

# 2018-05-21 Stay On The Path

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

And maybe it should be a little bit louder or set houses a little bit louder. So let's see now is that good? Okay.

So this evening I want to tell a tale. And it's a tale of a village where people lived on the edge of the wilderness, a vast wilderness, steep mountains and canyons and rivers, deserts. But people wouldn't wander into the wilderness that stay in their village. And the people lived there for many generations and they lived the kind of life that maybe you kind of expect from without people. Their lives and there was a lot of good and a lot of bad and people would bicker, and people would help each other and people will do politics and people would do the pursuit of well, then pursuit of each other spouses and all kinds of, you know, things that go on. And sometimes when the youth grew up, and they get a little bit restless with what they saw, and some of them saw with, it's always a lot of hypocrisy, and some of them saw boredom and some of them wanted adventure and some wanted to see some new possibilities. And they're often tempted to go wander off to look for and then but there was this wilderness right next door. And they wondered about what would happen if they went there and what They find. And to make it a little bit more tempting. There were five paths that went into the wilderness five different paths. And above each entry to the path that was a sign of a name for the path. And one path was called the path of kindness. The other path was called the path of healing. The third path was the path of wholeness. The fourth path was a path of truth. And the fifth pass path was the path path of freedom. However, seem nice, you know, nice, nice concepts. But a fair number down through the ages of youths had gone off into that these different paths into the wilderness. Only never to return. So people were reluctant to go in there they disappear. They vanished they they probably died in the wilderness. And so, you know, we can't go in there. But there was this idea in the village that there was an elder, all person who is rumored to have come back from the wilderness. But the person you didn't never talked about it and never talked about themselves. So the quiddity never found out if the person really had done the trip. But there was an extraordinary peacefulness about this person. And people often to go and sit with the elder just to kind of feel the peace. Feel as to well being and many times people would just be there and feel like grounded in presence and a lot of their troubles would kind of fall away and services. Write something to be with that person. So one generations five years went to the elder and is there in fact, this, those paths go anywhere they lead anything any place important. And the elders didn't say much. But said at some point said, Well, I can't tell you much about where they go. But I can tell you that if you start down one of the paths, it's only one thing you have to remember. Stay on the path and keep walking. Stay on the path and keep walking. So there wasn't much instructions. But they were restless enough and adventurous enough. Something desperate enough that each of them took a different path.

One of them because it felt like the path that was best suited personally suited went down kindness. Another one felt attracted to healing got that was what the need was someone else? wholeness, quest for wholeness, someone else truth and somebody else freedom. So they this they went off in these different paths into the wilderness and but they went well prepared. They carried a lot of things they thought they might need and they cared about carried about 40 pounds of weapons, guns and swords and ammunition and all kinds of things and 40 pounds of gold coins and jewelry and necklaces of all kinds because you never know when you either need to have a lot of wealth with you or need to show off and they carried with them, 60 pounds of magazines all kinds of magazines had lots of glossy pictures that provided the provided hope all the possibilities that were possible different photographs of different places in the world different things and because you have to have hope always. So they wanted to carry that with them and what was possible and what they dreamt about ensnared 50 pounds of magazines and, you know, it wasn't important to have food, lots of food. And they hadn't, village hadn't heard about freeze dried camping food yet. So they had about 100 pounds of each of all kinds of wonderful canned foods, all kinds of things they needed and you need to sleep well, because we're going to journey so they had 100 pounds of mattress with them. So they had a lot of gear. And so they set set off with all the stuff they felt they needed with them. And off they go down the river, but down the paths. And they're walking, carrying. Some of them had to put things down, walk 10 feet, put it down and go back and get some of it more and just like you know stages to bring it along. And it was tiring. They were breaking down the sweats, but you know the elder it's Just keep walking to there we're gonna walk and then they came across their first skeleton and there was a person it's just a skeleton was left but it had backpacks and things bag strapped on until there's all this stuff and they look at that wow person died here with all this stuff and then never been maybe I don't need all this stuff maybe I don't need the weapons so the weapons went down they went further along and there was another skeleton this time with no weapons but just the jewelry and gold coins and the bags and the chests of coins they were holding on to them tight I could see In the skeleton bony hands it was still holding on tight they're not gonna let anybody take it but they died so these use they saw that okay let's put down though all this jewelry and money and coins they kept going and they came across more skeletons this time the skeleton was kind of propped up against its tree kind of rusting I guess. But with their magazines open and that's as far as they got stuck in hope bins possibilities. So they dropped their magazines, they kick carried on and then they saw the skeletons and, but they were off the trail off the path and they could see Some of them had fallen, you know off the path, some distance, their hands reaching out for some wonderful thing hanging in the trees off the path. And other ones you could see they kind of gone off the path and they look like their mouth are still gapping open and fear and their hands up because the other side of the path there was what looked like a monster that was crawling around and crouching and crunching their teeth. And they were clearly you know, running away but somehow the path they died there the elder had said just keep stay on the path and keep walking. Sure enough, they walked in there all these beautiful alluring things on the trees nearby. They didn't go for them and all these monsters and they didn't run away, they just stay on the path. And then after a while they some more skeletons that Where the belly had been was lots of foods just underneath the rib cages of the skeletons, all you know piles and piles of half digested food and all this food we have.

