

2019-09-15 Mindfulness of Attitude

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, good morning everyone is volume okay.

So, I want to start with a statement that maybe is rather provocative and maybe controversial in an in a, you know vocally and that is that mostly what meditation entails or maybe entirely what it entails is an adjustment of attitudes. Somehow that attitude we have sits at the center of what meditation is about, and if we can find the right attitude with which to meditate, then meditate unfolds kind of on its own. Many people associate meditation with techniques. And you know, there's different techniques for meditation and the sound out there it's not happening anymore. It's turned off again it just low you know, those of you out there should learn where the switches Yeah. Let's see now.

just bought more volume there. So let's see is that louder now? So where was I? attitude? Yeah the so there's, you know, there's technique that we have about meditation. But techniques are useful for sure different techniques work for different people different ways. But techniques are really kind of the, the, I don't know, almost like the carrier for the attitude or the excuse for how we work with the attitude or something. But if we have the right attitude and things unfold, and, and generally I think that if we're having difficulty with our meditation, it's probably not so much. Probably the main issue is our attitude. And it's might be useful. If you feel like we're deathmatch. Meditation is not going well. We're having difficulty with it. It might be a good time to look at what is the attitude with which we're practicing. And is the attitude what is tripping us up is the adequate attitude. Even the very source for how we interpret our experience as a difficulty. And so attitude what is attitude? attitude is I think of it as the general manner or way in which we decide to speak or act or even how we think it's kind of like the maybe like the mood or the general orientation that we have, or the general policy that we're operating under, kind of, but, and it's can be just an attitude we have in the moment. But it's not a particular thought we have with particular thing we say or do, but rather, it's kind of the background context for it. The general orientation we have for something and, and if we focus too much on the details of the moment, what we're saying What we're doing, and even what we're thinking, it might we might be missing something more intimate, something deeper, something that's more kind of at the heart of who we are. And that might be the, the attitude orientation. That's the soil for whatever we're saying doing or thinking. So for example, someone could sit and meditate and have certain thoughts and maybe their thoughts about wanting something maybe wanting ice cream. And, and so they're just having thoughts. Maybe it's a hot day, it's a seemingly innocent enough thought to have these thoughts about ice cream. But then, if you look kind of kind of behind or around or broader to the attitude or the mood or the general kind of orientation is in which the soil in which those ice cream Same desires are happening. And you see there's an attitude of acquisition of wanting kind of attitude of kind of that doesn't really that the ice cream is just one specific expression of that, that attitude. But that attitude could be carried around and just gets transferred from one thing to another. And if you recognize the attitude of kind of the attitude or

the orientation towards desire, and then relax that there's not much fuel anymore for the ice cream thoughts. But if you let go of ice cream thoughts, but the fuel is still there, the attitude is still there, then, you know, it's just going to kind of keep coming up and you keep coming up. The I find it fascinating that it's in the dictionary that I looked up the word attitude. I like origins of words. And so my dictionary says that added to the or use English use of the word attitude had its origins in 17th century France, where they have the same word same spelling attitude, but back then 17th century France apparently this word was coined to express the refer to the positioning of a person in a piece of art you know, the attitude that they took in that piece of art you know, maybe how their how they are placed kind of in the apparently and, and,

