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## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

And I thought that we could take a little bit of time now for some discussion of if you have any you feel to talk about what happened in the morning meditations or the teachings in the morning or more generally about this anapanasati stuff if you have questions. Would be nice time to do that. Yeah, rainbow.

I really got into the

spacious awareness

choiceless awareness. I liked

something about the way you introduced it, and especially reminding us that you had to be sort of present to do it. I wondered why you chose to remind us of that and then in the middle Have the meditation like I understood why. And I had

a glimpse

of how, how to continue to maintain that because it was a lot of motion in the room, that's when you left to deal with that person. things were happening. noise in the street, think maybe I had an

airplane, maybe a train,

and it just put me in mind of how big the world is and how much motion there's constant change. Coming back to your breath or keeping to your breath in the midst of that is sort of a grounding.

an anchor. Perfect, yes.

Good. Immediate choices. choiceless awareness. There's nothing it's nothing that's a distraction. Every everything's included everything here so you know, noise outside. It. anything going on, it's just almost like it's almost like it's welcome. Like something has to happen. Something needs to come into awareness and it doesn't even matter what. But some, some people are like when they do choiceless awareness, like sounds a lot, because sounds are kind of neutral and new kind of way, but they're not painful, you know, just kind of so and there's also they're kind of spacious, kind of very open and, and, and very receptive and also sounds in a sense, you know, hearing happens here the sound is often far

away and some people had sense that their mind it's just as big as the distances of sound is. I saw Mary here

I didn't have the desire to fact I, I felt

flooded with too much

Hear that? A Creek. It's like every single sound noise sensation. And it felt like too much. And I thought, well, I'm obviously not doing this right. So I need help.

I didn't know how to deal with that.

Well, I don't know if this is a good answer, but it might be a transition thing. It might be that you've been holding things at bay. And that have that kind of openness is something new for you. And, and it's it all kind of comes pouring in. And maybe it's a matter of like, doing it for a while and finding finding where the balances within it. Find your way within it. There are some people who have hypersensitive nervous systems or sensory things. And so maybe this kind of practice is counterindicated for people who have you know, that kind of, you know, over and over, but get hypersensitive But so maybe you're that kind of one of those kinds of people just you know, one way of being and but so those are two things that occurred to me that you might try the first way and see if it's just a matter of settling down in the middle of it. I can imagine that some people there are some people who have very deep to say, this way, we all have some kind of deep operating attitude about the world. And sometimes it's hard to kind of see it what it might be. And so I don't know you know you well enough but but I notice I can imagine someone for whom the world is too much is coming on with one's might be operating under the attitude of the world's oppressive was was a debt to me. Was it do something to me? Oh, that hit a button.

So, so it might be interesting to look and see if there's an underlying attitude which is adding to the difficulty, not not not the sound and stuff, but it's the attitude. There's a lot to explore. And in the end of the exploration you might find that has to do with your nervous system and maybe you're better off not being so open or being open later. Some people you know, I mean, I've been so I sometimes I just feel so raw. And so whatever, whatever reason that it is too much to take in stuff. And then other times where I'm kind of very relaxed and settled and then it's like, you know, bring it on.

Yes, it could be. Could be.

All these practices are seasonal and sensitive. I guess you know all in a season all you know it's it's there's a time and place for different practices and now to take any of these presses being this is the way this is the way it's supposed to be and I'm a meditation failure because this instruction down looking for me it's just like oh I guess enough my season for that one green vote was tomorrow lumpy. And someone someone pointed out, I think, for the lunch break that you know that your ability to concentrate and our ability to be pay attention is also impermanent. And so are variable. And so, you know, some people have a video on them because a concentrate that's supposed to do been supposed to do it until the end of the clock, enter the time wherever long, but there's a kind of a natural kind of rhythm there's an actual kind of you know, it's the mind gets kind of tired or you know, after a while, and so Then it gets weaker and pips off. The it's like, you know, if I do a running practice, I haven't run for a while, I get tired after five minutes. If I render I've known for a while if I've done a lot of practice, then I can, I can run for an hour. And so it's just how well how well conditioned I am. So, for example, when I go on retreats, I often like to sit longer than the, you know, 45 minutes or something an hour, but I have to really wait a while into the retreat or sit longer. And when I sit in long periods of meditation, I have to

