

2018-07-16 Giving Yourself To Practice In Daily Life

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

Okay, so I'd like to tell us sort of story. First that's maybe sublime. And then talk about what is really ordinary. In the sublime story, doesn't work maybe the ordinary well. And the story comes from these ancient texts called suttas, teachings of the Buddha. And sometimes I love reading them because you sometimes you get these little, little glimpses of a little conversation that happened 2500 years ago. You know, time of Socrates or Plato or you know, was pretty it's pretty long time ago. And, or little, little like glimpse of some little event that happened with someone back then. And sometimes you get the name of someone, sometimes you don't get their name.

And so the story goes like this. There is a newly ordained monk, young young man who's been ordained. And that means that he's left his ordinary life that he, as he's known it, and it was called going forth. And it was a big deal in the ancient world to become a monastic. Because you really had to step away from your ordinary life and career, family, all kinds of things. And you became someone who wasn't supposed to have any money and well, then it was not allowed to store up food. So every day you are beholden on your eating was dependent on the people who offered you some food. You weren't even supposed to kind of explicitly ask. But you could have your the lid off your bowl, big bowl that carried and that was a sign that you were available. So, he was a newly ordained monk, we don't know his name. And every day he would go out for his alms around with his bowl and get his meal. He would eat it, that would be in the morning, he would eat it. And then he go to his little hut, where he would dwell and the way it says stated, he would dwell at ease and be silent. So that was his routine. He would get up, go for alms, come back, go to his dwelling and dualities silence And then it can't be the time once a year or so where the monastics get together and so robes, because that's what they were, they were these robes and he's and they would get old discarded cloth that they would cut up and sew back together into the shape of the ropes that they weren't. So they there was a kind of collective communal effort that they would soar together. But he didn't come and so with the rest of them so here you have this new monk goes to eat, then just goes into his room and just kind of lives there at ease and doesn't communicate and doesn't come out to help or invoke involved in communal work. So, the other monks, done with this is, you know, they they're, they're thinking this guy slacking off or he said the good for nothing guy and lazy guy who just eats and then he goes to his room and You know, if it had been in modern times, they would have thought, I wonder what he's watching. And so they go to the Buddha and tell the Buddha. So he says, we'll ask the monk to come see me. So the monk comes and the Buddha says, How are you doing this? Is it true that you go for alms and then you come back and you eat? And then you go to your room, and you dwell at ease and silent the rest of the day and you don't come out to be involved in that communal sewing that we do. And the monk reply is very simple. I think it's maybe the only words he speaks and the whole sutta, a little story. He says, I am

doing my duty. I'm doing my duty. And that's enough for the Buddha to get this clue I guess, or something prompt to look this guy over a little more carefully.

