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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So we welcome back our teacher Gil from his two month hiatus. Welcome. Thank you. So nice to be back. Nice to see you all and particularly nice to sit with you again. Some of you might not know that the last month I sat retreats myself. And it was kind of done as a solitary retreat. So for a month. Actually, what I did was I did four, five day retreats. And I came home on the weekend because I have these two young kids, so I couldn't be gone so much. So I thought it was four or five day retreats as opposed to I thought it was a month on retreat, then I probably would have related to differently for individual five day retreats. And so I sat in a little cabin in the Boulder Creek, and I myself, so it's kind of very nice to come back and sit with people again. It's different and I'm still very much in the kind of mood or mind space of getting good on retreat. So to me doesn't seem like I need to say. So I apologize for that. But it feels that way but I have some things to say. I got to saying hopefully it's interesting for you useful.

In about 1990, no before that, you know I my early training in Buddhism was in Zen Buddhism and the San Francisco Zen Center primarily, also here in Japan. And I had been ordained Zen priest. And the 1990 had been gone from Zen center for a while. I've been practicing Asia, practicing the past nine. And then the 90 I came back to live practice for a year at San Francisco Zen Center. And at that point in Zen center history, they were primarily two teachers there, there are two abbots, co-abbots. Both of them do quite well. And one day the one of the abbots took me for a walk and talked with me. And there was some question about how I was going to continue my training in center. And it did come to a point in the training where it's kind of made sense or they start they started thinking made sense for me to start being trained to receive training to become a teacher in the Zen tradition. But that training to be teacher that final kind of training me to authorize to be a teacher is a training is done quite intimately very closely with a teacher. And so one of the average took me aside when discussing this with this with me this possibility, and but since there were two teachers at Zen center, two abbots, you know, the question was, you know, which one should I do this intimate work with? And so he kind of asked me what I thought about the other one about him kind of and I said well, one of them the other one I I feel really deep resonance with his teaching. He's like this teaching is really true in some way really kind of represents the Dharma some really pure essential way. This really seems true. precise. However, interpersonally I don't really feel as kind of some kind of in feel you'll feel a very compatibility with this one. And then I said to the one that I was walking with, I said with you, personally, I feel a tremendous amount of confidence and trust and feel interpersonally It feels real connection, deep connection and closeness to you. But I Don't know if I agree with your Dharma with your teaching, and he kind of, he kind of stopped. And I remember exactly how it went, but it was almost as if like, he stopped and turned to me. And he said, Great. That is where we'll be. That's where we know that we're having differences. You know, and we disagree, whatever. That's where we're going to meet. And he was like, Yeah, let's go and get some meat there. He was going on like, yes. As opposed to saying, Oh, no, no, you reject

me for being thinking that he was wrong or bad Dharma or something. He said, we'll meet there. And so this idea of meeting you know, how are you going to meet another person? Have you meet a teacher? How do you meet yourself? How do you meet your experience is a I think a very, very important question. And so this last month, I was practicing meeting. And since, you know, constantly kind of how do I meet this situation, how to meet this moment, over and over and over again, it's quite precious to have the opportunity to be on retreat, where you can really devote yourself to this question. How do you meet this moment? What happens in that meeting, discover what happens. And, you know, most of us, I suspect, living ordinary lives outside of retreat. You know, or in some ways the mind is preoccupied, is caught up is concerned, accomplishing things, doing things, avoiding things, you know, whatever, that there isn't that kind of primary emphasis in how do I really kind of mute this experience? I don't really am I really, here for it. And so the training and the retreat is to do that in a moment by moment over and over and over again.

