

2005-09-30 Dhammapada Part 1

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good evening, everyone. Thank you for coming. I thought it might be nice to start with a short sitting. And part of the reason for that, but part of the reason it seems like an appropriate way of kind of wave segue into talking about the Dhammapada these ancient teachings, these ancient words of the ancients. And I'm reminded of a story of a king, who went one evening to visit the Buddha. And it was late at night, it was dark. And he was told that it was a large gathering, gathering of Buddhist monks in these woods where the Buddha was practicing teaching, and so he went to the, to the edge of that forest and There he left behind his bodyguards and soldiers entered into the woods with his with his minister and supposedly undefended, unusual for a mighty, somewhat horrible King. And which he was. And he was our walking into this woods. And after a short while, he got really spooked. Because it was completely still, you know, abnormally quiet, I guess, still in there. And he'd been told to expect the large gathering of monks around the Buddha in this grove of trees. There was not a nice sound and the discourse to say that his hair stood on it, because he was so afraid there was an ambush. And, but then, as Minister said, I think was minister said that or they saw light in the distance and so a minister, spotlight him into the light there, by the light was the Buddha sitting, and then all around the Buddha. Where are these groups? monastics sitting and meditating and sitting in silence, and perhaps waiting for the Buddha, the Buddha's teachings to occur, verse to teach. And this image of the Buddha syndic, sitting under the tree at night, outside the grove of woods in the woods, with people around, they're sitting quietly meditating, for me is a very meaningful image. And that it's partly it's an image of simplicity, how little is needed, and how simple the Buddhist spiritual life can be, in a way it was taught, not much as needed. There's not a lot of books. There's not a lot of, you know, rituals and stuff that go needs to go with it. They're just you can just go into the woods and sit out, sit at the foot of a tree, and there with your own practice, realize the truth. So in that spirit and with that image, perhaps we sit in silence, meditate for maybe 10 minutes, and then I'll discuss our text together. Good evening again. And many thanks for coming here to the book, reading I never would have imagined so many people would have come. It wasn't just was inconceivable to me. And here, there's so many people and some very good, appreciative and gratified. It's very nice that you came. celebrate this book that I

just been published. Yes, trouble hearing possible Turn it up a little bit. Now I should also speak up more, but better. Can you hear me now? So that happens again speak up because sometimes my voice drops. So the Dhammapada is technically a book in the Theravada tradition of Buddhism, the Buddhism of Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka for Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, little bit. Bangladesh teeny bit in India you find a little bit in Nepal. It's a Buddhist tradition to kind of basically survive from that part of the world for well over 2000 years. And the Dhammapada is, belongs to that tradition. And it could be argued that it's the most loved book, Love sacred text of that tradition in Buddhism. It is one of the first things that many monastics monks and nuns will study and learn. When they enter into the monastic life. They'll often memorize verses from it, and use it as part of their teaching as part of their own practice. It is often many of these verses of the Dhammapada then spread out from the monastic environment into the popular culture of many of these countries. And some of these verses are kind of cultural aphorisms are sayings that appear in a different forms. You know, in those cultures in those countries, many people know a lot of these verses they recognize and they grew up with them. It's kind of common, common currency, spiritual currency for many people. People go back and refer to this text for inspiration for ideas. There's not any developed teachings in the text. But the teachings appear very, very short and succinct. And so they work very well as quotes in his references and his basis for Dharma talks and teachings. So it could be argued as maybe the one of the most loved and best known of the body of sacred literature, the Theravada tradition. Loved by both monastics and lay people, it's often very accessible. Some of the other sacred texts like the middle length discourses, the Buddha, you know, it's a little bit difficult to get into it unless you kind of somehow be initiated or familiar with the teachings. It's easily put you to sleep to read some of that. And, and so but this is relatively accessible Dhammapada for many, many people. As Buddhism has come to the west to Europe and to America and to the Americas, it's Dhammapada. Sometimes it's kind of seen as being the quintessential Buddhist sacred text. And it's kind of bound on beyond the boundaries of its Theravada tradition. Many people know about the Dhammapada and will think of it as kind of the sacred text of Buddhism, kind of as a reference for the practice. And I was first given a copy of