track myself very carefully, that then I break the sitting when, when the concentration begins to wane. Because it will, and, and sometimes it wanes after five minutes, sometimes after 30 minutes, you know, sometimes after 10 minutes, you realize, I think that's make more effort here. You don't want to justify you know, you know, because you're lazy, but what I'm trying to say is concentration has a natural ebb and flow to it. And part of meditation practice is to be gracious and how to work with the natural ebbs and flows. And not feel like it has to be constant. So even like even mindfulness, the strength of mindfulness goes up and down. And sometimes in the mornings are for some people are a good time and the afternoons are my post not so strong construction are so strong the book The other way, sometimes, you know, it's, it could be that there's just the way your setup 36 minutes is really good. You know, and then 36 minutes your, your mindfulness kind of begins to kind of get weak, and so not too bad. So that was part of the point of all this, we try to do our very best with practice, do our best effort, but don't be so concerned about how it's going. And in effort also goes up and down. And what looks like you best you know, your best out here someone's teacher say Oh, do your best effort and then you You know, I got a really plug away now and tense up and really tough and tough. And, and, but best effort is the best effort that's available. Not so and it goes up and down. So it might be that you have really good, nice efforts, you know what looks like really good African morning, in the afternoon, you still have available the same level of effort. But that what you have available is the best effort available at that moment. So it's important to what I've discovered is that what's important is the continuity of your best effort, not necessarily the quality of that level of the effort you have just you giving it the best you have available at that particular time. So if I'm sick, the effort doesn't need no effort, in some ways doesn't look so pristine. For mindfulness meditation, it doesn't matter matters that I'm offering you the best. It's available at that time. And I don't beat myself up if it doesn't look great. Just come right Why am I doing the best I can Along with

my questions changed since I've been listening to every question. It's come up a lot. For me in the past. I'm not sure it's the same as with choiceless awareness. But I've always had the question. How do we stay present are mindful? While we're engaged in conversation? I find that very difficult and very challenging part about and I also was wondering about how to stay conscious of visual change the same way I can do hearing things I find hearing things fun and easy. I find visual ones. I get hooked into almost everything I'm looking at. But I'm more curious about the spoken word since that generally gets me as a spoken word, having conversations,

for many people is the hardest area to be mindful in conversation. And so certainly there's a lot to be said, but certainly whatever practice you're doing Going outside of conversation hopefully carries over so you're more present calmer and more mindful. And that's kind of helps you. And then there's a you know, a lot of things that can help in conversation. One of them is stay connected to your body. The more you're connected to your body, the more information the more presence you'll have when my posts you have. Keep coming back to your body. Come back to your breathing with your breathing while you're listening. It's often good to pause before people allow you. And I can imagine that even starting bad habits of me before you speak might actually be a little kind of mindfulness or something.

Huh?

No, no, no. People think you're very thoughtful. And you're just seeing maybe just checking in what my feeling was. People will give you the people will give you that if you have the right tone or you never

say that we should listen twice as much, twice as much as we speak, because we have two ears and one mouth.

For me, it was quite an amazing first sitting because pay, I got into very easy breathing and it was very enjoyable because it was flowing so well. And then my mind all of a sudden said, Oh, well with every breath out breath with every exhalation I'm closer to the end of my life. And so I was feeling this. Every outbreak was a loss with a loss a loss And in so I stayed with that for a while. And then I thought, How ridiculous to cling in then I really hard greathead ellory method, how can I cling to a breath? Yeah, I can't cling to a breath. Right. And so it, type it that put it somewhat in perspective. And I got into other things and it I still, you know, enjoy the breathing in and breathing out but there was a slight sense of loss through the whole through that whole meditation. Right, but the

I would treat that as being significant. I wouldn't say it's an insignificant thing, it's part of your process, part of what you're working with. And, and, you know, you are you are on the second half of life. And so the whole contents, the first 10 so this whole, you know, contending with issue of death and dying is a very important one. And feeling its proximity is part of impermanence, and how do we deal with that didn't resonate and your feelings that might come up as part of you know, the ripening process. And my hope is that people who meditate a lot will discover how beautiful is to exhale.