And the Buddha could tell when he's really paid attention to him, that this man, this young monk, was a transformed person that he had gone through the course of practice, the meditation practice that Buddha taught, and it come out the other end as a transformed realized person. The brain is person. And so then the Buddha called the monks together and said, Oh, you know, yes, this guy is going off and he goes through his dwelling and his dwelling at ease and the silent, but he's finished, his work is complete, and now he's just, I guess, did what he has to do. So the duty of a monastic is to practice to practice diligently. You're not supposed to pick monastic because it's the easy way to get food or easy for you to get dwelling, you know, supposed to become a monastic, just to, you know, avoid work out in the world. The duty of a monastic is to kind of deal as you become a monastic, in order to really give yourself over to do the practice, devote yourself to this path of liberation. And there were some individuals on the monks who really took this seriously, and really gave themselves over completely to it. And this is what this young monk had done. And he would go every day to his room, and he would dwelling at ease meant that he would dip into deeper states of meditation, and then do his work there, explore himself develop insights, throughout concentration, all the way to becoming transformed. And, and I love this little story. I love the story of a young man who decides young person who decides I'm this is what I'm going to do. This is the only thing that's important. This is what my life is about, and doesn't just kind of devote themselves to this essential thing of meditation practice. And he receives the Buddha's approval and when he did, and it was okay not to go and be part of the collective sewing, because he had important things to do engaging in. And this feeling of being dedicated to something to feel like and then dedicated to spiritual practice or the path of liberation, and to really give oneself over to it fully, as if this is the most important thing to do everything else kind of a secondary. that it isn't that we're trying to integrate a little bit of our practice into our lives. But it's more the other way around, that we have a practice and then our life has to fit into that. And so priorities for some people are this way, then This is what this is what's important. And it's hard in our society to have this kind of dedication, because there's all these messages of things we should do and are supposed to do and experience and attain financially or security or jobs or relational, all kinds of things that you know, and we live here in our environment here with tremendous variety of opportunities and things to do and acquire and to watch. And, and many people I think, have more dedication, in the course of a day or a week to watching movies on TV or on their computer or just surfing the web than they do for example, meditating. You know, if, if a person meditates for 45 minutes a day, that's a pretty serious amount of meditation. Nice thing to do. But there's I think that in our environment, In here, I suspect that most people are on their device more than 45 minutes a day. And some of it's because of work, which maybe is necessary, but how much of it's really necessary, what's being done. And if what's really important is to engage in a path of liberation and do this deep inner work really explore deeply into the spiritual life for oneself. Why not give it more time and more dedication than some of the other recreational pursuits so we might do or things. So that's what this young monk had done. He dedicated himself to it. So now the ordinary so most of us here are probably not going to become monastics some of you might too wonderful. I was monastic for many years and I loved it. It was a wonderful life for me. And I'm happy not to be a monastic now. I'm happy with my life.

Both are good and but how as laypeople? How do we dedicate ourselves to practice? How do we develop ourselves and cultivate this? to the same degree? Yes, maybe, you know, I don't seem to agree is the story of a monk in the same intensity and fullness, but how do we, you know, do this have a dedication to spiritual practice? And how do we bring it as part of our life or make it our life in a deep way? So I want to say that, from the point perspective, having been a monastic and number of monasteries, one of the very supportive aspects of that lifestyle is the whole lifestyle supports us to

remember to practice Remember to be mindful and focus to remember to look at our minds and kind of clarify what's going on in ourselves, develop ourselves and kind of engaged, you know, and you're always being reminded throughout the day, and monastics do a lot of ordinary things that everyone outside of them History does. My first job in the monastery was to do carpentry mostly was sanding. The second job I had, I was a dishwasher and worked many hours a day doing the you know dishwashing machine. And then I was a cook and did all kinds of things in the monastery. Sweeping and cleaning and cooking. And I was also for a while in the monastery, I was what's called the town tripper. And that was the person who once a week would go into the city way out of the mountains down to the city with a little truck in order to bring supplies food and stuff back to the monastery. So I was the driver of the show, you know, I'm sure for for the produce and delivery guy. And so there's you know, things people do that those kinds of things in ordinary life, but the context of doing it was such that it was, there was no motivation or it was more natural to bring a certain kind of reminder of the practice the teachings, as I was doing it as we're doing it. So a lot of activities are ordinary, like we're doing it. So a lot of the question is not so much how do you do a great hour long? 10 hour Long's a day meditation. But one of the question is, how do you bring that little bit more own sense of practice and dedication of practice, to the ordinary things that you do already? Maybe you don't have to do new things. And you know, you maybe you don't have to go off and become a monastic, but maybe all the things you're already doing are many of them. Maybe you can do them in a different way. My sense, and I don't have this, you know, I don't have the real data to tell you the real number but my sense my guess That if you were 20% more mindful as you went through your day than you are now, you would attain the kind of mindfulness that a monastic has living in a monastery. It's not like you know, like way out of sight out of you know that, that unattainable. It just takes, you know, some more than what if you're already trying to be mindful my day a little bit more. And that to build a month, it builds momentum continuity, and something builds over time this way, by practicing more. So today I'd like to do is offer two approaches to kind of practices for how to bring a little bit more intensity or fullness of mindfulness to your daily life. And so your daily life can get some of the benefits that someone has who becomes a monastic and the first is when you Do something, just do that one thing. Do one thing at a time. We have a lot of examples of people who are doing two things at a time. If you walk around the city, it's remarkable how many people are walking around the city and hunched over looking into the something in the palm of their hands. You know, they're walking and they're looking at their device, you know, or you know, or if they have a few idle moments, they have to wait maybe at the bus stop for the bus or wait for something. What comes out you know, there we are, because we have to look it's so important that so much there and that screen. But what about just waiting at the bus stop just doing that simplest rather than filling the time.

