

# 2020-06-08: Black Lives Matter: How do you Want to be Changed

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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So greetings and I'm grateful that you're here and grateful to have have the chance to meditate for a while with you and now to share some teachings. Before I do the talk about my topic for today, I want to mention that I haven't been doing these Monday nights for quite some time during the shelter in place time. And I haven't really had the, I think, the capacity to teach more than I'm doing and take care of more things. So it felt better to just be home, and over the next week's we will continue a start up again here at IMC with the Monday evening sits and talks. And Diana Clark will be teaching them now for a while. And Diana Clark is a wise and deeply practiced and wonderfully kind person. And I'm very happy that one of our teachers here at IMC will step up and is willing to step up and offer the space to on Monday evenings. So the reason I came this evening down was because I haven't really had a chance to talk kind of your IMC, IRC community, Audio Dharma community. In the last weeks, you know, regular talk and I won't be for another few weeks because I'm be away from next two Sundays. But it felt very important for me to come and speak little bit about what's happening in our world. What's happening in the United States and with the killing of George Floyd and all the police brutality and other people who have gotten killed in recent times, especially the African Americans who have been killed. And what a deep wound this is in society. And enough, I think maybe, of course, you know, I don't quite know what to say and certainly feel quite inadequate to be able to address all these issues that are coming up and we have to face and work with as a society. But I think that to be a witness to it and to speak, in order to try to find out what we can do, what we can say, is a very important part of this. And it's a little bit hard to give this talk not knowing exactly who the community is that I'm talking to, because all these circles of people who listen to these talks and you know, used to be I only gave the community was the people I've met with in front of me sitting in a hall like this. So it's a little hard for me to find my way here with this talk. So I hope that you will be patient with me. But as a Buddhist teacher, I have, and that's primarily how I speak publicly, as a Buddhist teacher, I have the Buddhist perspective on these things and the perspective of my years of being a Buddhist teacher

and talking with Buddhist practitioners and talking about their inner life. And one of the really important things I feel like I can offer is that the more distress, the more troubled a person is by events in the world, the suffering of the world and challenges of the world. And sometimes even personal challenges, the more they trigger fear in a deep way or anger in a deep way or distress in a deep way, confusion and deep way, the strength of it, the depth of that speaks to that there's something important in you and us to really look with look at. That there's really something here to practice with, and get to the bottom of really kind of bring your kindness, your mindfulness, your care, to really address and be with what's here. And also, when we're really upset by what's happening in the world, the suffering of the world. It's also very important, the more upset we are, the more of a moved by it, maybe upset, not the right word, but more were moved by it. And really, it really shakes us up and we really want something be different, to really want change to happen. The more important way, more we feel that, the more important it is that we change. If you feel that way that you change, that we change not only our mindset, our attitudes, how we live, but what we do in the world. That if we go back to what was the case before, we just kind of get troubled, be upset and say that someone else should do something, you know, they, the politicians should do something and it should be different. Other people should do something, it's their problem. And you wish it could be different. But we do a very big disservice to ourselves, this inner life who we have. We have an inner life, we have a heart, we have this deep inner that really cares, really is connected to others in the world. And that very deep way in which we get moved, is part of that primal connections, primal connectivity and kinship we have with people and if that kinship, if that sense of connection, that way of being moved, just kind of goes to sleep again, or gets covered over again. It's actually a little bit worse than it was before we even got moved in the first place. So the big question is, how do you want to be different? How will you be different? Or say it even another way? How would you like to be changed by the events of the world, events of the, you know, in this country? How do you want to be changed to be a witness, historical witness now, to the tremendous suffering of racism in this country, but not just in this country? It's also around the world. I think there's a heightened acute awareness now, for a number of reasons of racism. For one for me, I mean, maybe I've not paying attention enough for but it's so blatant now. When I first started hearing the language of white supremacy, I thought we were talking about really far fringed people on the edges who were, who were kind of, you know, just strange people. But it's so obvious now that there's this conscious and unconscious emphasis on white supremacy at the highest levels of the government and institutions that we have. There's no denying it I feel at this point. And to see, to be is amazing thing of having this videos, to be able to see history in front of our eyes in a way that I think in the past, it was very easy not to believe or not to get much prominence. And there's so many times down through the centuries, that such horrendous things happen to people as proceeding now in this country. And it was not recorded and we had one word against another or maybe the people who could speak speak about how terrible it was died and no one spoke up then because of it. It's remarkable what we're seeing in videos. We're seeing people being killed repeatedly, being shot, being choked, killed by no longer be able to breathe. It's quite an amazing thing to see and to witness this. We're witnessing police brutality. And I know sometimes it's not popular to highlight police brutality and sometimes there's a rush to defend the police. But they're here it is on video. We can see it. You know, a few weeks ago, a couple weeks ago, there was this amazing video taken in the central

