

2007-04-23 Conceit, Restlessness and Anxiety

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I want to read a passage from the old discourses of the Buddha. And this is actually not a conversation with the Buddha that conversation between two Buddha's senior students, one named Venerable Aniruddha and the other Venerable Śāriputra. Once Aniruddha went to see Śāriputra. And they said hello to each other and such things. And then Aniruddha said to venerable Śāriputra, Śāriputra this time, by time was a fully enlightened disciple, the Buddha was teaching himself and Ruto was nothing like he was still practicing an enlightened person to some degree, but he was He was a very, very developed practitioner. Most time practicing, he developed his meditation to great extent and fairly fairly mature your spiritual life. And under that came to start, start to ask him the question for help. And the Buddha made this statement by means of my purified vision. I see the thousandfold cosmos. So that's it's not this kind of things I mentioned that often sanction discourses when we don't know quite what it means. But we can take it to mean that he has a very high level of meditation, development, strong concentration, where he has this attainment or somehow, in his mind's eye, he can see the cosmos see the universe in some vague way. I don't know what it means, but it's meant to be kind of some Great attainments. My persistence is aroused and unshaken, my mindfulness is established and unshaken, my body is calm and under aroused, my mind is concentrated into singleness into oneness. And yet my mind is not released from the effluence from the toxins because I still cling. So it's not like breakage is mine is still troubled, mind is still agitated, because he still claims has this kind of clinging grasping in his mind. So it's kind of a great question. Here's someone who actually has a high degree of attainment, meditative attainment, has strong mindfulness, strong concentration, and he recognizes that he still somehow is not liberated. One of the things that happens when people develop their practice stronger and stronger, oddly enough, people become in some ways more sensitive to, to the ways in which the mind is entrapped, captured, suffering, grasping, clinging. And then women elegy would be like, if you have a white handkerchief that's all completely dirty. You might not be so dirty that you put one more stain on it. You don't even see it don't even notice. But if you if you if you see if you bleach, wash the handkerchief, and then this could be wider than a single stain, but really stand out a lot. And so, whether you think of a Christian saying something like maybe somebody will help me get it right. Something about you know, for a saint, you know, something which is inconsequential for an ordinary person. It is like having a splinter in the eye. someone knows the thing. No one can make us make it up. And so the idea being that, the more the more sense in the more more developed spiritually someone is, the greater sensitivity they sent, the greater sensitivity there is to the painful ways in which the mind and the heart operate. And so you might think, well, gee, then maybe I don't want to become a spiritually mature person. blissful ignorance would be nice. You know, I thought we were not as moody Buddhist meditations, but they can be stress free and calm and you're telling me if I'd get stress free and calm and become more sensitive to these uncomfortable aspects of how my mind works.

It works that way. Yes. And it's, but it's a good thing that works that way because that's what allows you to purify allows you to liberate to free yourself. And as we say, you know, it's better to know. If you're suffering, if you're grasping. If you're agitated, it's better to know you are suffering or agitated or grasping, that they continue living a life, not knowing. If you are, and many, many people live their lives without really understanding, to the dimensions and degree to which are ways in which their mind at heart is in pain and suffering is grasping is resisting its defensive, lives in fear is driven by ambition and greed, aversion and hate, judgments and criticism, self judgments, and other judgments and all these things. And see if those things are going on. A step to healing step to the Liberation Front reading from all that is to be really see that really clearly. And so the more developed we become, the more sensitive we become to that. And so here's this Aniruddha, who's very sensitive to this has done great practice. But still, he's not liberated he comes to ask for help. So as I read this passage, Does any of you maybe read it again, but maybe you can diagnose this problem here. So listen carefully. By means of the Divine I purified I see the thousandfold cosmos. My persistence is aroused and sluggish. My mindfulness is established and unshaken, my body is calm and an aroused, my mind is concentrated into oneness. And yet my mind is not released from the effluence to the lack of clinging.