What about just walking down the street Just do one thing at a time. So, one thing that is only took less last few years that are a little embarrassing, maybe to say this, but this thing about really doing not only one thing at a time, but to really get yourself over to it, and just do it and really make it your practice. You know, make it like what you fully do, like one point did, this is what I'm going to do. And any movement, any kind of urge to end and stop and move on to the next thing. You just let that shed that and shed that and just do this one thing. And it's fine. So, some years ago, I started, you know, occasionally getting this news or this information that we were supposed to wash our hands more than I was, but no one ever told me how long we're supposed to wash my hands. But then there was first first thing I remember learning was just recite the alphabet, as you know, and then it's 20 seconds, this 22nd rule so it took me a little bit before I kind of like took that seriously. And then I noticed that when I took it seriously, it was a little hard to do because I was already My mind was already, you know, simple thing, but I was already on to the next thing. And so decided, why don't I just make this the one thing? Why don't I make this my meditation practice so that when I watched those for those 20 seconds, I'm fully completely as I can in the washing. And so sometimes that's how I do it, and I close my eyes. And I'm

just really there. And especially when I started doing it, it was fascinating to watch my mind, how this urges to be finished and move on. You know, I have important things to do. You know, and like the school and these are the same urges same kind of activities of the mind that go on meditation that we have to work with and contend with so that we can let go over them and shed them quiet there. So we can be really here and meditation in a full embodied present way, a stilling of the busy mind stilling of the mind that spinning and running around and wanting things or thinking about things or eager for the next thing or something. Just certain kind of stopping of the mind. So you can do that you can cultivate the ability to do that, when you wash your hands after you go to the toilet, and you can count and then you have a debate while you're counting with yourself. This is silly. I can't do it. I'm the exception. You know, you know, and everyone else should do it. But, or there's important things to do, like no one's could, they can't wait out there because of whatever's going on. You know that 20 19 18 you can do it you can count down, make it more exciting. To see if you can get to one or to zero. But it isn't the point isn't to get to 20. The point is to get to here, fully here, just this and to don't just wait to meditate, to settle your mind to let go of your distracted mind your preoccupied mind your, you know, learn how to do it throughout the day so that you're here.

