

2014-10-12 Generosity

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning, everyone. And I was inspired today to have the theme, be generosity. It's one of the cardinal virtues of Buddhism, and closely woven together with other virtues like compassion, generosity, generosity and loving kindness, even liberation. So I'd like to start with leading you through a little guided reflection. So I know you've just been meditating but if you don't mind to close your eyes again and maybe take a couple of deep breaths, settle in again.

Settling back in. Breathing for a few moments here just mindfully connecting to whatever sense of calm and interconnectedness that's available to you sitting here.

So, as you're sitting here bring to mind I'm gonna ask you to use your memory to bring to mind some event a particular event in your life doesn't have to be dramatic or special whenever it comes to mind and the event is some time when you were the recipient of an incidental act of generosity. Someone did something for you gave you something, it was just this very small thing was just in passing, maybe or if you can remember a particular time where you received an incidental act of generosity, remembering the time the place, what it felt like for you

and what was it like for you to receive this act of incidental generosity? Small generosity. How did you respond? What did you think? What did you feel

Then take maybe a deep breath and let go of that. And then see if you can now remember, live at a time in your life where you performed in in incidental act of generosity. You did a small thing or someone gave something to someone. It's something for them, offer them something.

If you can visualize the circumstance, maybe it helps or just think about it the time and the place.

What was it like for you to perform an incidental act of generosity? How did you feel? What do you think? What happened to you and doing that?

Take a deep breath and let go of that.

And now See if you can bring to mind some events some time in your life when you were the recipient of a major act generosity. It was a big deal for the person who did this for you, big deal for you to receive it.

And maybe you can visualize the circumstance or think about the time and place.

Then what was it like for you to receive this major act of generosity? How did you feel? What was your response?

Taking a deep breath, letting go.

And now bring to mind some time in your life where you performed a major act of generosity big deal for you and for the recipient for you to give or act on this generosity.

And what was it like for you to perform this major act of generosity? How did you feel how your insides respond? What was it like for you?

And then taking a deep breath, letting go and then the last couple of minutes so this little exercise, reflect on what it was like for you to do this exercise or came up for you and what it might teach you what you might learn about your own experience so generosity and how it is for you how you respond to it. So some lesson for you about yourself about generosity.

And then then this little session you can take a deep breath Ready to open your eyes.

So, for four forms of generosity, incidental act of generosity that you're the recipient of an incidental act of generosity that you're the giver in, in a major act of generosity that you're the recipient of, and major act of generosity, you were the giver of four different things. So what I'd like to suggest next is that if you're a poor fit, that you form a little group of three or four people with the people right near you and share something about what came up for you and that exercise what you learned what it was like, what happened for you. But we only have a short time. So what this means is be careful, you don't spend a lot of time telling this story. You know that you because we all have those maybe stories, some event that happened to you. And some people, some people, it's fine this people find that they kind of process better and telling a story than other ways but because of limited time is everyone in your group has time to talk. See if you can be brief and not maybe not even tell the story. But what came up what you learn what, what was it? What was the impact of that exercise size, and you're not to share anything you don't want to share? And ideally, you'd go around a little group of three or four few times in a time. So brief statements and go around, see what happens in that little container. And then if you don't want to do that, you're welcome to sit quietly and meditate until we can begin to come together for the rest of this talk. So why don't you please if you could do that

Thank you for doing that. Whether you participated or not that you were here. So

as I said at the beginning, generosity is one of the cardinal virtues of Buddhism, both as a virtue because it expresses the goodness of our heart that it gets more and more revealed, as we practice as we open up as we become freer. And also, it's also seen as one of the primary or very important supports for the process of letting our goodness come out of letting us become becoming freer. That path of liberation is said to begin with generosity. And there's something to it because the operation has a lot to do with not holding on tight to something. And so when we give, we release what we have. And so people say it's very connected to this liberation thing. In their recent years, as many of you know, there's a whole movement of positive psychology where they study positive traits. And as with studies and compassion and things like that, there's also more and more studies on generosity. And, in fact, the University of Notre Dame and is in Illinois or Indiana and those places where Indiana is has a thing called the science of generosity project. Go on their website and see this you know, their articles and stuff. And so there's all these studies being made and people are doing studies for a long time. And one