them by my first Zen teacher. So you know, he thought it's very, very valuable and helpful, and he actually wasn't exactly with a personal gift to me, but I think he bought 100 copies. And he passed them out to all the students at the San Francisco Zen Center. The canonical or sacred literature of Buddhism is best. It's amazingly best if you started today and was and was going to read it all. Maybe you don't have enough lifetimes it's really it's a phantom believe asked. However, the terror bond tradition that it sets them apart is part of it's a relatively manageable collection of only about 18,000 discourses. Some of them are quite short but you know, but if you put them all together into English, you know you have maybe volumes that would be this big on your shelf. So you can kind of manage it but then if you get beyond the Theravada into Mahayana, then the shelves you know, get bigger and longer in system. Amazing how long they got. They can be And technically, there's no beginning to the Buddhist sacred literature in the way that there were to say there's a beginning to the Bible. You know, the book of Genesis at the beginning. So there's no beginning per se. However, I have noticed that many people in the West will often take the beginning of the Dhammapada, the opening versus the Dhammapada, as kind of like kind of like the same has the same function as the opening of Genesis. So it's kind of if you want to look for the beginning kind of conventionally some people will take this is

the beginning. This is where it all starts, the Buddhist sacred literature in this text, the first, especially first two verses. So I'd like to read you the first two verses. Now that I've kind of built up perhaps a sense of importance of these verses have the verses are difficult to translate. Because of one word, and the word in Pali is a dumb and which in English, I'm most noticed Dharma, Greg in dharma. I think it's not in a TV show. And as a Dharma, and Dharma has turns out has a lot of different meanings in Dhamma in Pali and Sanskrit. And so the question is which meaning of the one pot one traditional dictionary ideas and 54 definitions for the word Dhamma. So, which are the 54 definitions or other meanings? Should you translate the word Dhamma. And I've translated here as experience. It might be the most controversial thing I did in the whole book. So I'm hoping that people don't get to that second word in the translation and say, forget this book. Though I do explain in the footnote why I chose this word and why I thought it was the best word there Many other possible choices, but many of them are difficult difficulties in their own right. And so it's actually very difficult maybe shouldn't shouldn't have been translated at all. But I try to say it here as experience. All experience is preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind, speak or act with a corrupted mind. And suffering follows, as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of the ox. All experiences preceded by mind, led by mind, made by mind, speak or act with a peaceful mind and happiness follows like a never departing shadow. So, here the emphasis is put on the creative power of the human mind, that somehow it all begins with the mind. slayed by the mind made by the mind preceded by mind, the mind is at the beginning. In the beginning, there was the mind. And whereas in the book of Genesis, it starts with God and activities of God. And so it's quite, you know, just very interesting to call these big two beginnings of next to each other. And see that the that the, the context, the view of the religious life, the starting point is very different in a theistic religion perhaps, and then, here in Buddhism, which, in a sense, a certain kind of unusual way, it's considered atheistic religion. And here the mind is considered is considered to be preeminent very important. And what it thinks what's saying here is that when using the word experience, experience is nothing The same thing as events, doesn't say all events are preceded by mind experience. What I'm trying to say here is that the way that we perceive in our the events of life, the way we experience experiences through the medium of perception, interpretation, understanding, and the idea of and you know, so that that interface between the mind the mind, the creative ability of mind to think and interpret, and the events of the world is what we call what I'm calling here experience. And, and so that particular thing is somehow the mind has a very, very important role in defining, interpreting, naming, shaping, what our experience of the world is like. There's so many they Which is so that says that about the mind. And then it gives a little kind of example. If you speak or act with a corrupted mind. suffering will follow as the wagon wheel follows the hoof of an ox. Now the image of of a, an ox pulling off a cart with a wagon wheel is one of you know, you could maybe a little bit imagination, it's really a burden. The ox is burdened by this heavy card is struggling and pulling and sweating and snorting and, and then it's pulling this cart, and the cart is heavy, and the wagon wheel of the cart follows. Because it's yoked It's bound. It's tied up with the cart as follows along it's heavy work to bring this along. So speaker act with a corrupted mind and suffering follows and it's heavy suffering is a burden. It's something As entangled or entwined, yoked and then it gives the example in the other, the other end, speak or act with a peaceful mind. And happiness follows like a never departing shadow. And here the image of a never departing shadow shadow has no weight. You know