There's a wonderful four lines from TS Eliot's Four Quartets. It goes something like we will never cease. We will never cease our explorations. But the end of all our exploring will arrive when we return to where we started, when we arrived to where we started, and now it for the first time, the end of all our exploring will be to arrive at where we started and know it for the first time. You know, washing those hands. How could that be as profound as a monk who goes in the room all day long to meditate? I mean, that's so petty. You know, so ordinary, it doesn't count, right? What counts is there's a lot of things that count in that One of the tears of the spiritual practice of Buddhism. It counts what how you train your mind what you do with your mind. It counts whether you let your mind race out and race along to all its preoccupations and concerns, or you learn how to still the mind enough that you're here and a more fully complete way that you're really here. You've come to where you started, which is here and you're really here. And the mind is not racing. That rushing learned yearning, wanting, running away just here. So this idea of doing one thing at a time, when you walk down the street, just walk down the street and see in the walking, can you let go of restlessness can you get let go the urge that there's more things to do and multitasking and checking for emails or whatever it might be and learn how to Stop the mind. Not completely like, but to quiet, the discursive mind or quiet the scattered mind, quiet the fractured mind that's thinking and yearning and reaching and wanting and reacting. It's a great thing, to learn the skill to quiet the mind. And rather than losing something and doing that, we gain ourselves. We arrive where we bought where we started, which is here and ourselves in a bigger, fuller way we know ourselves better, are more more multi dimensional beings. There's more of us, there's a fullness of it. And there's much less sense of lack. Most of the reaching forward of the mind the spinning of the mind, the yearning of the mind, the wanting of the mind. usually comes from some feeling of lack or dissatisfaction or discomfort. We have But there's learning to use one thing at a time and a high quality way of being settled in that activity. We can settle out the sense of lack or dissatisfaction, just this, just this one thing. And you probably have lots of opportunities to do one thing that's ordinary things you already do. So it's not a matter of now suddenly becoming a super hero, super spiritual person who can meditate for hours and hours at a time. It means that when you brush your teeth, you just brush the teeth. The Samadhi of brushing your teeth. Isn't that cool? And so if you add in your day as you go through the day, and just bring that sense of just doing one thing at a time when you're doing, you know, 20% of the activities of your day doesn't have to be all day long. You'll get a lot of the benefits that come from going off and become a monastic And you get it easy. It's free. Isn't that nice? I think so. Okay, so that's the first thing. The second idea that can take ordinary life and help with this kind of developing a strong sense of practice, and it is called a steadiness of purpose. And what that means is if you have a purpose that you have, that you're going to dedicate yourself to, it could be a small purpose, ordinary thing. So it's a purpose. It was something you were tasked to do. Or

it could be a big purpose. You hold the purpose steady. You don't allow yourself to easily get distracted from it. This is what I'm going to do. So it can be as simple as washing dishes at home.

As you know, you're doing one thing at a time. But you keep doing that one thing at a time. You don't do Do that one thing, and then go and put the laundry in the dryer in the middle of washing the dishes. And then on the way back from putting laundry in the dryer, then you go straight out to straighten out the pillows on the couch. But you're doing one thing at a time, right? So but you're doing a lot of one thing at a time, but you're doing all these different ones. There's something about just when you're going really if you can, within reason. Stick with what you're doing. Don't let yourself get distracted from the activity you're doing. The steadiness I'm just going to do this help support learning how to have this still mind or quieted mind a mind that's quiet of its discursive neurosis and how to keep it while we're in activity while we're in our life. Hold Steady. So when I was in a monastery in Japan one evening I went into the kitchen Maybe it was in the air and it was I think it was the evening. And one of the cooks was chopping vegetables. There was a table and I said, I stood on the other side of the chopping table and he was chopping. And I was had these questions for him. So I asked the question, and he put down the fork and his character wherever he was. And he stood up and he looked right at me. And he answered he finished he picked up his knife, his vegetable, he started cutting again. So I asked my next question. He put down the knife put down the vegetable, stood up straight and look me right and gave me an answer. And I didn't really pick I'm kinda slow sometimes so I hadn't really picked up like how, how there was a squeal. intenseness beautiful intentions, the purpose. He was just doing this. Just doing eating me and answering my question. So then because I'm slow, and I asked the third question. So he did the same thing. It puts the carrot down the knife down and he looked up at me and said, Gil-son, Mr. Gil. He said, You know, I'm have worked here in the kitchen to do and if you keep talking with me, I can't do my work. And that's it. And then I understood. So I backed off. He could, of course, I mean, he was he was quite capable man. I know, he could have chopped and talk to me at the same time. But that's not what he was in a monastery to do. He was there to really be present for the things he was, you know, when he was doing it. And he wanted to steadiness of purpose when he was going to chop his vegetables. He just wanted to be able to do that until it was done. If another occasion time off in the monastery or something had come up to him. I'm sure he would have been very happy to have had the steadiness of purpose of having a conversation with me. Have a status hold a setting is a purpose. This is particularly useful if you have bigger purposes of your life. If you have really important things you want to do with your life, it's so easy to get distracted. It's so easy to kind of get broken up and be confused by other things. But it's really a wise thing to go sort through one's life and sometimes put aside even worthwhile things to do. So that you can really hope hold yourself to do something successfully, really give yourself to a few things and to have a steadiness of purpose. To do too many things, jumping around something internally in the psychophysical system. It's harder for it to be settled, harder, harder for it to kind of come from that still place, settled place or peaceful place or awake place or something. And, but if you can help us Do one thing and be steady and the purposes you do you have hold the course, or what's important for you, that allows something to get integrated or settled. And the analogy that I like for this was when I was a little kid. I remember like in second grade, there was a sandbox in the school guard school yard, and we get this little red u magnets. And we would rub it over the top of the sand there was little Iran Flint or something in it, and they start lying to do it enough they started lining up this little fence. So if you're able to hold the steadiness of purpose, all the little things in you will line up your all that scattered pieces of you can have a chance to get integrated in and work together.