and I talked yesterday to one French Frenchmen about this he said, Oh, yeah, the it's kind of like the English word posture, like the posturing as we say with posture it you know, taking a particular position and posturing in, among other people. So it's kind of like anyway, so. But what I found fascinating about this at the knowledge of source of the word attitude is that it was associated with art. And maybe our minds, our works of art where they can be works of art. Maybe the beauty of our mind has a lot to do with the attitude in which we live by. And if we could kind of kind of really tune in and recognize the attitudes we have, not only is it helpful for meditation, but it's really helpful for the rest of our life. And it's helpful for creating a beautiful environment inside of ourselves, out of which comes a way to live in orientation, how to be in this world. So there are certainly debilitating attitudes a person can have, that if their chronic can be de-stress tension kind of undermined ourselves. And if we don't see the attitude, because we're focusing on what, you know, on the details, but we don't look at the background, soil or background mood that's kind of operating, then we don't understand why this kind of debilitating undermining kind of feeling is happening, the stresses began happening. And it's very easy not to notice the general mood, or the attitude that's there. And I can think of two reasons. One is that we're so focused on what we want to do. We've so focusing on what we think. And so we're blinded by the background for that's kind of building those particular thoughts. The other is that if attitudes become chronic, like sometimes they've been there for decades, even they're so there's so habituated into our mindstream that Just normal is so normal, we don't see them at all. Other people might see that we have an attitude. But you know, for us, it's just normal, just how it is. And so, you know, I've met people who have, you know, seemed seemed, when we say sometimes Buddhism, they have an aversive personality. And but where did the personality come from? And it you know, is it really they genetics that they're that way? Or is it somehow an attitude that got born for whatever reason, that then became chronic became kind of infused into their character. And so it's an attitude that and what's what's surprising to me to some of the people I know who have kind of had these kind of adverse strong adversity tendencies, how little they see it, they don't recognize it in themselves. Or they recognize it sometimes but, but they don't really see that it's just kind of in the almost in the way in which they look at the world is They're kind of they're prepared or they're looking through an aversive lens through kind of a resistance or a pushing back or criticism there. And the

and so in meditation, there are no meditations and interesting place, I think, to study attitude. Because in ordinary life, sometimes there's not enough feedback for the attitudes we have. We can go around and have an attitude and, you know, we could walk around downtown or walking around tab, you know, around and, and, you know, we're bumping into people that maybe are, you know, they don't people don't see us that detail or they don't give us feedback or things basically work out. You can have a attitude about washing dishes at home. But you know, the dishes don't speak back. They don't give you a feedback. You know, like, you know, the attitude yesterday was better, please You know, we're just focusing and doing the dishes. But in meditation is a kind of a laboratory, where it tends to be very quick feedback. Because certain attitudes don't kind of work in meditation. They might kind of work into their life or we get away with in daily life. But in meditation, it's hard to get away with things. Because

they, we get and they, they trigger us to lose track of the meditation, they get, they kind of make a keep us agitated, or they keep us distracted. So, you know, I could go downtown and have my ice cream thoughts. And you know, it's no one downtown and even though I'm thinking about ice cream, I don't really see any cost to have those thoughts thought it's an innocent ordinary thought. And, and there might even be ice cream stores down there. So it's reasonable to have those thoughts. And so it just goes along, you know, so I don't see I have this mood that goes along with those thoughts of desire. Sit down to meditate. And that whole mood that drive for desire and wanting and those kinds of whatever thoughts they might be. They pull me out of the present moment. They pull me out of if I'm focusing on the breath out of the breath. And so there's kind of a very quick feedback there. Oh, look at that. Something took me away. That's not what I'm trying to do. I'm not income to IMC. In order to think about ice cream, I came to meditate. I can think about ice cream later Later, so that we let go of the ice cream thoughts. And then it comes back. Like oh, God comes back. I might really meditate today. This is probably not a good day to meditate. It's probably too warm or you know, I didn't have enough coffee. You know, maybe I'll go to Starbucks and come back. And we come back with a little trip, 10 minutes there and back and we sit down to meditate again, ice cream thoughts. And so, but if you so but you take that, as, you know, not really meditations not really working there, because you're not staying present. And you've considered what's the attitude behind those thinking. And then you might see that there's certain attitude policy kind of mood of desire, and perhaps that's their kind of craving that's there. That's what's going on. Let me turn around and look at that. So kind of to summarize what I just did a sub point I made that in the daily life we can get away with attitudes. In, in meditation, if you're oriented to notice your attitude, then and you notice where you get tripped up in meditation. You're going to you can much quicker feedback And that's one of the purposes of meditation. Oddly enough, one of the purposes of meditation is not to meditate well. Isn't that nice? For those of you who don't feel like you do it well? What are the purpose of meditation is not to do it well, if you use whatever not well means as a as an opportunity to take a deeper look what's going on here. And one of the things you're gonna look at is what is the background mood and attitude? What's really going on at a deeper level here with me? Am I feeling insecure? In my feeling ambitious? Am I really kind of is my general attitude and mood. One about proving myself for being a special person delusions of grander or is my general mood one of self deprecation or general mood one a feeling kind of lousy and inadequate somehow it's Not just particular ideas, but to kind of be a feeling of kind of being heavy or, you know, kind of broken even that people might have with them. And then, to put a question mark, after whatever attitude you notice,

