

Not-knowing, Discovery, Gifts, and Going Forth

Gil Fronsdal

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Thank you. Just a note that you may or may not be able to hear, we do have hearing-assisted devices on the counter right near the door. So maybe I'll say good morning three times too, so to make sure you can hear me. Good morning. Good morning. Oh, good morning. How nice. Hello, everyone. Very nice to be here.

And hearing about the potluck next week, I'm looking forward to coming. It's great to bring something, but don't let that keep you away if you don't have anything. It's fine to come. It's just wonderful to be here. So, you can hear okay, everyone? Okay, so.

I thought I would describe to you a sequence that can be a reference point for how to meet anything. How to be in the middle of whatever's happening. And it can be used in meditation. It can be used when meditation is going to help you deal with the challenges of life. It can be used in stepping forward out of meditation into the world, and to find your way. And sometimes it's nice to have a sequence, a series of practices to do.

And it makes it a little bit easier to know what to do because this world is so complicated. And so it begins by the practice of not knowing. And so in meditation it means you begin by not coming with knowing who you are, knowing what you're about, knowing the situation, but preparing yourself to know. And this idea of preparing yourself, getting ready to know something. And that's not only true in meditation. But some people say now with this last election that we just had, that maybe now is a time for preparation for what's coming.

And so maybe that begins by not knowing. Not knowing what to do, what's supposed to happen, what actually the situation is. And there's value in not knowing. Because often when we come to meditation, come to challenges in our life, the knowing we come with sometimes is not so helpful. Sometimes the knowing we come with comes with judgments, comes with

old memories, ideas of what's going on. And we're projecting onto the world, projecting onto ourselves a kind of knowing.

If you go meet someone, maybe for the first time, but the clothes they're wearing reminds you of some kind of person that you think is not the kind of person you want to hang out with. And so you're coming with a pre-existing knowing that you project onto that person based on their clothes. But instead, to do this process, is that you would begin by not knowing. Who is this person? Let me not carry with me my old associations. Let me find a way to clear my eyesight, clear my hearing, to find out who is this? What is this?

Let me not know. Let's not begin by knowing. Let me begin by not knowing. And not knowing then meditation can involve relaxing. I wouldn't underestimate the tremendous value of relaxation, of calming, of settling. Because when we're not relaxed, when we're not calm or settled, there is an agitation or a tension that is squeezing or pushing some of the projections, some of the prejudices, some of the preconceived ideas that we bring with us.

It's kind of like, you know, if you squeeze a toothpaste tube, when the cap is off, it's just going to keep coming out. And so if you're tense, something's going to keep coming out, pushing, and kind of a compulsion sometimes to think certain ways or be certain ways, feel certain things. And there's something about relaxing, softening, gentling, settling, calming, that stops that kind of pushing of our ideas, pushing of our prejudice and preconceived ideas and our projections of what's going to happen. So that we can come into a deep state, a healthy state, of not projecting, not assuming, not associating, not coming with prejudice, preoccupations, but showing up fresh, new eyes. And I call that the practice of not knowing. So we prepare ourselves.

And if it's in meditation, I don't know how long you have to prepare yourself to meditate to the next steps. That's up to you. But maybe it's a few minutes, maybe it's longer. If you can do a day long like some of us did yesterday, maybe it's the first two meditation sessions that has this flavor to it. If it has to do with international world affairs and you're the one who's supposed to solve them, that preparation might be much longer to really kind of clear your mind, clear your heart, to be ready to really do the next step. And the next step is to discover.

Now this is the place where you get to know. But now you're here to discover what's right here. Discover something new. Discover without the lenses of prejudice or preconceived ideas that we tend to bring. Pre-judged ideas. And so now look carefully. What is here? What's happening?

So in meditation, how are you right now? What's actually going on here and now? It's not an easy thing to stop and do because for some of us, the mind keeps spinning. It's thinking about things, thinking about our issues, thinking about the future, fantasizing, doing something that stands in the way of really checking in with ourselves. And in meditation, one of the, I think, very profound aspects of meditation is a chance to meet yourself. To really meet yourself in a deep, intimate, close way. To discover what's here.