And primarily it's meeting yourself in that kind of context. There was a few a couple of deer that came by regularly by the cabin, so I got to meet them. And there was a moth that flew in big markets into the cabin one evening. So I had to meet that and figure out what to do with it. And, but, you know, in terms of living things, it was, you know, a retreat is mostly mostly solitary cabin. There was a retreat center and they would bring every day at lunch at noon time. They had this big kind of insulated bags that they would bring food one day, once a day, they bring food to nearby where the cabin was, and leave it there. And then it was food for lunch and food for and a mason jar with the soup and little Tupperware thing of salad and it's soup and salad was me to save for supper, noodle stove and I could eat, eat the soup if I wanted. And then there was oatmeal in the cupboard for breakfast. And that was great. The first couple of days I got this lunch. I said, Oh no, it's like almost nothing. They realize this is my slowly food I'm going to have. But for me when I'm on retreats like this very quickly, I eat very little. And within a few days, they said they were they're sending up too much. Because I was eating so little. Anyway, so that I was just there to meet. And it's really remarkable. I believe this experience of going in there to meet your meet, meet reality meet yourself at training to meet and thinking about it. I think it's very easy to not meet not see or be present for huge areas of our lives. So perhaps a few analogies might be interesting. The if a person has a nervous kind of nervous quality about them nervous each or something and the nervousness kind of plays itself out his fingers always tapping the fingers you know, I've seen people like this you know, maybe always topic nervous but the person spends the whole day at the computer typing away they might never notice they have this nervous disposition because you know, there's always busy there. There's actually maybe faster than you know the fingers and they would be they would just not doing anything. And so you have to kind of stop typing on the computer in order to kind of see Wow, my fingers are kinda nervous or say that Yeah, some deep core issue for you in your life is loneliness. It's really there's a prominent thing that kind of their deep inside. Let's say you have you figured out you found a job, maybe it's I don't know what but there's a you know, the public relations manager of a large firm, you're all you're doing is talking to people all the time. And, you know, it's, you know, you're always busy and always talking to people always engaged. And so it's, you know, it's kind of nice, but you never have a chance to meet to confront the fact that deep inside of you, maybe even motivating how you behave in a way that you don't even realize is some deep loneliness. That's gonna stop doing maybe doing that jobs, kind of take a vacation and be on your own for a while to realize that each one side which is loneliness, one response to that would be to go back and be really busy. Go back, throw myself back into social life. So that when doesn't have to feel lonely, it's reasonable enough. However, maybe it doesn't heal or resolve. The deep loneliness is there kind of in the background ready to be activated at the moment where you kind of don't have all that social props and supports and serves sooner or later you might find yourself in a situation where the all that around you is not there. And you might think the Find yourself a stranger to yourself, because you've never really looked at that part of yourself. And I think some people are real strangers. Maybe everyone is a

stranger to some part of themselves. They've never met it. And we take the time to meet that part of themselves. So the mind mind the heart is very much concerned about something always kind of concerned about something many things and there's layers and layers of concerns that it has And when you do something like sit and meditate or sit and go and retreat, there's the opportunity to stop so much of the normal activities we do. So some of the concerns of the mind can reveal themselves. And that meeting those concerns for themselves in all kinds of ways, they show themselves in the kind of thoughts we have. And it's amazing how repetitive or thinking can be, you're the kind of concerns that can kind of take on Vegas last month, you know, periodically, the different themes would come through, you know, and, and I would have sometimes a delusion, common delusion of permanence, delusion of permanence, which is, oh, it's gonna be this way forever. And we're always gonna be thinking about this. always concerned about this always had this problem. And then a few hours or a day later, so it's another concern that reveals itself. What happened to the yesterday. It's amazing how quickly you've left things behind them in the streets, only testing Do reveal itself. So the mind is a concern machine has raised concerns. And some of those concerns are there because of some personality disposition that we have. Some has to do with our life experience, things we've learned from our family from our society from our, you know, life experiences. And, and they're operating, some of them are latent. So they're not really always kind of obvious. They're kind of quietly in the background ready to kind of sprout up in different situations. And some of them are not exactly the latent, but sometimes they're active actually. But we don't see them. Because we're kind of blinders on and we're not paying attention to it. And sometimes, these concerns are quite obvious. And sometimes people some of you perhaps, are quite bothered by some of the concerns of the mind some of the ways in which the mind thinks the themes, the ideas The fears the emotions, concerns that it has the concerns you have, what's it all about? And mine which is concerned about something is a mind which is active in Buddhist vocabulary, they would say mind which is concerned.