So they'd put down their food and started traveling more likely with food and kept walking. And then this mattress they were carrying, you know, that's not gonna work hundred pound mattress and bedding and everything. So they put it down and they kept walking. And after a while, they didn't toward carrying all this stuff anymore. It was a lot easier to walk and they kind of felt freer and lighter. And after a while they started enjoying the walking. And then it's new this day and the path and keep walking but it was just like a joy to walk with knowing that carrying anything, and then at some point, those five paths came together and they became one path These five new friends from the village saw each other again and happy to see each other they became companions on the path and they started walking. They

really enjoy the walk at some point it became very easy to walk. And it was almost like gliding on a very smooth, no obstacles maybe slightly downhill. Just beautiful, just walking, walking, they do no idea where they're going. But the elder had said to always walk, keep walking. And then at some point they were walking and they were kind of almost forgot they were walking so easy, so smooth. So in the walking, they become the walking and there's no self consciousness about walking, getting anywhere, avoiding anything. They just walking so nice. And suddenly, with no warning. They came to a big dip in the path and they just kind of almost like tumbled down but slid down. We're waiting. And there was a sign. And the sign said, the end of the path. Where are we? What's this about? And so they looked around and sure enough, the path ended but there was like kind of a nice Meadow that opened up. And then just not too far away in the meadow and there was a sign. And let's go look at the sign. And it said, Peace. Oh, maybe we come to peace, peace down or something. Peace. And they felt very peaceful and it's like so nice and peaceful and settled and they felt very safe. But the safety they felt was not like they were safe from things around them. They were and they felt that way. But For the first time in their life, they felt safe from themselves. And that was kind of a radical idea they hadn't they hadn't realized that they were maybe in some ways, their own greatest danger. And so that any upcoming safe person for themselves was a radical new idea, but they felt safe inside safe outside, they felt peaceful. So they walked further. And there their surprise, they had returned to their village. And then their life was as it had been. Except they were found how to be peaceful in the middle of it. And so they live their lives in the village, very peaceful, very safe, productive lives, good lives. And they became the elders who, for whom there was kind of a They're they were their piece was a gift to their community and great help. So this is an allegory the story where you don't go anywhere. I mean, you end up where you started. But then you go off on a journey and a path. And people who start the meditation path or Buddhist practice, and he just kind of a path that you follow. And there are some teachers who say that if you start this path, don't stop. You have to really see it through to the end, but always use just keep walking. Keep going. Don't stop and stay on the path. And that's the most important thing if you start this, stay on the path and keep walking. And people start this you enter meditation or Buddhism for many reasons. Some people do it for kindness and compassion. And that's the greatest need. Some people do it for healing. They're broken or wounded or deeply hurt or betrayed.

