

2018-10-21 Guardians of The World Guardians of The Heart

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, good morning everyone. And today I'd like to talk about what is called the bright guardians of the world. And I like to think of them as guardians of the world and the guardians of the heart. And these are two mental qualities, mental states, that are also considered to be a beautiful states of mind. Beautiful factors of mind. So it's supposed to be a happy thing. And it relates to the English word conscience. conscience meaning, the self reflective ability to be sensitive to one's moral orientation towards the world moral sensitivity, ethical sensitivity. And, and I it's fascinating this word conscience, moral conscience, that in to relate it to the word cop conscious consciousness seriously you know and until the 1700s 17th century in, in Europe, the word conscience that consciousness used to mean conscience like moral conscience. It was only in the 17th century, that the meaning of that word started to change to become what we call now consciousness, which is more of a maybe, you know, ethically or morally neutral field of perception or awareness that goes on. And we many of us take this word consciousness so much to for granted that we think it's a thing and it seems that at least in Western Europe, it's only been a thing for the last three 400 years. I don't know what they did. I don't know what they did manage how they managed before that. But apparently they were fine without, so out of selecting out or defining this particular thing. But what was so, you know, whatever consciousness so in the past consciousness was associated with his moral sensitivity is more moral sensibility that now we associated word conscience. When you look at the word mindfulness, and how mindfulness is taught in the West, there's a strong tendency, I believe, to teach mindfulness as an, the way it's taught or defined as an ethically neutral phenomena, where we're taught mindfulness you're supposed to have non judgmental and non evaluative awareness of what's happening in the present moment and that non judgmental or non evaluative suggests that that you know, it's not there to make any moral judgments or moral evaluations whatsoever. But you'll find that in the teachings of the Buddha there is an intimate connection between mindfulness and the ethical life. That mindfulness, the Buddha gave instructions that the one of the functions of mindfulness is to abandon the unskillful unwholesome states of mind. The favorite way of talking about the ethics of the ancient language was not with our word ethics, but rather was this word that means either unskillful or unwholesome, some people, different people prefer different ones of those choices. And that the function of mindfulness was to abandon the unskillful the unwholesome, the unethical, and help us to enter into the skillful the wholesome That mindfulness is a way of abandoning the unethical behaviors of killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication. So mindfulness is not just something you know, just to kind of just, you know, just simply be aware of it all. It has an impact. To observe our experience in a deep way, changes our relationship to the experience changes us in some way. The Buddha also talked about how mindfulness is a function of mindfulness is to abandon wrong view, wrong intention, wrong speech, wrong action and wrong

livelihood. The first five of the Eightfold Path and it's on the other side function of mindfulness is to support the growth of right view, right intention, right speech, right action and right livelihood.

And a wonderful kind of analogy that he uses for all this is that of a gatekeeper of, you know, in the old world, they had this fortified cities of the wall around the city. And everything that came in and out of the gate was known by the gatekeeper. And the Buddhist said that mindfulness is the gatekeeper that helps us to abandon what's unskillful. And I think he made a little more dramatic than abandon what is a wicked and unskillful and support that which is beautiful and skillful. So we see that in mindfulness, there's a kind of intimate connection with ethical sensibility. And I'd like to believe that that's because ethical sensibility is a deeply ingrained or deeply, almost biological instinct that we have and that the particular ethical, kind of Guardians or guides that we have in our psyche, or something in Pali, is called hiri and ottappa, hiri-ottappa are those what's called the guardians of the world? And the question is, how do we translate these words? And because many of the English choices don't don't evoke the idea of beauty for me. Remember, I said in the beginning that these words are part of the beautiful factors of the mind. And so they kind of quite don't do it for me, but maybe they do it for you. So things like moral shame, and moral dread. That's a common translation. Is that beautiful? Yeah. Good. And, and then there's other what are some of the others that I've heard or read about? There is

