

2020-04-27 COVID-19, Grief, and Mindfulness

Wed, 4/29 2:16PM • 27:02

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grief, loss, people, mindfulness, life, grieve, lost, existential, kinds, sadness, feel, support, flow, recognize, virus, meditation, world, deep, meditating, friend

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, we've been living now in a COVID-19 world where this little virus and billions trillions of them perhaps have disrupted our lives disrupted our society in a way that was unimaginable. You know, just a few months ago or a month ago or then many people now have been living with this new life for long enough now that for some people are starting to wear them down. be tired be exhausted from it. being impatient as some people, it's bringing up all kinds of unresolved issues and challenges that now have kind of center stage difficulties at home difficulties with work or without work financial difficulties. And for some people, they're working extra long hours, difficult hours, some people living right up close, where it's dangerous for them, dangerous for their health with the virus. And, and some people being sick, very sick, some people dying. Some people knowing people who have the real virus and who are dying or dead people, doctors and nurses in hospitals who have been seeing a lot of death and a lot of exhaustion and a lot of suffering. So I hear now that there's a A lot of people who are also in this challenging time, who are grieving, some people have been grieving for for a while some people now are beginning to grieve, because there's so much loss. There's so much that's changed and disappeared. For now at least, some things have disappeared forever. And to have these week after week of a life with so much that we usually depend on and have for our lives and enjoy or live with, that we depend on. just vanish, disappear, can bring up a lot of sadness and a lot of anger, a lot of grief. And that might be helpful just to name that and to recognize grief. Grief is one of the great teachers. Grief is one of the primal conditions of human life. Sooner or later, it'll come and visit us in one form or the other. And there's also very Deep some people call it a core grief that everyone carries inside. That when some of it has to do with our life experiences, some of it has to do with just the existential truth of life. That even if we haven't lost important things yet, we will we will lose our life. We will lose the lives of our loved ones will be separated from things we like and value that's built into this life is loss of one form or another. Is things changing and becoming radically different from what they'd be we were before and that things becoming radically different, is challenging for people. That sense of loss and what what's lost. And so I thought it was important to talk a little bit about grief and loss. Especially because in in mindfulness practice, it's really presented already is in fact A very powerful

tool very powerful support for some of the most or the most challenging issues of human life, that this practice is actually designed for these challenges designed for the deepest existential challenges of human life. And we know that the story of the Buddha that he started his path to his discovery of freedom in his encounter with existential issues of sickness, old age and death. So what is it that mindfulness can do to support us during this time? How does it help? What can it do for us? First, it helps us to be present for it, and to see it for what it is to really be able to have the ability to stop and really admit to ourselves or see or be honest, what we're feeling what's happening. And to be able to do it mindfully means to recognize it clearly. So clearly, that there's some freedom in there, that freedom from it like it goes away, not dismissive of it, but the deeply respect to respectful of grief. But still being able to recognize it there. So in a certain way, we are not completely lost in the grief. But there is a like, we're, we're our friend, where are the witness a companion, we can accompany our grief. So we bring the capacity to open to the grief to allow it there. And it's remarkable that mindfulness is a practice especially in meditation, that has the room and we cultivate the ability we prepare ourselves to allow the waves of grief the tornadoes the volcanoes of grief to come. It's nice to know that There's a practice where we don't have to live with the ideas to get over their grief or to fix the grief or be ashamed of the grief. But to this is the time to let the grief have its life to make room for it. But at the same time is making room and allowing for it and that recognition and mindfulness. We are not collapsing into it. It's painful and difficult. But we sit upright and allow it to wash through us wash through and experience it and experience it. One of the, you know, basic practice of mindfulness of breathing, letting go over thoughts coming back and breathing, quieting the mind and breathing is a very powerful in the context of grief. Because what can make it unbearable that grief is when we continually tell it, tell ourselves stories over and over again. of what we've lost. What's gonna happen, what's not going to happen? how we've been hurt how we're angry how someone has wronged us how life is unfair. And of course the mind will think these things. It's not a mistake, the mind thinks these things. But to get lost in those thoughts is where we can. Grief can be too much. But meditation is to, like, let go of those thoughts just enough, or what I do what I've done with my big grief, I haven't exactly let go of them because it's asked for too much perhaps, but rather, to compost the grief back in the body to bring the grief and grief and feel how to experience in the body. Feel how it is with the breathing, breathe through it with the body. And I find that it's very respectful of grief to allow it to be there. But feel it in the body. Keep coming back. Let the body be the container. Let the body be what holds it, even no matter how painful it is in difficult, trust the body feel sensations, what's going on in the body. And that's a way of not getting the thoughts, the projections into the future, the stories, all that they're allowed to live, it's okay. But we don't feed them, we don't get involved in them, we don't actively get engaged in them. So to be able to recognize, oh, that's thinking, Okay, I'm thinking, there's a lot of grief. So of course, I'm thinking maybe we can't let go of it. But we can turn the attention to feel the experience of grief in the body. I like to think of grief is kind of like a mystery. It's something very profound in human life, the stronger the grief, the more represents the profundity of something inside of ourselves that are really needs, its time needs to be seen needs to be heard and needs to be felt needs to be expressed in some way. And I think of grief while we're meditating as a form of expression, it's not a damping down, or a denial. It's to sit still, to allow the volcano to flow inside, you just pour and pour it all the tears to flow and to flow. And this idea of radical permission to just feel and