And so they go for healing. Some people go for wholeness, they feel fragmented, they feel like they do. They're divided against themselves in some way. There's the good part and the bad path part are acceptable and not acceptable part of who they are, and they're at war with each other and they do come together and become whole again. Other people will start this path in order to discover the truth. They have a real inspiration, love for truth and discovery, what is what's really going on here? And that's what's that gets take sets them off on a path. And some people are there to be comfortable, for freedom, to become free to have a sense of liberation and no longer constrained or limited or in bondage by so many things that society and psychology keeps us caught in. And so keep walking, but some people start the path with so much luggage. So much they have to carry with them. And some people carry, you know, tons of weapons. There's so much resentment and so much anger and so much fear that they're ready to blame and attack and to, you know, defend themselves at all costs. And it's hard to walk this meditation path with all the weapons that we carry with us and animosity. And some people end up as skeletons. Some people carry with them, their possessions and wanting and all the things that they want to acquire and things that feel like they have to be and through read their desires, then that makes it hard to walk the path. It's heavy. Some people have all kinds of fantasies hope, where it's all about some people have amazing fantasies about what it's like when they become enlightened and float on clouds and everything they touch turns, cold in everyone's bows to your feet, thinks you're the savior of the ages. All kinds of hopes and ideas that people have but what's going to happen and that becomes the way that takes us off the path that can't really continue. People stumble and fall. Some people keep looking looking off the path and things that are safely a far from the path,

but they get distracted by them. The allure of The world and all the things you can get and want and things and jobs and relationships and wealth and status and all those things and they veer off the path to pursue those things. Other people see monsters dangers. And they recoil from the dangers and fall off the path they run away and hide or something. all they had to do was stay on the path, stay on the path, keep walking, keep walking. And then there's people who are attached to pleasure and food, drinks and all kinds of drugs. And then there's people who are attached to comforts, hundred pound mattresses or whatever and just, and they want comfort all the time and it weighs them down. And if you want to walk the path of meditation or path of Buddhism, you have to learn how to Put all this stuff down. Even if all you do is meditate 20 minutes a day, if you really want to meditate well and really get into it as a daily regular thing. You have to be able to put all those things down while you're meditating. And many meditators will see how difficult it is to do that. All these things come along, come along. If you take the path further and you know meditate more and go on retreats and make this Buddhism much bigger part of your life. It's actually more important to know sometimes more difficult to discover, and put down all the things baggage we're carrying with us. And it isn't like you have to put down the baggage. It's not like a requirement. But it's like but it's like kind of like if you go backpacking up in this year I was in the mountains. You're not required to go with a light backpack. You know, you can bring a 500 pound backpack. No, you're welcome. As you wish. You know, there's no requirement not to.

