

2019-08-05 Karma of Beauty III

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So Good evening. And I believe it was last Monday I talked about the topic of beauty and the Dharma. This topic of beauty has been on my mind quite a bit since I kind of discovered that it's much more in the Buddha's teachings than the English translations had let on. And, and so maybe it's natural that in thinking about this topic of beauty, I'm reflecting on it also in relationship to the mass shootings we've had in this country for the last eight days or so. One here, just relatively nearby in Gilroy and El Paso and elsewhere and I'm struck by the statistics that come out come out in the wake of these, depending on how, what the criteria criteria is for how to measure mass shootings or something like that. One of them is that there have been 21 mass shootings this year so far where four or more people were killed. There have been 31 mass shootings where three or more people have been killed. But if you only consider how many people have been shot in mass shootings just this year and the criteria is four or more people have been shot, either wounded or killed. There have been 250 250 there's not been 250 days of the year yet. So in other words, there's more than one mass shooting in this country every day. It's kind of mind blowing. And there's a nonprofit that's been counting how many of these. So I went on their website and it's all documented 250 you know, and they're very strict about what they document what they accept as being, you know, counting guys to be clear evidence reports from the police and things like that. 250 shootings were four more people have been shot in this country in the first some like 216 days of the year. So I think it's on many people's minds or in their hearts that we live in a country like this. That kind of To me, it's certainly a little bit mind blowing that I live in a country where so many people get shot and so many people are shooting each other. And there's many, I think this kind of situation deserves a response from every single person. I think the greater the tragedy is, the more as individuals we do ourselves a disservice. Or maybe I should say it's stronger. We do ourselves a kind of harm. If we don't in some way, if we're not some way changed positively by it. If not some way we respond. Not that we can fix the all the problems that exist, but to somehow be changed by it and be a person who responds It's such a different way in the world, so that we can become a force of good in the world and change. By the very magnitude of the things, the more greater the magnitude, the more I think that if we don't somehow let it affect us, I suspect something inside of us goes numb or shuts down. I had this very strong feeling of this in right after 911 good number of years ago now. And, and so in the wake of that I didn't fix 911 you know, like that just happened right? Then they don't have the presumption that I'm going to go out there and try to save, stop terrorism or whatever it is. But what I did was I started a Buddhist chaplaincy training program.

And and now it's been going on for, I think, the 15th year or 16th year that we're doing it and, and you know, it's not addressing terrorism, but it is a form of compassionate care in the world. It's something I dedicated myself to doing, because I wanted to do something different or wanted to contribute in some way. And that's been I've been very happy for this many years of your doing this and tremendous amount of good that has been done through the hundreds of people now that we've trained going off

into all kinds of settings, where there are trauma victims and people going through tremendous tragedies and hospitals and ER rooms and hospices and all kinds of places. And so to be changed by this end to become somehow. So then we come to the topic of beauty. Why would I talk about beauty in the wake of tragedies like this. Turns out that for the Buddha, the teacher his teachings on karma were couched or presented in the context of teaching about beauty. So what in the world is karma have to do with beauty? And what does karma beauty of karma have to do with mass shootings in this country? The teaching of karma is a teaching. I think, first and foremost, that we're supposed to take responsibility for ourselves, for what we do, what we say what we do, and not even only that, but also what we do with our minds. What we think there's a amazing expression in English, I don't know or I'm there in American English at least. And now maybe some of you who have used this expression I couldn't help it. Wow, what admission you couldn't help it. This is like the most unbiased To say,