Just problem

you please Maybe things clinging to the thought of enlightenment could be good. Maybe that's the last clinging to standing in the way of enlightenment itself. like minutes freedom from clinging to cling to enlightenment. That's a barrier. Yes.

Don't remember that. It seemed like well, if that's the case, then he shouldn't be clinging one of the three items that are one of the items that you said he may not really have accurately

diagnosed his own state so to speak, to be

submitting meditators Miss diagnose, Miss, evaluate their meditation states or their spiritual state. Sometimes people overestimate how wonderful they are. And sometimes people underestimate how wonderful they Boy, am I ever concentrated Boy, am I ever mindful. And one of the things I've noticed as a teacher is this app and people who sometimes you have people who are rotation practices going really well. There's a lot of concentration a lot of joy, a lot of calm peace. And they'll come and tell me Oh, there's a lot of concentration, a lot of joy, like calm that peace. It's really good at practicing really well, practicing really well. Well, good. And then somebody else would come to me and say, oh, there's no concentration, there's no peace. I'm just so hard for me. I'm so agitated, so much turmoil in my life, so much physical pain, difficulty, and my mind just can't settle down. And I keep trying, but my practice is really bad. And sometimes, I complain are here that you know, people come and talk To me that way, I have kind of listen to them or look at them more carefully. And sometimes I'll see, well, the person who is calm and concentrated they're taking too much credit for that. Sometimes, you know, it's just they had a good nap, they had a good use of ages throughout the night of food and temperature was good. And maybe they went for a nice walk, and you know, and they just kind of like, cause the conditions came together for some strange reason that their mind was settled for that hour. And it wasn't some you know, wasn't because of years of practice, which is kind of like luck. You know, something, you know, you know, happens that way sometimes. And, and the other person who's struggling, who says, Oh, my practice is so poor. I look at that person say, wow, that person is practicing really well. They're really trying, they're putting themselves into it. And even though they think they're not very mindful, there's a lot of attention, a lot of mindfulness, a lot of effort to be present and through really putting a call out to try to do their best in their practice. And it's really hard for them. They're struggling. It's really hard. That's true. But their practice, again, it's, you know, bad luck, causes and conditions have come

together. I don't know why, you know, all these of the mind is operating this way. But given what their mind is given, they are doing a read, they're practicing really well. It doesn't look good, doesn't feel good, but they're practicing. And, and sometimes I have tremendous admiration for people who practice patiently,

patiently and even courageously, when their life is going through great difficulty. They don't give up, hang in there. It's very embarrassing for me to tell you this as a teacher, but maybe it's useful to have encouragement. Once or twice in the many years I've taught I have encountered a student

who

struggled for years and their meditation practice. And not so much a daily meditation practice that went pretty well was very nice for the first people. But when they went on meditation retreats, it's really hard for them and stop hunting through my hands that, you know, kill, you should advise this person to give up meditation. You know, maybe it's not working for them, they should do something else that you know, works better. But I've held my tongue because it's a thing to say to someone, someone who's, you know, devoted a lot of years to practice and really, really do it, you know, and it has a lot of faith and confidence in what they're doing and be careful. Who am I to know what their karma is of this person what they're doing so I've been hesitant sometimes. And then to find out, maybe a year later a few years later, to see the person again, and to see that the fruit of all that hard work that some have they been transformed and changed in a way that is awesome. They've really they've had to deal with a huge challenge in their inner life in their personal life. And they hung in there with great courage, working with a difficulty working with the discomfort working with men emotional pain. And then they saw to the other side and then I was embarrassed I'm glad I didn't say anything to them you know, I'm the teacher I'm suppose I'm the one who's supposed to have confidence in the practice and you know, cheer people on and keep them going and, and I was having doubts, you know? So that's why it's embarrassing. But I've seen that you know, people have really because people over evaluate their practice too easily people undervalue rather practice too easily and sometimes. Sometimes that's the value of having a teacher who kind of helped you out and make a correction for that. But now you'll never come to me.

Now that I've told you Yes.