But you know, it's pretty foolish to bring a 500 pound backpack up in, you know, to go up, you try your best, you know, if you really make it we want to make it work you go light. So the same thing with spiritual life, this Buddhist practice is no requirement to put down all kinds of things. However, you want to have be able to have the mind and the heart be light, not burdened, not weighed down, not preoccupied by all kinds of things. So there has to be some ability to put things down to keep walking. And the admonition is stay on that path and keep walking. Did at some point, these things that people initially need, and there's other things besides the five things that I mentioned. Some either or either are attained or something happens Think shifts are dissolves, that they're no longer needed in the same way. But one way that they're taken care of, and then the path becomes a singular path. It's no longer a path that's particular to the individual and the individuals needs, but becomes a common path. That is not kind of personal, fulfilling personal needs anymore, but rather fulfills spiritual life or more universal things that we share with all beings that point in the path we're all walking the path together and then keep walking. Just do the path. Just take every step, be mindful, show up, keep doing it. And then this idea of becoming unselfconscious became becomes easy and natural second nature to do it and, and it's such a joy and such a nice thing just to practice and do and all the stuff that it doesn't matter if its attainment is not so important. Getting away from things not so important. There's nothing to accomplish except to walk the path, just the joy of it. And no self consciousness is like some point it's almost like we become the path or become the walking or the walking becomes us. And then because of that radical full fledged on self consciousness, this kind of the hooks of me myself in mind, the hooks of self concern have been put down. That allows something to drop away, come to the dip, and dip that is in a certain way in Buddhism seen as the end of the path. And the primary way that Buddha characterized this end to the path this state that people attain or experience how they how a person is who's come to the end. The primary way it's the person described it. A person's not peaceful as attain peace. Sometimes he uses the word safety, the person has attained, attained safety from bondage safety from being fettered or caught up. Other times the Buddha talked about happiness, kind of high quality happiness. And then in some ways to realize that you're back where you started. You haven't really gone anywhere, maybe. But you're back in a very different way. You're back having put down a lot of attachments, a lot of the burdens. That's another way the Buddha described the ultimate goal if his practice was the goal. The goal is a goal is attained in in putting down one's burdens. putting down once burdens or taking off the load that we carry. And then we're here in this world without the load without the burden, we're here in the world in a peaceful way, in a safe way. And they're out there only

safety that I think is kind of guaranteed or really obvious, really, you know, really can count on. And this end of the goal is that you become a safe person for yourself. So there's no tendencies to do anything that's going to cause you inner harm. And, and along the way, we learn how much inner harm we cause ourselves clinging or grasping, and our version and our judgments and fears and all these things. And that's remarkable thing to become safe for oneself. And to some degree, we become safe for others. There's no guarantee because but There's no more conscious intention that we're going to cause harm.

And so this idea that people will be able to come and visit the elders, the elders, the people who are peaceful, the people who are safe to be with the people whom we can sit with and feel like we're, we can just be ourselves and it's just sit there and, and be disarmed or be open or be transparent. And we can just be here because we're safe. And that's a gift that people at the end of the path can give. That's a very important gift, the gift of peace, of safety, of kindness, or healing, of wholeness, true freedom. And the way to that is there's a path and if you take that path stay on the path and keep walking. It's a true path. It's a good path. But you have to stay on it and keep walking one step at a time, one step at a time. And for one of the kind of core practices or core aspects of this path, in our Buddhist tradition, is the practice of mindfulness. There's something very powerful about the next step being clear recognition of what's happening now. And to discover how powerful that is and how helpful it is to clearly this is what's happening now. It's it's kind of like, when you when they reckon when their mindfulness is clear enough and strong enough. That moment, the mind is not caught by anything. It was maybe caught with things just before that, but to clear this thing of something about the very clear wow This is what's happening now. I'm angry. I'm I am angry. But it's so clear that it's that there's no room for being angry in the clarity of knowing your anger. Greedy, upset, confused, desirous, distracted. Boy, I am really distracted. At that moment, you're not distracted. There's a clarity of knowing there's a step through groundedness there's freedom in that. And one moment maybe doesn't seem to count for much. But if you string those together and start living that way, it's kind of like you have an umbrella and the water the rain just falls off the sides. You have this wonderful capacity. To keep walking, and everything is kind of those falls off and doesn't stick because of the strength of the recognition. So there's other elements to the Buddhist path. But that that's the core one that we teach here that mindfulness and keep being mindful. take the next step of mindfulness, take refuge in mindfulness, find your strength and your support in being aware. And rather than going off the path because of the dangers or the desires, the rulers know clearly what's happening. And then experiment and develop what it means to be clearly aware. If you're casually mindful, it doesn't quite work as well as if you're fully mindful, this is happening. And that's a path to peace. It is a kind of peace to do that. So here we are in our village. And just on the edge of our village, there's a vast wilderness. And there are all kinds of little paths going into that wilderness. And some of them have, they all have labels names. And some of them have the one that's just right for you, waiting for you. And if you want to take it, it's there. A beautiful path. It's a wonderful thing to do. So that's the fable for today. The fable of the paths. So we have some time. If you would like to make any comments about that or questions or direction or directions How to do the PAP. You're welcome to Ask or speak up.