of the areas of a lot of studies has to do with generosity within religious groups in America. The one of the things are coming up with is that there's people get a lot of benefits from being generous. And they say that people are healthier, both physically and psychologically when they are generous people who are generously correlated to their strong sense of well being. And they speculate a number of reasons for that. One is because there's a more positive personal feeling of oneself positive regard or self esteem, that comes with being generous, doing good things. And other is that it's a way of feeling much more connected to other people. So that Jack's generosity is a practice of connectedness. So that heightened sense of connections, supports all kinds of well being not just psychological but also physical. And then one of the, one of the reasons they think that generosity is healthy, is they seem to think that generous people are more active. Maybe you have to do something He's did to be generous, you know, except writing a check, perhaps it's good for your fingers. But But often people are generous to the volunteering and all kinds of ways. And I'm impressed by how much volunteering there is in America tremendous amount. And, but there are other reasons as well as I think that and one of them is that and the sorts of Buddhist practice it is very important Buddhist practice to have a sense of a network or community of people with practicing it with. And so to feel that your practice is connected to the world to his community of people around you, in your city, in your town, your nation wherever, is very good for the sake of practice, because it gives your practice a sense that it's not just for yourself, but it's also for the welfare of others as well. And I think that boys and fuels practice quite nicely. There's a lot of self learning that goes on in practicing generosity and even if you Don't want to be generous. But actually you can't practice generosity. You can practice giving generosity, you know that what they say is generosity can never believe be an obligation. Because then it's not being generous. But but giving can be an obligation. And in fact, it's an obligation sometimes to expect it doesn't mean that it's wrong to do that. It just has a different dynamic in the heart. But you can practice giving as a way to awaken this quality of generosity. And so some people take on the practice of giving. And there's a lot of self learning in that process. We learned, for example, that we don't want to give that we're maybe stingy or afraid, or greedy or all kinds of things that come up in the context of it is useful to bring those things to the forefront to understand ourselves better as a result. The

One of the nice things about generosity I think, is that it's in the class of emotions. Which are connected to empathy, or empathic concern for others. And from Buddhist terminology. I mean, when I was a new practitioner in the early years of my life, I used it. I used to talk about how the practice opened my heart, I felt much more open hearted, felt much more connected, I felt more receptive, I could feel more fully the other people, their situation, their state of being. And if they suffered, I could feel that and I feel compassionate, they felt joy, I could feel that and I was delighted and void by that. And this capacity for empathy is directly connected to compassion. It's connected to gratitude, like many, many part of these positive emotions that people feels and, but it requires a certain kind of openness. And if you think about the opposite of generosity, most people think about things like stinginess and miserliness or fear and All those are movements of closing up, stingy or close up, you tighten up you kind of resist if you're afraid also calm, protective closing and feeling and the movement of Buddhist practices in the opposite direction is to not be closed, not be tightened down, but rather to relax and open up. And dependent being the candidate gesture of practice would be the chest is open, arms are out wide, as opposed to crossing your arms in front of your chest, you know, you know, here you are and no one's going to get in, but kind of available and open. And even at times when we're feeling sad, or even depressed, it's possible to sit there with empathy and being very strong by sitting and being open, as opposed to being closed. And so this movement towards being open, receptive, sensitive, available to feel and sense the world around us. is key to do the positive psychology of Buddhism at least two things like compassion and generosity. Another benefit that comes from generosity is that when it's done it cleanly when it's done as part of this empathic concern for others, just as with compassion, compassionate activity that's clean, that comes from empathic concern without any distress, as part of it tends to produce a sense of

well being in a compassionate one or well being and the generous one, a sense of lightness or joy, or wholeness or, or connectedness or ease or some kind of a kind of neuro. I don't know exactly doing different people's feel a different way, but something that's nourishing, satisfying to feel. And if it's giving, it's obligatory, it's hard to feel that but if it's giving that's inspiring that flows from us, then we feel this nourishment that comes from it. And so some of these Positive psychology studies. I don't know if I haven't heard of this kind of concisely said, but, but concise kind of cliché would be if you want to be happy give Dalai Lama Dalai Lama says if you want to be happy, be compassionate. But you know, compassion and giving are closely connected. Because to act on your compassion is a form of generosity. And if, and maybe some of the good feelings that come from being compassionate is not from the compassion per se, but the generous act that one's doing as a result of being compassionate, genuine concern for others. I don't know which comes first or how they know what actually goes on in this inner ecology. But I've felt very warm, nourishing kind of feelings in myself in my heart and my chest. In being in just kind of vicariously or not so spontaneously, being generous to offering something People, and I felt the opposite. I've been I thought I was generous. But, you know, I left feeling Oh, maybe I shouldn't have or why did I do that? Or maybe it was the wrong time or I you know, that was maybe I didn't have to do it and then I, you know, I could feel the difference with inside of me because going to kind of move more close resistant, hesitant or something. But when I really kind of comes from me freely, then there's kind of a nice feeling inside the first time so I started feeling this. I was quite surprised. I was kind of confused. Like, what, why am I feeling so good, I thought I was helping them. And turns out, I was helping myself as well.

