

Dharmette: Reality as our Teacher

Gil Fronsdal

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So, sometimes when we do this practice of mindfulness, I think that our teacher for the practice is reality. So it's not that a teacher like me is the teacher. It's not the Buddha as a teacher. It's not even you yourself are a teacher. But when we, it's reality. And what is reality?

Reality is whatever shows itself for us. Whatever arises in the moment, that's in a certain way our teacher. And our job is to understand what it's teaching. Our job is to understand where's the wisdom, where's the understanding, what is... And the key thing to understand is, given this is arising, this is happening, where is my freedom? Or, what am I attached to?

What am I caught in? And this question of, where am I caught? Where is the grasping? And where's the release? That's how you find the teacher in you. That's the core essential question that Buddhism has.

On the way there, there's another thing to ask, and that is, given what's arising, what is my relationship to what's happening? Am I relating to it in a way that's healthy for me and for others? Or am I relating to it in a way that's unhealthy for me or others? Is there attachment or is there non-attachment? Is there generosity, or is there no generosity? Is there kindness or is there ill will?

Is there... curiosity or is there shutting down? Is there, you know, how am I relating to it? Am I judging it, judging myself because of it? Do I have preferences? Am I being here with this with blinders on so that I can't really see the full picture? Can I see the full picture that I'm in?

What is that like? And so all these are examples of how you allow reality to teach you. Or you give it that kind of role, okay, what am I learning here? The job is to learn from your teacher, and you have to figure out what the learning is. So the idea of the reality is your teacher means that you don't turn away. It means you don't avoid.

It means you don't, at some point or other, you want to stop trying to be different in any kind of way. Finally you stop trying to be anything in favor of just being with what is. At some point you don't try to be different, but you just try to be very simply free with what is. If you become free only under certain circumstances, if you become free only because you have certain states of mind, you're not really free. But if you can be free in any circumstance, what is that? Can you find your freedom in any circumstance?

And we know that reality will forgive you lots of things to be uncomfortable about, lots of things which are unpleasant, lots of things which, you know, shouldn't be happening. And the question is, can you be free with that as well? And the idea in Buddhism would be within reason... that if something needs to be addressed, then you're better addressing it if you've become free than if you're still caught, still reactive, still judging. And so how can I be free with us? And so certain times the teacher that comes along is whatever shows up.

And what's showing up is my reactivity, what's showing up is my preferences, what's showing up is my aversions. And now that's what I'm supposed to study, that's what I need to include in order to understand where is the clinging and where is the absence of it. That has to be included. Where is the kindness? Where is the generosity? Where's the aversion?

Where's the miserliness of it all? Where is it where the hands can be open-handed, open-hearted, open-minded to whatever is going on? And where am I closed-handed? Close-hearted, close-minded. And so you're kind of navigating in this world and finding reality as our teacher. And so I don't know if that kind of metaphor works for all of you, but it's really worked well for me.

That offering this, the kind of respect that I give to my teachers to reality itself. Oh, I wonder what reality has in store today. And then not be surprised by what comes, but rather to say, okay, now I have to practice with this. This too is part of the practice. This too is my teacher. This too is where my learning is going to be.

And there's a long history of people who, maybe most people who practice sooner or later, will try to fix their problems by avoiding it. I know for many people, as soon as they develop some capacity for concentration, will use the concentration to avoid their difficulties. And I did that. I used to... The main one I avoided was I would have a lot of physical pain in meditation, and I just knew that if I can get myself concentrated, I would kind of blast out of the pain or go through it into some wonderful deep state of concentration, and there was no pain. So every time the pain came, I would focus on the concentration.

And that was great until it stopped being great, until I stopped working. And at some point

I realized what I was doing, that I was avoiding, and what I needed to do was to really meet the pain and meet myself. Meet myself meant to see, what was I reacting to? What was my attachments? What was my resistance? What were my fears?

What was going on for me? That I felt like I couldn't just be free with pain. Just, okay, this is pain. And I can just be with this in a full way and find my freedom with it. And I remember once, it was a long retreat, that I had a lot of physical pain. And this wonderful teacher gave me lots of good instructions of what to do.

None of it worked. And the pain got worse and worse. And I think that I finally burst into my teacher's room. You know, just some, I didn't have a scheduled meeting with him and said, it's just too much. This is too hard. And he just, like, he knew he had given me lots of advice and, and so he kind of like, maybe he resigned himself or something.

And he said something like, yeah, I guess maybe you punch someone out in your last life, you know, maybe in that spot where you feel the pain. And as soon as he said that, I thought, oh, it's there for a reason. I don't have to know the reason. His interpretation didn't mean anything for me. But I had this thought, oh, it's there for a reason. I don't need to know the reason for it.

And something, that little understanding set me free from the very unconscious reactivity I had to the pain. And then I discovered that now I could be a quantumist with a pain and it was no longer a problem. And then I saw how much this unconscious reactivity had actually made, it's like putting a magnifying glass on the pain or had strengthened the pain. That's what made it so strong, was the reactivity I had to it. And I didn't understand that. Even when I was trying to, when the teacher had told me to be a quantumist about the pain, that was still working the pain.

And that somehow strengthened it. And so I finally learned, oh, I can be free. I don't have to add anything. I don't have to be strengthening it. I don't have to be battling it. I don't have to be resisting it.

I can just be with it. And then, from then on, the pain was not an issue. And then slowly over time it just faded away. But I learned so much from that. And I learned about avoidance. I learned about how I use concentration to avoid.

And I learned to do the opposite. To wake up with, find my freedom with what reality is offering, rather than needing to find a special state to be in to become free. So those are my thoughts for today. So now we're going to do