

# 2001-05-13: Simplicity

Tue, 6/16 3:59PM • 40:30

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

simplicity, awareness, people, clinging, define, mind, pleasure, personally, home, restlessness, freedom, entail, life, bit, simple, point, retreat, trust, sense, complicate

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

And

this morning is the very end of this 10 day retreat that I've been teaching up at your code for 14 people. And I'm very much filled with the retreat.

I'll leave here as soon as we finish

and go up there for the closing at 1130 or so before the retreat. And it's a very special to be on retreat in general, but this retreat is particularly

sweet for me. People who are

very dedicated practitioners are all they're all people

that are dedicated, very dedicated, a lot of experience. And I get the opportunity in this retreat to work with him very closely and there were 14 people and I can see 1414 people a day for interviews. So I said everyone every day and kept track and it was quite wonderful.

And what I like to do this morning, I said try to

Do a summary of what I've been teaching for the week for 10 days. And I don't know if I can do it.

But that's what I'd like to try.

Ironically, the subject is simplicity.

So I should be able to say that quickly.

One way of describing spiritual practice

is that it's a homecoming. It's a coming home. And it's useful to I think, distinguish little bit between a house in a home and a house is just one building. And many people can see anything will drive down the street and see lots of houses. But a home is a place where someone inhabits and they feel at home and they feel like this is a place that can relax and be themselves and don't have to defend themselves and don't have to create the self image. Your place of acceptance usually place where if there's family members that there's some kind of acceptance. Family members, sometimes it's complicated relationships, but it's a place where people can kind of let their hair down or feel at home, at least in the image of it to kind of the

generic image of a

being at home is quite different than being in a house.

And then a spiritual practice is in part about coming home, finding how to be at home, not just in your home, but wherever you go in yourself in life.

And being

kind of a homecoming.

It's also a kind of

coming back to something we already know.

I think I believe it's a kind of belief that we all have some deep innate, knowing of what is true, and what it's like to be at home or what it's like to be just presence in a very simple, complete way, without needing to be anything, anything at all for anybody. And that part of what spiritual practice is to point to that which we most deeply know, and to give it and perhaps find an opportunity to develop that or live in depth much more

often.

And that is not a matter of imparting teachings or something you don't know. But practice is really about pointed, pointing something you already deeply know yourself. Maybe just have hints of it.

Maybe something you remember maybe a childhood experience or some experience you've had some point in your life felt so. Right, there's so true or so much at home, that it becomes a cornerstone or a touchstone, the memory for what's possible and maybe perhaps spiritual practices about coming to that again. And it's not about creating it, which is many people think You know, some of you have to create, I put all the conditions just right, then I'll have it again. But the kind of deep knowing that's within us is really can't be created. It can't be can't create conditions to make it happen. It's there. And the very act of creating something gets in the way of it. It's a state of great simplicity. TS Eliot wrote the form the four quartets, and in it, there's a line that goes something like a state of complete simplicity, costing nothing less than everything.

And Buddhist spirituality can be

understood as a process of simplification,

or a process of pointing to simplicity,

the process of liberation, the process of coming home, it and it's pointing to something very, very simple. It's always here. The present moment, in and of itself is always quite simple. If we live fully in the present moment with no before and

after,

no here or there, it's quite simple. If we bring in past and future here and there, then

it gets complicated very quickly.

But the present moment in and of itself is quite simple. And the present moment in and of itself is indistinguishable from our capacity to know it from knowing. And there's something about knowing itself, which is quite simple. And if you knew how simple it was, a knew how precious that simplicity is, then

you would be free.

One of the comments that several people made at the retreat, these are people who environment then practice for a long time was they said They, by the end, we finished this theme of simplicity. They said, why I never why no one ever told me it was so simple. Mindfulness is really simple. It's not about the thought of had to do but find getting some insights and try to, you know, use a laser like mindfulness to kind of get in there and see clearly kind of understand what's really going on. Or some particular states of mind was the point or

to get rid of certain things which were undesirable was the point.

our capacity to know is so simple. Mindfulness is so simple, it doesn't require any of that. And to understand to taste the simplicity of what the practice is about, is transformative. And so I tried doing this this week to try to point to that simplicity. Can you hear me okay everyone.