allow it to be there, while sitting still and quiet. And giving yourself lots of time. There are many kinds of losses that people can have and sometimes it's helpful to be able to recognize and name this specific loss. So it has a little bit of a handle to it. So we're not kind of it's not a morpheus and confusing. So there is material loss, we can lose our money. We can lose our work, we can lose our access to some of the wonderful things about life that go on. And so the loss of material of wealth and sometimes there's loss of food, loss of freedom to get food that goes on. There's a loss of, of functionality. We can't function can't behave in the way we're used to behaving in places where they've been locked up in their apartments or homes for weeks. So much as lost being able to play children who can't play outside. People can't go outside and go hang out with their friends and talk with their friends and go out maybe it's to nature and see the woods or they can't do the recreation opportunities or can't go and get their education that way. They're used to some people. Some kids are do now doing education at home but doesn't work for some kids. That form of learning and that kind of discipline doesn't work. There's all kinds of things, functions, activities we do that have been curtailed. And for some people, these are really important activities and there's lost us grief and not being able to do it. There's loss of our image in our imagination, we have an image of ourselves being capable. We have an image of ourselves as someone who can support ourselves take care of our situations can work. And to have that self image, that rug pulled from underneath is very, very challenging to feel that and people feel disoriented, they feel lost, and they feel afraid. You know, who's going to take care of me when I'm sick, sick, cold and alone, perhaps, very frightening, very difficult to be in. It's a huge grief to have that kind of loss of company and support. There's a imagination of what's coming in the future. There's anticipatory grief, that because of what we've lost now, we've lost the future, we lose a friend of ours dies. And now we've lost the future of all the things we're going to do and hope to do and anticipating. We lost our educational opportunity, we lost our job, and all the things we're anticipating were going to do, were taken away. And so there's grief. There is relational losses. You know, this idea that certainly with death, we lose relationships. But with this shelter in place, there's ways in which our relationships are not as some of them are not as rich we can't connect to people. We can't have the regular easy contact with friends with family, family, people who don't see each other because they're supposed to be quarantined. They might talk they might video conference little bit somehow, but very different than just hanging out in the living room and talking with a friend or grandmother or parent or siblings are children that you know, we haven't seen and we're used to seeing in the sense of loss of that relationship. Their relationship skills have gotten strained, dramatically strained couples, kids and families, where the inherent maybe stresses and tensions that have managed to manage just fine all along. But when in quarantine and loss of work and money, lots of Lawson, the value and the relationship what it's all about. And then there's existential loss, the loss of the existential support that we have the needs we have to live a successful life needs we have to live a safe life, a loss of safety, to go to a store and to go shopping and not feel safe because you maybe you'll pick up the virus to not know if you know it, look into the future this apparently expires is going to stay around For a while, right now, there's no known vaccine. How long do we have to live with this existential fear of, of sickness and death, and suffering. So there's all these forms of grief, all these things come to a loss. And of course, it's going to be difficult. There's no shame in grief. And there's no grief is to be respected. Grief is a powerful working of the heart powerful

working with something deep inside. And the task of mindfulness. The offer of mindfulness is to learn how to grieve well, to have good grief. And it's possible to grieve in unhealthy ways. It's possible to collapse completely in it. It's possible to not deny it, it's possible to numb out it's possible to distract oneself. It's possible to you know, all kinds of things that dampen it down, push it away or ways in which we over indulge in it, we get caught in it, all this and in some of this has to do with strong identification with the suffering strong way of being attached even to the suffering to the sadness that there sometimes a strong identification with the anger. Grief often can come with anger can often come with sadness, that one of the interesting paradoxes or interesting movements around the anger and sadness that can come with loss is that when you feel one, you feel the anger. Ask yourself where the sadness is. If you feel a lot of sadness, ask yourself where the anger is. And the interesting practice of doing that is that the we often we can often get stuck in anger or stuck in sadness or sorrow. But if you can Notice that the baby underlying it is the other that sometimes can loosen it up and let it flow more easily and it's not so stuck, but it's recognized and we can breathe with it. To have breathing room with the experience. Grief will take its own time. And its own time means there's no particular time how long it's going to take. Generally grief takes a lot longer than people think it's going to take. And sometimes it takes a lifetime. Some grief is accompanies us for a long time. And they are to mindfulness when we really learn it and can stay with grief and feel it even if it stays for a long time. It becomes our companion in such a way that it can actually help us become freer helps us to be more honest, helps us to be more real and connected in full. That the sorrow the pain of loss doesn't have to be done. To limit us, it can actually free us and actually heal us in some way. There can be healing with grief and through grief, but not on your time. If you're too quick to want to heal, then you're not respecting the deeper unfolding the process which grief is. Grief is a process. Don't shortchange it. Don't speed it up. Except one way. There's one way that I know that's a healthy way to let the process of grief to speed up. And that is to meditate. I've meditated a lot. There's something around being undistracted and remaining open and receptive and just coming back to the body and over and over again. Things get composted. Things get worked out, things get resolved, things get released, in a much faster rate than if it go busy working around the life and being distracted. And having to take care of things in our everyday life. The grief will still kind of wash through us the grief will still take time. And, but it might take a lot longer to kind of go through the cycles of grief that we have to go through. meditation can speed it up, not that we speed it up. But we just letting the system unfold and roll and move and move and move. So to grief takes a lot of energy. People who, when there's a lot of grief, people can be really tired, it's hard to sleep sometimes put stress, strain and all kinds of other things. It makes the suffering of grief more difficult if we don't sleep. It's a difficult thing to do and when grief is intense, and I say that, too, so we can recognize that. So we're not fighting it or surprised by or despairing that this is how it is Whatever way it is. That's how it is now. Whatever way it is, is is now, this is the experience of the moment. That statement or this is now is an antidote to the mind that has predictions. The mind that says this means it's going to be forever. This means it's going to get worse and worse. This means I'll do something more. This means this and that. This is just now and to just, that's, again, back to mindfulness. Oh, let me feel this. Now. This is just the experience of Now. Now. Now, it doesn't have to be tied to the imagination, about prediction what's going to happen. Grief is also a powerful teacher a powerful event. When a grief for the present moment something like a loss

