

Dharmette: Heartfulness Practice

Gil Fronsdal

January 08, 2025

Keywords: sati, mindfulness, heartfulness, love, suffering, well-being, freedom, Buddhism, emotional heart, practice

Is that they have hearts. And certainly as long as we're alive, we have beating hearts, but we have this emotional heart. We have this capacity within that some people associate with a heart. In some Asian cultures, they associate it with something deep in the belly, some deep inside. A place where our capacity for love and to be loved exists, a place where there can arise the deepest motivations for how to live a life, or a place that gets covered over and doesn't have a chance to surface and arise. And somehow we all are born with this wonderful capacity for communion, communication, for love, for connection, for inspiration, for living a life that comes out of some kind of depth within, that something that's set free.

I think part of this wonderful heart is a place that wants to be free, not to be restricted. And I think of watching young children who were maybe two years old, three years old, who until at least that point were raised well, and the joy in which they run around and play. I remember once a friend of mine had a daughter, and the daughter was, I don't know how old she was, probably not even two yet, because she was just beginning to learn to speak. And so it was kind of a new thing. And so I was kind of just exploring with her language a little bit, and being kind of playful with her. I pointed to her father and said, who's that? And she said, you know, I'm like daddy. And I said, who's that? Mommy. And then I point to her and said, who's that? And she said, I am.

And I said, yeah, but who are you? And she said, I am. But I was wanting your name, right? So, I go, who are you? And she stood up. She kind of like stood tall. And because she embodied herself in a full way. And she looked at me and said, I am. And I backed off. Oh, it took me three times to get the message. Yeah. She didn't have to be anything. You know, she was just who she was. I am. It's enough. And that freedom and that allowing. And I don't think I caused lasting damage. Not one, but just allowing this young girl to just be herself and run around and play and feel like she has freedom to be.

So we all have these hearts. Yes. And the primary caretaker for our hearts is ourselves. There's actually no one else who can care for it. And sometimes if we expect other people to care for it, we usually get in trouble. But this wonderful heart we have, we caretake for our own well-being or inner well-being. But that allows us to care for other people's hearts. We can't really care for them in their depths of what it is, but we can care for them as human beings. We can respect them, we can love, we can make room for them. We can care for their freedom, we can care for their well-being. And not for many shoulds, not because we're expected to. But just, what is this? What is it that comes out of our hearts? What is it that wants to come out? What wants to flow? What's there?

And of course, there's so much there. There's great difficulties. Sorrow and suffering that we've had. For me, when I first started practicing Buddhism, what was in my heart was a closed heart. And I remember very well the day when I was probably 15, where one of the days, it happened a number of times growing up. I could remember a series of times over many years growing up, but that one way or the other, I could feel that some door in my heart closing. I'm never going to show that part of myself again. Never again. Click, click. And then slowly, as I practiced, those doors started to open. And the hinges were pretty rusty. So it was kind of like, you know, it needed a lot of, and needed a lot of tears to lubricate the hinges. But the tears came and the hinges loosened up and the doors opened.

And so we have these wonderful hearts. We have this wonderful thing that's waiting for us and caring for us to care for us. And a wonderful thing how to understand other people, to understand other people not by what they do, their profession, not for what they do for us, not for, you know, their special qualities that they have, or not by their successes and failures. But rather to know people just that they have these wonderful hearts. Everyone has it. Some of them are covered over. Some people have closed hearts like I was. Some people have confused hearts. Right. But the hearts, everybody's heart wants to be free. Everyone's heart wants to be healed and resolved.

And so how do we hold each other? How do we view each other? How do we care for each other? So that we are the supporters of all our hearts, our own and that of others. It's a phenomenal thing that we human beings have hearts. It's not a mistake that we should have them. Though I can feel that way sometimes when the doors close or the hearts break. But it's a wonderful thing.

And this practice of ours here, of mindfulness, it's unfortunate that we call it mindfulness. In the Pāli word for mindfulness, *sati*, there's nothing about the mind in it. So sometimes I like to call it bodyfulness. But today I'd like to call it heartfulness. Practice of heartfulness. Yes.

So may you, may this practice and may you care and respect and love this heart that you have. And remember that everyone else has a heart too. And maybe that their hearts are challenged as well. So may we care for each other with our good hearts. Thank you.