So if you can mic up today and the edge there within, some people won't hear you anyway.

Can you comment on?

Can you comment on how to put down

the burdens all the weight It helps if we really know that it's, it helps when we really know how heavy it is. So sometimes it's good to stop and get to know it well get familiar with it. And if you if you really need to get to know to see it, spend time getting to know it, get to know it so well that you see the



shortcomings of it. And when and then it's easy to put it down. Sometimes it puts itself down, but some people try to let go of things or put things down before they've gotten to know it.

Um, I was wondering about boundaries and boundaries. Mm hmm. So following following certainly hold a little bit closer because

I have trouble here.

So following a path, I think there's a boundary that's already set for you. But I wonder without confining, how do you set boundaries, you know, for other people or for yourself against other people and against isn't the perfect word, but I hope you understand the idea

as a important topic for people the question of personal boundaries and how to maintain appropriate ones to dissolve the dissolve the inappropriate ones, the ones that are fortresses. And so what to think about the path is it's that as I, as I talked about it today, it's a metaphor. And there is actually no physical path that we're talking about. The path only exists for you when you walk it and it's in the walking that the path is made. And And so the walking it is to really inhabit something and really act in such a way or, or that you're grounded in presence, in your experience in in yourself. And so in terms of boundaries, boundaries, it's very hard to be in interpersonal relationships when there's neediness and demands and pushing and everything. If a person is not grounded in themselves, and able to stand on their own two feet and really know what they're experiencing, and, and be able to feel the confidence to say, Stop. Take your time. Let's find out what's going on here. Let's talk about what's going on. And so one of the and that's there's a hard skill to learn. And that's, but that's what this path of mindfulness is pointing to is possible to really start knowing knowing what's happening here with me. Am I grounded in my, my standing of my own two feet? Am I really centered in this situation? Or am I By being pushed around, am I leaning into someone? Am I pulling away? Am I closing down? Do I get confused? Do I feel inadequate? Do I feel unworthy? Do I feel like I'm undeserving? Do I feel like I'm the one to be to blame and therefore I need to accommodate and make all kinds of things, what's going on here? And so to be able to take centered stand and stand upright, in a dignified way, and then track and see what's going on here, all the inner voices, all the things going on, is the beginning of knowing how to have healthy boundaries. If you just set up walls without understanding yourself, they can kind of backfire. That makes sense. So get to know yourself

is the awareness that one has without the thought of my individual self is that Permanent or impermanent?

Is the awareness that it has no self consciousness.

You know, you'd mentioned the awareness without self that self. Yeah, right. So the self, I assume means the individual. So is that awareness permanent or impermanent?

I don't know. It's kind of I appreciate the question. It's not a question I know how to answer. Because it's a question about the nature of reality, but the nature of consciousness. And, and in Buddhism, we're not so interested in those kinds of questions. They're interesting questions. We're interested in the process of freedom. And so as we're conscious, do we find out how to be consciously free and not caught and not suffering? And that's a no and an actual nature of what consciousness is what awareness is, in some absolute way. Like, is it permanent or not? That's that's really not a particularly interesting question for the purpose. is a becoming free of suffering? Believe it or not. So but it's a very

unsatisfying answer I'm sure for you. So I'll give you I'll try to give one syllable more satisfying, but not so satisfying for me. And that is that