I've seen shame and compunction and the quite, not quite sure what compunction means, but I have looked up in the dictionary and it seems like what you what you guilt you feel after you've done something. So, so, what you know this hiri and ottappa. So, what is it? Part of the teachings of these two words these ideas is they come from respect, they come from self respect and respect of others. And, and so, how does one acquire self respect? How does one relate to oneself with their self respect. And I think, this practice that we do the practice of Buddha is in fact the practice of to acquire to develop a self respect, sense of self worth, self valuing of oneself, even to the degree to which Buddhism emphasizes the idea of not self. It. to that degree, it also emphasized the tremendous respecting of oneself as well. And, and so if you really respect yourself, you know, you wouldn't harm yourself in any way. So my discovery of these qualities was on sitting long retreats. And sitting long meditation retreats was a way where I settle the mind quieted the mind calmed it down, so that the normal agitations of my mind were no longer present. And some of those or maybe many of those agitations had their Genesis in unhealthy or unskillful states of mind. There was lust, there was a version there was greed, and there was fear. There was All kinds of things kind of circling operating kept my mind busy and engaged. That actually made it hard to settle in to see what was going on. But on long retreat, my mind settled and quieted and what I experienced, which was surprised me the language I used for it, because I wasn't into this language, but the best language I could use to describe what I was feeling inside was purity. And, and then if I tried to kind of avoid it, because I, you know, I was uncomfortable with that word, you know, coming out of the 60s or something. And so, in trying to avoid it, I tried to use the word clean, like a cleansing cleanliness inside inner inner sense of cleanliness. And that works a lot better for an ex hippie like I was so but the sense of inner purity Kind of clarity and openness, a unfragmented if nothing is torn, everything is whole kind of feeling. And that and then I was surprised that as I had certain thoughts, which I won't share with you the I could feel that that wholeness cut wood circuit torn, or I could feel like there was a kind of like, I was harming myself this place of purity inside and it felt Ouch. You know, why would I do that? And so that gave me a, it gave me a strong sense that there was some kind of guide inside of me, kind of an ethical guide and that you know, or a guide to avoid certain kinds of behavior, certain kind of thoughts, even certain kinds of speech acts, that somehow it didn't align or wasn't in harmony with this inner sense of goodness, that was There. And, and then that inner sense of goodness also taught me the value of doing the opposite the value of not closing down, not carrying the fabric of the heart in a sense, but where they're coming from the place that supported that, that express that, that manifest that in some way. And one of the

beautiful qualities is love, or loving kindness or goodwill to come from a place where we have, you know, as much goodwill for others as we can meet with that controller that the other is a sense of generosity, that it's somewhat so much nicer to be generous than it is to be miserly. It's so much nicer to kind of give everything away, give things away than it is to acquire.

And it isn't like it isn't like a moralistic thing, in the sense of you know, there's is a set of external principles that I have to live by. But rather there's this guide, a feeling guide inside. And so, for me, that inner feeling guide for when I'm going to feel impulse or desire to say something which is unskillful, unhealthy, unethical or something, if I stay connected to that, then I won't do it. I'll feel that how that feels disharmonious to do and that's where mindfulness comes in. Because I have to be mindful, to be in touch with that place. I have to not be preoccupied in thoughts. I can't be caught up in all the agitation of the mind that's maybe, you know, kind of creates cloudiness, you know lack of vision to what's going on. And so mindfulness, the settling of mindfulness, settling of meditation, settling of concentration is a way to kind of touch into this. So ethical sensibility and so that's, that's what I call it. That's what I associated with this word hiri and he and hear what it means what how it's usually kind of defined. It's a certain kind of feeling of wrongness or feeling of awkwardness. Like this doesn't feel good. Or if we respect ourselves, we kind of like our kind of shattering that self respect. If so, I don't know what the best word is in English. To translate this instance. Obviously they have moral shame. Some people just do shame. I've seen In one place I saw shame and blame. Great, Nick, let's do more of that. Lots of it and feel good about it. But so I think of the word for my choice right now for transcending the word history is conscience. I like the word conscience. To me, that's a very, that's a kind of feels like a beautiful word. To me, personally, we all have different association with these words, but that's nice for me.