So the

One of the things I said Is it the hump coming coming home.

It's not always a comfortable process, just as maybe in our physical homes, there could be places rooms we haven't cleaned for a long time.

Or maybe we haven't been to the basement in

the attic. And finally we go through it and we find, you know,

musty, dusty,

unfinished projects, or things that we tried to push away and shove away not pay attention to. So part of coming home isn't is it also entails going into all the rooms in our houses in our homes, and cleaning them up and seeing what's actually there. And part of that is is seeing the ways in which we complicate the simplicity of presence, simplicity of knowing and seeing the different elements of the complication, allows the possibility of simplifying our presence or knowing seeing what keeps us from being free. helps us then to let go of those or to find a simplicity that maybe doesn't even require letting go of them. But simplicity that's beyond them especially simplicity that the larger simplicity of knowing that holds them. There are two movements in Buddhist practice

thinking very general generally.

One is to see what obstructs your freedom

and then find ways to let go of it.

The other way is to see what obstructs your freedom and then find how

there's a larger freedom that can hold that.

It's kind of like the knowing of that which obstructs your freedom

can lead to two things. One is

the data information you can try to do something about your problem.

The other thing you can do is to relax And hold that problem in a larger piece of awareness itself. And both are very important ways, these two pointings and some people can only do the first until they get a clear enough sense of what awareness is precious and phenomenally simple and, and transformative awarenesses so that they can trust awareness enough, so they can do the second option. And so they can see a problem they have in their life, no matter what the problem is. And rather than thinking they have to get rid of it, or fix anything, yeah, of course, you should do do that to some degree. But in your heart of hearts, you don't have to do that. Rather you have to discover how to hold that in the nonreactive. Open, spacious boundless awareness that's free. The simple awareness which is always here, can hold everything and not be caught by things not contract around what goes on

And that entails a trusting of awareness.

And, and the profundity of what Buddhism has to offer involves a phenomenal trusting of your awareness of awareness. We trust that before we trust anything else. And if you look at your life, what you'll find is you trust me different things. We don't use that language so much. But you trust your bank account you trust having money in the bank account. You trust, building up a sense of self, you trust your fear. You trust your ambition. You trust your desires, you trust your aversions. We trust them because we're so quick to take up residence knows we're so quick to live in those we're so quick to have them be the preoccupation of our mind. Anything which is a preoccupation of the mind is something in a way that would entail some kind of trust we're asked to do in Buddhism is to trust awareness instead. And that can feel feel very vulnerable and very tenuous, because Where's awareness? What is awareness? It has no color, no shape, no sound. Awareness is very silent. Awareness by itself is kind of like space.

It's often likened to space.

You know, you look around in space, you know, you can see space exactly except by what defines it is empty of things. And if we're always focusing on things, we're not going to appreciate the space. The awareness is always focusing, focusing on things and preoccupations, that it's very hard then to turn away from all the preoccupations we have what we feel a need, and, and rest and awareness itself. So these are just two ways, either of letting go of

what obstruct your freedom,

or understanding how there's a freedom available right now, when your awareness can hold that in a nonreactive way.

So there's a list. I went through During the retreat, have nine different aspects of simplicity, simplicity of being simplicity of being home, of knowing of awareness. And for some people just pointing to the nature of awareness itself. And for other people it's this it defines what they have to let go of to discover that simplicity, depending on which of these two approaches you take. The first and the list is progressively understood to be progressively more difficult things to let go of more deeply embedded in our psyche. Those a little bit too humbling to realize this because the first one by itself seems quite daunting. The first is not to believe in taking things personally.

When you think of that, are you ready for that one?

Not to believe in taking things personally. Not to

have a not to believe that there are things which will define you. taking things personally means that these are things that define who you are.

And Napoleon's called Sekai Aditi

and we're very quick to take things to define who we are. our body, our intellect, our emotions, our possessions, our relationships with people around us.

The Cosmos people and people identify with nature.

