

Thursday Dharma talk

Gil Fronsdal

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Sometimes I think of this path of the *Dhamma*, *Dhamma* Path, to be a path of simplicity, a path of simplification. Many of the reasons we make things complicated, reasons or motivations, activities that increase the stress in our life, increase the suffering of our life, increase the reactivity in our life, increase the complexities of our life. And one of the remarkable things about this path is to discover how little you need to do compared to how much doing there can be there in the society, in the world, not just the doing we have to do to just survive, but all the doings we are doing, navigating, negotiating the social world and the ways in which we try to survive with a... not just with food and bread and roof over our house, but with ways of being, with identities, with roles, with... relationships and all their complexities, and to be able to trust that it's okay to not always be working, not always be navigating our social relationships, not always contending with our fears and our challenges, that there is a time and place to trust deeply enough that we can put to rest all that is not needed.

And one of the great questions is in any circumstance at all to ask, what do I really need here? What's really needed as opposed to, what is it that you want? What do you not want? What's really needed to be at ease? The great reference point for ease is to breathe easily. How much do you need? What does it take to have an easy breath?

I don't think I really understood what an easy breath was, ease in breathing, until I started this path of practice. The Pāli word for reassurance literally means to breathe easily. And it isn't that we were supposed to then always live in a simple world. There are ways of being involved with our lives that involves complexity for sure. But we don't have to carry that with us everywhere we go. Some of us find it very useful that they have paper napkins here at IRC.

It doesn't mean that you have to carry it with you everywhere you go. Collect all the dirty ones, in case you need them. Maybe they'll run out, so you might as well save the dirty ones.

It's okay to put things down. It's okay to become simple and discover something brand new. Discover a way of being that's very meaningful, a way of being that's inspiring, a way of being that doesn't depend on so many things, doesn't depend on getting things and having things and constructing things and... It doesn't require work and careers.

Maybe it doesn't require relationships being just right. Simple, just here. It's how we discover freedom. So, this path to the learning about how we add fetters, at complexities, at entanglements, to the simplicity of our sense experience, is... is part of the supports us in understanding what we do that's extra. That's not really needed. And how much can you trust putting away all the things which are not needed?

So you can just be here, breathing naturally, the mind at ease, the heart at ease, to discover what this is like. In Buddhism, they hold up the possibility quite in quite a lofty way that the simplicity of being is the stepping stone to liberation. If they want to even make it more lofty, full liberation. Maybe it's even more lofty to call it awakening or enlightenment. This one simple way they talk about it is the mind becomes free through non-clinging, by not clinging to anything.

In ancient India, time of the Buddha, down in the area near Mumbai on the coast, there was a spiritual practitioner, apparently of some high regard in the community. People gave him lots of his requisites, medicine and robes and food and He was sitting one day reflecting on himself and his life, and he wondered, am I enlightened? It seems like people around him thought he was. So, am I enlightened? Or am I at least on the path of enlightenment?

Well, that seems like a very honest question for someone who's been involved in a spiritual life for a long time. I kind of appreciate that he's asking it. And a passing deity heard him asking the question. And the deity came down and said, sorry. At least I wish he did. And he said, nope. You are not enlightened.

Not only that, but you're not even on the path to enlightenment. Now, I think this, I think, I kind of believe he's been around on a spiritual journey for many, many years and maybe a great teacher. And it's quite a distinct thing to be told. Nope, not at all. Not even on the path. So he asked the deity, well, is there someone who is enlightened who knows that path to awakening?

And the deity said, yes, there's a Buddha up there, northeast India. So it's a long way from Mumbai to north where the Buddha was. Then this guy called Bahia immediately left to go see the Buddha, trekked all that way. And I imagine he was old for what's going to happen in the conversation with the Buddha. He goes to the Buddha and said, he finally comes to the

Buddha, sees him for the first time. But it happens to be when the Buddha is just setting out on his alms round, setting out to collect the food that he's going to eat for that day.

And he comes up to the Buddha and said, Can you please tell me the *Dhamma* in brief so I can learn it and practice it? And the Buddha says, this is not the right time. And he said, please tell me the *Dhamma* in brief so I can practice it. This is not the right time. So he asks the Buddha a third time, but now he says, please teach me the *Dhamma*, in brief so I can practice it. And you know, Mr. Buddha, that we never know the time of our death.

Don't know when I'm going to die, we don't know when you're going to die. Please teach me now. That's quite a profound thing. Maybe he was an old man, maybe he was exhausted from the trip, heart condition. And so the Buddha taught him the *Dhamma* in brief. This very famous teaching, but this teaching is a little bit, I don't know if it's enigmatic or cryptic exactly, it's very simple words.