you No one's burdened by the shadow they bring along with them just right there, it's light. It's you know, studied and came say it's light, right? Just the shadows have weight. And, and so it's something is not a burden doesn't do fear doesn't hold us back. There's no drag. So happiness occurs to us in a very light, free open way. Speak react with a peaceful mind. And happiness follows like a never departing shadow. So here there's a dichotomy between how we what we do with our mind, act with a corrupted mind, certain things follow. act with a peaceful mind. And there's another thing that follows in the wake of that so here let's put emphasis placed on the on the mind what we do with the mind the creative potential of the mind and suggesting that we start being the caretaker of the quality of our mind. And if we want to be careful with our mind how we were the kind of mind we speak from kind of mind we act from and how we act and how we speak has consequences. And then any text wants to give gives kind of some more examples of this quote maybe some of you are better at acting this out but he abused me he attacked me. defeated me rob me. Oh, no. For those carrying on like this hatred does not end she abused me, attacked me, defeated me, rob me for those numbers. carry on like this hatred ends. Hatred never ends through hatred, by non hate alone does it end. This is an ancient truth. So here again, we have very a quote a verse that's quoted many, many times over and over again. Hatred never ends through hatred, by non hate alone does it end This is an ancient truth. So here, hatred is a form of suffering. And it just, you know, the problems in our life. If we if we live complaining and about life complaining about things, then our hatred doesn't end but we can learn just to refrain from hating to have certain equanimity and peace and certain kind of patience, switched on kind of forbearance, then hatred can come to an end is what the suggestion here is. So here again, it's watching your own mind watching our reactions trying to live in a way responsibility for the quality of your mind, which is emphasized here. And this you see throughout the text, emphasis and taking responsibility for our own mind. They there's a lot of discussion about training the mind restraining the mind calming the mind making the mind peaceful, just like a carpenter straightens wood and irrigator straightens out the irrigation channels. So and Fletcher straightens a, the arrows flusters the arrow maker, so a sage or wise person straightens her mind. So it makes it straight. So you do something take responsibility for your mind. You don't need to leave the state of your mind the chance, but you engage in it. And what you see through the text, or what the text then presents is an uncompromising teaching of personal self reliance, uncompromising teaching, of taking self reliance self responsibility. Personal liberation becoming the greatest. And I know of no other sacred texts in the history of human history of humanity that has the same kind of dramatic emphasis on self reliance. The terrible tradition, which this tuition comes from, is sometimes criticized for teaching a spiritual path, which is selfish by the other people who don't follow this tradition. And I don't think it's a selfish selfish tradition at all. But this kind of emphasis on personal self reliance, maybe can be seen that personal liberation can be seen as Oh, you're so caught up in your own practice in your own mind and what's going on. The, the image tradition gives in response to this is that of two people who are stuck in quicksand And if one of them out of great compassion tries to pull the other one out, the one doing the pulling is going to sink further into the quicksand. And then the other one tries to pull and it's like a seesaw, they both go sink, one of them has to get up onto dry land, and then the dry land can pull the others out. So there's something to be said about, you know, getting out of the quick sense maybe said about saying the airlines, you know, put the air mask on yourself first before you put it on the children. Because, you

know, otherwise you can't maybe have a chance to. So there's something to be said about taking care of oneself and being responsible for oneself and purifying oneself to some degree so we can be a greater help to the world around us. So here this text was a lot of emphasis on personal practice, to get a little bit of sense of the hands of urge See, the text puts on this? The next quote goes like this next verse. Many do not realize that we here must die. Well, I guess you all realize that, don't you? But you really realize that I've really realized that I've known some of you, you know, people who right here nodding. And, but I've known plenty of people, including myself, for whom I knew I was going to die, it was a pretty clear thing. But it just seemed like kind of was there in the mythic future. And it didn't really have any impact on my life and how I live my life and what I was doing. And I've known people who have