With with a world and I'm one with the world.

There's all kinds of ways in which we can default to define

ourselves. And the more kind of closer ones that can cause a lot of suffering. And a lot of our suffering has to do on this. personalizing things, taking things personally. And it's very liberating to realize you don't have to do that. in small ways people begin seeing that as a practice in big ways. For example, people can struggle for a long time with physical pain. And then at some point, they feel the pain. And they realize you see a difference between taking it personally, my pain, and just holding it there just kind of openly and stuff. Pain is a whole constellation of reactions that come together with my pain that are absent with just the pain. self pity, for example, venting just one and just allows me to be there not take it personally, or to have a strong emotional reaction. And now take the emotional reaction personally, to recognize us there be very honest about it being there, but not take it personally means you don't take ownership of it so that you don't engage with it and act on it and defend yourself from it

or fight it or support it during you know, fuel it or all kinds of ways in which we take things personally. If you just allow the emotion to be there freely, it'll fade away by itself. We engage in it, we take it personally, often we just feed it and fuel it. It's not like it's happening to someone else. But to take it personally is to say that this, this defines who I am. And any definition that we have about who we are, limits who we are. And we can see that and other people, how quickly they limit themselves by their definition. They'll come to you and say, you know,

I'm incapable of doing that by myself.

That's the definition they're finding themselves. And sometimes you see, it's not accurate. on where they are, you know, I'm always this way these people say,

sometimes people define you.

And you get very clear when they're doing that, then it's, you know, once upon a distant time, you just happen to get a little bit annoyed slightly. And for that person, you're always someone who's an angry person versus always kind of careful around you and they've kind of put you in a box in a category There's many ways in which we can feel how people define you, it's a lot harder to see how we define ourselves. By taking things personally, it's a lot simpler life is a lot simpler. If you don't take things

as a definition of who you are.

You can say kind of working kind of you can kind of general light ideas, you know, to carry around with you, if someone asks you what nationality you are, it's okay to tell them. But you know, you're not fooled by that. You know, you're not gonna let that be the kind of the thing that defines you. If they want, you know, they want a category to pick you and that's fine.

It's helpful a little bit

for the census, so whatever.

But this is, the first step of simplification is learning how to simplify ourselves from taking things personally. The second and this is this is a popular one.

Especially for people who

persevere and the second one is

Giving up clinging

to virtue

and spiritual practices. Thank god finally I've been doing this but in fact, for 10 years now and finally, I can let go of it. It doesn't mean stop doing. That doesn't mean stop being devoted to a virtuous life or being engaged in spiritual practices, but no longer clinging to it. And this is really common for people engaged in spiritual life is to claim religious life. This is a claim to their religion, claims their spirituality. In part spirituality will often people use it as a way of defining themselves. You know, and so, they go around, they do all these kinds of, they adopt a garb uniform way of talking or, you know, worldviews not so much because it's true, but because if then they you know that and then they kind of, you know, it's approved that they buy belong to that tradition. They're part of that they have. This is who their identity is.

When I first showed up at San Francisco Zen Center in the 70s

you could tell who were the rebels and students. They were the ones who wore

Amish gray Amish vests,

fat pants, and carry Danish school bags, and warm mollis. This Buddhist beads. We know those things in themselves are wonderful things. But it was adopted as a uniform and all these people were going around various combinations of those things. Because, you know, part because, you know, they could do some comfort that they knew that they were on the right path, if they're at least wearing the right clothes. So we cling to but if we cling to religious practices, this practice will do it for me, mindfulness I tried, that's really great. And there's hope and to claim with our hope with our desire with our

ambition.

I really do it well. I'll be the most mindful person in my block. And people will just praise me to no end.

But and to claim to virtue,

you know, be self righteous, for example, is a process of complicating our life unnecessarily. So in Buddhism, these things are important, but you don't want them to you want to like in a sense, like owe them the freedom of freedom is not complicated by virtue is not freedom, the process of becoming free is let go of clinging to virtue, to hopefully your virtue at the same time, but richness at the same time.

The third is

giving up doubt.