And not only to meet yourself through that discovery, but to find a way to meet yourself that comes out of this not knowing, but is respectful, is kind, is caring for this person. Just like we hope it would be that way in meeting someone else. That we meet someone, we are there to be present, to respect, to be kind, to get to know them well. Yesterday I talked about my experiences in life with meeting people, sometimes with handshakes. And I once met a candidate for president many years ago. And I think I was behind a little fence or something and the candidate was walking down and shaking hands. And so I thought, oh good, I get to shake this person's hand.

And as soon as the person's hand touched mine, the candidate was already looking over to the next person. And there was this limp, limp hand. Like, oh, what was that? It was like there was no contact. There was no seeing, being seen, being recognized. It was like I was just almost like an instrument or something to just I don't know what, to pass by and move on to the next person who is more important or something. So there can be that kind of meeting.

There is then the meeting of someone really stopping and shaking your hand in a nice way and you feel like they're really there for you. They're stopping and they're curious, they're interested in you. You're important for them. The equivalent for this when I was in the Zen Monastery was that in the Zen Monastery, there's a tremendous amount of bowing going on. I counted how many times I bowed from the time I woke up in the morning, I think, which was four o'clock in the morning, until maybe ten. And I think I got close to a hundred bows.

And, but what happens in the monastery is that every bow carries a little bit of significance. Like you're supposed to bow to people when they pass, all kinds of times you're supposed to bow to people. Like if you pass them in the pathway, you're supposed to bow to people. If they serve you meals, which they often were doing, they'd serve you the food, you'd bow before, bow after. And so much was communicated by how you bowed. You know, like, if you kind of didn't like them or kind of got angry with them, you know, like, you know, you're kind of like a little, ugh. Just a little, little kind of, you know, just, you know, maybe you'd bow an inch and your hands wouldn't really come together. But you were bowing, right?

Or sometimes, you know, you'd bow really deeply or sometimes when you, the idea, when you saw them coming down the path, and you knew you had to bow when you passed them. You just went the wrong way around. So there was a lot of things that got conveyed through these bows. So as part of the richness of the monastery was to study and see all these things that were involved with bowing that highlighted who we are, what was going on in the moment. So how do you meet yourself? How do you bow to yourself? The meeting is really important.

So first not knowing, and then meeting yourself, discovering. Meeting and discovering being the same thing here. Really discover what's here and the layers of what's here. And I'm surprised sometimes that, like, you know, after the election for me, there was layers of emotions. And I had maybe the first recognition that I felt dismay or something. And that was strong enough. And I was just operating and kind of doing my life. I was busy doing things and just kind of carrying this feeling that I just thought was dismay.

But then when I sat to meditate, then I saw, oh, there's layers here. There's fear. There's, for me, a little different than fear is alarm. There is anger. There is all kinds of things. And as I went through them all, it was kind of, oh, oh, I was kind of delighted, as opposed to caught in the grip of them. Because that's what happens when you start with not knowing. You start with knowing, then you fold what you discover into that preconceived ideas, preconceived attitudes, preconceived judgments, and it's a lot more difficult.

The advantage of not knowing, and you feel yourself, what's going on? Oh, look at that. There's fear. Who would have guessed? But how you meet is so important. So, oh, there's fear. This needs attention. This needs care. This needs kindness. So, there's a process of discovery.

Discovery of what's happening with your thinking, what you're thinking about. More deeply than that maybe, what you're feeling, what the emotions are. More deeply, that sometimes is deep underground kind of attitudes with which we carry ourselves into the world. And so as we relax and calm, we start going through the layers and start meeting more and more parts of who we are. And in different days, we meet different parts of ourselves. As different days, there's different things to meet here.

And so, two people coming, meditating at the same time, might have radically different experiences of meditation because they're coming from different events in their life, or different things that they're concerned with. And they're meeting different things. And because of that, meditation, mindfulness serves a different function for them. Because of what their need is, given what's happening. So, that comes to the third. So, not knowing, discovery.

And then the third one is the gift. The gift. What's the gift here?

And then that's an odd thing to do, to ask, what's the gift here? And part of the gift can be, what's the gift you have to offer? How do you, like if you're sitting in meditation, what's the generous thing to do here to yourself? Maybe this is a time when you do a loving kindness. That's the gift. Maybe this is the time that you really now say, okay, now's the time to be my own companion. I'm going to companion my anger. I'm going to companion my fear. Just like a good friend, you might take a walk in the park with them and they're mostly just there to accompany through your grief. And it's just so good to have someone there accompanying you who's not going to fix you.