And then the other one post up and ottappa comes from the root tappa which is sometimes translated as asceticism, it means to to burn. So, that gives you some sense of what can feel like some burning inside that can exist. And this is said to be concerned for the consequences of one's action. So the first is a subjective experience of concern. Caring for the artistic quality of our inner life for ourselves. The ottappa is concerned before the consequences are our behavior could have on the world around us and maybe even on ourselves as well. So what is the source of where we come from the motivation, and the other is the consequences of acting on those. And so rather than calling it moral dread, a certain kind of fear of causing harm, which maybe is okay fear of causing harm, fear of wrongdoing, I don't have too too much trouble with that. But maybe to kind of soften it for myself or a bit more inspire me or kind of. For myself, I'd like to translate it as moral, moral caution. Moral caution. So sense of caution. sense of care of attention of paying, you know, being cautious. And, and it's also said to be that it's kind of the concern for what people he respect what they would think of you. And that's an interesting reference point to take someone who you most respect in the world your most value, someone who's been a big benefactor and, and what would you do in their presence that would make you feel really good about yourself? And what would make it What would you do in their presence that would go well, you know, I wish they didn't see that. You know, that was unfortunate, you know. And so if we have people we respect their example, their value, their virtues, their with how they evaluate what's important. How does that guide us as well? How does that protect us? Because sometimes I think it's really helpful to not only rely on our own moral compass But sometimes, you know, a personal moral compass is not enough. Some things are pretty challenging. So I have some other reference point friends, and teachers who have respected ones can be very helpful. So these are called guardians of the world and Guardian I call them guardians of the world guardians of the heart, for the heart because they protect the heart from these unhealthy tendencies. And they support the Buddha was quite explicit that they support the growth of skillful and health, healthy qualities of mind. And we find in this ancient tradition, a big emphasis on cultivating and growing, what is healthy inside of us.

growing in faith, growing in integrity, growing in honesty, growing in mindfulness and compassion, and, you know, all these kinds of things that we can develop and grow so one of the leading sources of food or benefit for this is, are these two things here, you know, tapa, when they're present, it tends to make it hard to do things which are unskillful. And they tend to support, cultivating, acting on manifesting that which is beautiful within us.

And it's also guardians of the world. Because if we really stay close to these hearing otava, then there's so many things that we wouldn't do that would cause harm represented by the five precepts, right. We wouldn't, or the opposite, we wouldn't we wouldn't kill we wouldn't steal, engage in sexual misconduct, we wouldn't lie we wouldn't be involved in intoxication. And, and that, you know, the world has so much suffering because of people who engage in those one way or the other. So it protects others in this as well. So This ancient or not so ancient idea in Europe, that consciousness has in it within it, conscious conscience, that maybe being really conscious is not separated from having a conscience that they come together. They're one in the same, perhaps, perhaps being mindful. The awareness of mindfulness also comes with an ethical sensibility that guides us in what we pick up and what we put down what we learn and what we don't do. And certainly it becomes a fantastic guide to begin having an inner place an inner reference point of goodness of wholeness, of purity, of cleanliness of freedom, of openness of unhindered notice an obstruction of be dumb. I don't know, there's all these wonderful words that could describe it. They don't want to be stuck just on purity. And so hiri and otava conscience and moral caution. So what do you think about that? And what do you think about that I would, you know, ruffle the feathers of Western mindfulness by by bringing in a little bit of ethics into it. Ethical evaluation, so yes, author, please. Is there a mic there?

So, as you're speaking three, three thoughts or concepts come to mind views cognitive dissonance and rationalization and rationalization. Okay? And views. And it seems like rationalization, cognitive dissonance kind of are reinforced by views and they seem the opposite of what you're describing. And I guess my question is about how views and hiri and ottappa interact, or what the effect of overcoming views through mindfulness, I guess related to hiri and ottappa?

