

# 2018-06-17 The Importance of Nothing

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Okay. So in perhaps in important ways, you know, I really don't have anything to say this morning. And, and the important ways in which that kind of exists I guess I can say some things about and it's so it would be the topic of the talk then would be nothing. And, you know, and one of my favorite topics. So how much can you say about nothing? We'll find out. And ideally, I would maybe talk about nothing, and by the time it's done, there'll be nothing. You'll have nothing. You have gotten nothing here. And you'd be Happy, did the content to have nothing. The one of my favorite words from the ancient Buddhist language is the word I can shut up, which means no thing nothing. And it's used as one of the titles for the people who are fully awakened fully liberated. They're a concerto. They are nothing. And, and that sounds pretty frightening and interesting and perhaps boring. to, you know, to do all this practice and meditation, maybe go on retreats, the end up being a nothing. I mean, that's, you know, you want to be something and, and so, we don't advertise this to publicly, you know, come to come to IMC to be nothing. You know, we said come time to be something important than, you know, maybe people would come more But they can be nothing. The tradition says that these people who are the nothing's What what? What qualifies them as being a no thing person is that they have no attachments and they have no clinging and nothing they cling to. So it's no no no thing that they cling to. So they might have some possession some things, but there's no clinging to it. And the definition of no thing here is this absence of attachments or clinging.

I was a little bit inspired to have nothing to talk about today by something that one of the great spiritual teachers in America said, which is Mr. Rogers, Fred Rogers and he He preferred kind of quote him exactly right. But something like he was more interested in simple and deep. Then, kind of for him, he thought a culture which focuses on shallow and complex, so simple and deep versus complex and shallow. And so I think this, you know, certainly characterizes the path of meditation, that we're more interested in something simple, nothing that goes deep inside of us, that has a depth to it, as opposed to being complex, complex life, lots of things, complex identities, complex agendas. And, and it keeps us shallow keeps us on the surface of things surface of our life surface of our minds and our hearts. And so the process of making dictation has a lot to do with shedding the complexities that are shallow, or shedding the preoccupation with the things that are on the surface of our minds and our hearts so that we can settle in drop down into what's deeper down. And so, to the degree to which the kind of shallow parts of the surface parts of our life are preoccupied about things, it's a lot to do with meditation about shedding that preoccupation with things, so that we can have something and nothing which is very different than having things. So the kind of things that we have in our minds preoccupations is you know, as a whole range of things. The Buddhist tradition has a very interesting term called do potty which has a meaning Apparently in this original form of meaning to take something up. And so we take things up, and then we're taken up by them. So we pick something up an attachment to something. And that attachment then lives in us in such a way that it motivates us or drives our behavior. So example

might be, we get attached to certain identity, we need to be someone and we need to be smart or beautiful or have status or, you know, have opinions or we need something to be someone who's a someone. So we take that up. And then once we've taken that up, then that becomes a determining factor for what motivates us we have to sustain it but to keep it going. It has requirements. You know, if the requirement is to be beautiful, then I better spend, you know more time in the morning, taking care of my clothes and getting just the right clothes, then care in what I say when I speak. And I think that quite an interesting kind of balance, how much time some people spend on their looks, compared to how much time they spend on what they have to say. And I learned that a few days ago, apparently that are my favorite man, Mr. Rogers. He spoke very simply, to this children's program in America. And he spoke to children, young children who watch TV. And one of the best things going on TV if you've never seen Mr. Rogers, watch him for a while. And apparently, he would go, he would, you know, write out a script that he was going to say, for each program. And it would take sometimes eight different versions of a sentence before he had the sentence just right, in order to convey just the right thing to children, and, and so the example I was given to me was, so the first sentence the first draft would be, he would tell kids you should be safe. Well, that's not a good message for kids to get, it's probably makes them more scared than than safe. And, and by the after a number of renditions over and over again, he would say, you know, it's a good idea to check in with your parents about what's the safe thing to do. And somehow that I don't know if that clicks I have exactly right how we did it. But you know, the point I wanted to make is he was a lot of care to what he said.