So he's afraid he's going to lose his mindfulness is mindfulness is strong, and he's afraid he's going to lose his mindfulness and that's bothering him, keeps him agitated. Okay, very good for you.

Perhaps he had a mystical experience and,

and understood and understood that that is also transient.

Maybe he had a mystical experience. And he understood that's also transients and impermanent. And so there's some feeling that so what's that why set of problems these

may not have been a problem. It may have been an observation that he had this feeling of oneness. But moment later, he realized that, that feeling that that oneness that he was feeling is temporary.

So maybe he was something we had Enlightenment, but he didn't see it because it passed also

say that again.

He had some experience of enlightenment. Yes, but but he didn't see it as that because it passed as well. Right? Okay. That maybe thinks he needs to do something or go somewhere when actually we really need to do surrender. Maybe think he needs to attain something and get something but maybe he just needs to let go. And so that's true for many meditators that they, sometimes they get caught up into being goal oriented. And the very kind of pursuit and striving pursuit for goal and get something stands in their way of getting somewhere. It's a paradox.

Maybe he realizes he hasn't really been tested yet.

He's hangs out with a very kind crowd. The alms bowl gets filled every day.

Just listen to the Buddha every day and

know what if it all broke up for? What if the Buddha for some reason picked him out? And he wouldn't know he knows he wouldn't like that.

So yeah, that's so it happens sometimes that people can I think that there have some high degree of spiritual maturation when all the causes and conditions around them help them stay calm or peaceful. And it's you know the kind of the stereotypic example of this is a person that goes like a monk goes into the forests of Thailand or it's very peaceful and serene perhaps and spends you know, years and years and years on retreat. And it tastes great peace and serenity. And this Ranger seems to last and last. And the rainy season comes peace last in the hot season comes with P slash hot stuff. I'll never get agitated again on the thesis set in, I've got it I've arrived and then they go to, then they have some reason they have to go to Bangkok. And, and they're completely frazzled, they get irritated and angry and, you know, and they don't even know how to cope and you know, I gotta get back to the forest because this I can't handle this. And you and then they realized that city people like you might be actually getting more developed. You know, because you don't get frazzled so easily when you get one of highway 101. So you hope okay, right next to

possibly the way that it's worded, but it what came to my mind is that there is too much

of an agent behind the words. So I have my concentration, my view of being able to and In the end, I think that's what's holding you back. So there's too much self involved too much self identity. And thinking I'm in charge. I'm the one who's doing I've attained concentration. I've attained mindfulness. I've seen the great cosmos. You know, I've done all these things. And so perhaps that sense of I is standing in the way. So good. And now that's probably enough because Śāriputra then response. Tell it tells Aniruddha what his problem is. And the first thing he says is what Andrea said that, that there's too much self there. And but he says, He says more than that. He says, This is what Sariputra says in response. My friend, so nice when you start that way, he's gonna admonish his friend right? In he says, he starts to my friend. That's very nice. May everyone be admonished that way. When the thought occurs to you By means of the Divine I purify, I see the thousandfold Khan's Cosmos that is related to your conceit. So conceive can be very, very subtle, but it's not like oh, I've done something I've attained something. It seems innocent enough to do that. But it can be very gross that could seat that can be a very simple little kind of turn in the mind where I'm the one and essentially you are the one but who you know has attainment or who's concentrated or whatever. But even the idea that I'm the one who's done it is extra, it's not needed. And it gets in the way kind of muddies the water. You don't need to you know,