Well, I think the way that I was presenting today the way that I discovered it was the conceptual views ideas about what what is and isn't, for example, can be sometimes such a shell or a cover over our eyes. So we see through the opinions, the stories, the beliefs that we have. And if we're caught up in that world of belief making an opinion making, we don't have access to the heart. And the stronger this this world of beliefs, the less access we have to the heart. It's possible to get settled and quiet the mind and be settled inside and connect to the heart. It's still then possible to have some views, some opinions about things, but they don't interfere anymore. And it's possible that those views are accurate enough to be supportive for this path to freedom. So is that relate? And I think that the more that we get settled in here Then we have an inner reference point for hearing, you know, you know that we really feel connected to from the inside in the heart.

Thank you for clarifying Harry.

Here in the West in western psychology is often a distinction made between guilt, which is I've done something wrong in shame, which is I am wrong. And toxic shame is often a childhood

from childhood,

a place where

I am somebody who has toxic shame that's unresolved because of bad messages and family and other situations. And so shame has a lot of connotations in the West and that may not have in Southeast Asia and I find your clarification quite helpful. Yeah,

so so the English word shame for many people has a very negative connotation. So using it in any kind of way just triggers that for people. And now we have more reason to be ashamed. Thank you, thank you Buddhism. And, and occasionally I've seen the word I've seen the word guilt also associated with this. I think sometimes sometimes it's Asian translators who don't know English so well, they just kind of going through the dictionary and, and they find the so it's often been said that, especially for in terms of guilt, that there's no guilt in Buddhism. I think Buddhists have guilt but especially here in the West in the West. But, but the idea being that, in Buddhism, there's no healthy place for guilt, because guilt in Buddhism is considered to be a form of aversion. Still ready to oneself. And, you know, maybe doesn't feel that way in the midst of a strong bout of guilt and what have I done and all that there is a sense that there can be regret and remorse, and which is different than guilt. And that is that something like that is considered healthy in Buddhist psychology. So the apps in absence of self hostility, but the presence of kind of feeling or gosh, that doesn't feel good. It's like that place that hearing otava comes from it that feels really heavy now that feels, you know, like agitated or feels, you know, aching. And that's appropriate if we done something that was harmful.

I keep thinking of the metaphor of the finger, pointing at the metaphor of Then the finger pointing at the moon. So

so where where do here endota

fit with?

All right, could you? Could you remind us what the moon represents the full moon? The full moon? Yes.

Or the sometimes in Buddhism, the full moon represents an enlightened mind, the mind that's liberated.

Right? So where do you hear me and I'll tap it

in relation to see enlightenment,

whereas Harry and hotaka fit with the liberated mind if we use the moon as the analogy for a liberated mind, maybe the it's the light that shines on here you know tapa?

And here are not described as the guardians of the world. Yes. guardians of the world of the world and of the heart. Yeah.

Okay.

So they're guarding. They are guarding

enlightenment,

our potential for enlightenment. Absolutely.

Maybe you can just comment briefly, I think it was, to some extent related to the first question. But, you know, one of the things that I think a lot about is the kind of moral conditioning of my childhood, and how sometimes that inner voice that I listened to, isn't necessarily, you know, the inner voice of say, a kind of a Buddhist practitioner, but it's the inner voice of the moral condition. My childhood and it seems genuine and authentic. And when I quiet my mind, it's still there. That's how kind of

what it what is genuine and authentic mean.

It's it's a serious concern to me some of these kind of moral principles that when you view it from perhaps an intellectual angle, you see the maybe the bankruptcy of the concept itself, but it's still a feeling that feels that feels true. And as part of who I am great. I think that's probably something a lot of people feel. And so I, I just want to maybe get your comments on how do you negotiate between that voice that you're talking about, which is this ethical guide that, you know, you you listen to when you quiet yourself down? And then the voice that seems to be there just as as

I guess it's there as well.