So if our identity is tied up with our looks, there are people who spend an inordinate amount of time taking care of their looks. Is that really is that complex? Is that really the deep or is it shallow? And I choose that as an example, because looks are they say our skin deep? You know, it's not very, it's not very, you know, very deep inside of us, and to be concerned with our appearance, versus what's deep inside is a huge difference. So what we do when we meditate is a lot, a lot of what we do is do nothing. It's an amazing place to do nothing to undo the doings. And to make meditation just one more something that you have to do one more something to attain. One more something to be is to add to the complexity that our minds are often caught up in. And in fact, a lot of what meditation is, is undoing or doing less. And this idea of doing nothing and meditation is a very powerful idea. When the mind is incessantly trying to do something. It's trying to plan the future. rehearse it, redo the past, engage in fantasies. Construct amazing what the mind can construct, what the mind activity gets involved. And making up. One of the ones that's fascinating is boredom. Boredom is not inherent to any place or anything, any situation at all. Boredom is always a construct in the human mind. It's an evaluation, a relationship and attitude that gets formed in the mind we evaluate situation against our desires or wishes or, you know, past, you know, memories or you know, our projections, all kinds of things. But boredom is a construct. So, what happens in a really boring situation like this talk? What happens if you're able to relax that part of the mind that constructs boredom, let that fall away. That activity, of boring of making boredom, ceases stops, nothing has changed. But the feeling that it's boring has dropped away. Some people have a very strong recurrent idea that something needs to happen, or something dangerous is about to happen. That's an activity of the mind. The mind is engaged in those kinds of thoughts, those kinds of feelings. It's mental neurons that are firing in some way. It's not built into the fabric of the universe that you should have that those attitudes and those thoughts and meditation that those firing those neurons can quiet down. And the feeling of fear. The feeling of wanting something has to happen to get something begins to kind of fade away, and we're just left here without it. The idea of of shame that some people people carry with them or feelings of somehow being unworthy, or the feelings of resentment that we might carry underlying sense of aversion, that might be very deep and kind of pervasive filter which we see the world. These are all considered to be activities of the mind constructs of the mind, in Buddhism. And when you have a construct of the mind, it can be unconstructed. When you have when the mind is involved in activities, that act, those activities can, can

become quiet, can become settled. And one of the best ways to settle the mind from all those activities is not to be interested in too many somethings to be interested in nothing to not be focused on the objects of our thoughts, focus on our concerns, focus on trying to make something happen, even focused on making something better in meditation interferes with this important part of meditation, which is in fact too subtle to quiet the stilling of all the activities of the mind. And in that process we touch into something deep. So there's Mr. Roger quotes simple and deep.

So what happens to you if you sit quietly and then take maybe the metaphoric and the mind of awareness and reach deep inside of you to the deepest place that you know, and touch it. What do you encounter there? What do you touch, you become still and quiet and reach down inside, below all the layers and all The preoccupations with daily life affairs, work and the relationships you have and just keep going down, reach deep down in there. In your depths. What do you find there? What do you touch? Some people will touch something that's difficult. Something is unresolved or touch. Maybe some of the places where there's deep hurt, or maybe some deep anger or something, someplace that needs to be healed. Some people will touch sadness that they didn't even know they had. Some people will touch fear that this was kind of pervasive underlying current of much of their lives. Some people will touch degrees of peace or contentment, or their places of love that can exist within us. Do we touch down there and part of the function of medicine mission is to shed to simplify the surface chatter of our mind, to have nothing to do nothing really, to allow ourselves to do nothing to sit here, do nothing and go through the layers of boredom through the layers of agendas and trying to get something and attain something. And trust. It's okay to do nothing for a while. It's okay to shed. And then in that process of simplifying and simplifying, allow, what will happen is that will drop down into a deeper and deeper place, or a more fuller place or a richer place inside of us. It seems that a lot of the places where we suffer and our lives have a lot to do with one way or the other. The surface chatter, the surface complexity of things doesn't mean that we don't suffer deep inside either. But a lot of the challenges and the reactivity and running away and the attacking and the blaming and the self loading that come with our challenges are surface activities of the mind part of this complex, shallow area of our life. And to be able to kind of settle deeper than that, to quiet that, to have all those things. You know, to see them as less important than nothing. There's, there's some things, there are some activities that go on in the mind. And those activities don't have to have final authority. They don't have to be the thing, the place that we say that, you know, this is what's centrally important in my life. And to trust this process of simplification to trust that nothing needs to happen. That little slogan, nothing needs to happen is a very powerful slogan to carry with you when you meditate. And then you repeat that to yourself nothing needs to happen. And then the minds will argue Do you mean nothing needs to happen of course something has to happen. And then you go through the list of all things. And you know, Gil doesn't know anything about meditation when he says nothing needs to happen and you know, there's deglet the Buddhist text lists all these things are supposed to happen first jhana second jhana third jhana the stages of this the stages of that and you know, I got to get going here and huff and puff and you know, and in you know, you want to do this quickly. I mean, nothing needs to happen. Yes, maybe when we get fully liberated, I can be nothing. But you know, but the way to be nothing is first to be a something first to have something I don't know That's the way it works. I think that is the whole process is a process of simplification, of shedding, shedding all the things which are extra, all the things that are extra. And you know you're on that path when we start touching into a deeper sense of contentment.

