quit putting a question mark, after our rumination or thoughts, just enough like what is this rather than being swept along by them? What is this is this true? Do I need to be This isn't useful to do this. Are there other perspectives? And this psychology is called rumination, associate rumination, a lot with thinking into the thinking a lot about the problems. What's the problems

with me? What's the problem? What's going on? What's their problems with what happened? And there's a negative bias that psychologists think, in, in what they call rumination. Many people have strong negative biases. And so they're often looking and ruminating and thinking about, you know, what's wrong, what's wrong with me? That I'm somehow wrong, I'm a loser, if you know I failed or I can't really do something. And so when the rumination when the thinking discursive thinking is circulating, and repeating over and over and over again, these kinds of thoughts. It's very debilitating. No wonder all system kind of taught us to be drained and struggles. Also our emotional life comes into play with all this. So these negative kind of thoughts are disturbing or emotionally, you know, depressing in itself or sad or we get angry. And then it becomes this feedback loop between the negative emotions and the negative thoughts.

And if we think that these thoughts are true, or important or necessary to have, without any questioning them without any, you know, kind of stepping back. And so in mindfulness practice, the kind of the parent they'll think to do this, you will go along with my little thing about the six children is to be able to step out of the orbit of discursive thinking, just enough to recognize I'm having discursive thought. That's what's happening. And to do that with enough, enough strength, enough clarity, that it's kind of Like the adult part of our brain has showed up. Oh, that's what's happening. And then and then beginning to place find find a way to make that clear recognition. Oh, I'm having thoughts that that place will be recognize it the mind that recognizes is a mind which is not wrapped up in the thoughts. The mind is not wrapped up or excessively influenced by the mood that's present. So Oh, here is depression. Here is worry. Here, here's thinking about all the here's thinking about the future, problem solving about things which are important, but very uncertain. can't know how they're going to turn out Captain know what the right thing is. And so there's a strong kind of pull to be thinking and thinking about it over and over again because so uncertain and the consequences are great. But it's more rumination. It's more kind of spinning. But what about that place? The adult one thinks we step back. Oh, I'm worrying. I'm problem solving. That's what's happening. I'm fantasizing and fantasizing of how great it's going to be. Some people have a wonderful discursive thoughts, that they're really that to pull them into, they get pulled into is the delight of anticipation. And unknown people who their primary joy or a primary joy is anticipating things are going to happen. And I've known people for whom actually doing them was less pleasant than anticipating doing them because then it dissipated in just a fantasy and fantasy way. It can all go perfect. And you can kind of save or the hope and the problem, promise, but once it happens, sometimes you know, it's Kind of like, we're busy in the middle of it or distracted or it happened so fast or it's complicated or something. And so it's nice, you know, anticipatory delight and thinking is nice. It's not, you know, it's not a sin to do it. But it is kind of reinforcing this kind of place of being caught up in this discursive world. There is another world, there is another world of thinking to be in, then emphasizing is a place where wisdom can begin to operate. And I say that because the promise of discursive thinking is to solve and fix, but maybe there's another avenue, another place in the mind and the heart where solutions can come responses can come. And this is a place where that is not wrapped up or not caught in the reactivity, what's going on, where the thinking is not mixed up with fear or worry, or negative bias. So the simple act, you know, it's so it's so simple to describe it but difficult to do. The simple act of mindfulness is to take a moment and to recognize clearly at this moment. This is what's happening at this moment. I'm sitting here in a chair. At this moment sitting in a chair, my cushion, I feel the weight of my body against the chair. At this moment, I'm aware of the temperature of my body. That's simple, as opposed to, you know, composing a letter to the president of IMC about we should have the air conditioner on more. It just that this is what the tests warm, just for the just a simple recognition. And right now I'm having thoughts I'm thinking about this talk and what Gil's saying, or, I'm not really I've been listening at all to what Gil saying, I'm thinking about, you know, something else. I'm thinking about air conditioners. So it's that simple. It's that simple. And it can be very difficult for this mind of ours, to be convinced that it's valuable to be that simple, with the act of

mindfulness, because of the authority and the investment, that we are entangled with all the thinking we have to do.