I couldn't help it. It means that we're caught in slave to actually inhabit acting on powerful forces inside of us that we have no control over. No can't take any responsibility for can't kind of. And the clear antidote for this one, one antidote, one place that we laboratory for exploring this. Understanding this is when we meditate. To sit and meditate is to choose not to go along with some of the impulses that arise. It can be as simple, maybe it's not simple, as simple as having an itch while you meditate. And I couldn't help but I scratched You know, okay, or in meditation, that is you don't scratch. You sit there and don't give into the impulse even if it's strong and there can be very strong forces inside that, say that, you know, screams that you scratch the itch. You know, so strong that it can seem like you know, probably, it feels like you're going to die but it's just an itch. Or there can be strong justification that says, I don't deserve to sit here with an itch. I deserve pleasure. I've had a busy day and I should have pleasure and just relax and so then I couldn't help myself but I scratched but to sit still and not Give in is to help yourself is to learn how not to respond with habit, not to allow very strong impulses inside to have control over you. But learn how to be free. And maybe the consequences of that meditation with which you would say, you know, you go to work the next day and people say, how's your meditation yesterday? And you would say, it was awful. And they say, Well, why did you do it? Why did you say awful you should get up and do something else. There's TV shows to watch. You might say if you revise, well, it was awful. But I'm actually stronger personnel in a particular way. I'm stronger at not getting into my impulses. I'm stronger, a stronger ability. Now. to not have have to excuse myself and say I couldn't help myself. I now can, I can now stay balanced nonreactive I can not give into forces that in the past I always gave into. So Ah, isn't it you know, it's not such a big thing in and of itself. But the book we learn with the itch is actually a big deal for how it applies to other places in life. So meditation, these things happen, all kinds of things like happen like this. There's a pain in the knee. Do you automatically shift your your posture? Or do you the impulse is to shift or do you sit there and just kind of don't get into it right away, rather meted with mindfulness? If you don't get into an impulse, but instead mediate and look at it with mindfulness, you're exercising your ability to be free. You're also exercising your ability to help yourself Because some of the things some of the impulses and ideas and thoughts that come up feelings come up and all that are not really healthy for you. So for example with thinking, I imagine that, you know, a huge percentage huge percentage of your if it should, should have happened that you had some thoughts during the sitting. If it happened, chances are that a huge percent of them were elderly, ethical, beautiful, exemplary, the kind of thoughts that you know, saints, beautiful, wonderful people have, that you would have been proud if we had broadcast the thoughts on the wall here so that everyone could have seen exactly what you're thinking about. It would have been, you know, inspiring, enlightening for all of us. Nice. But occasionally it happens that people have thoughts which are not so exemplary.

Not they're not so proud about it, they actually saw them on the wall, they they turned red or they would, you know, wish they hadn't. And, and so that thought that is kind of difficult to maybe it's an

ethical event or maybe it's, you know, whatever you make up, I don't have to give you examples. And maybe it's one you have repeated lately, certain theme. A bit has to do with your boss if you have a boss. And you're just really annoyed with your boss. And you go through these scenarios of how you're going to really lay into your boss or how you're going to make sure that you get the last cup of coffee at the coffee machine. So the boss can't get it. Just get back at that boss and you're doing a whole plan. of how you can measure this if you figure out the timing of it so you can get that coffee and because in spite of him or angry at him, you're going to, you know, not let the boss get that extra coffee or whatever, something right? So I couldn't help it. But to have these thoughts about revenge on my boss without coffee, I couldn't help it. Okay, well, then you're not free. But you're sitting, meditating. And those thoughts come up. And you say, Not now. I'm not going to do this. I've dropped them. I shift my attention away from those thoughts and the planning, it goes into it, to come back and be with my breathing. The thoughts come back. I exercise my freedom, my ability to not give into it, that it actually is my ability to help myself. Because I've learned that when I go off and spin out on those thoughts of revenge, it harms me and so I'm helping myself to come back. And then after a while, perhaps you begin to stay on your breath, you start to relax, you forget about your boss. And lo and behold, after a while, you find that you kind of relaxed and it actually feels kind of comfortable and nice to be here, as opposed to the tightness in the heat that was there with the boss in the coffee machine thoughts. So they're, you're helping yourself in that moment. So it turns out every moment that you're alive, you can help yourself. Every moment you have a choice, whether you help yourself or you don't help yourself, what direction you go. What do you what do you do in the moment? mindfulness is a very powerful way of helping yourself. Mindfulness doesn't mean that you can stop certain impulses and thoughts and feelings, but it means that you step away from them. Do you engage you put the energy of your mind to notice it, to see it, rather than being caught in it and absorbed in it, then obsessed with it? And it could be as simple as, wow, I'm obsessed. The moment you say wow, I'm obsessed. That little moment, you've helped yourself. That little moment you're not obsessed, you kind of distance yourself distance yourself from it, you're not caught in it. And so and so, exercising this capacity to help ourselves is something we get stronger and stronger with. That's what meditation is about. Some people associate meditation with getting calm and relaxed and having good experiences and you know, and blissful experiences and a huge part of what Buddhist meditation is about is getting getting better and better at helping yourself better and better at being free, not giving into impulses that when you're caught, you're stuck, you're attached. And then choose something else to do to exercise our capacity for choice. So if you ever hear yourself saying, I couldn't help myself. I think there should be some follow up statement that you make to that. And I don't know what the best one is, you can decide for yourself what it should be. But what occurs to me in the moment is something like I'm sorry, that's the case. Or I'm going to try to do better next time. Or that was unfortunate. As opposed to gleefully saying, I couldn't help myself, but they have a second donut. You know, add something, add some wisdom to the end of it, I couldn't help myself and