And that's dangerous to cats or something. If anything's, anything's a thing you can get attached to. But But on that path of simplifying and simplifying, simple and deep, there comes a time of contentment. And sometimes that's a contentment that's different than how maybe surface contentment is. Because it can even involve a contentment with feeling uncomfortable, contentment with being present for what's difficult in our lives. There's a way of being simple and deep to really connect to the depths of who we

are, and find that that's a difficult place. Some people will require Boil from what's difficult. And the recoiling surface up into the word shallow and complex. Some people will actually distract themselves quite actively and get busy. So they don't have to feel what's going on here. This path that meditation path is a past that of trusting what's deep inside, whether it's difficult or whether it's quite beautiful in there. It's a wonderful thing. So to be content with what happens when we sit there, just sit there and just be present. And this idea of reaching deep, deep inside, becoming still becoming quiet, and reaching deep inside and touching what's there. In my mind, the idea of touching is a beautiful thing. It is not fixing it's not hitting, it's not falling away. It's kind of a you know, a loving act. Like you know, a friend of yours perhaps is going through a hard time and you might gently touch there. There arm I'm here with you. So they know there's companionship company. So to touch ourselves to touch which deep and we can't go into those depths if we're too busy doing things if we're trying to be something to do nothing to nothing. So some people find it very powerful when they meditate to put a lot of emphasis a lot of attention on all the things the mind is trying to do. And when you look at your if you're really study what you're thinking, chances are that all those thoughts are in some way or they're trying to accomplish something. If we are involved with our if our emotions are strong, it's not unusual for the emotions themselves to represent something in the background of them something we want, or something we don't want so this idea that so but just kind of not to do anything, not to need to do anything, nothing needs to happen. And then you argue, of course something just needs to happen. No nothing needs to happen. Maybe I'll take my chances maybe I'll trust this little slogan. Me took a list they hear a little bit longer and see what happens. And then perhaps you can stay longer, maybe some of this mental activity this the swirling and whirling the excitement, agitation of the mind, the preoccupation can settle some more and settle some more and settle some more. So the corner that the classic, I know a classic metaphor simile for this idea that many of you probably heard of, is that of a muddy pond. So you know, it's been stirred up, the kids have played there and started roll ups all muddy. And then if you leave the pond alone, the mud will settle and become clear. If you do nothing to the pond, it'll settle. But if you take a big paddle and try to help it to settled by stirring it around, you know, the paddle, you know, you're pushing those mud particles down, you go down, you go, get down, you know, just keep you keep, you know, the water is going to be stirred up and as mud is going to stay in solution. It's not going to settle. In order to let the pond settle. You have to stop paddling. You have to leave it alone. And so the our minds get all worked up about things.

And then if we're trying to too much we're actively involved in trying to fix or change or push away or pat down. You know, all that activity. It actually stirs it up. You And more. And so just do something very profound learning how to leave everything alone to do nothing to nothing. One of the places where it's kind of very clear after a while if you meditate is meditators tend to be sooner or later troubled by their thinking. Because thinking somehow, you know, is the opposite of meditation or it gets us keeps us from being present and focused and keeps us distracted. And so it's reasonable to be able to trouble because distracted thoughts can be so distracting that they distract us. distractions that distract us from the fact that we're distracted. You get that we're so caught up in those distractions. We don't even know we're distracted. And so, too. So if we're bothered by the thoughts, by our thinking, and we want to try to attack them or fix them or think our way out of them, we just stirring the mud in the pond. One of the best things to do with thinking is to do nothing. But it's not nothing which allows everything to gallop along the way they were. But it's a kind of nothing that is inherent, or is part and parcel of, of mindfulness of clearly seeing. The recipe here is to see to recognize to be present, to have a clarity. This is what's happening. And leave it at that. This is what's happening. And that does a number of things. But one of the things that does is the energy of the mind is kind of like food. It feeds that energy will feed wherever it goes. And if the energy of the mind goes into being clearly aware of what's happening, then the energy in mine is not going into. So what's happening is distractions is a lot of thinking. If we're really caught up in them than the energy, the mind is feeding the distractions. If we