So the sublime maybe is to go off pa New monastic, do your duty, go to your room and really give yourself over to lots of meditation. The ordinary path is to discover how to be more present in what you're already doing. And the two things that support that is doing when you do something, just do one

thing at a time. And, and then when you decide that something's important for yourself, the steadiness of purpose, be steady in it, just do it. Keep with it, follow through. If you're committed yourself to doing or you to make a decision, this is what I'm doing now. And then you'll get a lot of benefits. And maybe you'll get the same benefits as that monastic who did his duty. You didn't do for lay people. We don't have a duty like that. But we have a golden opportunity in this life to do something very profound in clarifying and liberating our minds and hearts. So those are my thoughts today. We have about 10 minutes if any of you would like to ask any questions, comments, when offered testimonials about how to have you've done this one thing at a time or steadiness, the purpose what you found useful. Anything.

I'll bring you the microphone. Hi, guys.

I don't know. Yeah, it makes you louder. I was gonna say I haven't meditated for a couple months, I kind of stopped abruptly for personal reasons, but um, it was nice to come and sit again and to feel just the discomfort in my body that I haven't felt for a while. in a strange way that was kind of nice to feel the discomfort.

Yeah. Because I've been ignoring it for

I think it's a wonderful thing statement you just made just just just as someone who have the wisdom to that's all you wanted to say. I love it. Yeah, to find it valuable. It's much better if your body and mind is uncomfortable to know it, and inhabit it and live it than it is to stay so scattered and busy and caught up in things. We don't even know what's happening for us to kind of coming home and then when it then our whole system has a chance to heal or settle or come together. And so and put to appreciate Fantastic, thank you.

I find waiting really difficult. He talked about waiting at the bus stop. And I've, for the past many years of meditating, I'm doing more and more things one at a time but waiting. Any waiting, waiting is the hard one. Okay?

So to do one thing at a time for you is to experience how difficult it is.

Just do that. That's the one thing. It's a little bit like what it said. Just be With the discomfort get to know it become its friend, let the restlessness or the discomfort or the be it's something that you learn about, just like I learned when I, when I said how much I learned so much about myself, I was so surprised to discover the simple act of washing hands, showed me all these ways in which, you know, I was off to the next thing already. So there's all kinds of things you can learn. So I think it's great. That your one pointed difficulty, just just let it be difficult and sit inside of that difficulty and breathe and get to know it and, and we can make all the feelings that you have that add up to this is difficult. But all those feelings, feel that they have an opportunity to breathe with you. They have an opportunity to show themselves to you

at first I thought that was just funny but I actually think that sounds brilliant.

valuable. Thank you. I love this comments come time see and learn to suffer.

Could you say a little bit more about

befriending discomfort?