I'm sorry, or that was too bad or I'll do better next time I'm gonna, or I couldn't help myself and that meant that I didn't help myself. That means that I was not free. So exercising this capacity for helping myself, then it comes into this directly into the Buddhist teachings about karma. The karma the karma teaching is emphasizing that you have the ability to help yourself, what you do makes a difference. And it isn't really a complicated theory about multiple lives and past actions cause what's happening today to explain everything that's going on for you today is because you're past karma. It's gotten kind of complicated all the associations for this teaching. But in having studied the Buddhist teachings repeatedly, I see that the whole karma teaching is an emphasis. Be careful what you do now. This can now be careful because what you're doing now has consequences. So, the most one of the common ways of talking about karma is people talk about good karma and bad karma. And I've heard this language for decades. And the Buddha you know, if you want to be you know, the Buddha said, you

should avoid bad karma you should do good karma. And, you know, I didn't I heard it so much I kind of just went along with it and good bad it's that's great. Murder, you know. And turns out that the, the word good and bad, has connotations of ethics, what you should do and shouldn't do, of being moralistic. You know, you're a bad person, if you do the bad. You're, you know, you're really good. You're, if you do the good and you know, it's all kind of that's kind of the I don't know the soup that I was swimming in. Until a week or two ago, I looked up what the word is that the Buddha uses for good karma. And it's the word that I talked about last week called Pollyanna, which the first dictionary definition in Pali, English dictionaries, and also in Sanskrit, English dictionaries, those famous Sanskrit English dictionaries, the Monier-Williams dictionary, the first definition of Pollyanna is beautiful,

beautiful, so beautiful karma. We're not talking about good karma We're talking about beautiful karma. What does that do to the whole teachings of karma? And then this word bad is a bad word. I think it's an unfortunate translation. Sometimes it's translated as evil. And those of you here from India might recognize some of these words maybe there can be been used in modern languages. And there's a word papa. And, and I just most people translated as evil. And I just can't get myself to be enthusiastic about it, because of my kind of European heritage, religious heritage, that the word Evil has so many associations with sin. And if you have sin, if you've sinned, your unredeemable you know, if you're, if you're saying you go to hell forever things you know, you know, apparently God's given up on you And, and so that's a pretty heavy thing. And this idea that, that the evil has that meaning in Buddhism doesn't doesn't fit. And so I kind of lucked out with the evil sir. Right? Right. word for translation for them bad is so vague. It doesn't really say much. So I don't know what the best translation is. But right now I'm proposing to call it L. I II. And the reason for that is that it's clearly something I something. It's both I means both like it's sick, but it also means it's bad or it's wicked, or maybe it's evil even. But it doesn't have the same strong connotations with the word evil and the vagueness of bad. And so the teachings of also ill something gets ill is ill in and of itself. In addition, it might be ill, you know, in the future or cause problems in the future. So the karma teaching His teachings about what is beautiful actions and what are ill actions? Doesn't that change that kind of connotations from good and bad, beautiful. And the Buddha used the word boot you squirt, Pollyanna. Hundred percent clear it should be translated as beautiful, but it works really well. And if you look up the dictionary definitions for beauty they say one, one Dec definition is what pleases the aesthetic sense. That's nice, right? But the second definition is what pleases our moral senses. In English, the word beauty has sometimes in association with ethics, what is virtuous or ethically beautiful, someone who's a beautiful person, internally inner beauty is often seen as someone who's really ethical the other connection And this comes from this wonderful authority Wikipedia. But it's nice to sometimes look at Wikipedia because there's lots of good information there. But also you get a sense, I feel like when I look at Wikipedia, some words, I get kind of a popular view of what something means when something's going to find or understood. It's kind of nice to see what the popular thing is. So, if you look up beauty, one of the things says about beauty is something like beauty is connected to the sense of the harmony or natural order of the and the harmony of nature, or the natural order of the natural world, something like that. And so, to bring this into Buddhism, this kalyana as beauty relates to kind of ethical beauty, And it relates to something about the natural order or the harmonious order of nature. And so karma teachings are part of nature. And if you, whatever actions you do, whatever choices you make, you're going to reap, in one way or the other, you're going to reap the results of those the consequences of it. That's just a natural order. It's kind of like if you drop a ball from your hand, natural order, harmony of gravity as the ball falls. In the simplistic teachings of karma, if you do something which is ill, you will reap something else.