I'm not going to judge you. I'm not going to say, aren't you over by now? We've been talking about your grief for five minutes. It's enough already. We have to talk about the warrior scores. That doesn't work. You really just accompany your friend. So you accompany yourself. That's a gift that we can do for ourselves. And we don't know how long that's needed until we go through it.

At some point you feel, oh yes, something releases, something lets go, something opens. Maybe the gift is freedom. And this is kind of the calling card of the Dharma, freedom. And so what's the gift of freedom here? And it might be that you give your fear freedom. You give your anger freedom. You give your love freedom. You give your patience freedom. You give freedom to what's here. Maybe even you give freedom to your thoughts.

Maybe that's what's needed, is not resist your thinking, not try to change it, not to judge it and be horrified by it or whatever. And maybe also what's not needed is to keep fueling it, participating in it. But there's a whole other way of giving freedom to your thinking mind. Will you get out of the way? And so the compulsive activity, the pushing of the toothpaste tube is stopped. You give freedom to your tube to just be a tube without you, you know, squeezing the life out of it. And so this freedom And I love the idea that the word emotion has the word motion in it. The E is a Latin prefix. It means out. So moving out. All emotions are moving out. Or all emotions should be in motion.

But we get stuck. We resist. We hold on. We get tight. We get somehow afraid. We get alarmed. A lot of things that kind of keeps the gears inside from moving. And so the idea is how do we give freedom to our emotional life? Liberate your grief. Liberate your anger. Not to get rid of it, but rather to let it flow freely. Because in certain circumstances where you're not participating in the grief, not participating in the anger, but you're giving it freedom, it has a chance to evolve and flow and heal and do what it needs to do. It has a chance to give you the message that it wants you to hear. And so, let it free.

I think one of the greatest places in the world, at least for me, there's two great places for me, for really giving freedom to my emotional life is in meditation, where I know I'm not going to punch someone out. It's safe. So I can feel my anger. Just let it flow and move through me. And then to discover something new about it. To see what happens. It might be that there's a relaxing then with the anger or opening up something. And maybe underneath the anger it turns out there's fear. And so then, oh, that's interesting. Underneath the fear, there might be love even. There might be a capacity for care and kindness. Oh, that's what's going on at the root. What a great thing to have done. Giving freedom to my anger led me through these layers that I tapped into something deeper.

So the giving freedom and leaving things alone. And so what's the gift? What's the gift we give ourselves? The gift of freedom. The gift of kindness. The gift of understanding. It's invaluable to discover deeply and well what's going on. So I said there are two ways I deal with strong emotions. One is I love sitting like this in this posture. And the other is I love going for hikes. Go alone in the mountains and go for long hikes. And that also just lets it flow. And there's a different way that it flows when I'm walking. Because when I walk, I let my mind think what it wants to think. In meditation, I kind of stop thinking. And it's valuable to let the mind just flow. But because I'm walking, I don't get caught in my thoughts. They stay, you know, I kind of constantly kind of, not letting go of them, but kind of staying limber, loose, kind of staying unattached to them. And they just kind of flow and flow. And that helps this process also, because thinking and emotions have a wonderful synergy. And so there's something important about how they work together to see deeply what's going on.

So, the gift. And just asking yourself that question, what's the gift here? And I say that with the intentional idea that there's two kinds of gifts. What's the gift you want to give, since you're the one meeting yourself or meeting the world? And what's the gift of this situation to you? What is there to learn? What is there to be changed? What is there to be transformed? What is there to be received? And so from yourself or from the world. And so, sitting in meditation and saying, what's the gift here? What's the gift of fear? Have you ever asked yourself that? You're just, you know, afraid and that's good enough. No, what's the gift of fear? What's the gift of anger? What's the gift of love? What's the gift of respect? What's the gift of compassion? What's the gift of mindfulness? What's the gift of presence? What comes out of it for you? What's the message? What's the attitude? What's possible through it?