what is this really true? Is this really the case that it feels that way? But what is what is an attitude? is an attitude true is just a construct that comes out of the mind and caused by causing conditions or may or may not really be true. Maybe it doesn't make sense to talk about attitudes as being true or false. Maybe it makes more sense to talk about attitudes which are useful and not useful. how they function for us. So is this is a useful attitude to have, should I carry this, maybe don't have to live under the weight. That this is the truth. That who knows. But I can really see this debate. It's not useful. I wanted to offer you five attitudes that are useful for meditation. And then I would like to ask you, after I've listed these five, if you can identify some common commonalities in these five, common denominators, things that they all have in common. So the first one, so this is for meditation, mindfulness meditation. It's enough to clearly recognize what is happening. Nothing needs to be, nothing needs to be fixed or changed. To enough to clearly recognize what is happening. Nothing needs to be fixed or changed. patience with all that happened. Be patient with all that happens. Being in a hurry is a form of greed. There is nothing to prove or resist in meditation. every occurrence is a time to learn something new, about being peaceful, towards what's happening. You are a valuable person. your well being is important. And your capacity for attention is a treasure. No message that you are less than beautiful is worth believing. Trust the awareness that flows out of stillness. Trust the awareness that flows out of

stillness. So I don't know if you could track or five but any suggestions about what they have in common?

So if you could use the mic, that would be nice, sir Mike.

They're not about doing anything. They're not about doing anything very nice.

Do they all have self compassion involved?

Are they both Well, they all seem to have self compassion, self compassion, self, self complete all seem to related to self compassion, very nice.

They're adding to that self acceptance,

self acceptance in it very nice.

In the back there.

There's a lack of pressure and each of them to become something or do something special or have a special experience great

lack of pressure to become something or some special experience, even special meditation experiences. Nice apparently asking for help. I mean, you know, I thought you know, I learned something new today. So I'd love to hear more.

Each of them each of them has to do with becoming aware of things as they are rather than imposing a personal

projection.

Great is a lot of messages about the word use things as they are accepting or

knowing, being being aware of being like the word allow allowing.

Is there. That plastic? I wondered if each was mapped on to the five hindrances. Oh, yes, each one is mapped onto five. Whoa, that would be interesting to see. It seemed like they were great. Well, they all seem welcoming. They all seem welcoming. Okay.

confidence,

trust faith,

the element of confidence and faith and trust and having those okay so up here in the front

there there was a certain centeredness so you're a little closer and there was a certain centeredness because there wasn't it wasn't apathetic or not caring him is engaged in a calm, centered way.

So it wasn't passive or, or doing nothing. It was engaged in a nice active way but in a peaceful way. There is a kind of engagement, you're kind of doing something right, but almost doing nothing. Yes, everything you need is already here. Everything you need is already here. Great, that's I love that. So this is what I wrote about the common elements. And the common some of these is repeating what some of you I think the common element in these five is they are calm attitudes, promoting a calm non reactive attention, including a calm non reactive attention to our reactivity.