It preoccupied way mine was concerned on a kind of automatic pilot, well, you can't just kind of let go of it easily is a mind which is agitated. And one summary of the Buddhist teachings, you know is that is the practice, teachings and practice, which helped bring the mind to peace. Bring the mind to there's all this restless activity, the agitated activity, the mind settle, to bring it to peace. But in order to do that, you have to meet yourself. It'd be nice some people kind of want to leapfrog right into the piece. And that'd be nice, you know, be nice to kind of dwell in peace. But maybe there is no peace, real, genuine peace, unless you've actually met yourself in some deep way. Unless you've actually kind of looked at all the concerns of the mind really been honest about and seen what is what is it? What is it the next year might operate with concerns, what drives, what drives your thinking, your concerns, your preoccupations, what drives your, your feelings, your emotions, your fantasies, your imagination, that drives all these things. And so, in doing mindfulness practice, is a practice meeting. There's a kind of this process where you kind of stop all the normal activities and try to be present for your life as it is, and that being present gives you a chance to kind of see what is going on what's happening, and you get to meet yourself. And sometimes you meet familiar friends. And sometimes you meet familiar enemies or difficulties. And sometimes you meet unfamiliar things about yourself. And sometimes things that you thought were minor concerns, can lumen realize this is really big and really major thing in my life I used to look at. Sometimes you think this is a major issue in my life, you go on retreat and you realize you actually it's not such a big deal. And, you know, there's a whole perspective on what's important. You can shift dramatically, and you really there and offer your full presence, that meeting of your with yourself, your mind, your concerns, and all that. This at a meeting I think is very important because some people who do a practice like meditation are in a hurry to let go or in a hurry to overcome whatever the difficulties or whatever their concerns are their mind so they get to the piece get to some great place to great joy or whatever they might, might be chasing after. And I think that's it's too quick and doing that process is disrespectful of the mind, disrespectful of the heart, with respectful is to

take the time to really allow yourself to have that meeting. And even if you disagree with yourself, like my teacher said, you know, if you disagree with me good, that's real meat. Even if you have a problem with yourself, something you don't like about yourself something which is, you know, there's the opportunity to meet there. And perhaps that is a place where the most important valuable meeting is going to be, to meet yourself. In meeting yourself means taking the time, to feel it, to sense it, to see it to acknowledge to be honest about it. And it's not always an easy thing. You know, the rhetoric of mindfulness practice is infuriating the simple rhetoric of the practice, we do here is suggests that we do kind of a really simple, simple, simple kind of thing that any anybody should be able to do. Right? Which all we do is we stay present for what's happening in the present moment. That's all right. I mean, what can be more difficult, not asked to do quantum physics, you asked to just be present in the present moment, just a simple thing, just what it is right? But the mind has all these concerns and preoccupations and reactions and responses that make it all very complicated, to just be stay present. And so the process of learning how to be present is, is a lot to do with going through the discovery of what makes it difficult To be present in what is it that needs to be done? What do you have to do to come to presence? What are you to discover about yourself? What do you have to resolve about yourself to help you come to presence and in sitting this month, as has happened in the past, I have tremendous respect for the value and the power of the work it takes to really come to being fully actively present. It takes a lot and it's really valuable work to that meeting and work through those things.

So, you know, what are some of the things that need to need to come into place Coming, ready to happen, so we can really be present. It's not just a matter of repetition. It's not just a matter of trying to do it, or be present and be present fully present, you know, it's not just kind of sometimes other, there's a lot of it may be a big part of it. But as you do that you can encounter things that require things of you. One of the things for some people is that it requires, sometimes it requires a lot of compassion. And you're not going to learn to be present unless you develop the kind of gentleness, softness, acceptance, compassion, love, for what's going on for yourself, for your fears, your anxieties for your animosities for whatever or for others. That unless you've defined that compassion without finding that it can be impossible to work through what needs to be worked through to kind Really arrive to really meet and be present here. Sometimes what's needed is humility. Not very popular. And, you know, the first week of the retreat for the first week I had, I hadn't been I hadn't been on retreat for a long, long retreat for a while. You know, and I'm a teacher, you know, all these people come and hear me and I teach this stuff all the time. You know, I know what to do, you know, and I got to make the most of it and show people I can still do it, you know, and, you know, so whatever. So there's always all these kind of strange ideas, but a little bit there in the background. And so that first week, I was making too much effort. try too hard. You know, I was supposed to kind of do it. And it wasn't for a second week that I realized that this wasn't pushing the grid up being the kind of the, the great shining example of adamant practice was not the point. So that the second week was about softness. Don't be soft, unnecessarily. humble, but that humility, exactly, but be softer and don't have so much self. So sometimes you have to learn how to let go of self, self image, self ideas, self representation, self kind of way we kind of build up an image of ourselves are trying to prove ourselves to someone else or defend ourselves to someone else or to someone who's so self thing goes along. And so we have to work through the selfing is activity, self identity kind of thing. It comes into play, in order to learn how to be present. Sometimes there's all kinds of issues unresolved issues that need to be addressed and Some of those issues might be come up as memories. And you might you think that memories you have to do with the past, have no role in being mindfully present for the present. Right? They're just, you know, ugly distractions. They're trying to keep you from the presence. But what happens when you do a meditation practice like mindfulness, you kind of try and be in the present moment, it's kind of like opening up a space to empty space in the mind. So that the concerns whatever is really the concerns of