And one of the ideas of the gift is that you've made yourself ready for it. The not knowing. And then the knowing, the discovery. really the meeting of this situation. It's kind of getting ready. What is the gift? So it can register. So you can feel it and know it in a deep way. And

the gift of setting an emotion free inside is that maybe now you have confidence. That you don't have to be caught in the grip of the emotion. You've learned that it's okay, there's a possibility of having strong emotion, but not be glued to it. Not be entangled with it. Not be defined by it. Identified with it. But just, it's almost like, wow, there's fresh air, there's breathing room here. By giving it freedom in the context of mindfulness, there's breathing room. That's the gift. Who would have known? What's the gift? And what's the gift that you want to offer the situation?

So, not knowing, discovery, and then what's the gift? And then this third step is to, the last step of this process, is what do you want to bring with you now? What do you want to be different now, having done this process? How do you want to be different? How do you want to live differently? How do you want to act differently? And what have you learned that has shown you something? That yes, I want to be different in some way. Without a desire to be different, you might stay stuck. Simply the willingness and the openness to be different loosens something. It lubricates the gears so something can move and change again. If you don't want to change, well, good luck. I mean that in two ways. One is, then you really won't change some of the ways you're stuck so easily. And the other is, yeah, good luck. You'll change anyway. We're always changing. But if you're stuck in something, you might change for the worse. If you're stuck in your anger and resentments, and that's what you're churning away in, and you're not going to give it up, and you continue feeding that and living in that, it just gets worse and worse. Something gets kind of debilitating or drained out of us. We're always changing. And we could be involved in having some choice over what change we allow for ourselves. How we want to change.

By asking the question, having gone through this process, now what? What would I like out of this? Maybe that first step was so impactful, relaxing, that you say, oh, I want to be careful that I don't tense up. I want to be careful to bring more of this calming into my daily life. Maybe I'll set a timer on the hour to remind myself to pause for 10 seconds and relax. Maybe that's how you want to change. Maybe the second step was impactful. It was like eye opening to stop and take a look and see what's going on and to learn. And you say, I think I need to do this more often. I think I need to kind of get to know my, when I run into someone, take the time to know them before I say something silly or joke with them or say something. I've told this story many times of a friend of mine showed up and I just was immediately kind of silly and said something only to find out that I think his best friend had just died. And I was kind of so disappointed that I had acted that way, not taking time to know my friend and find out what was going on before I kind of barreled ahead and And so maybe that's the gift, how

you want to change, is to take time to get to know people, situations, before you prejudge them. Or maybe it's the gift of kindness, or the gift of giving other people freedom, or the gift of caring for people's welfare, and living in a good way.

In Buddhist meditation, that's often one of the gifts that is regularly reflected on at the end of any significant Dharma event. It could be your own meditation. It could be some Dharma ceremony, Dharma event. We do at the end of every retreat. is, we call it at IRC, we call it dedication of benefit. Traditionally it's called dedication of merit. And that is to consider how the benefits of this event can be used to benefit the world. And so at the end of every meditation, Spend a little bit of time. Now I've meditated. That's nice. Now is there any way from this that I could now benefit others? Could I make this world a better place? And if you get a big no because you're overwhelmed and exhausted, then maybe it's simply, I'm just going to sympathize with other people who are exhausted. I can at least do that. Commiserate with them. Maybe that's nice for them to know that they're recognized and understood. But what is it? How is it that coming out of meditation that you can be different, that you can change?

And in the Buddhist tradition, this idea of living for the benefit of others is done for your own benefit, partly. Because there's something about not living for the benefit of others that actually limits us. It's kind of being closed down, or being shut down, or the heart's not really open. Something is, you know, is being clouded over. And the idea is to step forward in the world with no limitation. And if we're unlimited in our freedom, I think it's a natural thing to delight in people, to love people, to care for people, to want this world to be a better place. If we don't do this process and we're caught in fear, caught in anger, then there's a danger that what we spread into the world is more fear, more anger.