encountered death in a very dramatic way because of some diagnosis or a friend who dies or something. And they realize, wait a minute, and they develop a sense of spiritual urgency that this is you know, you don't know how much time you have and Let's get serious here about this life of ours. And there's a lot of ways in which we can live our life in complacent ways or lazy ways or kind of postponing ways procrastinating. So here is very emphatic statement many do not realize we here must i would i would i, the way I read this text, the way I understand it, as I read it, is that the whoever brought these verses together, had a sense of urgency, had a sense of human life is quite precious. The time we have is precious, and let's just get really down to what's essential right away, but let's get to the point. And let's not, you know, get sidetracked from some really important work that that can be done. And so you find diversity are the same chapter. It's a little bit funny, worse, but those who consider The essential to be essential, and CD essential as essential. don't reach the essential, living in the field of wrong intention. Those who know the essential to be essential and the essential as essential, reach the essential living in the field of right intention. So know what's essential. And, and what's, you know, what's the deepest intention of our hearts? What's the most important thing to do with a human life? Is the question that I see when I read this text here, because it said that text challenges me as I read it. In the first chapter, as it talks about the importance of the mind and caretaking, the mind cultivating the mind living for the mind that's pure or peaceful, rather than one that's corrupted. It talks over and over again that the benefits of a peaceful mind or a purified mind is happiness either in this life happiness in future lives, the results the consequences of a corrupted mind, the hateful mind, for example, His unhappiness in this life, time and unhappiness in future lifetimes until you get to the last two verses of the chapter one who recites many teachings. So this I pay attention to this right when he recites many teachings, but being negligent, doesn't act accordingly, like a cow herd, counting others cows does not attain the benefit of the contemplative life of the spiritual life. be counted other people's cows. One who recites but if teachings, yet lives according to the Dharma, abandoning passion, ill will and delusion aware and with mine will freed, not clinging in this life or the next attains the benefits of the contemplative life. So, here the shift has been from attaining happiness in this life and spiritual lives to beginning to talk about a whole different goal the spiritual life, which is liberation freedom. The benefits of contemporary life is here is meant to be the benefits of liberation itself. Freedom from peered says passion, ill will and delusion aware. And with mine well freed, and that's one expression aware and with mine, well freed, I love that. It speaks something about something really precious and really beautiful. A tremendous jewel, some visible jewel that we all have the capacity of the mind to be awake, aware and freed. A mind is free doesn't

have any preoccupations, it doesn't have any constrictions, it's not driven by fear. It's not driven by hate driven by ambition, confusion, seven, the mind has been freed and awake and aware. This is the kind of the goal, which is called the ultimate goal or the absolute goal. The goal of happiness in this life is considered a conventional goal. And it's nice to have that, but it's not what the Buddha was really pointing to. He taught a path he taught how to cultivate conventional happiness in life. But what he was really interested in was how to liberate the mind or the heart, how to free it. That's freedom of mind. The mind that's aware and well free, awake and well freed is sometimes referred to or connected to, what is called the deathless, the deathless state deathless dimension. And maybe seems like a strange expression, the deathless, many of us. In my own mind, I think it's an inadequate connection to the word deathless. It's kind of diminishes a little bit. But to get a little flavor of the deathless, I like the English expression that timeless. If some of you have ever been present such a way you felt the moment was timeless. The deathless maybe has a little bit of quality of the timeless presence. vigilance is the path to the deathless negligence, the path to death. The vigilant do not die, negligent, are as if already dead. Now so when I read this, I read a very powerful verse. So People translate up Hamada as hatefulness, some part some people as diligence, some people as mindfulness, constant mindfulness, energetic mindfulness, I translate is vigilance. vigilance is the path to the deathless. negligence is the path to death. The vigilant do not die. That's quite a promise. The negligent or is it already dead? Or the mindless ours? already did. You already want to feel life would be alive. You need to be awake and aware. If you're lost in your thoughts, and hardly even know they've ever been driving in your car and realized two exits beyond that you missed your exit were you alive then? Where were you? This sense of urgency in the text also translates to a to emphasis on energetic effort, vigilant