Great, but I appreciate how Cognizant you are of this. I think that's a, that's a really important step in what you're asking to do. I think becoming more aware of if it's really big enough issue for you to do a little bit just enough studies of ethical theory, different forms of moral principles more the way morality is understood is in an academic way just to come to sit very simple kinds, but principle based ethics, virtue based ethics, consequentialist ethics, and then something called Moral Sentiments, those four and then to use that to really understand what were these voices are what they are, what do you believe what, where do they fit into the moral universe for yourself, once you have some better understanding of what they are, then if you want to meditate, then you may be able to meditate through them. Because these have to do to do B which they're conditioned and learned. They're there, they can be unconditioned, they can be deconstructed, and this is one of the functions of strong concentration is to Really soften and settle the mind. So the conditioning is not there. And because you're because you're so familiar with it, I think you can do a more realistic job of dissolving it or settling and going below it, and then see, and then from that perspective, looking at it in a new way. And one of the new ways to look at it is to no longer identify with it. And chances are that right now because it's such a deep childhood conditioning, somehow it's you identify strongly with it, you really feel like it's you or it's the truth or something. So that's a matter of that's a satisfying answer, but that's the answer. You want to set you want to say more?

No, no, that's it.

It's Mike and Nick, we pass the mic the outer Hall.

Thanks, I I'm hearing a lot of what You're saying kind of in terms of a compass, very intimate compass. Like I grew up in the 60s too. And, you know, we had had a psychology of you were supposed to give voice to every feeling you had every thought you had. You weren't supposed to judge it. So there was a lot of rules, kind of moral rules built underneath that, that, you know, were they true or weren't a true and what is really true. But what I'm hearing you say about these two guardians is that you can also listen to what is feels good, what feels as if you are loving. You can listen to the love that you have, and let that replace the home. The conditioning, you have to judge yourself instead of judging yourself, you're listening mindfully to what is happening inside yourself and listening to that. Yeah, heartfelt is what I'm trying to get at.

Is this to some degree? I'm not, you know, I don't think I would feel I don't feel so comfortable saying it the way you said it, though, the way you said it makes sense based on what I said. So I appreciate what you said, but only to only make reference to feelings as a justification for what we do is a bit dangerous. And, and so there's something there's a different reference point than just what I'm feeling in this. This hearing notify as an inner compass or in any kind of a feeling is a subcategory of feelings has to do with a particular way of feeling. Free afflictive emotions flee free of afflictive motivations, so free of things like greed and hatred and delusion and free of clinging and that Has this feeling of wholeness or purity? So it's a very particular kind of feeling of not wanting to violate or do violence against this feeling of tenderness or this this place of hearing. Oh, tuffa. So is it? So it's a particular kind of feeling in a sense. Now, is it just a feeling? It's a bit hard to understand, you know, really what this is? Because it's a moral. It's a kind of moral sentiment kind of thing. Is it it might be, you know, where does that come from within us? You know, what, what arouses our hearing on top of what what it takes up? Is that only innate within us is it's partly learned and conditioned from the world around us. You know, there's so many different ways in which we learn our ethics and we hold our ethics in different ways. minds human different human beings have different kind of ways of figuring out their ethical life choosing what to do or not to do that this hearing notify me might be kind of for every person kind of consolidation of their particular approach to ethical evaluation. But with a reference point of this feeling of purity or feeling of freedom, feeling of non clinging. Does that make any sense?

I think you're correct in

it Yes.

I think what I'm trying to get at is that you can mindfully evaluate what your your inner reaction is to how you act in the world and to just go by guilt and blame is very unsatisfactory. But if you go by these pillars of what you're really saying is goodness Like, what is the effect of me having love for this being that I could have reacted to in different way? Yeah. And to evaluate on that and build on that, that was liberating. And that's what helps you with the blame and guilt, because that's what we suffer from.

So I think that if we want to make it really simple, and this is a, you know, you know, we only said the simple things, we would just repeat ourselves. So we try to make a little more complicated to look at the different circumstances of life and they get richer for us. But I think it comes down to, in essence of it, not causing harm to oneself or to others. And so, and so, the motivation they do not cause harm can come from some deep place inside. And, and so we have to have a feeling or a sense or understanding of what is harm, and what causes it and then feel that. That's off That's the fundamental ethical impulse in Buddhism is not causing harm. Yes. Can we have the mic up front?