But sometimes the people hear the teaching and hear it in kind of mystical ways. I think it's a great teaching on being non-dualistic. And that's certainly not how the tradition understands it. And there is a second story that of a monk who comes to the Buddha to ask him similarly, please tell me the *Dhamma* in brief. And his name is Malunkya Putta. And it seems, from the records in the ancient texts, that he'd been a monk for a long time and he was kind of a little bit foolish.

He didn't really get it, wasn't really practicing. But he got old. And as an old man, he came to the Buddha and said, please teach me, I'm ready to practice. And the Buddha said something like, what can I tell you that I haven't told a young monk even? Somehow it puts him off and he says, Oh no, please, even though I'm old, I can understand and I could put it to practice. I kind of love this.

The context of both these teachings is old age and death. that represent kind of the predicament, the challenge that we all have. How are you going to live this life with sickness, old age and death, and all the challenges? And somehow, Lungyapututta had been monk for so long without really practicing seriously. Something got to him, okay, if I'm going to practice now is the time. And so the Buddha gives him a teaching.

He gives him almost the same teaching, The heart of it is the same as the Buddha gave Bahia, but there's more context for it. So to Bahia, the Buddha said, Now, I think I have it here, a piece of paper. So the beginning of it, he says to the Buddha, But you never know, sir, when life is at risk, either the Buddhas are my own. Let the Blessed One teach me the *Dhamma*. Let the Holy One teach me the *Dhamma*, that would be for my lasting welfare and happiness.

In that case, Bhaiya, you should train like this." So he's not exactly teaching him a teaching to remember, he's kind of giving him instruction. It's a big difference. This is how you can train. This is how you can engage. In the scene will be merely the scene.

In what you see, let it simply be what you see. In the heard, simply the heard. In the thought, simply the thought. Some people translate it in the sensed, just the sensed. In the known, simply the known. Some people translate it as in the cognized, simply the cognized.

So what I'm saying, and now I want to highlight the word simple. What is it to see and to simply see? What does it mean to see and simply see? How simple can you see something? So that's the instruction he gave him. So someone who walks hundreds and hundreds of miles intent to get the Buddha's teachings and instruction, this is all he gets.

It's a good thing he wasn't paying for it. It's so little. But is it profound? In what way is it profound? What way is it freeing? In what way does it make life simple?

For a few moments, for a minute, for an hour, for a day, to see something and not have it entangled with your desires, your aversions, your meaning-making, what it means in relationship to you, yourself. It's just seeing. Very simple. Maybe I think of clarity as being part of this simplicity. And that's what in the teachings to Malunkya-Putta, the monk who was kind of foolish, who got an old, he taught him the same thing. But there also he added things, maybe because he wasn't foolish, needed more help.

And there he said, there Buddha refers to how, often when we see something, We don't just see it. We have desires and wants that go along with it, preferences. And that complicates it. And probably you've had times in your life where you saw something, and you did complicate it through your desires, your aversions. And we do it with other human beings, often to great harm.

People become the objects of our desire, some sort or other, the object of our aversion. It's something really profound to see someone, really see them, without the filter of our desires or our aversions. I think it's one of the great gifts we can give people. Some people maybe never have had the experience in their life of being seen that way. I was a little bit set free by that being seen what I thought I was being seen that way. My first retreat in Thailand, And I'd been a Zen monk where you had to follow all the rules and schedules and everything very closely.

And there, this little bit dog patch kind of an archistic monastery, I was sent out to meditate all day, day and night by myself, a little hut on stilts above the swamp. Okay. And so I did diligently for days, I was there for 10 weeks, I was just walking and sitting, walking and sit-

ting. But one day, I don't know when, two-thirds of the way through, half the way through, I don't remember when, I did something radical. I decided to go for a little walk around the monastery. And, but you know, I didn't think I was allowed because I was supposed to be walking and sitting all day.

And so I was out just strolling around innocently, but who should walk by but the abbot? Busted, red-handed. You know, and so for me, my sense, easy sense of guilt, easy concern about how I'm seen and breaking rules and what they're going to kick me out of the monastery, I complicated things a lot for myself when I was younger. And, And so he was kind of perpendicular to me, maybe 40, 50 feet away. And so I was walking in his direction. He was walking 90 degrees.

And he turned to me and he clearly saw me. But there's something about the way he looked at me. I felt seen, but I also felt like he looked right through me to the other side. There was no ripple, there was no eyebrows, there was no sense that he was judging me or criticizing me, or... I felt like I was seen for the first time without anything extra. It was freeing for me, especially because I was seeing myself through the weight of all these complicated ideas about what I had to do, should do, couldn't, shouldn't do, getting caught while they kicked me out.