The nice

Can you manage that it's like stuff like juggling too many balls be nonreactive to your reactivity. They do not involve trying to change what is happening. They are part of finding a useful meditative way of being aware of what is happening. And then there are also attitudes we can take on which are more active, like we can actively be kind or actively be compassionate. And we can actively actively be letting go. And I chose those three and purpose because those three kindness, compassion and letting go our Two ways of one ways of talking about what the Buddha called right? attitude. The second factor of the noble of the Eightfold Path. So it usually called right intention. I think it's deeper than intention. intention could just be wishful thinking. attitude is something deeper, that we kind of infused ourselves with or an approach that we have. But and this is, you know, it's not uncommon to find people translate these positive words like kindness, compassion, letting go for the right intention, right attitude, but the, in the language of the Buddha, the letting go is usually translated as renunciation and the kindness of friendliness is literally non ill will to negative is used, and then compassion is non cruel. They are non non harmfulness and Dharma teachers when they kind of read the literal words like that how they are nonya will non cruelty like me are quick to say with this can mean the negative in Pali in ancient language implies sometimes the positive. Because we we don't want to be left but nothing positive. However, I think there's something very profound about the fact that it's worded the negative because there's something spectacular ly beautiful that happens to the mind when it releases itself from its attitudes. And so rather than substituting ill will, with kindness, there's something more profound about freeing the mind from an attitude just opening it's kind of like opening up the space, relaxing and opening and feeling how When there's a release of the attitude, when the mind is not weighed or pulled in or contracted by some kind of attitude, there's a lightness and openness and freedom that goes on there. And, and so to, to not only know what our attitudes are, to know when there's a nice alternative attitude to bring in that supportive and helpful, but also to know something about the beauty of a mind, which is set free, that's open, spacious, which is available for all kinds of good attitudes that might arise in the moment. But it's not carrying with it a policy that this is how it should be, and then trying to bend oneself to that policy. So if the policy is to be compassionate, and you carry that with you, then you have to always be figuring out how do you do this. Maybe the situation is not doesn't call for compassion, it calls for being kind or calls for something else. But if the mind is has the ability to have been freed, then then we're actually much more able to kind of adjust and adapt and kind of hopefully do what's appropriate at the given time. And sometimes many times that's compassion. But it might be other things that are there. And sometimes what's appropriate is to keep letting go. keep letting go. And that's one of the things that happens in meditation. That as meditation deepens and deepens, not only do the difficult attitudes, the debilitating ones seem for that they're how they shortchange us. But even healthy attitudes, good ones, and once we should we can celebrate in life in deeper and deeper meditation. They get in the way of this movement towards freedom, because a free mind is not burdened or not happy Then check are not caught up and are involved in any attitudes at all. It's more like I don't know what it's like but it's like you

You try out all kinds of windows for your house. Some are tinted red, some green, some blue. And, and you know, it's they're nice you can see through but it's always you know, and then they tried it you try to

get a clear one but these days everything has all these lead free classes class has a little bit of green in it. And then finally you just open the window. And then you see right. So the same thing with the mind. Open the mind free the mind. And then they're in that freedom there's much more of a sense of, of creativity and sense of openness In a sense of wiser choice, around how we want to live our lives, what attitudes we want to have, as we go into things, we're not an automatic pilot, about the attitudes we're carry carry with us. We go into new environment. We're not an automatic pilot, you know that we're always come showing up the same way because we have this personality, you know, his character, temperate temperament that's been built in from attitudes. But there's a freshness and openness to kind of just be there and see what's appropriate and what's needed. So this is one of the I think, can be some one of the benefits of meditation is not only do we see the attitudes we carry with us if we look for that, the deeper moods or mindsets we have, but also, we can begin finding healthier ones. We begin to get a sense of what it's like to not enter the world or be in the world with attitudes automatically. There. And to let go and deep way to be refreshed. And I think was one of one of the benefits of meditation is the ability to know the mind, have a reference point of a mind, which is not preoccupied with anything. And that's not an easy thing to discover. Most minds are always preoccupied with something. But to really become calm or centered or settled, or, or if if we don't get calm or centered or settled, to have the mindfulness itself be clear enough to see the attitudes are there. And in the mindfulness. To see the mindfulness self has no attitude. So whether we discover a mind itself that has no attitude, and then have much more freedom about how we go through our lives, or we discover that mindfulness that's strong and clear enough itself. has some of these qualities you talked about of acceptance and not trying to change things if you don't have an attitude towards things, even if we have attitudes, that also creates a very important reference point that changes how we enter the world and how we go about the world. So your mind can be a work of art Guess who's the artist be the artist of your own mind. And, and, and you know, when you go you know who the I know maybe it's the wrong word, but the client is for your artwork. You know who's gonna see it is the artist is you may who have a beautiful mind. So we have a few minutes. If you have any questions or concerns or testimonials about what I said? That would be great to hear some of your comments.

I especially like the way that you contrast

this so called positive, you know, attitude like compassion or something like that with the non harming and how much more freeing it can be the energy, non harming. Yeah, right. Nice.

So it seems that some attitudes are much more beneficial or helpful than others, especially relative to, to meditation and mindfulness. It's been said for example, but metta can take one to the threshold of awakening and freedom. I suppose the same might be true of compassion.

