

Dharmette: Eight Worldly Winds (2 of 5) Fame and Disrepute

Gil Fronsdal

August 06, 2024

Keywords: eight worldly winds, gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain, Buddhist practice, meditation, contentment, clinging, insight retreat

Welcome to this second talk on the eight worldly winds. And perhaps it's easy enough to focus on these worldly winds as problems and somehow contend with them as the problem and we have to do something about them. So these worldly winds are the ways in which the ways of the world get us caught, get us push us around, or trouble us, or get us reactive. To remind you, these are gain and loss, fame and disrepute, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, and pleasure and pain. So today I want to talk about this fame and disgrace, fame and disrepute. But I don't want to start with the idea that they're out there and problems and how terrible they are and how they cause problems for us and we should do something about them.

But rather to start with having a reference point within. And this is the advantage of Buddhist practice. What we're looking for through Buddhist practice, Buddhist meditation, is a way of being, a reference point, a state, a quality of being, a way of practicing where we feel this is good, this is right, there's a sense of well-being, there's a sense of peace, a sense of at-homeness, a sense of being settled here and now, a sense of being somehow disentangled from all the preoccupations that normally we're caught in. So there's something like that, and it's a wide range of possibility exactly what this is. Maybe just a little bit calmer than usual. And that's a reference point to understand ourselves better.

And what we understand? We understand how we lose that calm. We lose the peace. We lose the being rooted in ourselves, at home in ourselves. We learn how we sacrifice ourselves, give ourselves up for the good cause, for the bad cause, for our resentments, for our hurts, our grudges, all kinds of things. Our desires, our wishes.

We leave and depart. We ignore, we abandon the sense of being centered and rooted here in ourselves. And so we want to understand this. And as we understand it, we understand and

see that it's better, actually, not to be caught. It's better to be more settled than unsettled. It's better to be calm than to be agitated.

It's better to be peaceful than it is to be conflictive. And not that it's just a cognitive idea that we should be a certain way, but it's almost as if you put your hand on the hot stove and your hand automatically goes away. You don't have to have a philosophy, or a belief, or a sense of should operating that pulls the hand away. Standing on a splinter in your foot. We stop, we don't keep walking with it, we pull it out. So it's that simple that we have this reference point.

And with that reference point we can understand these worldly winds better and our relationship to it. We learn that the worldly winds are ways in which we give up, or sacrifice, or abandon, or lose touch with something that feels holistic, something that feels good, right. Something that allows us to enter the world in a wholesome way, in a connected way, in a useful way, rather than one that makes the whole situation worse. And so, for the—hang on a minute again. So this is where we come now to these worldly winds. That these are ways in which many people can easily lose themselves, easily lose touch with what has been developing in meditation or Buddhist practice, with the goodness, the wholeness, the sense of being at peace with oneself.

And so, the second pair is fame and disrepute. Fame is well known to really trip people up when people are feeding on the fame. When their sense of vitality, their sense of rightness, a sense of having value as a person, depends on having lots of people focus on you. I think the word fame here means having a really good reputation in the world. Not the same thing as praise, which is the next one, but just many, many people know you. So there's a feeling that you have value, you're connected, you're somebody.

By the number of friends you have on Instagram or Facebook, or the number of people who log onto YouTube every morning to listen. That's where the sense of vitality and sense of aliveness. And something where we don't have that, we feel deflated. We feel lost. We feel somehow that we're not fully alive anymore. Because the aliveness is fed, is feeding on others, feeding on this sense of fame and what people think of us, what people are thinking of us, that we're known, we're somebody.

And then the pendulum can swing to disrepute, to being disgraced, to having a bad reputation in the world. Where again, our sense of well-being is really dependent on what others think of us, and how many people think of us. And so what there isn't is being fed from the inside out. What there isn't is learning to be alive, breathing in a relaxed way, open way, settled way, and allowing and feeling quite content with ourselves, quite at home and at peace

with ourselves. It is possible to have that. And it's very difficult to believe that sometimes when our whole psychophysical system has been conditioned by society, by our experience, by being fed from the outside in.

And so this drive that we have to get it, we have to have it, and so, if the fame goes away, which inevitably fame goes away, or is not there in the same way to feed us and to support us and to energize us, and there's nothing inside to replace it, then some people crash and get depressed. And feel kind of lost and feel like they don't count. Sometimes people's lives unwind in deep and painful ways. Or if people feel disgraced or feel like they now, lots of people think that they're a bad person, then that also is something that is challenged inside, that we're not getting reinforced, this outer validation. And so, there's nothing wrong necessarily with fame. There's nothing wrong necessarily with not having any fame, to losing that fame. Where the challenge is, is how we're relating to it. And if we're relating to it as the source of our well-being, then it's a challenge. And one of the benefits of doing maybe any kind of spiritual practice or anything that connects us to a kind of much more of a, I almost want to say, innate sense of well-being. A sense of well-being that doesn't have to have a reason.

Being fed from the outside of success and fame and recognition and all this. It's just because we're breathing, because we're alive, that's enough. Just being in this world in a kind, open, supportive way, and not succumbing to the beliefs that we have to be different, we have to have more, we have to be known and recognized and do something big in the world so that we have our 15 minutes of fame. It's okay just to be alive and present and here. And one of the validations of this whole approach of Buddhist practice, finding some deep inner peace here, that's unconditioned, unaffected, not dependent on the world and things and thoughts and feelings, is that this turns out to be a phenomenally effective, powerful, meaningful way to respond and live in the world in a wholesome way with compassion and care and love. And caregiving to this world.

A caregiving to the world. A love and a compassion where we don't lose ourselves in the process. We don't feel like we have to hurry and rush. Our sense of well-being, our sense of personhood is dependent on the outcomes of our service, our care, our love, the things we do. We do things because it's the natural or easy kind of manifestation of being deeply at peace and connected. Not because of what we get from it or what we should happen from ourselves.

So that's why fame and disrepute is such an important thing to be attentive to. Because it's a way of losing touch with ourselves. Losing the ways in which we can be fed from the inside out. Where we can feel the deep sense of contentment. Just to be. Just to be here.

Trusting, or more than trusting, knowing that being at peace and settled, almost like with nothing you have to do, that that is a powerful and effective state from which to do. And it's a little bit of a paradox to not have to do anything. Allows us to do everything peacefully and effectively and without succumbing to clinging and attachment. So fame and disrepute, whether it's fame locally in our neighborhood or places at work, or whether it's, you know, these days many people are on social media and count their friends and their connections. Maybe fame is overrated. And maybe disrepute or the lack of fame is also overrated.

And we don't have to base our life on either one. So, thank you very much. And I have one announcement. And the Spirit Rock Meditation Center that I'm very connected to up in Moraine County had invited me or requested of me to do a kind of event celebrating the publication of my new book this year called Everything is Practice. And I agreed and now they would like me to try to encourage people to come to it. And so maybe some of you would like to come.

It's this coming Sunday. It's on Zoom. And it's at 6pm. And I'll talk a little bit about my book, but I didn't really want to focus only on my book. So I want to talk a little bit about the great value of retreat practice. The book is kind of a manual for insight retreat practice.

So that's what I want to kind of just talk a little bit about. So some of you might be interested in going to it. There's a link to it. You have to register. There's a link to it on the IMC homepage on that little box in the lower right. It's called What's New. There's an announcement there about it. And also, if you go on Spirit Rock's website, you can probably find it. And it's a small, I think it'll be small, somewhat intimate kind of opportunity on Zoom to have a discussion. And I'm certainly looking forward to having this little period of exchange. So thank you.