It's just like all this stuff that I carried evaporated in that moment. It was quite something to be seen. In the scene, just the scene. What a great gift we give people. And so in this teaching of Malun Kaputa, he says that we often see, we often sense here where it's entangled with desires of all kinds. And then he says to him, I won't say what he said because I want to build on it my own way.

So some of you probably accidentally have had some attachments. It probably came along or almost. But if you had a few things you've clung to in your life, however many that is, you've only clung to a very small percentage of all the things you could cling to. So if you're going to, you know, if you want to be like a good clinger, you've all failed. I mean, you guys have hardly done your job. I mean, it's like, you got to get to work.

And if you want a list of things, you know, we can provide you with a really big list. And I think just, I mean, just begin with, but just go through everything you can buy on Amazon. Right. and want it all. You're still only a small percentage of all the things you could want to get clinging to. There's a lot of non-clinging going on, even right here in this room.

How many of you have clung to Andrea's water bottle during this week so far? Now that I pointed out, thou, you're ready to cling. Maybe, you know, maybe wasn't even noticed. But

then there's her folding tables. Or my Zapatan. Are there things in this room that you failed to cling to?

Because can you look around and see if there's things that you don't cling to at all? You have no desire for it. You can just see it. The light switch, the door, and I see that too. How about those little kind of things you open the windows? Yeah. the tissue box over there.

Those of you at home, there might be a few things there that look around that that you don't cling to. What's it like not to cling? What's it like to look at something and not desire it, not have any aversion towards it? What's it like to do this exercise I'm offering to you without any resistance to it, without trying to prove something? Just gaze upon the world. with simple eyes without any desire.

In the scene, just the scene. It helps if your eyes don't fixate on anything, but if you let your eyes just roam, kind of float. Then the Buddha goes on to Bahia and to the monk. That's how you should train. When you have trained in this way, you won't be involved, entangled with that. If you're in the scene, just the scene.

If you can do that, then you're not going to have anything extra. You're not entangled. You're not caught. And the Buddha is emphasizing this is actually very important, to have some sense, feel for what it's like not to be caught, not to be entangled, not to be involved. And so if you can look around, maybe not now, but, and not be so... Sometimes all we ever see is what we cling to.

then, because that's what's grabbing us and forcing us, you know. There's some clinging around almost every act, some people, every act of seeing. Some people are trying to be safe. And there's a clinging there, and they're always looking to try to see, you know, where is it safe? How could it be? Some people are always wanting.

They're looking, what do I want? Just a matter of principle. You should always be wanting something. Where should I sit? Where should I go? What should I do? Okay.

But can you begin to appreciate what it's like, what it's like just in the scene, just the scene, in the heard, just the heard, in the thought, just a thought, in the cognized, just the cognized, so that you're not involved with it, you're not entangled with it. And that language is a little bit ambiguous. I kind of like it, the word with is in the polygrammer, so it's, or by. So it's like, you know, you say in English sometimes I'm with you. You're kind of involved with something. And anyway, so involved or entangled is added to the text here.

You won't be involved with that. You won't be with that. When you're not involved in that, you won't be with it. If you're not involved, you won't be involved. Kind of like silly statement,

but it's actually pretty profound. because it's useful to recognize that this is the case.

I've seen in my mind, my mind always used to, sometimes it used to be especially, always want to be involved with something. There's always something I'm thinking about, something that I'm wanting, something that I'm not wanting, something that I'm afraid of. It's always something about. We live in a world of about-ness, and not in the world of just seeing, just hearing, just being. So to recognize the times when this happens, to appreciate it, take it in.

Don't be so busy living in the world of aboutness, which is often the world of thinking. We're always thinking about something, and we're missing the world that's not about anything. It's just a world of being, of seeing and hearing. So when you're not involved in that, you won't be with that. When you're not with that, You won't be here or there or between the two. Meaning that you're not defining yourself maybe with anything.

You're not defining yourself with something here, you're not defining yourself something there, or anything in between. And that is really an unusual state. We're so involved with ourselves, so centered on ourselves, so concerned with ourselves. How am I? What's happening with me? What do I want? Who am I?

What should I do? And that is also often, and there's a subject to that, or an object to that, there's a thing that makes us who we are or makes what we want. And to see, and merely the see, see, just see. Simple seeing. And in the seeing, there's not the complexity of being the seer, and all that that means. in the herd, just the herd, rather, the complexity of being concerned with being the hearer.

Wow, that's a nice sound of a bird. I need to... How am I going to get that on my... recorded on my phone so I can bring it home with me and play it? I think that's the way to have a perfect meditation is to have that bird sound all the time. And what am I going to do?