Sometimes they can be really difficult to differentiate what is not causing harm. What is the greater not harm, for example, and when is one causing harm to self or others? Or when is it really important to have courage and speak out about one's truth which may cause harm? And I think, for example, recently on the national stage, we saw that, you know, when somebody spoke her truth, and there was enormous backlash, but no one could have anticipated what the result of you know of her speaking our truth was, and you know, in advance, so, how can we disagree discriminate, and some people would say, well, maybe it was better she didn't do that, you know. For her sake, you know, so how does one go about making decisions when speaking one's truth can create dissension and can create harm potentially to oneself or others?

So there's many criteria for answering that question. And one of them is to use our best capacity, we have to anticipate the consequences. And so, you know, generally if you kill someone, you can

anticipate that's going to cause harm. So but so, but some things are not so clear. And so we do our best from our what we've learned over our life, what other people say we try to figure out the best. And, and so that's one criteria is really getting a sense of the consequences. And that sometimes takes evaluation and sometimes as you said, it's weighing the pluses and minuses and what are the consequences there might be there might be some negative consequences, positive consequences in the bigger picture, what's the best for everyone involved. And so there's all kinds of things that so consequences is one. The other is to look at our intention to look at what's motivating us to act this way. And that's where you can feel if the if the motivation is to hustle one is I want to, I want to really stab it to that person. I really want to get back and cause harm, then we know that the motivation is is that's about that's behind the motivation. Some things like greed, generally is harmful, at least for ourselves. And it can that's when this this is one of the advantages of strong meditative practice is you can feel how greed causes harm to oneself. So that's another way of evaluating is based on the intentions and other way it has to do with not so much the intention, but the inner inner dispositions are qualities that are present, they feel wholesome, do they feel unwholesome? Do this, this inner purity that's there? Is that being covered over or contracted? Or is it you know, being supported to grow more and more more sensitive, we're on the inside, we can feel this more and more. And the further of other ways. The fourth way is, you know, if it involves other people, is to make sure that you feel a human connection to them. You know, so ideally, you would talk to them personally get to know them and you wouldn't just be an abstract caricature of a person where they represent some particular idea. This is a real human being that we're talking to or be involved with, and have some enta Fie, a feel the emotional connection that comes from, from being close and practice. enmity and getting to know someone and, and, and not leave them out there as the as the bad other or something, you know, or the obstruction of something. And, and so find a way to feel that human connection, and then when that that connection is felt, how would you behave? Or would you do? So these are all kinds of different ways of kind of finding our way to decision and at different different times different ones of those are going to predominate, seem relevant and seem important, you know, or, or what's going to carry the day. But it does take reflection at times. The idea that we're supposed to just be able to sit and meditate, get enlightened, and we'll just naturally just kind of know what to do and just all just flows freely. And, you know, and you know, it's just all it's, you know, just, you know, I think it's a little bit of a myth. I think there are times where ethical reflection, or you know, some people don't like the word use ethics. So reflection, careful reflection about what causes harm, what doesn't cause harm, requires some real thought and consideration and exploration. It's not a straightforward thing. So, thank you. And I think that the, I have given now a few different talks that are related to Buddhist ethics and I think that's why I'm doing it. I'm teaching this course on ethics here at IMC for a year. So I think that the I have this little bit of idea that from time to time, I'm going to bring in more ethical teaching this year, this is like the year of ethics at IMC and, and hopefully that works okay. And certainly hoping to hoping to do it in an ethical way. So one of the surprises As I had when I when I first started practicing in Thailand was kind of flabbergasted me

and I was like perplexed why would anybody be this way? How could this be? And this is more this is more about me than people in Thailand. Maybe but people there felt joy in the they're good ethics and I was like what? You'd feel joy for that. I thought that was the strangest thing when I got there. But now I feel it's a joyful thing took me a while. And so now I'm on board for it. So I hope that this is a happy topic and or it's going to be a happy one as we go along because it's a wonderful thing. This it's beautiful this beauty and have this freedom and have this purity and, and to be able to share it with people is a fantastic thing. And I it's here for it's here for the betterment so thank you