

2019-07-10 Dharmette Noticing

Wed, 8/5 6:37PM • 10:47

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

ordained, combination, buddha, met, attentive, noticed, priest, mistake, shortcomings, robes, talk, problems, dharma, zen teacher, zen meditation, people, person, practice, cigarettes, ordinary

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Two days ago, I was at a kind of a birthday party for my Zen teacher, who's been my kind of Zen teacher for some 43 years, and met Mel Weitzman, and he turned 93. And so I calculated when I don't know if he's 90, and I calculated that I met him when he was 47. And I was 22. And he struck me then as being an old man. And so, but I want to tell you the story of that first meeting I had with him because it was kind of pivotal for me. I was doing Zen meditation in college in Davis, California. And there was a small sitting group. They're very small. I think sometimes there was three of us the couple whose apartment it was in and myself and sometimes there's a few more people that came in SAT. And at some point in 1976 male came up from Berkeley to lead a half day sitting. It was like kind of like scheduled like we have for these Wednesday mornings, you know, I think it was two sittings and a little walking meditation and there was probably a little talk that he gave, and then he, we had a lunch together. And for me, I never met someone like Mel something resonated something about him spoke to me. And the way that I characterize it to myself and other people, this man is that he was extraordinary. The ordinary. There was, you know, there was something very ordinary about him. And I thought to you know, if I met this person than the supermarket checkout line, if he wasn't in front of me or behind me, I wouldn't have I wouldn't have thought anything of him. Just the person is there. But there was only extraordinary about how he was ordinary. And it was like, I'd never met anybody like this. There's no ego seemingly or defending himself or proving himself or asserting himself and he was completely at ease with just being nothing special. That's pretty special to me. So so. So that was kind of like I kind of got my attention when he showed up. And we were having this talk. But like it was just lunch. I know it was but and, and then this thing happened. That was a wonderful, less powerful lesson for me. He the one of the hosts, the woman who was the house that we had the sitting group in, said, has anybody seen my cigarettes? and mail said, Oh, yeah, it's in the nightstand in the bedroom. And I don't know if, you know, maybe that's where it changed into his robes, or I don't know what the story was. And, and I was so impressed that he would have noticed something like a little detail like that. Wow. So this I didn't know if the word mindfulness wasn't popular yet. So I don't know if I knew the word mindfulness, but I was so impressed by someone who would be attentive to the little details of everyday life, like where the cigarettes were. And that really is the ordinary guy who seems so extraordinary, that he was mindful, he was attentive to his world that he lived in and notice these things. And, you know, I didn't know. I mean, the world was just what you was in the way as you went on to take it, you know, go on with your life and what's important, right? So you have to somehow deal with this world that's in the way and, or something. So I wasn't, you know, and it wasn't paying attention so much. And so I was really inspired by that. That was great. And then the host went up and look for cigarettes. But they weren't there. And I thought, I thought, Wow, he just made a mistake. And, and the combination of those two things really inspired me. I was inspired by this idea of being present and attentive for the life you live. So I granted him that

it didn't like back then he was wrong didn't detract from it. And he made a mistake, how wonderful. He wasn't perfect. And this combination has served me well in my life. Some of you probably noticed that, that, you know, it's pretty wonderful to be present and practice. And it's okay to be wrong, it's okay to make a mistake. And, and that combination of these two sides, and it was kind of, in some ways, came to be again, and maybe more, I don't know, more dramatic way but from a different angle. When I was ordained as a Zen priest, and it was clear that I wasn't I didn't want to be a priest. I wanted to be a monk. And, and up until two months after I was ordained, they called everyone it's in center monks, the people who were ordained two months after I was ordained. The Abbot said, oh, by the way, we're calling you priests now. And I said, What? That was not what I'd signed up for him. But I got used to it. Anyway, so, but so, you know, No, I wasn't, you know, I've kind of, you know, grew up pretty secular and the idea of religion never really still doesn't interest me that much. Oddly enough, given what I do, and, and so and so ritual didn't really mean much to me. And, and somebody had to go through this ritual, you know, being ordained. And, to my surprise, it had a big impact on me. And, and then in the next two weeks, I noticed some very peculiar I noticed that now that we had a shaved head and we're robes, I was kind of a public figure that represented something and people would stop me and talk to me I'd be you know, before I I was just like, you know, scruffy hippie, and you know, and if anything, people kind of recoiled from me. Certain people, they would have nothing to do with me. And if I'd sit on the bus waiting for this bus stop or something in San Francisco, you know, but mostly just people ignored me. After I was there, Dan has shaved head, people would come and talk to me. And like, they start telling me all these details of their life and these people who clearly would have avoided me before, were no longer avoiding me. So it was a public person kind of, and so how I behaved and how I was, was, you know, noticed by people. So I became much more aware of my shortcomings in this kind of set setting, and I had lots of shortcomings. So I became really aware of how I couldn't live up to this or my shortcomings but the I think that was not so hard. But the odd thing was, now that I was ordained, I felt like I was a child of the Buddha. And it was more okay to have the shortcomings. And there wasn't that effort that has that great combination. Of course you want to know about your shortcomings, I wanted to know them because then you can practice with them and find a way with them and be wise about them. So that's good. But then to be okay with having them. It was it wasn't mean like I was just going to go barrel ahead and you know, impose them on people. But, but to kind of feel at ease, feel at home feel comfortable, feel like, Okay, this is how it is that combination. So this combination of being attentive to living in the world, aware and awake and present, and, and knowing you'll make mistakes and be okay with it to be whether you're a danger or not. You cannot be ordained for this. But if you'd like if this kind of language works for you know, you're a child of the Buddha or you're part of the Buddha family or, or if you really want to get religious about this, you're not just part of the Buddha family or childhood a, you are the Buddha. And you have these shortcomings. And that's okay. Isn't that great? This is two sides. And, and for me that was very important to to learn this because it was so such a strong tendency to have one or the other, you know, like, Oh, me, I'm so terrible and bad. I have all these problems. And, you know, I'm just lousy and I'm pretty foolish, bumbling around and so, you know, lean in that direction. That's the whole world. Right? And, and then I didn't I didn't really sell them that quickly. And then the other direction, but you know, like, Oh, I'm so great.

But Somehow to hold these two together. And it was very important for me because I had, you know, I erred on the side of you know, I'm, I have these problems and struggles and all this and, and so to have this Dharma, the Dharma field that helped me kind of create a context in a way where that's okay. It's through a space where there's allowing for it It wasn't I didn't make it a problem. But it was something to practice with, not to ignore, but to practice with and develop and grow. So please be mindful, be attentive and if you make mistakes, it's okay. Thank you.