efforts, heart making, really, there's something here about take your time, relax, just accept the present moment everything will be fine. You know, just you know, everything is perfect. These people are serious people. This the serious teaching gets serious and apply yourself. Because who knows when when you'll have the chance again. So this is so they have a lot of words like energetic words. effort, vigilance, energy, appear over and over again. absorbed in meditation, persevering, always steadfast, the Wise touch Nirvana, the ultimate rest from toil. And that's an interesting juxtaposition. There's emphasis here, persevering, always steadfast. That's the path. And what that leads to, is the ultimate rest, from toil from the work from the efforts. So the contrast between the work of being on the path and then the results of that work, which is here these calls are rest from toil, but which is a phenomenal experience of peace of well being. One of the flavors for me as I read this text that comes through regularly is that idea of peace. be having a heart having a being that's deeply at peace, address, nothing conflict with anything in the world. Now, just the mind is so important in all this it's important to understand something about the mind restless, agitated, the restless agitated mind hard to protect, hard to control. The sage make straight as a lecture. The shaft of an arrow. Like a fish out of water thrown on dry ground, this mind trashes about trying to escape Mars command or feel your mind is crashing about like a fish out of water. Yeah. Trying to escape Mars command Mara is the personification of all the forces of the mind, which dead in the mind, which somehow bring up bring about suffering, torment the mind. There's a beautiful book recently published called destructive emotions. That book is all about tomorrow. The mind hard to control flighty a lighting whereas wishes One does well to tame the disciplined mind brings happiness. The mind hard to see

subtle, alighting word wishes, the sage protects the watched mine brings happiness. Some of the verses in the text, as you listen to them, don't have to be Buddhist. In fact, scholars believe that some of the verses in Vemba pata, originated outside of Buddhism, they were kind of current at the time of the Buddha or preceded the Buddha even in in India, there will be part of poems that already existed or songs that existed at the time, and that they were taken by the Buddha or by early Buddhists and incorporated into the Buddhist texts. And so you listen to some of these and some of that some of these are just, you know, wisdom teachings that any any spiritual tradition might speak. Here's one Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy or haters, one to another. far worse is the harm from one's own wrongly directed mind. That's quite a statement about the power of your own mind. Neither mother nor my father, nor any other relative can do one as much good as one's own well directed mind. Here's another wisdom teaching. do not consider this as many traditions say almost the same thing. do not consider the faults of others or what they have or haven't done. Consider rather what you yourself have or haven't done. Some of you know they went bye bye My favorite a lot of favorite verses in here, but one of them is the one that goes something like I don't know where it is right now, but something like they'll criticize you. If you speak a lot, but criticize you. If you don't speak at all, and they'll criticize you. If you speak in moderation. There's no one who's free from criticism. Now, I read that and I start getting more economists very quickly. You know, you know, what can you do? You do the best you can and you'll get criticized and that's the way it goes. irrigators guide water Fletcher's shape arrows, carpenters, fashion wood. sages tame themselves. As a solid mass of rock is not moved by the wind. So Sage has not moved by praise or blame. As a deep lake is clear and undisturbed. So as Sage becomes clear upon hearing the Dharma for a person who, like the earth is untroubled, who was well practiced, who was like a pillar of Indra, who is like a lake without mud. There is no more no more wondering, a pillar of in Indra was a huge pillar that they bury at the entrance of a city and embarrassed, you know, as much of as buried underground as above ground. So he's really tall, and so you couldn't move it was really unshakable. So that kind of stability and grounding and rootedness was someone who's liberated. Here's a nice one. I like this one of describing an enlightened person Like the path of birds in the sky, it is hard to trace the path of those who do not hoard, who are judicious with their food and whose field is the freedom of emptiness and sightlessness. Like the path the birds in the sky, it is hard to trace the path of those who have destroyed their toxins, their destructive emotions, and whose field is the freedom of emptiness and timelessness. So there's something untraceable about the enlightened person, they can't find their path can find something new, something that can't be seen about them. And they're in their field, the field they buy it in this dimension they live in, is somehow characterized certain kind of freedom, this character characterized by emptiness and timelessness. It's a whole teaching itself what that means.