you know you know say that you're gonna say that you're a good Walker. Some of you guys are good walkers right? You figure it out because number And how to walk. And, you know, so, you know, you're going down the streets and you walk in. And then you say, Well, you know, I'm a good Walker. I'm a good Walker. You know, you know, what's that about? Why do you need to kind of walk, you know, congratulate yourself for being a good Walker. It's a huge it's amazing accomplishment. To walk on two legs, and it's an evolutionary kind of thing, a miracle. It's not an easy thing for living living beings to have discovered how to walk on two legs, you know, it's like a picnic was one of the pinnacles evolution. See, look at me be good Walker. So it's extra going on, you don't need to. So the same thing with meditation practice. And in fact, as meditation practice gets deeper or more more concentrated for people. One of the very important qualities needs to be used to be developed is the core quality of ordinariness. Where the distraught, sometimes very unusual kind of kind of heightened rarefied states of meditation that can occur, that they no longer seem special. They're special, you know, from some perspective, but to do them enough to repeat and re experienced them enough over and over again, that their specialness falls away. And he starts feeling ordinary, almost routine. and the value of that is as it gets more ordinary and routine, then the self sense of self. And the sense of, you know, specialness and this is wonderful and self Congratulation, all kind of so gross and subtle things and go on in relationship to it will stop and this becomes ordinary. And what happens then when it's ordinary, is the mind can relax more, and then it's easier to let go further. But it's harder to let go in a deep way. When you can think oh, this is special. This is neat. And it's not unusual for some people who meditate to experience some unusual state of calm or joy or peace. And then get excited and then they pop out of that you know it's gonna like kind of destroy it because you get so excited oh look oh wow, I can't wait to tell someone then what happened to it. So conceit but then Śāriputra goes on with a thought occurs to you my persistence is aroused and sluggish. My mindfulness is established. unshaken, my body's common unperturbed in mind is concentrated into oneness that is related to your restlessness.

Interesting, the restlessness and you think it's such a pristine state, you know, oneness, concentrated, unperturbed, how could there be restless isn't there? restless is can be very, very subtle, very subtle movement of the mind. Looking, searching, wanting, wanting something to happen not quite satisfied with what is happening and what makes me different or something more somehow kind of an even even the even the effort to evaluate and judge your experience? Oh I concentrated I mean one Miss even though you know it's it's a reasonable thing to do to see that it's also in deep meditation and Mike it's very still it becomes extra needed like you're saying you know the good Walker is needed so he calls it restlessness here and then when the thought occurs to you and yet my mind is not released from the effluence from the toxins, the poisons by means of freedom from freedom from clinging that is related to your anxiety. Someone said something like I didn't know. So I was anxious and so some people's relationship to spirit growth, development, freedom, liberation is one of anxiety. They're there, they somehow they feel that their safety, their salvation is going to come through experience to having some kind of thing happen to them. And so they're anxious about getting it, they're anxious about, you know, not getting it worried or don't get it, then don't look good or get it that won't be saved, go good. If you don't get it, then, you know, my life will have any meaning or there's many things people assigned to meaningless people assign to spiritual attainment, spiritual realization, and, and here he calls that anxiety. So in order so, in order to go further, this man has already fairly well developed. He has to take it he has to learn how to let go of his conceit, his sense of self and self identity, and he has to learn how to let go of his restlessness, which might not CTOs like so much restlessness. The subtle movement and agitation of the mind has to let go. The rest, perhaps surrender a certain degree of anxiety or fear that's maybe in the background. And all three of these can be very hard to see. Certainly, I think all of us can see gross experience of conceit, restlessness and anxiety. But for someone who's well developed and trained in spiritual practice, and sometimes it can be very hard to see the subtlety of how this works.

And

in the first one in particular, I think is a big one for many people, the way in which the sense of self which interferes with the very growth of spiritual development and growth.

Yes, Nick.

I've been wondering how how much longer the discussion will go before we Realize that we have to talk about what happens to meditators when we become a parent,

with a parent or the parent or parents, but there's this presence,

which changes the whole dynamic of our lives. Generally speaking, if I'm not exaggerating too much,

that must be figured in.