And doubt is a kind of obvious way in which we complicate our mind complicate ourselves and you know, often difficult to feel at home if you're filled with doubt. And doubt in particular about what is the nature of freedom? What's the nature of have, you know what it really feels like to be at home what it is to be really to know deeply. And if you don't really know for yourself what freedom is, even when you engage in spiritual practice, you're always going to have a little bit of doubt which is going to agitate the mind keep you from really being at peace. And it's just the way it is it's okay. But the process simplification is to then at some point, let go of doubt also, hesitation holding back.

The fourth is

no longer clinging to sensual pleasure. And this is a find a lot of lists in Buddhism that focus on essential pleasure. And you think Buddhists are party poopers. And, but the thing is, it's essential pleasure it in and of itself is fine, you're welcome to

to enjoy it.

But it's like clinging to it, which is the problem and essential pleasure is a shorthand for the tremendous drive In human beings, to towards pleasure and to avoid to comfort and pleasure. And on a gross level, we see that you know that some people confuse pleasure with happiness. And people will pursue all kinds of pleasant activities thinking that's going to provide them with their happiness, addicts and alcoholics sometimes, you know, it's a clear example of this. But the, the, the, there's a tremendous there's a lot of attitudes and beliefs we have around pleasure not just simply attachment to pleasure in a physical way, but also comes with our attachments to beliefs about what pleasure entails or discomfort entails. Some people feel that the you know, the has attitude that their life is only successful they've only you know, doing it right life, right? If things are pleasant, if there's pleasure, if something's you know, if they have a headache, or they're little bit off that day, or there's things are uncomfortable, but there's no electricity or no water that day or something. I don't know what to do. things which are uncomfortable that that's if that, by definition means that something's off with life, something's off with me. I've blown it, life has blown it. And something has to be fixed. Freedom has freedom has to allow the possibility

of not reacting for against pleasure

and comfort, comfort and pleasure is not of freedom.

And if you are pursuing and preoccupied with pleasure,

you're not going to discover the radical simplicity of just now just being present. And it you know, but pleasure drives human beings to phenomenal degree. Many times, I believe,

people's

philosophy of life or even political positions, political party they adhere to, sometimes it's not because of the great philosophy that's involved. But sometimes it's just it arises out of a reaction to pleasure. displeasure. Someone's uncomfortable with seeing homeless person. And their whole philosophy of how to deal politically with homeless people is not out of some wise philosophies because they're repelled by their own discomfort.

And they're trying to get rid of that and push that away.

The needle in Amoeba like reaction to pleasure and displeasure is very foundational to what drives human beings.

The

the fourth, complication is aversion. Ill will, it's a little bit kind of the flipside of sensual desire, clinging, sensual desire, but the clinging to ill will.

To aversion. There's a lot of energy,

a lot of seductive power

in ill will,

and aversion in particles. People use it sometimes to define themselves, but sometimes because of the rush that comes with it. Sometimes be Because the belief systems entailed what you feel again, like you need and don't need, what you need to be present for, not present for and if there's something there which is uncomfortable, you know, we have ill will and we want to push things away. The mind cannot be simple. The mind cannot discover the simplicity of freedom that's present right now is available right now. The home that's here, regardless of what's happening, if the mind is for or against anything, the awareness at least the awareness cannot be contracted towards or away from anything.

The fifth, the sixth.

And this is in it, those of you who are following a traditional list i'm actually going over nine usually as 10 and six and seven are going to be collapsed into six and six is a clinging to spiritual experiences. Now this is considered really hard to get rid of, you know, it's a lot of easier to get rid of, to let go of taking things personally than it is to cling to spiritual experiences. Certainly you can cling to it because if you take it personally, but there's you know, even even without that clinging, taking things personally clinging to spiritual experiences a way of complicating,

agitating

the mind hindering the freedom that's possible. And so many people who engage in spirit of everyone who gauges spiritual practice will do this sooner or later. There's levels of calm and peace and well being that you've heard about, and so you want to get it. Only if I get those things will like you know, then I'll be okay. Or you've had a taste of it, and I got to have that again. And so you spend years negotiating your mind

and everything else around you,

in order to reap re experience

that particular piece that you've had a particular joy or love or great bliss or whatever it was and to cling to any spiritual experience, creates suffering and is a way of conflict The simplicity of just being being present.