Yeah, I hope they I hope this translates to you he says how beautiful it is to let go. You know that that when a time comes to die, that it's well worth it. So it's often said in Buddhism that the mindfulness of breathing practice developing mindful breathing is a way of preparing today

had a question about You mentioned holding on to a pole in the wind, when you were saying at the beginning of meditation, I wondered if you could say more about that.

Right off isn't that was the best metaphor. But the idea being that, that there's a lot going on here, especially as choiceless awareness practice I said earlier, and, and so it helps to have some stability. And so we want to find find someplace that we can stabilize attention. So that we're not too easily kind of pushed around by what goes on in the world goes around with us. So breath meditation for some people is a great stabilizer to stay there. And so we hold on to that or we kind of stay there. Maybe hold us up the best metaphor here, but we stay grounded, they're centered there. And because they have that grounding, then all kinds of stuff can happen but we're not going to either chase after it'll be pushed around by it. pushed off balance by but we don't have that Stability someplace, then it's too easy to kind of float, be pushed around by all stuff. And then eventually you know, you won't need the pole or need the stability if you're really still, but until you really still sometimes it's really important to have some place that the mind can be connected to that provides sort of the breath can be that or the body can be that

when when I was counting breaths,

I found that my mind got stuck in numbers and I don't know it got mathematical and I wondered if, if there was a maybe a more natural way or if you had a suggestion of a different way of focusing on the breath. would be more like what you were saying about natural awareness rather than willing yourself to be aware, because when you said that I felt the difference. And I just wondered if

you could share anything about that.

Ties a little bit to the earlier one video of stability. That's particularly important. When the mind is really agitated, and a lot of thoughts, we kind of wander away and a lot of thoughts. And so we get caught up in the thoughts involved in the thoughts just not very productive for meditation practice. So you won't have someplace that's not thinking where the mind can come back to as a reference point, come back,

come back, stay there, stay there, don't get don't get pulled away. Don't get pulled off this way now. Now for some people whose mind wanders off a lot and thought even just go home and come back to the breathing is not enough. Sometimes counting the breath is a way of staying on track, because little extra effort has to go in there. Remember the count to keep it going and all that. Some people find it very helpful to count it's a motor concentration practice. Sometimes I'll teach it to people to do that. In our tradition, what we do more than counting is as an aid to staying with the breath is we use what's called mental noting a very subtle quiet and one word thought in the mind, that keeps us connected to the breath rather than mixing, letting a thinking to take us away. So we breathe in we just say the word in out or sometimes go like say, rising as as the belly or chest rises for the in breath. And then falling as it as it falls is surprising falling and that very simple, very soft, very, very soft. Kind of nudging encouragement stay there. Stay there stay there is sometimes used tradition. Yes.

It occurs to me that when you're answering her question that another topic that we had talked about earlier and I think was mentioned here was the quality was yes was the quality of the body being able to breathe itself. And that witnessing that was also very powerful way to stay connected and concentrate without numbers or they will fall and that was

very helpful. Being brief, rather than breathing within free

if I might, I have another issue

You talk about being able to sit with pain. I don't think it's particular to me. Maybe some of the other women also have had this experience of how

to sit through hot flashes.

And they can be very, very

compelling. And

I guess what it brings up for me is I have to move, I have to do something. And you've never talked about that in sense of pain where a pain level gets to the point where you have to move.

And I find that

somewhat,

it really is relieving and there's but yet I think, is this doing a meditation?

Well, certainly, if anytime Is any hint? slightest little hint that you might be damaging yourself or sitting with pain? The person should change. We should err on the side of being careful with that. You know, if we think we're damaging ourselves, though whenever there's discomfort when we're meditating, I think it's helpful to give some, you know, it's not so not helpful, just kind of stoically kind of bear through it and push through with what I'm supposed to and you know, just, but it's very helpful to consider. What's the opportunity here for me in staying with the pain or staying with the discomfort? Is there an opportunity? If you see the opportunity, then sometimes appropriate even the heroically with great effort, sit there and sit with the pain for a long time, super discomfort for a long time, or only if you feel like it's an opportunity you're content you're working with. So for example, it might be opportunities to learn