If you do something beautiful, you will reap something, reap something beautiful. So here's a verse a poem by the Buddha Whatever kind of seed is sown, that's the kind of fruit you'll reap a Dewar of

beauty reaps beauty or do or have ill reaps. So how is it when you do something beautiful that you're repeating? One of the things is that you reap the benefits of the beauty of here and now, it feels really good. It's kind of inspiring and nice to do something that's beautiful. And where does it feel nice? It feels nice internally. You something good, and you might just be following the rules. You get out the ethical rulebook, and it says Thou shalt Okay, I'm gonna do that. You know, you're supposed to be generous. Okay? I don't feel generous, but I'm gonna do the right thing. The good thing But you know if you can do the beautiful thing, you can't do the beautiful thing in an ugly way, because it's the inner. It's the inner beauty that we're looking for. And so to act in the world in a beautiful way, then we benefit from that right away, feels good. We also benefited from it because it becomes conditioning in the mind. It trains the mind. If in meditation you choose not to give into the edge. You're strengthening and developing and training your mind not to give into impulses. Which you know, it's a minor issue around the edge. But if you train yourself not to give in, you might come to a situation in life, where it's a matter of life and death, whether you yelled or not, or whether you punch someone else. or not, or if whatever you know, and you feel so grateful that you know how to control yourself that you don't have to say I couldn't help myself officer when I hit you know, that's all we could argue couldn't help yourself, that's okay. And that's I'm fine with my bloody nose and, you know, have a nice day hidden. So you don't know when it's so. So you're conditioning yourself for training yourself to develop in yourself. If you do things that are ill, it is a kind of training. It is a kind of reinforcement. It is a kind of conditioning of ourselves. And the more we do things which are ill, or if I can use this language, where we do things which are ugly. We're actually creating the conditions for more ugliness. So, if we answer this is how we come into this topic of the mass shooting If we want to be changed by it, if we want to kind of try to be now as a result of that a force that does better for the world, you can do things which make them kind of ill, you can just go around and be more and more angry at any number of people, people's and, you know, and just be furious and angry and critical and figure out how to, you know, kind of plan how to make sure that certain individuals don't get any more coffee because you're realizing that, you know, that's your way of doing vendettas or resetting the order of the worlds, you know. But you're just doing ugly things. You're doing ugly things with your mind. You're speaking ugly things, you're planning ugly things, maybe you've been doing ugly things. And so what we're doing is we're then contributing to more this ill In the world, first and foremost to ourselves, but it spills out and travels beyond us. And so I've said this story a few times, and I, especially when I tell it now, I feel actually kind of embarrassed to tell you, but I think it's a powerful lesson. It was for me. So I'm raising two boys. And, and the older one was what they call a high spirit child, highly spirited child. It's a very polite way of beautiful way of talking about certain kind of behavior. And so he was at times and it was really small a handful. And

he was always pushing boundaries and things. And, you know, he tried to be wise about how we raised him and probably then, you know, well enough so that the arm mistakes and parenting. He learned he learned enough that he, he'll correct for themselves when he's older. I thought that was the best we could do. So anyway, so there was some times when, when we, when, you know, we felt like this, this has to stop What's going on? And so I used what I called my strong voice. And it worked. There was no you know, it worked. It didn't it didn't end So, well. It wasn't gonna use that very often. But well, you know that that, okay? It worked. Behavior stopped occasion. Then one day, at home with his younger brother who was on hold, he was maybe two years old and he was maybe six, seven. I heard him use exactly the same voice on his younger brother. And I said, What have I done? What have I created? I was horrified. I thought it just worked for that moment and that was it. But I was teaching him something. I was teaching him what people do when they're frustrated. I was passing my ugliness on to him. So where it is, are ill or ugliness, you know, how does it ripple out? And how does it come back to us and where does it live in our memories, and where does it live in our conditioning and, and, and where does it live? You know, when when does it rear its head so that out of the blue at a time when you know 10 years later that the old condition To do something and Ill away in harmful harm, creating