But when we make that simple mindfulness act to recognize what's happening, we're beginning to step out of the gravitational pull of discursive thoughts. So there's more space. There's more space in the heart in the mind for more, more ways in which the mind and heart to operate to inform. We understand what's going on and what goes on, which are freeing ourselves from it. So recognizing what's happening. So it's not easy to do this. And sometimes as simple recognition is not enough. So in the Buddhist tradition, there's a recommended number of recommendations of things to do besides just mindfulness. One is to focus on something different. That's more useful to focus on. So one of the things that's for some people and classic in meditation is to focus on the breathing. The breathing is connected to something very profound within us it's a very valuable connection to wait to connect to ourselves is to be with our breathing. It's not obvious when we first start but if you get into it, the breathing opens up to a wealth of treasures inside. And so to begin tuning in to the breathing and trying to come back to the breath, come back to the breath, rather than spinning out in our thoughts is a very powerful thing to do. It takes a while, but every moment every time you say you take your attention and bring it back to your, your breathing, bring it back to your breathing, some of the energy of the mind is no longer going to feed going into feed the discursive thought and the amount, amount of difference and change is very small initially, but if you take drops of water and drop it into a bathtub, eventually that tub will be filled, but each drop is inconsequential. So, coming back to your breathing, keep coming back to your breathing. Keep them back to your breathing slowly slowly begins to decrease the amount of energy that's going into discursive thoughts. The other thing that is skillful to pay attention to is something which is not discursive thinking, which which is enjoyable and pleasant. So for some people who get into the focusing on the breathing, the breathing becomes unpleasant. And so to use that pleasure with the breathing, as a place to ground the attention, so we're not so easily seduced by the thoughts that we have. Sometimes other things are more skillful to pay attention to the breath. Some people find loving kindness meditation is good. In daily life, it might be intuitive look around if you're in a nice setting, and see if you can look around and see if you see any nice trees, or do you hear birds? Or they're nice people around or are there you know, something that's enjoyable in the environment right now, as opposed to spinning and discursive thoughts that have nothing to do with WhatsApp. Hearing now, so to speak in so focusing on something nice and pleasant. If the discursive thoughts are really strong and then at the recommendation is you actually distract yourself, which is what people do kind of some people are experts at this distraction thing. But we're not as distracting ourselves to escape. We're distracting ourselves to begin to shift the inner life enough. So we can start showing up here. So there's skillful distractions. It's really helpful, but it's not to run away from something. So, you know, go for a run or find a friend to talk to or read a book or do something that cook a meal or do something for you, which kind of takes you out of the gravitational force of this spin. rumination that's going on. The other thing that we do in meditation that's so meditation is called like a laboratory or gym or something where you can kind of learn how to work with your mind. And then once you've learned how to work with it, you can start working with it outside meditation. So one of the things that we can learn as we sit and meditate is that when thinking is thrown strong, we can feel what I call the thinking muscle.

And the thinking muscle is that place in the body where there's tension associated with thinking. So there's pressure, there's tightness, there's constriction, there's forcefulness. A lot of there's a lot of energy swirling around. And the more strong we're thinking, the more likely if you sit back and start looking at the physical sensations associated with thinking, you start feeling something and you certainly see it and other people sometimes you see someone suddenly starts to get really preoccupied and thinking something Really hard and you see their forehead is furrowed, you see that there, maybe