Central Park in New York of a white woman, Amy Cooper, who called 911 and it was videoed, watch her making the phone call and she's saying in the phone call that she's being assaulted by a black men, come and get me, help me. He's not assaulting her. He or his sisters taking the video. And so the police came but you know she was the one who got in trouble, it was clear that she was lying. But there was a video to show that she was lying. Too often there haven't been videos, and the white woman has been believed, the white person has been believed, and there's no nothing else happening. This story, the same story was the beginning of the civil rights movement at least in Mississippi a year after I was born in 1955. There was a 13 year old boy named Emmett Till, who went into a grocery store and some conversation with the young 21 year old Carolyn Bryant, who was the clerk. Something went wrong. And she accused him. She later she accused him of grabbing her in a sexually inappropriate way and telling her obscenities. Her husband, friend or husband in relevant relative relative went at night, kidnapped the boy and did a horrific lynching. And eventually the boy's body was found. The two people who killed the boy were charged, were tried and were acquitted. All and relatively quickly, a year after being acquitted the two killers because of some rule of double jeopardy, or you can't be tried for the same thing twice, admitted that they killed the boy. Many years later, Caroline Bryant at an interview. many decades later, said, I just made it up. What you said about the boy who got killed? There was no videos, no record, who did people believe? So to be witness to this kind of history. One of the impacts it has on me is that I certainly want to be changed by it and try to create a better society. And I could say a better society for the African Americans. But how many times have white people said that? How many times have white people ... there's been all these commissions that have been you know there's been a lot of race riots in the United States and these commissions keep coming up and saying the same thing ever since 1919, that there's unconscious prejudice where the police will treat black people poorly, badly. They'll side with the white people because in 1919 riots in Chicago, they stood to the sidelines as white people rioted and killed many, many black people. There was a riot in that. The reason for the riots and why the frustration was a young white man, 17 year old man, had swum in Lake Michigan across an informal line into the white part of the lake. And so he was stoned to death. No white person who was ever arrested for that. And there was a commission. And the commission talked about police brutality and the way the police didn't take care of everyone and make people feel safe and attack the blacks and who were there and all these things had to change. Nothing changed. There kept being commissions, probably 20 25 30, big commissions of these riots all came to the same conclusion. And police brutality and not feeling safe by the police was a recurrent problem. So this is the white history of the United States. And so I could say that I want to make life better for the African Americans and support them and open doors for them and give them a helping hand, whatever. But I think it's also very important. Maybe more important to study not like African American history and their difficulties, but the other half of it for study the white history of racism. It's an amazing history. It's a powerful history. It's a powerful current, and there's no denying it. Certainly a lot of people are not racist. But the institution's, the momentum, so much of the culture over and over again, it's heartbreaking. So, if your heart is broken, don't turn away from that. A broken heart is really at the beginning of being changed. It's a source of how we can open up to a new world. And I think we really need to look at this question, how do we want to be changed? Because, in so many ways now, in these last months, the world has changed. I can't imagine it going