Yeah, yeah, I think so definitely, there's some attitudes which are tend to be more useful than others. And so sometimes if you're in doubt, choose some of the standard, helpful, middot intentions, if in doubt, be compassionate, when in doubt, be kind. And another one is when in doubt, this is a wonderful Buddhist attitude that I learned through my Buddhist years of practice. When in doubt, bow are the equivalent, you know, you don't know that we're literally bowing but there's something about the appreciation, the care, the respect, the reverence, the gratitude, the that is kind of expressed through bowing, that if you know that it's quite something, if you're in doubt, don't know what to do. But if you don't know what to do about a conflict with someone, you're in the middle of a deep conflict but you have no idea what to do. What if you bowed? Can mindfulness

be an attitude?

I kinda want to say no, I don't think of mindfulness i don't think i think of mindfulness as an attitude. And mindfulness is just knowing it doesn't just knowing is kind of doesn't have any agendas. It's not trying to do anything. Attitude little bit. This has infused with intentionality with an agenda with something but mindfulness Can't we could add my attention ality to mindfulness or we can add a mood or desire or something. But that's extra mindfulness by itself I don't think is an attitude.

So is there a no attitude attitude?

Maybe I mean, you know, we've been just puking says, Oh, this is our language game. But I think that freedom of the mind is consequential. And so it's someone's disposition or someone's way their mind operates the way that they experience the world is through or with a mind that's free or with the absence of clinging and so is that an attitude? Is it a mood and orientation? You know, what's the 10th on an open window? It kind of doesn't quite make sense to talk about it, right? Because there's no window of you know, it's no you're not looking through the window and the window is open. So you know, Talk about the 10th. And

so I wonder, like, just being human being with a mind is is there? Is it reasonable to have any expectation of seeing things as they really? Is there any way things really are? Or is there always because I'm here observing the thing?

Yes. Generally we have this idea or Buddhism is the idea that the expression seeing things as they are, is very particular what it means. The idea of having some pure perception that really sees things as they truly are, is kind of ridiculous. We don't have the we don't you know, there's so many different ways of seeing things, right. If we look at a flower, we see the flower different than the bee, who's seeing it accurately, who's seeing it as it really is. You know, if you look, you know, if you look at a star we see is a really is the best we can say we see it as it really was. Long before you belong before you were born. You know, so the idea, you know, it's all kinds of you know, once you start kind of analyzing, seeing, but when Buddhist use the expressions, seeing things as they are, it's really refers to seeing the nature of the experience we're having, that the experience is impermanent. The experience itself is not self, and there's certain kinds of Duke are suffering inherent in that experience. And, and so it has to do more with a quality or the nature of how we experience the world to see things as they are. We're seeing the nature of experience in these in these three particular ways. But you know exactly what it is, you know, the fifth thing you know, You know, we have this big bell in front of me. Right. But I've seen spittoons there looked like this. You know, and if I put it down, I had my teacher and I bet teachers in Asia who had spittoons next to them. And like they're sitting there, and you'd hear this big kind of, you know, gurgling and you know, bubbling up and you know, kind of gargling coming out of the throat and then there's this big when they get ready to deposit something into the spittoon you know, so if I had that next to me this you know, you see it as a really is you'd see it as my spoon. So, is it a spittoon? Or is it a bell? What was the concept of Bell or spit to in the way I experience it is changeable and impermanent and not self. And so anyway, so it's, you know, the idea of seeing things as they are in In this, this Buddhist tradition has a very particular meaning. It's not meant to, you know, to see the true physical nature of things.

Yes. Is there a mic over here? Yeah.

I want to thank you because I think you've given us an invitation today. And I hope to accept it. When I first started meditating, I learned that it was to quiet the mind.

And

we have a spittoon

Yeah, I, I need one.

And then to not ignore what comes up, but actually look at it. And I think today where we were given is the invitation to go beyond That to go deeper into what brings that on, right? And you gave us some examples of attitudes. And I kept looking for the right one the key for me, and it just came at the end, when you said, Be still and I forget why.

Let awareness flow out of that stillness.

I forget

the three, the three and

the very end, you said, Be still and something. But anyway, be still. And so I'll be still. Thank you. Wonderful.

Thank you for capping the talk with the summary and I appreciate that a lot. So thank you all and I hope that you study your attitudes. I hope that you know, become wise about the attitudes and it's doing so support you as you go through your life. Thank you