The seventh

complication is

conceit.

And conceit

involves,

at the very foundation of conceit

is not taking things personally not saying that something defines who I am.

But rather is the very sense that I am

which can seem very innocent, or so obvious or so what's the problem with that? Of course, I am mean, I'm not someone else. But there's something about we're talking about very subtle states. Now. In very subtle states.

The mind is very attentive.

You'll see that the very sense of I N is extra, it's not needed. It's a fabrication. It's an assumption that arises in part of the sum total workings of who you are. The sense of I Am, is, you know, if you look at it

is very amorphous. It's very, you know, it can't be very difficult to understand or see it directly for what it is beyond kind of a vague sense.

Some people might say it's a sum total of all clinging.

You know how they all feels together.

I don't know if this is a good analogy for this. But

I use it sometimes this is some great athletes like Michael Jordan, is, you know, playing

playing a championship game and it's

his Chicago Bulls, or, you know, one point behind and it's one minute left in the game or 10 seconds less than the game. He has the ball and

you know he's driving towards the basket and

you know, the whole the whole championship, you know, pinches on you know hinges on him making that basket and in the middle of that he starts wondering, am I how am I? Where's the true self here? This is who I really am he's not going to make the basket he's gonna trip he's gonna trip over speed probably to have that kind of self conscious concern but I am at that moment

he just gets in the way

it's kind of like I am it's kind of like I don't know if this is a good analogy but sometimes use your eyes. Your eyes function I suppose you you can see with your eyes, but you can't see your eyes. And then tip but to get involved with the sense that I have eyes this my my eyes I this is how they feel like is to actually take one step apart away from the car. Do That make sense? Let your eyes to see, you don't have to be concerned about the ins of the eye. It makes things a little bit more complicated. The sense of I am make things more complicated. One of the things that lends itself to is one of the more traditional definitions of conceit is comparative thinking. We compare ourselves to others, we compare ourselves to how we were in the past, how we want to be in the future. And it's one of the, one of the great sources of suffering is compared, comparing ourselves it's possible to live in the world as we are

without needing any comparisons.

Comparisons or contrasts comparisons are valid in some ways. But we get to suffer so much by getting contract and defining ourselves and, and

and

getting a sense of it. From that, those comparisons it's not needed. So to let go to drop, even the sense of I Am, to have the kind of radical trust and awareness that it's possible just to be present with your awareness with knowing with life with beingness in the same way that you like your eyes to see without getting tied up with what's the anus of the eyes.

So then we're at the eighth to the eighth is

so then we're getting really subtle according to the list that gets progressively more subtle closer and closer towards complete freedom is

restlessness.

It's kind of a kind of amazing it's still restlessness after you know you're no longer defining yourself and no longer clinging and but restlessness. Education. He says his wide range of what you know, restlessness can mean in us. I mean, sometimes we can barely sit on our cushion. It's like it comes down to sit for meditation. It's like being at the rodeo. And it's a successful meditation, the fact that you managed to get to the end of your sitting without bolting.

But I think what they're talking about here is a very subtle

restlessness of the mind, the mind that focuses on objects, the mind that focuses on something external to itself.

Or to say a little bit differently, perhaps

the mind preoccupied

in objects the mind which is delimited by what it's paying attention to. If,

if I won't have a desire,

you can be driven by the desire the thing you want, you're always looking at the thing you want

## Part of the movement of practice

is to turn the awareness away from the thing you want and sense and feel the desire itself. If you have a version, turn away from the thing that you have aversion about, and turn around and just feel what it's like to have a version in and of itself, the subjective experience of that. When the mind is always focused on a thing, the mind is actually alienated from itself. When the mind is restless, there's a way in which restlessness sometimes is self perpetuating, by desire. Sometimes it's self perpetuating anything you do regularly, and continuously, you create a certain momentum in the mind. So if you're always busy, always doing multitasking, you do many different things. It's very hard to stop because of the momentum to want to do to do is still there. If you're always the mind is always preoccupied with things. Then the momentum is there for the mind a little bit be added to To always want more things to fill it.