Well, we have these amazing bodies minds hearts and it's very sophisticated what goes on under the hood? You know, we don't you know that that happens even you know, we don't even know. You know, most of what goes on under the hood here in our in our who we are, but we have an amazing capacity to want homeostasis to for healing, to become free, to not be caught up and not to suffer. And, and so we have these built in mechanisms to give us warnings, warning system warning signs that something here needs attention. Something here needs our love or care something here needs something. And, and so if we didn't have those warning signs I've heard there's people who like can't feel pain and it's dangerous for them to walk around the world because they can hurt themselves and bleed and not know it and cause a lot of damage. This can be deadly for them. We need to have we're lucky to have pain sensors in our you know in our body so that we can give you the warning things. So to have this discomfort, the whole range that we have set up with the system psychophysical systems that are designed to feel discomfort to give A message is fantastic. We're so lucky. Learn the message. Don't take an aspirin every time you can. Don't drink alcohol every time you can. If you're uncomfortable, don't distract yourself from it don't get more busy so you don't feel like this is an important message discomfort. discomfort has all kinds of realms and levels of teachings for us what to learn from it socially, personally, all kinds of things. So discomfort is our friend is here to take care of us. Learn the message, stop and pay attention to it. And we have this amazing systems that want to self heal. So to this is why meditation is so so powerful. It's one of the optimal times to allow self healing to happen. So a really good A time to meditate is when you're uncomfortable. That's the time to befriend debt and be with it. So this inner mechanism of settling of opening of integrating and healing can have a chance. So it's one of your best friends. Your discomfort probably misses you. Thank you. You're welcome.

So one of the things I noticed throughout my day is moving back and forth between being very present and

feeling the constraints of time.

Wondering if you can talk about the

working and

being present in a context where there might have to move more quickly.

Well, when I met my best, then I realize that time is a personal construct. Other people are operating on, you know, clock time and you know, I'm operating clock time. But the, the feelings of this little time, there's a lot of time. Those are all constructs of our own minds. So that to, to be caught in those constructs is optional. It's possible to do things quickly and be outside of time. So, you know, it's your, it's you're making the time that feels constrained. It's your mind that's making that wonderful practice I've done. I haven't done enough from a number of years. But if I feel constrained with time, I feel like I don't have enough time to do all the things I have to do. I'll stop and meditate. And that's like crazy. I learned to do this because in the monastery, or I was at one year I was like, cooked in the monastery is Zen monastery where the meals had to be served. Zen monasteries are choreographed. Like dances like 20 you know, 18 hours a day dances, you know, everything's choreographed, and you kind of do show up in certain places certain time. So the food had to be exactly to the food that be ready at exact in a minute. And the whole monastery was kind of built around this thing's timing of things. And so but I don't forget what it was like 10 or 15 minutes before the meal is supposed to be served up. Or the kitchen crew had to stop all their cooking and chant the Heart Sutra. And the first two weeks that we had to do this, I was cooking. We can't do that. We have time we have to time. We have to you know,

we have 10 minutes before serve up anyone who thinks not ready. This is the time where we're working the hardest, right? Nope. You gotta stop. And the Heart Sutra is long enough. It's a rhythm rhythmic chant and you're like, Okay, okay, yeah, you can't you can't speed it up because you're chanting with people. And, and then everything always worked out afterwards. So then I applied this to my life when I felt kind of suddenly constrained. Time to make things to do. I would stop and meditate for 10 minutes. And then it seemed like always had lots of time after that. And that taught me a lot about how it's so much a construct is for me a construct To my mind, and I get caught up in I think I have less very little time. But that feeling of not having enough time, and a lot of it has to be some, in my mind, is a curtain of claustrophobia in my own mind. And that the kind of time that's created by mental claustrophobia, and so meditation can kind of clear the claustrophobia. And there's lots of time to do things quickly. Great. So we should stop now. But if you want to come up afterwards and ask me you're welcome to and, and I hope you all have a wonderful week. I hope that you find some meaningful ways to whatever you're doing, just do that. And if it's no other You're going to do this to washing your hands. Because you actually get two benefits. No mainly benefits. But one benefit is the personal benefits of being present and practicing. And you get the benefit, perhaps, of great compassion that you are trying your best not to be a vector of illness. And it's a way of caring for others in this world. And isn't that pretty cool to be able to do the same things? The same activity does both develops your own practice and cares for others? I mean, how many times do we find that opportunity? If nothing else comes from tonight. That's a good one. Thank you.