the mind will flood and come into that empty space. And if there are, sometimes there are memories or experiences in the past, which have never really been resolved, never really been dealt with never really been faced properly. And so sometimes these memories will pop up in meditation. And I've you know, since the time I started meditating over 30 years ago, especially happens to beginners. You will But it can happen anytime is these memories from Long, long ago will appear. So when I was early meditator, I had a lot of memories that I'd forgotten. A lot of experience. I started remembering from when I was a child, young child just came. Wow, I remember that. Yeah. Yeah. Wow. And some of them were kind of not so nice memories that I had to look at and work with a little bit. And some of them were quite beautiful memories that I forgotten about, and actually became kind of a resource for me, because of, you know, helped me as I practiced. So they can be off and the memories popped up. They're important to make space for that. What we tried to do in mindfulness practice is then not think too much about those memories.

Get lost in the world again, that we have to meet them and make space for them and really be honest about them. No, that's what it is. Sometimes those memories of those concerns have to do with behavior of ours, which maybe was not so ethical, or so appropriate or maybe cause someone harm. And sometimes it's actually not really possible to come to really being fully present until you've gone back and somehow dealt with those interpersonal issues. And maybe you need to go back and apologize or go back and leave. Sometimes it may, sometimes it has to, or maybe you have to forgive someone. Maybe they've harmed you. And until you've actually done some act of forgiveness, and maybe some, maybe it's not possible to be fully present. And so forgiveness, sometimes the really important movement that people have to go through in order to come to this kind of simple thing of being present.

Certainly to be present you have to learn to let go a lot and that's really hard so the mind is concerned about something is concerned it's important to doesn't want to let go. And so even though you might some wisdom you have might say, Oh, I should let go of this. Some other aspects of the mind doesn't want to because it feels somehow that's important. And the more tenacious some thought pattern appear occupation isn't the mind the more some part of your psyche thinks it's important. So when you meet yourself and meet this preoccupation, more in the questions to ask or explore one of the Explorations is is can you meet that place with this is important? Why is this important to meet that place? So if you're preoccupied for example, with with work, he thinking about work or getting emotion or finding work or something that might be all kinds of obvious reasons why you're concerned about it. But perhaps the real reason why the mind is so caught by this issue of work is that maybe a parent told you when you were 10 that you're only going to be as a real human being when you have a successful job. And so you're still trying to prove or just find out or prove to yourself that you can be successful human being by and this is very deep seeds, very deep kind of idea that someone planted in your mind when you were 10. That makes us really important. And if you can meet that place, then perhaps then you can let go, maybe you can see objectively true. This is really what it takes to be a successful human being to have a successful job. So one of the things that happens sometimes when you come out of retreat like this certainly happened to me. I came out of their freedom Friday. I felt by the end I felt very peaceful, really beautiful sense of peace that I had. But it was peace that certainly came out of work. It wasn't wasn't something you just sat there quietly and relaxed. There it is. And the retreat center that it was it was very helpful for me. They had these trails that led up to the cabins where I was staying. And they had these signs. you approach the retreat cabins, and the sign said, meditators at work. And I found that helpful. That's fine. Oh, yeah. This is work. Even though it also felt like a vacation. I love doing I mean, I just love that kind of work, but definitely work. But then I came back on Friday and one of the very strong feelings I had is how much suffering there is in this world of ours. And in such a way in which the more still your own mind can become the more nonreactive and peaceful

and settled Your mind is, the more you can see how much suffering there is. And so there's word of coming to peace, I think is, is a very, very important process that helps everyone and to learn how to meet their suffering, and this is one of the things that people have to do is, in order to be present, you have to also be able to meet be willing to meet your suffering, the places where you don't want to go things you're afraid of. Learning how to be present for fear for some people, is life transforming, because they've always afraid or their fear it's not uncommon for me as a teacher, to people come to me Be on retreat. And say, I had no idea how pervasive fear is in my life. It's there all the time I didn't realize was there. But here I had a chance to see it to really see myself meet myself. Now I see and hear that you say, Well, I'm not going to go and retreat. Sounds pretty uncomfortable. Why would anybody want to put themselves through that? The reason to put yourself through that is that the fear is there regardless. And it's actually much healthier, to be honest. They see it, didn't let it fester and be there in the background kind of subconsciously or unconsciously operating anyway. And so you have to be willing to be uncomfortable, to see the discomfort to work through it and discover a whole new relationship with it.