I'm struck, very much struck, moved to feel like it's a profound thing that if a parent lives afraid as they raise a young child, the child learns the world is a frightening place. And is that the best way to raise a child? To have that anxiety? So a parent, I hope, really takes this idea seriously in order to want to change. To not be spreading more fear into the world. But to do so with sincerity and honesty and authenticity. Maybe doing this process. Start with not knowing, relaxing and calming. So there can be a deeper and deeper discovery of what fear is and where it comes from and how to relate to it. So that maybe there's a discovery of how the gift would be to give that fear freedom. Or as I like to often say, a big huge task with chronic fear is to give the fear, help the fear feel safe. Help the fear feel safe. That's what it most wants. A young child who's afraid mostly wants to be helped. So this is safe now. You're here. It's OK now. You're safe with me. Let me give you a cookie. And just feel like they're

protected a little bit. Our fear is that way also. So the gift would be help that fear feel safe inside of us. Safe from what? Most likely it's from you. Because of how we relate to it. And so, how do you want to change so the world is a better place?

And one of the ways to really make the world a better place is to do this process over and over again. To meditate. To practice. To clarify. To open up. Discover the gifts of what it is to be a human being. And bring those gifts into the world. And that's so, as I said in the beginning, so that's true in meditation. And it's true for not only international events, cosmic events in this cosmos we live in, that we can do this process of not knowing, which is also a preparation to be ready to do something. Then discovery. Meeting ourselves. Asking the question, what's the gift? And what's the gift to offer? What's the gift to receive? And then how to go from here in a different way to benefit the world. Benefiting yourself. How do you want to change? How do you want to be different? And then go forth. into the world. And you'll probably forget about it very quickly. So we do it again. And it again.

And so in meditation you can do this four-part process. You could do this four-part process talking with a friend. Let's go through this four-part process. Let's not know here first. Then let's discover. Let's just talk together. What's the gift here? And how do we want to change? We could do it slowly. We could journal about it. We could spend days on each step if it's a really big thing in our life that we don't know about. So, if this interests you and seems like a nice four-step process, I think it's a wonderful kind of thing to live by. And a wonderful way of orienting yourself in this life. And it's kind of a reframing of the basic Buddhist practice of mindfulness, which is a profound process. And this is one way of understanding this process. Not knowing, discovery, the gift. And then living differently, going forth.

So we have a few minutes. And any comments, questions, clarifications, anything? Anybody like to? Gil, I appreciated that you talked about the emotions and kind of welcoming them and letting yourself feel them because, for me, I've had to feel a lot of emotions that I'm very uncomfortable with. But I feel like that is part of the job right now. It's part of what's in front of me. So thank you. Yeah, yeah. Emotions are a huge part of being a human being. So, learning how to be wise about them and familiar with them is part of the task. We're not supposed to reject them. But, you know, what's the gift in being emotional? It's odd how the word emotional kind of has negative connotations. I think that person's too emotional. But what else are we supposed to do?

Yes. Good morning. Thank you for a very timely talk. This was very important because I went through all the dynamics that you described in terms of emotional reaction to the election that happened. But I wanted to ask, this morning I've been very fearful of what might be hap-

pening in Ukraine with the current administration and all the bad things that are happening in a theater of war and so forth. And I read an article in New York Times that essentially shed a different light on the situation. What the author said in this piece was that this war that's going on over there is costing a lot of life and is really not solving anything. And the perpetrator of the war are not just Russia and Ukraine, but also United States, that in a process of providing just enough ammunition and help and support and financial and so forth is, we are trying to diminish Russia, we are trying to make Russia smaller in the process without helping Ukraine win the war. So the very fact that this personal administration is planning to potentially, this is a part of not knowing, is potentially might be aiming to to really bring this war to a conclusion, but not in the terms that we have favored, in terms of Ukraine winning and getting their territories back and all that, but lots of compromise that will make Ukraine much, much smaller, potentially, but at least stops the bloodshed and all these horrible things that are going on in the upcoming winter and all the grids are essentially coming down and so forth. So that gave me a different thought. Maybe I was wrong in really having a prejudice or preconceived notion that there's only one desirable outcome. And maybe there's a different desirable outcome that is completely different from what I've taught.

So then to tie it into what I said, you had a preconceived idea about this situation. It's one of these international challenges that we live with. And then something inside of you, something offered a different perspective on it that was a surprise for you. And now you're reoriented around this and wondering if there's a different attitude, different way of responding. And that's a wonderful process to be involved in, questioning and looking and wondering and looking for new ways. And the art of it all, especially in a room like this and meditating and all that, is to offer these words without trying to offer the truth. Without saying, this is now the new truth. But rather, this is part of this discovery process that we're all in. And you've now contributed a little piece to it. And you also contributed to this wonderful fact that it freed you up. It kind of loosened something for you, which allows you to go through this process in an even better way. Because now you can relax even more and discover even more what's going on and see. So thank you.