It's kind of like you've come into a room like here,

and you're always focusing on the things of the room.

You think that's all really important.

And you look at things and things and things and things. And finally, you realize, wait a minute, there's something else here. There's a space in the room. Wow. Space holds it all. And that space kind of holds all the things all the containers, the same way awareness, there's not preoccupied and focused on the things it's aware of. It's kind of like space that holds it all. As long as it's awareness is focusing on things. It's always can be a little bit agitated, restless, it's always gonna be a little bit.

fragile, brittle.

For the mind to be totally

soft, pliable, open, spacious, boundless. There has to be a sense of object list, awareness, awareness, which has no Center. There's no sense of I am and there's no center to the awareness. There's no sense of being focused on an object. There's no, there's no there. There's no here. There's no before and after. There's no becoming. There's no movement. Awareness becomes as a definition or they're all surrounding all, like 360 degrees. It's like all radiant and all directions.

So the last of the complications

is ignorance.

And when the last remnants of ignorance are let go of, then we have the experience of this unconditioned simplicity. And the unconditioned simplicity is ignorance is maybe not the best translation for a video here, but rather, it's unawareness. When when awareness becomes total awareness becomes set when awareness is set free when awareness becomes completely simple, when a sense of presence becomes simple and is not focused or preoccupied or caught by anything, when it's 360 degrees all around,

then that's the taste of

the complete unconditioned simplicity

of being at home.

And then once you have that experience even just once, very radically, then you realize it's actually of the of our nature all the time. That simplicity of awareness, presence is actually here all the time. And then rather than having to get rid of all these things, it's possible then to open the pret your sense of presence or awareness, beyond where you're clinging, so you don't have to let go of the clinging go the complication, you can just rest Hold it in a bigger container, a presence of awareness. So that you don't have to be involved in incessant movements of becoming and creating and, and manufacturing things and manipulating the mind. You let the mind get bigger, more open, more space

to hold it all.

We're kind of like people who

if we you know, someone who lives in an ocean, in the ocean, and they're always swimming in the ocean, and they really want to rest.

So they're swimming, swimming, and only if they find some Island somewhere

where they can finally

pull them up, pull themselves up on the, on some shore in the dry land and rest. And so constantly swimming and they see these mirages, they see these different things of the distance they have swimming to it and they come to it and they really think it's going to work and they finally get to it and turns out that it's nothing there really support them and so they gotta go swimming some more and they swim some more another direction and they come like swimming and swimming and swimming and looking and looking and looking and trying to find a place to rest. Only eventually to finally realize that all they had to do

was float

in the water would have hold held, held them up just nicely.

Awareness is like an ocean that's there but waiting, waiting to hold

us to let us float.

A very important aspect, the core aspect of Buddhist practice is to learn to trust the awareness, to place our trust and awareness into trust and doing that the native intelligence, the innate intelligence of who we are, that bubbles through that.

So you don't have to prepare ahead of time when you come to do something.

Perhaps you don't have to think ahead and manipulate or create certain cells.

You can just show up

Simple.

You don't have to always know.

And you also don't have to not know.

The radical simplicity of being

doesn't entail having possessions and doesn't entail having no possessions. It doesn't entail having attainments and doesn't entail having no attainments. It's realizing the fundamental emptiness of all things. And in seeing the emptiness of all things.

trusting your awareness,

letting awareness be the foundation where you float,

and let the innate intelligence and compassion and love that's in your home, come pouring through.

Trusting awareness to trust us to give space

For

intelligence, for love, simplicity, there is no love apart from simplicity.

There is no love apart from silence.

To try trust awareness

is the sense the silence

in the space

which is always here.

So it was quite profound

for me to be on retreat and I hope for the people who are there at the retreat. And I hope that you appreciated that whatever sensor the treat I brought with me and giving this talk because I feel very much still in it and

thank you very much