You know, I can't afford to meditate now because I have important things to consider. How do I get that bird sound on my phone when I checked my phone into the office? How do I explain to them that I want the phone back? I can't be meditating now because I have important things to think about. And how great it'll be to meditate when I have this at home. I mean, we're wasting our time meditating.

It's like me for a whole year thinking about being a cook. Missing the opportunity to just be here. There's unusual words here. Here it's translated here or you won't be here or there. And the words more commonly have the meaning, especially the word for there, more literally it's this and that. There won't be this and there won't be that, but it's a shorthand for this world

and the next world.

So it has a little bit bigger meaning, or different kind of meanings. So there won't be any concern with this world or the other world, the next world. And that's kind of, that kind of like pulls the rug underneath certain things, certain concerns about birth and rebirth and other times in heavens and everything. It's kind of like you won't be concerned with those things. And we find that the Buddha in some places repeatedly was pointing to something that was so radically just here, that a person who knows how to be really here will no longer have any concern about a next life. It becomes irrelevant.

Just here. Free, present, now. When you're not with that, you won't be here, or there, or between the two. Just this is the end of suffering. So that's the great deal in Buddhism. It isn't just a matter of learning how to be simple.

Giving yourself the deep reassurance to relax and trust. Just breathing, being here in a simple way, seeing simply, hearing simply, But the real reason to do this is to learn something about releasing, letting go of all suffering. I mean, it's a big promise or a big, not a promise, but it's a big potential that Buddhism offers. It is possible to put down the burden we carry with us. the burdens of suffering, the burdens of self, the burdens of clinging, craving.

It is possible to die peacefully. When the Buddha taught his son mindfulness meditation, he said, if you do this, you'll be mindful of your last breath. Then how I interpret that is you'll have a free and easy breath. You'll have freedom. right there as you're dying. You'll find peace right there.

What we're doing here is not stress reduction. It's much more bigger thing than that. And when the... When Mulukyak-Yak-Putta heard this teachings from the Buddha, he then kind of restated it to his own words, what he understood. And what he said is that, oh, This is my paraphrase. This is to see without adding any meaning or signification to what I see.

We're adding, we signify, we look at things and we see it through the eyes of our ideas of what it means, what it is, possession. I love the little idea that... If we all walked left here to this afternoon, went down the stairs to get your shoes, but someone else had taken your shoes, your shoes wouldn't mind. Your mind is signified, but this is mine. It's reasonable, it's okay. But it is an activity of your mind.

I think it was Ajahn Chah who said something like, when you're meditating... maybe other times too, but it isn't that some terrible sound around you, like the leaf blowers we have here at most every retreat. It isn't that they're bothering us. You're bothering it. You're bothering the sound. You're signifying something.

You're making something out of it. You're applying meaning to it or something. It is not just hearing, just the heard. It's not just the sound. So it might be interesting for you to spend some time today, this evening, while you're here, noticing things that you don't cling to. Notice the small insignificant things that you usually would overlook, that they're not things that have no meaning for you, no purpose for you, no value for you.

You just kind of... But take a look and be curious. What is it to look? What is it to hear without making meaning or significance behind it? What is it to see without wanting or not wanting or having aversion? What is it to breathe freely, lightly with a useful gaze?

Useful gaze. Your mind just dies, just roam and float, gazing upon something. What's that feeling of non-clinging, non-involvement in the seeing just the seeing? In the hear it, in the heard, just the heard. And to get a sense there, then you might bring it in more close. In the thought, just the thought.

Some of you have been known to have thoughts. What if a thought just floated up and you didn't do anything with it? You didn't assign meaning to it, have aversion to it, pick it up because you like it, react to it. Just like your eyes gaze upon something insignificant for you. Can you allow a thought to just be that, just float up and just, oh, it floats and goes by. Can you know how not to cling to any thought?

If you cognize something, if you recognize something, that you're conscious of something. Can you get a feel for what it's like not to cling to that, not to react to that, not to want it, not want it, not to add meaning, stories, not to relate it to yourself? How simple can you be? Not for the sake of simplicity, but for the sake of your freedom, or even better still, maybe for the sake of your heart's ease, your heart's peace. Here, I find it interesting that this capacity we have to sense.

See, here, have all the different tactile sensations we're capable of, smell, taste, to sense and feel what goes on in the mind. All that occurs beyond the edges of your desires. It's bigger, wider. What is it to see? beyond the edge of desire, or does your desires fill the universe? What is it to sense beyond the edges of thinking, or does your thoughts fill the universe?

Thank you.