patience, it might be an opportunity to understand how you react to a challenge. And it's a real you know, some of you sitting meditation, even though you have an easier easily choose to pull away from discomfort. It's a laboratory to discover how you tend to react, the judgments, the thoughts, the emotions, the beliefs, all the stuff that kind of clicks in, and you see it really clear in meditation, then you can that translates into daily life, you will be able to seal those reactions daily life and have more choice around it more freedom around. Sometimes the opportunities to understand something more deeply like with discomfort, like with physical discomfort, it might be that you've never a person's never really looked at it so carefully really see what's really going on here. So what comes to mind is like walking meditation, there might be some pain in the hip as you're walking meditation. And so I think I should pay careful attention to this. And so, think here potentially find it actually, there's a funny way in which the leg kind of do Twist it outwards. And if I twist the leg inward, it doesn't have pain. But that discovery only happens by staying present and looking at it, not by escaping from it. It might be the opportunity is the opportunity to develop more concentration. People get very concentrated with discomfort. It's possible the opportunities to let go of some deep seated attachment to comfort. You know, I'm so attached to comfort, I think, I think I'll experiment and see you know, can I let go of discomfort or it might be there's a strong feeling of, of self identity with a pain or negative identity with the pain and the opportunities to really look at how identity sense itself comes into play. You're on it. And it can only really see it clearly if I stayed with the pain. So if there's no damage, and if you see there's opportunity there. It's possible to sit with so much pain. I've done this, so much pain, that I was dripping so much sweat that I got up there was sweat all around me my cushion. And so that's I don't know if that was a hot flash, but

it was it was pretty hot.

I think you're right there.

And it's the lack of control. Oh, some

change. Yeah.

So it might be the opportunities to look at the whole issue of control and lack of control and maybe that's what needs to happen give up control. So, so, but if you don't see the opportunity in the practice, you don't see how it's a practice for you to explore something, develop something, don't do it out of a sense of duty or should that you know, meditate is not supposed to move. That's silly.

You talk about discomfort

in a actual sense, instead of encouraging us to see it as just one sensation among many.

Well, that's the end of opportunity.

The what you were describing was engaging with it as a reified,

saying I was just trying to go through a list of terms stretch, stretch my mind to go through a list of possibilities that someone else might say the opportunity is to, is to just see it kind of equally with all other sensations and things arising and passing enough discomfort. Or the opportunity is to be free with this and just let it be a normal thing. As I like to say, you know, if your person is only free when it's comfortable, it's not really freedom. So we have to sooner or later in meditation, it's really healthy, really appropriate to work in meditation with discomfort. If a person thinks imitations only supposed to be

comfortable departmental managers Doing themselves a disservice. There's a whole area of learning that would be really useful to cultivate. It's also good to be comfortable. That's also a whole area of learning and opportunity there too. So, take the opportunities that come.

There was an extraordinary booklet

I think was called

something like simple awareness on the desk. And I read it with a great deal of attention and interest.

And he, the, the monk was saying about the breathing

and impermanence and he said something like

You die with every breath.

And I was wondering,

not sure. If he was talking about like the space in between the in breath and the out breath. Or with there's nothing there. I'm not sure what he meant by that. But the expression was pretty compelling and I thought I would find out what was behind it.

I don't think I read the book. I can't be sure what's behind it for him, but, but it's not so common. It's common enough to have Buddhist teachers say something similar to that and has to do with when we started realizing how thoroughly things are passed away and then reappear that in some ways recurse there's a constant dropping of everything and then it re appearing or reconstruction everything moment by moment. isn't just breath by breath. And in a sense, you usual ways in which people think of themselves as existing is living is a construct. And if you're really staying in the flow of life flow of experience without constructing any concepts around it, all the kind of constant just keep dying away, keep passing away. And so you see that really deeply, thoroughly. Something very different happens about how we think about death, we'll get into in depth that one big, big data is going to come. Because I think that it's just another one of those moments. And if you know really well how thoroughly things dissolve, you know, then, you know, in each moment, then it's almost welcoming to the idea of dissolving just just one more dissolving just that just happens to be that doesn't reappear, but it's just it's nothing different than all The other moments of complete dissolving to make a sense