open up to a clear seeing clear awareness, I'm thinking and do nothing more than that. Then the energy of the mind is going into the awareness more than into the distraction. Same thing with swirling of emotions. It turns out that a lot of emotions continue through time because we are involved with them, we're bothered we want them or somehow engaged with them. But to really To be clear and open present, here is an emotional life. Here's an emotional feeling. And let that arise in the clarity of the mind clarity of awareness, then the energy of the mind is going into clarity as opposed to into fueling and feeding the emotions. And this so, the idea of doing nothing has a lot to do with what we're feeding. And by doing but not being involved in the all the activities of the mind. We don't feed and reinforce the mind being so active and busy. And then you'll be debating with it. What do you mean, I'm not supposed to be active in the mind I have important problems to solve. I have important things to attain. I have important things to do when I'm an important person and, and we live in an important society where is neurotically driven For more and more activities and more, he mails and more texts and more websites and more. There's just so much that keeps the mind busy and active. He's involved in something. What if you let your mind be involved with nothing? What about nothing? In order to make the nothing as something that's more appealing, we could call it sacred nothing. Maybe that's just enough of a carrot. So that you're willing to try the sacred nothing. The nuts just didn't speed to be simple and deep.

And one of the interesting things that happens is we kind of let this process of shedding of Simplifying and deepening happen is that certain things get amplified. space, spaciousness gets amplified. When we're claustrophobically involved in thoughts and ideas and feelings caught up in all the details of our life. There's very little room to feel the spaciousness of life spaciousness of, of now of here, but to have spaciousness, and it's all here. There's lots of space, but it gets amplified time. wonderfully, time gets amplified. What does it mean to have time amplified? So it's not saying he's saying a time slows down, or time speeds up. But sometimes in meditation or this simplified way of being this kind of subtle, quiet, simple situation, there's something about time that gets a rich, almost like multi dimensional. Sometimes it feels like it goes faster sometimes it feels like it's go slower, but it's amplified. awareness, the capacity to know becomes amplified. Our sense of presence in the middle of our life gets amplified. The now this moment, wherever we're doing, it becomes amplified. It becomes a richer it becomes a deeper, it becomes kind of special. And it's a little bit sad. All the chasing after something that people do, when some of the most probably what they most want in life, the sense of happiness and well being and safety and contentment and feeling complete feeling settled feeling at home in this world feeling is available here and now in an amplified moments of now in the Amplified moments of nothing, nothing, nothing to do nothing to be. Nothing needs to happen. And the trust that and then the magic or the specialness of this, is that this deep and simple place that lives inside of us isn't, is in some ways, not quite nothing in there. It's not it's not I don't think of it as same thing as an activity of the mind. For me, activities of the mind are more surface things but there's a deep sources with inside of us. Have motivation that are connected to love, connected to compassion, connected to peace. They're connected to a deep sense of well being. That can provide us with all the motivations that we need to live a good life. So it's a kind of turning inward, that allows a turns itself inside out. And so that when we come back into the world, we're not doing it in the complex and shallow way, but doing it from a deep settled place. A place that doesn't get anxious, doesn't get greedy. A place where there's no need to prove oneself or defend oneself where there's no place for shame or resentment, not because it's shouldn't be there, but because doesn't live in that place that depth. And those things are just seen as a surface. So finally, what I'd like to say is that a lot of this process repeats a lot of this process of meditation is about shedding, shedding a lot of the things that we think are so important to us to keep us so preoccupied keeps us kind of racing and going. And to help that shedding the reference point of nothing is very useful.



And I use the language of shedding because and I think of it as like shedding the snake of his skin, of this skin of a snake. That as the snake gets bigger grows, it sheds its own skin. As we go deep and simple, we grow become bigger. And all the stuff that we thought was important is seen as just skin that gets shared. And this natural organic process of somehow becoming bigger, and then shedding is like a wonderful, wonderful analogy for this process. And may you become really big and maybe even a certain kind of way powerful, content peaceful. At home, in yourself at home in this world at the same time, as becoming nothing

Doing nothing and trusting that in nothing you will live in this world wisely and caringly.

So, today, for some people, Sunday is a Sabbath which is a time for sacred nothings. Maybe you have a sacred nothing day like your time and presence and attention be amplified. Thank you