back to what it used to be like, so much has changed. And I don't want it to go back to where it was like before. So then I asked myself, Well, if that's the case, how am I going to be changed by it? What will I do differently? And certainly, one of the things that I would like to do differently is because of my profession, what I do is being a Buddhist teacher, I really want to people to do the introspection, to do the deep inner looking to purify their minds and hearts of hate, of greed, of conceit, of selfishness. To really drop down into the depths of who we are, where we find freedom. Where we find love and compassion. Where you find connectedness to others. We find kinship with all beings. It was a very, very powerful moment for me some years ago when I was talking with an African American friend, and I was asking about some of the warm and friendship that I sometimes receive from African Americans in this country and so I was asking some question about trying to understand something. And her question really took me by surprise and really went deep inside. She said something like, of course, they're friendly. Because we're all kin. We're all family. And when I heard that, I kind of what kind of rapid succession my mind went through the experience of being an African American, descendant of slaves, where some ancestor had a white slave owning father, who disowned his own black children. In fact, allowed his own children to go off into continue to be slaves. And on plantations, there were black children of this white slave owner, living together with the white children, siblings, half siblings. And this idea that their family and the family rupture, the father was a mean, violent person. I mean, what would it deep karmic connectivity. But to think, Oh, well, we're all kin here in this country. There's not everyone, literally. But maybe we start seeing each other. Yes, we're, we're all kind of have the same blood. We're all connected. We're family. So hearing that that was kind of like a powerful moment for me. And that was a moment, I decided to become an American citizen. I hadn't been an American citizen for I had been here for many, many years, decades. And partly because of the racism of this country. I had great hesitation about becoming a citizen. Watching as a child, the fires of Watts burn in the Watts riots. And just go on and all the stories that are things I've seen. And when that my friend said, you know, we're all kin, and I thought, I want to be kin. I want to be family, with this group. With this with the African Americans, I want to be part of this big family as well. And that's when I decided to become an American citizen. More recently, someone said to me, you probably wish you hadn't become a citizen now, given up your Norwegian citizenship, and I said, no. That this is why I chose to be a citizen. I chose to be here now, to help in support, to make a difference because of these things, because of these kinds of challenges. And I'm you know, so I offer you these examples of myself because we can make a choice about how we are changed. We can be moved in such a deep way that we don't want to go back to being the person we were before. We want somehow to live a different way, with a different purpose, a different dedication, a different thing. And I'd like to believe that this Buddhist practice that we do, is a practice that is meant to prepare us to live in the world, with all the challenges. To live in the world to address and to meet the challenges. To learn how to be fearless. To have some courage. To learn not to pull away or shut down, but to be able to stand up and look at the problems, difficulties directly. I'm very confident this Buddhist practice has that capacity to do that. The question is, will we practice it? Will we avail ourselves, will we engage enough to go deep enough and full enough so that we can be changed. So we can be someone who really is trying to make a difference in the world for a better world as if or because of, we are all family. We all are, we are kin. Ideally, in my mind that there's no them out there. It's all us. And it's all up to us. And to be able

to drop the conceits of us and them, the separation, to drop the barriers. It's just another way of discovering what Buddhism has to teach. That there's suffering in holding on tight to a sense of self conceit, whether it's personal or for your tribe, for your ethnicity or something. But to really understand that and see and sit and quiet and let it melt away. And this beautiful thing of having it all melt, shed, drop away, this quietness, still place this beautiful place of tenderness within. To trust that and to allow that to come forth, to let that be the guide. So it's not from a sense of obligation and duty and should that we try to make the world a better place. It just, of course we do. That's what this tender heart wants to do. And it's possible to follow the tender, caring, loving, liberated heart. It will guide us. It will help us find our way. This stuff that doesn't have to be a burden. We are beautiful people. We have tremendously wonderful capacities. We do have I believe completely that we all have good hearts deep inside. And how do we support others to let their goodness to come out? One way is we start with ourselves. And it would be nice if all the ways that we tried to help others that we do from that place of freedom within, a deep abiding peace within, and then we make a difference. So how would you like to be changed? And if you want to be changed in some way, what will you do to make that personal change possible? And what do we want to see change in our society? And what change can we do for our society? That's really for the welfare and happiness of everyone. And I'll end with a little story that I heard from last week. There was a black lives matter rally, about 1000 people here in Redwood City. So I went down there with my family, my two boys and my wife. But I didn't see, so there is a remarkable thing. And but someone else from IMC was there and she told told me about it yesterday that what you saw. And that is the very center of where the protest was. There was a storefront, actually a theater front, where the glass was all plywood over. And she watched as some person there was writing the names of African Americans who have been killed here in United States. And she apparently had a piece of paper that she was kind of copying the names from. But there was a police officer there as well watching her. And at some point, he started reciting the names of the black people who've been killed here in the United States in recent times. He started reciting them from memory, so she could write them down. This white police officer knew the names of the people who've been killed. He must have cared. And if you go on the IMC website, I took a picture of it today of this plywood with the names. And you can go and it's on the What's New section of the website, there's a like a letter that I wrote about the George Floyd killing. If you go to the read the letter all the way to the end at the bottom, there's that photograph of it. And as I was down there today and they had also on the plywood written Black Lives Matter. And I thought that's, yes, of course. Black Lives Matter. But, of course, that needs to be said, so sad that it needs to be sad. But I wish there could be another phrase as well. Something like white lives care, white lives making a difference. Because we really need to do more than just see that black lives matter. We really need to be the ones who do something about it, really care and support and change what's going on. Especially given the legacy of what white people and then this country that continues right up to today. I think that we have to understand this white history and have a slogan of white lives, white people, white lives care of white lives for change. So thank you for listening and as I try to find my way on this topic and hopefully say something that is supportive and moves us all in a good direction to try to make this better world for us to live in. Thank you.