Yes, I agree. And, and the conceit and restless anxiety are factors that come into play when you're a parent as well. And, and they, they sometimes can get masks masks are justified or, or you're justified or seen as this is the way things have to be supposed to be this way. When you're a Parent because you think, Oh, I'm supposed to be anxious for my child. And you know, it's okay to be conceited in some ways for my child to take my child's very special, I'm special or whatever. And, you know, supposed to be kind of restless somehow built into it all. And I've seen in myself and I've seen in other parents

a

kind of a inability or hesitation or kind of having blinders on, where people somehow are blinded by the responsibility of being a parent, to not really turn the light attention back on themselves, to really see what they're doing in their own minds and their own hearts. That's extra needed. And so that's one of the hopes I think a mindfulness practice is to be able to turn the attention back in all kinds of situations. And so here we're talking about meditation practice. And you know, one of the main things we do here is meditation practice. But what do you learn about yourself meditation practice will help you understand yourself outside of meditation practice. So if you can see if you can see the forces that keep you from being in deep peace in meditation, it gives you a vantage point to it much better kind of to highlight or see more carefully how you lose that piece when you're parenting, for example, and the forces that come into play. And so some parents, for example, the conceit operates that they need to look good. They won't be a good parent. And you know, it has idea where it needs to be good parent parent and I've certainly succumb to that kind of difficulty, or restless, you know, kind of there's all kinds of restless system and being parent thinking and worrying and, you know, went on this retreat last month. And David, one of the i was i was on retreat, Monday through to Friday and so I was home in the weekend because my kids are young and then I volunteered Monday morning usually what they do is to go to the retreat Sunday evening after the kids were asleep but one last Sunday off last day overnight and bring my oldest son to school in the morning because he was going to go on a three day camping trip for the school and the first three days away from us ever, you know nine years old so big big step right. And so I went drove there and the bus there was gonna take them to where they're going to go wasn't there yet. So all these kids 630 in the morning all these kids were there in the school parking lot. So we're hanging out there and they didn't go up to Ukiah was was really cold in March. And so I saw him off. And then I went back to my retreat. And for the next half the day of the retreat, I couldn't get concentrated. My mind was restless. And it was kind of you know, oh no, I didn't pack

warm. sucks it's rating, you know, and he's gonna be cold and, you know, wet these, they're gonna get, you know. So all this anxiety arose and it was really hard. It was really hard for me to get to turn back and see deep inside of myself What was going on? But tell me why you asked me the question.

You answered it very well

except that I was thinking also of

how the child

as he or she was growing up, starts out very conceited and very self centered. And typically, they grow out of that, and it served for me as a model of compressed in a shorter time period, of course, of how I need to work out conceit in my inner In a different scale, sort of for an adult to work it out as for a child, but still, it's a very vivid example because we relate very personally to what's happening with the child. Right? And we have to try to coach them along to grow out of this as well as watching our own selves.

Yes. So if I understand what you're saying is that you're, you're saying that you're suggesting that children go through a phase where they develop a strong sense of self and being the center of the world and their world and your call may be conceived to something kind of sense strong sense of self and then at some point developmentally as possible the child to relax that as well and sort of softens and maybe some of the unhealthy forms of it kind of might disappear. And then in that the term normal, maybe somewhat normal developmental process which children can they be similar normal developmental process for adults? Who didn't do it healthfully. when they were kids in New York, see it through to the end with their kids. And I think there's some truth to that. And when I was living at the San Francisco Zen Center, I practiced there for many years. It was kind of a residential community. Back then, especially when I was young. I went there when I was about first time, I think it was about 20. And there were a lot of young people practicing back then still are. And, and one of the teachers there observed to be said to me one day, that a lot of people will come to the Zen center and practice there for a number of years. And after about three to five years, many people leave. And what's happening for most of these young people when they come through in the early years, they're not really practicing Buddhism, what they're doing is finding themselves. There's tremendous need to find a leader from their culture, their society, their kind of counterculture people sometimes back then. And they're kind of trying to find themselves and find yourselves in community. They don't have community. And so the whole idea of living in community in a Buddhist community and working there was their attempt to try to find themselves. And once they kind of have some sense of who they were and what they're about, and some healthy kind of relationship to themselves and other people often involved a lot of people a rediscovery uniting or kind of cleaning up their relationship to their own parents. And sometimes it was cleaning up their relationships, their own religion that they grew up in. And I saw people who would go back and re establish connection to parents they weren't talking to. I saw people who would actually find, after a few years of Zen practice, with through that practice through the kind of what was revealed or what they understood through a spiritual life. They began to appreciate the value of the religion they grew up when they went back to the Christianity or back to the Judaism. So kind of finding themselves finding some new way right. And then a teacher told me so teachers always make people leave after they find themselves. But those people who stay After that, that period of fighting themselves that three to five years, those are the people who finally start practicing Buddhism. Because Buddhism is not about finding yourself, but, but, but something further you have to, but you have to have some sense of strength, inner strength in order to be able to really go further. You can't be a complete confused person. Sometimes you have people who are so confused and lost. And they think, Oh, this is you know, I can't I don't fit in anywhere. I don't even know who I am. And this Buddhism is a