the jaws are kind of grinding, you see perhaps that their shoulders are going up, you know all kinds of ways physical things, you can feel the tension you see it then people the advantage of meditation is that sometimes you can see feel that which is not visible to other people in more subtle ways and things are operating. For some people, it's not uncommon to have the tension, pressure be in the in the head someplace, kind of behind the forehead or in the forehead or around the eyes are different places. And so the advantage of feeling this thinking muscle, the sensations of tightness around thinking, is that then it's possible to might be possible to relax it to relax the thinking associated with relaxed, relaxed attention associated with thinking. The advantage of doing this is that the tension associated with thinking, if it's still there, it's kind of like if you have a toothpaste and one of those tubes of toothpaste and you stay squeezing it for a long time, the toothpaste just comes out and comes out and comes out. You have to stop squeezing it. So if we have this physical, emotional tension associated with thinking, the toothpaste comes out the thoughts just keeps coming and coming and coming. And you can let go of your thinking momentarily. But if the tension is there, and you'll think again, so part of this mindfulness is to not only be aware that we're thinking, but be aware of something about that, physically what's happening as we think emotionally what's happening as we think? And also, what is the relationship we have with our thinking? And, you know, I think many people have never occurred to them that they have a relationship they're thinking, some people are so embedded in their thinking, so connected, so involved with their thinking that it's kind of like they are they're thinking. It's kind of like thinking is the way we think about things. And there's no need to think about thinking. There's no need to look at thinking because that's just, I mean, how often unless you have problems with your eyes, ordinarily as we go around our inner world, we're not so cognizant of the eyes doing the looking, even though we aren't using them. So, in the same way, we're thinking we don't really look at our thinking or Question it. And Haskell, you know, what is what is my relationship to this thinking? And the relationship is kind of subtle. What's the attitude I have to my thinking? attitude can be one of despair. Just Just depression, just kind of like, oh, once more, I'm thinking this thing. And so the attitude can be one of hope. I just think enough, there's got to be a solution there. If there could be one of strong identification. A lot of thoughts have to do with me myself in mind. So it's all about me, I'm the main character of my thoughts. So there's a lot of investment of AI, the whole next a whole kind of phenomena of AI comes into play. So thinking can be a rich, rich world, the world of thinking and the way to begin Having a different relationship to discursive thoughts. The way to bring the parent into the room or their way to let this thinking grow up, become more mature in their mindfulness practice, is to start doing the very simple act of recognizing. I'm thinking.

But maybe you need to say it again. Like, you know, I am thinking, yep, I am thinking, no question about it. As opposed to, I'm thinking and then running often thought again, it really kind of step back. And this is a thought, this is the mind thinking, hears a mind caught up in his discursive thought. This is thinking, I'm repeating this because the idea is to do it often enough, and clear enough to know that at some point You're in your little bit standing away the thoughts you're not too wedded to it or caught in it. You're a little bit kind of observing it from a relaxed, mature place in the mind. You all have a mature adult in your mind that I would suggest, kind of to be provocative, to get your attention. You don't use often enough. And if you can step back and clearly recognize what's happening from a place of recognition that is not caught in the experience that you have the moment you recognize it. Replace it with balance, place of non reactivity. Simply, this is what's happening. Then the mature part of you will begin To grow and have a chance to show up and there'll be adult in there an adult in the room, something like that. So I'll end with another story. Famous, often repeated story, but I think it's good to be reminded of it comes from the Chinese Buddhist tradition to Chinese Buddhist monks. were traveling on a journey across the countryside, from one monastery to another. And halfway through the day, they came to a river crossing and there was a woman who couldn't quite make it across the river. And so one of the but you needed to get across. So then one of the monks wanted to help so the monks picked

her up and care You're crossing Porter down the other side. Then the two monks continued to monastery for their stop for the evening. As they came to the monastery door gate, the second one finally blurted out, how could you have done that? You know, that we as Buddhist monks, were not allowed to ever touch physically touch a woman. How could you've touched her and picked her up and carried her across the river and you broke the rules and this is, you know, how could you? And then the first monk said, You know, I put the woman down back at the river. Why are you still carrying her?

So maybe you don't have to carry as much as you do. Or maybe you can put some of the stuff down long enough that you can see it from a different perspective, and one of the perspectives is points to freedom and delight. And one of the results for me from doing this mindfulness practice in relationship to my thinking is nowadays I feel my thinking is my friend and I have a very friendly relationship with my thoughts. We get along pretty well. And generally, I'm in charge not my thoughts. So May you be friendly with your thoughts, and may they become your friends as well.