So there's a lot of stuff that's being worked through. And it's you know, And I have a lot of respect for how rich or complex the human mind is. Even though we talk about as simple thing as just being present. To get there we really the fullness of our human humanity is met hopefully has to be met. Then once we start getting an inkling that we're meeting ourselves then we also begin to sense that there's actually two things going on there's what's being met and how you meet it. There's what's being met and how you meet it. So did use words to talk about fear. You might discover this Wow, I didn't realize was so much fear. I finally met my fear. Now how am I going to meet my fear? Can I meet it in different way can immediate with kindness can meet it with compassion, can we meet with openness as opposed to meeting it with more fear or anger? Or discouragement. So once you have this meeting this meeting happening, it's not just a matter of meeting something and seeing it. It's also a matter of seeing what can you do in yourself that can meet your experience in wiser, more compassionate, more useful ways.

And to meet yourself, to find in yourself a way to meet yourself with kindness, and compassion. Think is one of the great tasks in human life. And the ability to do it for ourselves translates directly I believe, to the ability to do for others. And I think the world has a tremendous need for people who can meet each other with care and kindness, compassion so how do we meet? So that we meet ourselves? And then questions? How do we meet once we're in that meeting. And as we do this work, there is a possibility of settling the concerns of the mind settling the preoccupations of the mind. Some of them are let go of some of the resolve, some of them are knotted, there's always knots, you know, of concerns. Some of them evaporate. There's all kinds of things that happen to them. So that we know that the mind gets less and less concerned in a preoccupied way and agitated way. There can still be kind of conventionally kind of, sort of all kinds of things that can be concerned, that doesn't disturb the peace of the mind. If you're concerned about something and disturbs the peace of your mind, then that's that's where the Work is, you try to meet that place and see what you can do. And as they agitated concerns settle out, then you start tapping into deeper deeper wellsprings of peace, of happiness, of joy, a sense of well being, of compassion and it's really great to feel inner peace. That was peace around with you. So when I went when I went when I moved into the retreat center, the first day of being my suitcase, my bags up there. I was just so happy. And it was it seemed like such a peaceful place. It's a great place to retreat. You know, just throw the fellow The peace of the place. And then the last day when I was packing up, and take most of the back of the car, walking along at all Next, the bridge in the woods Remember how peaceful had been at the beginning? placed the trees and atmosphere nice and so peaceful and didn't seem peaceful anymore? And for instance, I thought, oh no. You don't know what

happened to me. I'm no longer in touch with it. And then I realized that now it was inside of me and in some ways was stronger, was internalized rather than externalized.

And then coming back to household with two young kids, Saturday's opening up a little league season opening celebrations and the first little league game and yelling and Meaning and things aren't quite as peaceful. But then we meet that and the process of coming back from retreats coming out of meditation and having our life reveal itself. Again come back. It's actually a very important process as well as rather than feeling regret that Oh no, I'm losing my piece for this and you know, it is. It's actually part of the whole process of learning discovery and meeting yourself and taking it to a new level or new phase are different aspects. didn't always realize that. When I one of my first long retreats, I sat in Zen tradition. I hit the end of it. I felt so much intimacy with myself. Never, I've never felt so intimate with myself as I did on that retreat, I felt I knew myself was knowing myself, I could see myself depths of myself in a way that I never seen myself before. And in subtleties, whenever, and when it was clear that the retreat was ending, I teared up sadness. Because I was gonna, I was gonna lose that intimacy. I knew I was gonna lose it as I went back into more ordinary life. But I don't get sad anymore. Right. Now, I didn't know I kind of know it's okay. Now it's next phase. Now I get to meet myself in this situation. So I hope all of you have a chance to meet yourself. Say hello. And I hope that you're a

When you meet those parts of yourself, that you're a stranger to that are strangers to you. It's an ancient and wise custom in many parts of the world to offer hospitality to the strangers. So, I hope that as you meet those parts of yourself which are strangers to you, that you are your you offer your good host. So, I hope this was an okay talk kind of out of out of, out of out of habit of giving talks. Seems a little strange sitting here. But the how the strangeness will pass with time. So, thank you very much