godsend to me because I can be a nobody. I could be a non self, I don't have to find myself I can just kind of be you know, empty and, and then empty and happy, right? And they're just most of those people do a disservice to themselves and to others, that kind of attitude. But but you don't want to take that. So I don't know if you're talking personally about yourself. But you got to be careful with that. You get that kind of rationalization that oh, I have to do all this work first. about self establish myself. And eventually I'll get to the real important work of freeing my heart. May be careful that kind of revelation ation when you get to your age.

I'm still waiting for the instruction book about how to raise my son and granddaughter to and I still don't know.

So when I was sitting this retreat and this is probably the inspiration to read this passage to you today, when I was sitting this retreat in March there was one period of the retreat where I was slowly catch on that's often the case when you read when there's some kind of difficulty in meditation practice you kind of slow to catch on. But the hindrance was my sense of self that was operating happened in a number of ways that this operated and sometimes I made too much effort and meditation teacher, you know, it should be easy for me right? I should get in there that concentrated you know, so that's conceit. Right You know? So that was there and that took a couple of days to kind of notice that it was operating the background and now better not tell anybody that'd be really embarrassed. More conceived right. And certainly the idea of anxiety Oh no, this is pretty rare for me to be able to go on a hump whole month of retreat, I better make the best of this

better try harder.

And as soon as I try harder, you know, that just makes it worse. So you know, there was a kind of an after about five days or so there was a few days there. Were so often happens on retreat also, people That retreat is a fantastic place to start separating out the. Or, to clarify, it's kinda like you're purifying yourself. And as you purify yourself or purify the gold, for example, you start seeing the impurities. It's hard to see it otherwise in daily life, it's hard to see what's going on. And so you might have a certain way of practicing or certain way of understanding yourself or some way of carrying yourself in the world, which is not really a problem in daily life and you kind of You're always so distracted anyway, it's not really going to be an issue. But as the mind gets simpler and simpler on retreat, some of the hindrances in our life, some of the obstacles, some of the wind, drag some things that are holding us down our back, become more more obvious. And that's part of the beauty of retreats is to have that purification and simplification process so we can see exactly what it is that we're doing. And then work with it and perhaps surrender it, let go of it. And I think it's a beautiful process. Because it's a process that step by step we take responsibility, we understand ourselves more and more deeply, in which we are taking responsibility for ourselves in some deep way. Sometimes there are attempts to kind of, or desire to have spiritual bypasses. And you know, and so somehow going to do it quickly, you know, you know, LSD or sometimes you have certain gurus that will zap you, you know, just do the work for you. This is great charisma and they do something and you leave. And, you know, LSD and charismatic gurus are great, have their place. But sometimes people will hang out with those things as a way of avoiding responsibility and avoiding the more grounding work really understanding themselves in a deep way. And so sometimes this practice that we do here is a slow practice. And but I think in the Slow, step by step is a practice we're really beginning to understand ourselves step by step deeper and deeper ways and do that purification or clarification work and take responsibility for how we manifest ourselves and what we do and for cleaning. And it's a great thing. And I've been so inspired by so many people, many of you who have practiced so well and who have matured so wonderfully through this practice. And I

think if the confidence is there, the practice will take you wherever you want, wherever you need to go.
Thank you for this evening and thank you for your answers.