ways kind of is there and you can't help yourself, it just kind of comes out under stress. And then you feel horrible or the opposite, that because of all those times you've done the equivalent of not given to the pitch. But even better than that you didn't give into the pitch. And you did it with tremendous sense of care, reverence, respect for yourself, selling yourself, you know, I know it's hard to sit there with an itch. But I really care about you talking to yourself. I really want you to be free, and be prepared to do the wise things when things get really difficult. And so staying here and not getting into the edge is a training for this. 10 years down the line. That's challenging my situation arises and you say You feel like I can't help myself. And you think all the inch I think I can help myself. I cannot give into it. Or perhaps because you keep telling yourself you know this nice words like oh, I care about you and want the best for you and not going to give it to the rich. You find yourself speaking kindly to yourself at a time when you feel really furious. And you feel like just like yelling at someone and saying swearing or something at someone. And you say Wait, wait, wait, wait, I care about you. I care what goes on I care about your inner beauty. And that comes back unexpectedly. It's almost like a hero voice. It's all okay. So the idea of this that you reap what you sow is that in variety of different ways, some that are just kind of almost mechanical and obvious in some which are unseen. The byways and highways in which these things work in our psychology, that if we do, if we do beauty, we do beautiful things. We will reap beauty. If we do ill things will repeal. And to simply kind of give up responsibility for what you choose is to I'm afraid that if you don't get if you give up responsibility on exercises, stability of choice with that, that what you don't want will probably take precedence probably take over the places where you don't can't help yourself and will grow and develop. And you can as we train ourselves and do the mindfulness practice and the Buddhist practice and learn to do what's beautiful.

Then that grows and develops. And as it grows, it grows with a clear sense of purpose. perception of something that's here, maybe within you maybe in the maybe in the perception or awareness itself. That feels really beautiful. We started living in beauty to do the things we can't help ourselves to, even if it's not unethical, but if we you know, rushing if you give into rushing, it's not a sin, not a crime usually to rush. And, you know, I don't want to say it's bad to rush until you instead of doing the bad rushing, you should do the good somehow. But when you rush, there's no connection to what's beautiful. We lose touch. What is it to start learning to be in touch with being perceptive and experience And your beauty to establish a sense of beauty, psychological beauty and heart beauty, ethical beauty, A Beautiful Mind a beautiful heart. And stay close to that. And if you're committed to staying close to that, you won't rush unless it's emergency, or say differently, you might rush, but you'll never Hurry. Hurry, hurry is when you lose yourself. presence and self awareness, doing things fast, you can do things with awareness. So the idea of beauty, so I'm kind of reflecting on this, and this talk I'm giving today is kind of my own reflections on this topic. Once I discovered this word beautiful is such a big part of the Buddhist teachings. And no one's been talking about it. I feel like wow, this is like a cold Mind of trying to understand something or life in a different way. And to live a life that's that is focused on pudi rather than focusing on good, that seems like more fun. That seems like more inspiring. And maybe if you do, it's beautiful. The goodwill come as a byproduct that don't come along. But you get so much more when you do the beauty, beautiful thing. So what happens if you live and do what feels beautiful? which feels you know, that has the aesthetic sense of some aesthetic sense of beauty in that variety of ways that can, inner beauty can be experienced, maybe it's ethical beauty, virtue, maybe it's a sense of nature and natural order of things. What if you are much more beautiful than that you allowed yourself to know? What if your capacity for being beautiful, beautiful person and beautiful being it just sitting inside waiting for you? That feels, you know, much more kind of nice and inspiring than if I said, you know, you're a good person, you have the capacity for really being good. And just waiting for being good is waiting inside. That might inspire some of you but but, you know, aren't you at this little bit at least like I am really intrigued? intrigued by what is this beautiful thing and what is how does that change the discussion? How does that change how we think about life and think about ourselves, if we are oriented

around beauty And how is or being oriented towards beauty? not selfish. You know, kind of more kind of indulging in something you know if you do the good thing, but that's not that's not indulging with beauty and using that kind of just pleasure. I think there's something when we talking about Dharma beauty, inner beauty, we're talking about something very, very profound. And something that's more profound than just the good. So you're beautiful. Please show it to us. And if you can live in a beautiful way, maybe in your away to people you touch people you meet.

Maybe you'll have the occasion to offer such kindness, generosity love care. Someone that maybe directly or indirectly, you prevent some future mass shooting. If we don't care for each other and take care of each other and let people kind of let the ugliness kind of prevail and not be countered or not be experienced, you know, there's not much hope. So, may you be the agent of change simply by being beautiful. Thank you.