we don't know what awareness is. No one knows. We don't know what consciousness is. Do you go to Stanford? You know, you go to people who study consciousness and they have many definitions of IQ, many understandings. It seems like every decades more books being written there. Now they understand what consciousness is that new theories. No one knows what it is really. And, but but in one's experience, which we're in from Buddhist point of view, we look at our experience It would seem that it's possible to have an experience or a sense of awareness is always operating one way or the other. Sometimes it comes along with a lot of self consciousness. Sometimes it comes along with desire, sometimes it comes along with different shapes and colors and forms. And sometimes it's unburdened and unshaped by the conditioning of the mind. And so you could say, you could theorize that awareness, as long as we're alive, there's a kind of awareness it's more or less kind of constant ache. And in addition to that, there's all this extra stuff we put on top of it. So that's one. I don't know if that's if any more satisfying but I think they tried to theorize it a better better than that. I'm pretty reluctant

to try again, just a follow up from the public. viewpoint Yeah. From the practical viewpoint, so when you're meditating, one part of it is negation of sensations that are transient in nature. And the other part occasionally you may feel this awareness without the sense of individual, I thought, some practical perspective should want focus on that state of awareness on the sensations

and I do both. Great, nice question. At different times, different ones different different parts of those are useful as a focus of attention. So it depends what's happening overall and also depends on a particular meditation technique a person's following, and, and where they are kind of in the stages of meditation practice, the answer would come so I can't give you a you know, I can't give you an you know, a definitive answer to your question. Those are all options. And you have to be you have to use your wisdom or guide guidance to know, you know which to do. The general approach here and the kind of meditation practice we do here is the default is to is to bring your attention to whatever is the predominant predominant experience of the moment. So we're not negating anything like negating sensations. We're not rejecting anything. And when the practice is really strong, we're not even letting go of anything. But whatever is the salient but there is predominant experience of the moment. That's we're bringing our attention to. And there are times when the predominant experience of the moment is consciousness or awareness. And those times, that's where the attention goes. Other times in sensations in your, you know, in your knee, you know, you some, some people will start meditating are surprised by how many sensations you can have in your knee if you're sitting cross legged. And so that's where your attention would go. And, and if you and part of the benefit of that of going to wherever is predominant is if you don't go to predominant bring your attention to what's really happening and then you easy to set up a tension between what's calling your attention what's loud and versus where you think you should be or we want to be and that tension sometimes it's okay to have but it kind of makes you know, it makes the whole process a little bit more complicated and agitated. Is that adequate an answer to you? Are you satisfied it well enough, or do you want to ask again? later on? I'm in trouble. Okay, so anyone else? One more.

So in the tail girl.

When people leave the path, they always end up as skeletons.

Yep. Oh, yeah. Yeah, like out to Robert. Right.

So my question,

how many skeletons Have you had so far in this lifetime?

Now I'm in trouble. Okay, so the question is, is it possible to leave the path? That's a serious question, is it possible to have a sense of leaving the path and then coming back on the path or do you just leave the path

forever?

That's satisfactory.

So, so this path is, is a, you know, it's a very, you know, if we take the metaphor of path as as you know, a little more, you know, it's at its face value. Then it's possible to go off the track the path for decades, right. Years and years. And, and some people never find their way back. However, once the decision is made to start the path, it turns out it's only a step away. does it know that it's not very far away. It's just the next moment to be mindful and clear and show up for this. It's just this is just a step away. And it's the path is very forgiving. The path doesn't care how far how long you were distracted and lost and off the path. The path doesn't care what you did when you were there. The path just is happy to have you back. Welcome back as you are, and you don't have to carry the burden all I made the wrong choice and the wrong decision or I wasted my years. I wasted my youth. I could have been practicing, I've wasted you know, the path doesn't care. The path is so happy to have you back in the next step. So don't don't carry the path with the past with you just start again. Start again.

No, that's a satisfactory answer.

Thank you.

So. So thank you. And I hope that by telling this teaching in terms of little fable, maybe it's a little bit evocative for you to kind of see how it might be a match for your own life and your own how you live. And because it's, you know, it's it's suggestive enough to allow for many, many possibilities. I be curious to know, if you're in the village and decided to take one of those paths in the wilderness, what the name of your path would be. Great. Thank you.