of work or loss of money or loss of rent money or loss of housing or all kinds of things can happen. Loss of health resonates or awake wakes up. Grief we've had in the past. Many, not many people know how to grieve Well, our society or family or religions, culture sometimes don't teach us that much, especially in the modern world, how to have respectful grief and proper grief for full grief for healing grief or make space for grief. And so if grief hasn't been complete, or it hasn't really been respected well in the past, the pain of what happened the past that still can live in us. And the loss and the fear around the loss of losing still lives there. And so, contemporary losses, reawaken the old ones, and sometimes the core grief that we're feeling with contemporary loss is not the contemporary loss itself, though. might seem that way, but rather it's how it resonates with these old grief said we still carry with us that have never been resolved. So one of the primary things I keep saying that I want to emphasize is the idea of respecting grief. Take it really respect it, really give it its time, in a certain way to grieve well, is to trust the grief, even when trust seems impossible, and so painful, so difficult. So over the top, what's happening, so I hope the whole world is falling apart for people. It's okay. It's okay to grieve. Trust, the grief. It's now this experience now. If you've been meditating and you've prepared yourself through weeks, months, years of meditation Hopefully, that preparation will allow you to keep opening to it and feeling it and be with it as present moment phenomena, let it flow, let it be there trusted deeply. Be the friendly presence for it. Or friendly is too much. Be the companion, accompany your grief and help your grief, feel safe. Help your grief, feel that it's accompanied, help your grief feel that it's not alone. Help your grief, feel safe with you that it's allowed to be allowed to exist. And if you do this, some of the it's not just this particular grief that you're working with. We're working with deep deep conditioning inside deep courses inside of us and it's definitely part of The path to liberation. There are some teachers who say the path to liberation is one grief after another. All these things were grieving what we let go of and what goes and what ends. That has not been my experience, that the path and liberation is, you know, one grief after the other. But sooner or later, the path to liberation involves some grief or touching in with the historical grief we still carry within us. So, if you're, if you're experiencing grief these days of COVID 19. Please know that you're not alone. That that's a challenging times for many, many, many people. Please know that there's nothing wrong with grieving. But see, do see if you can grieve well, and grieve well doesn't mean you have to be you have to be Clever or you have to have the right tools or techniques, it mostly means you get out of the way of the grief. And let get out of the way by really feeling in the body. Make room for grief itself is a inconstant, impermanent flow of things coming and going and flowing. Whenever you find yourself thinking about grief, thinking about what's going on the loss, the upset, the angry the sadness, come back into your body. Let your body be the container and let the body be the temple. Let the body hold at all. Let the body be the friendly space create this friendly space around the pain. So the pain is not alone and I hope Is that we can be each other's companions. That we can be by our ability to sit with grief in ourselves. We can also have the ability to sit with others when they're grieving, not to fix them, but to help them feel there's no shame that it's safe and appropriate, to allow it to be front and center. To let grief has it has its have its time. Don't be in a hurry. And I hope that in that process, this whole process, that you learn that there is love, that you can love yourself, have compassion for yourself, no matter how dark it gets. And you can have love and compassion for others. May it be that we live in a world where we love each other. May we be that we live in a world that's built on the foundation. of

caring for each other, caring for everyone may it be that we live in a world of care compassion, generosity and love. That's the world I'm hoping that we can make from the ashes of what is happening in our world today. So thank you, and I hope that you sleep well. Those of you are getting ready to sleep I hope that you go to bed and, and when you go to bed that you offer yourself loving, caring, generous, warm and caring and support yourself, love yourself to sleep well through the night. Thank you