So out in the outer hall. It's coming. Thank you, Gil. This is really so wonderfully timely. One of the things I've been to manage the whole anxiety and stress of what happened in the election for me is horrifying, is I've been telling myself it's going to get worse before it gets better. And I wanted to get your thoughts about that, because to me, as you've been reflecting on what you've talked about, that in a way it's not knowing, but it's also kind of saying it is knowing, right? Well, I'm reconciling that it may get worse before it gets better.

And I just wondered what you thought about that. Is that really being, unknowing, or is it not?

Well, I don't know. Probably I'm not going to ask the question directly, you know, in terms of how you ask the question. It just seems to me that for a lot of us who are not in the middle of the political world where there's a lot more information going on, that we're partly in this phase of not knowing and discovery. And it's a matter of really discovering. So, if you have this idea that things will get worse before they get better, that's a very big generalization. And it might be that some things get worse and some things get better. And so it's important maybe to make that distinction. If we generalize about the state of everything as one single thing, then we come to one conclusion. But if we have the ability to tease apart where there's benefits, where there's harm being done, maybe it's possible to support the benefits, how things are going to get better. and somehow then contend, then we're in a better position to contend about how things get worse. And chances are, no matter who is going to win the election, it would have been that way. Some things will get better, some things will get worse. And so you want to be very careful that these ideas don't limit our ability to discover. And it's reasonable that you have that idea, but my words of caution is be careful with it as a generalization. Relax, don't know, and then discover what actually is there. Is that okay that I answered like that?

Yes, it is. And what's also occurring to me is when I came out, what I've been pondering is this question of fact checking. And that there's been so much delusion in the media. And so that's for me an action that I'm taking is whenever I see something, I really go deep on not a lot of issues, but a particularly like, let's say one or two, where I really, really, really look at the source. And, and for me, that's a little bit of not knowing, like keeping it in mind that I don't know, you know, yeah, I'm being, it's being said that this is the truth, but there's a lot of, there's a lot of, intention that isn't really about the truth in those messages. So that's one of the, like, what to do next. That's what for me I'm doing. And I'm finding that very helpful. Very nice. I love that. Fact-checking.

And there's a couple of things, a few things that I recommend around the news. is when I was in the Zen monastery in the 1980s, they had something back then, some of you probably don't know about, it's kind of, they're big pieces of paper, and there was lots of what's called print on them, and they'd fold them, sometimes the first in half, and then in quarters, and sometimes they'd roll them, put rubber bands around them. And I was talking to someone recently who grew up in Palo Alto, and he said all his friends and everyone took those and they would put the rubber bands around them and ride around in the morning, sometimes

at four o'clock in the morning, and deliver them to people's driveways. There was a whole army of teenagers who did that. So when I was in the monastery, these things with big pieces of paper would show up in the newspapers. But usually they came a few days late. Because we were deep in the mountains and there wasn't daily traffic back and forth. And I discovered how different it was to read the fresh news on the day versus a few days old. That there was something that grabbed me when it was like the first day, the paper, the current paper. It was like, I'd be more alarmed, more attached, more involved, more like something. But if I read the same thing and I knew it was old news, I could do it in an even, matter of fact, kind of more curious way. And it's gotten worse now because we don't use the paper thing anymore. So now it's like minute to minute we're keeping up. And so then it's really alarming, really get caught in it. So there are ways of changing how we do the news. One is to actually wait and read it on Wikipedia. And it's not necessarily accurate, but it doesn't come with a kind of language that is designed with headlines and first sentences to excite you and pull you in. There's not that click baiting going on. And so you can kind of read it in a different kind of way. The other is that there are some new services that will present both sides. of a political side of things. And one, I forget the name, has both sides and then who they think is the centrist news. So you can kind of study the same piece of news and how it's being presented different ways. Another one that's more recent is called Tangle, T-A-N-G-L-E, which is also trying to offer serious news from both sides of the partisan divide. And so you get both, and you get it engaged in an intelligent way. And so then it's easier, I think, to start being more careful about what you take in and how you respond to it. So thank you all for being here and being part of this. And may you live a life of gifts.