And this is one of the principles I think of least some of schools of Buddhism, that self help and other help. Helping others and helping oneself are closely intertwined, that there can't be one without the other. In fact, sometimes the idea is that when you really give Completely, that there's no separation between the giver, the receiver and the gift that you as a giver kind of falls away. And you and that person as a recipient falls away. Just like it just kind of maybe a little bit the way it's like for a young parent to offer something to the child, you know, it's just like a, you know, natural things, no giver receiver, just kind of part of the system. That's what happens. And that's that kind of kind of freedom, that kind of intimacy and openness, where we kind of disappear in the process, certain kinds of disappearing is one of the things that makes it very satisfying this act of generosity. The, I think very meaningful and very closely connected to what in Buddhism we call liberation, liberation from self preoccupation, self constriction, self concern even and at the same time, the fact that generosity can do so much good to ourselves. Rather than not being not thinking about that at all, saying, I'm not supposed to have any concern for myself, which is give out of, you know, no self concern. It actually is the opposite is that to really care for yourself is also to be cognizant of how much we can benefit from the virtuous acts that we do, and allow ourselves to be nourished by that those benefits, to feel the joy, to feel the light to feel the openness to feel, the flow of whatever juices that flow inside of us when we're compassionate or generous.

So the practice of generosity and if we can call it a practice, I think of it as a lot to do with what we do in meditation practice, that meditation practice, we're trying to see clearly what's here for us. Be present for what's here, and to cultivate an openness to what's here. willingness to receive a willingness to be present, where there's difficult or whether it's wonderful, kind of a willingness to open willingness to yes to even this or be present for it, or willingness to kind of have that empathic concern even for oneself here, yes. This is what it's like to be a human being. And this Yes, this openness, this willingness, this receptivity that we're cultivating over and over again, it's not just a matter of bearing down on the breath and being present. It's more like, yes, I'm going to be with this breath in a receptive way, I'm going to be here in a way that opens me not doesn't close me. That's the movement that supports generosity. And so rather than giving because you should give, one of the things we try to do in Buddhism is to come

back to the state of being where giving seems much more of a natural thing to do. Or if we feel like we want to be generous, then the practice generosity is too honor that respect that feeling, even though there might be fear and resistance, and take a deep breath and open up and see if there's still it still makes sense to give if we can let go of some of that fear. Like, take a deep breath and let go and see if it makes sense to give when we've let go of our stinginess or resistance and what goes on. What comes out of us when we are open, receptive, what comes out of us when we relaxed when we no longer closed, no longer tight, no longer constricted? That's one of the great magics of this practice the alchemy of the practice. You have tremendous power. There's been so many times in my life where I have been in socially, situations social, economic, interpersonal relationship with people. And I did not feel compassionate. I did not feel kinda differently. I did not feel generous. Her How could the person ever you're and, and, and when I've, you know, catch up to myself and see what's going on, and then relax and try to open up and see if I can come from a different place. And if I can come to a place of exploring what's the generous thing to do here what's the kind thing to do here friendly thing was the compassionate thing here and just kind of helps me relax around this person relaxed but situation. And it's remarkable how much people change when I am more generous and compassionate and kind and friendly. I mean, I haven't changed at all but they have they're suddenly become so much nicer and better and, you know, and I think there's part of that alchemy, because that's one of the benefits of generosity and being generous is that If our generosity and compassion comes out of empathic, tuning into other people, human beings have a strong empathic quality to their hearts our being. And so when we do something as compassionate and generous to someone else, and it's received well, by them, they're not just receiving the gift, but they're also receiving the joy or the ease or the openness of your generosity, and then they feel it. They benefit from it, and then you get the benefit and return because it bounces back. If they kind of feel Thank you, they smile on they relax, then then you're you're the recipient of that. And I've noticed I've noticed that you know, the times I've been a little bit irritated or resentful or close to people. If I do the inner work it takes to open up and I meet them genuinely then when happy emcee then I'm present. They seem to light up and when they light up highlighter, it's nice for me And so it was worth the effort. And the other thing I've learned is that I can think much more clearly, when I'm not grumpy or not, you're resisting or irritated by people or something. And so I, you know, sometimes I'm slow to slow, slow to kind of catch up to myself, but, but okay, you know, I don't think this is useful to be this way. And so then and over and over again, if I do the inner work to kind of open up to let go and find the other way, then I see so much more clearly what the situation is about who the other person is, what's going on, and I seem to be able to, to know better what to do or how to be with people.

Last thing I'll say is I've learned that when I'm angry with someone or irritated with someone, I try not to act on it or do anything based on no decisions based on it. If I can do it to avoid avoid having to Until I have a chance to be in their presence. And I tried to go find the person to be in their presence. Because I've learned that through a lot of life experience, that my relationship to that person in my imagination is very different than my relationship. That person when I'm live with a person, and my imagination is not always realistic. I don't know about you, maybe you have perfectly pristine, perfect, you know, picture perfect imaginations that captures the person perfectly that you're having an issue with, but not me. So I find that, that if I can go and meet with the person talk with the person, that then I have a whole different feeling about them arises for me, and then whatever I'm holding against them begins to soften, and that I can have a much more kind of productive process with them or connection with them. And it's a generous thing to be well, it's part of generosity is willing to show up for difficult, difficult relationships and not just show up but show up in a way that's trying to Hockley go forward from here. How can we find our way in a good way with this situation as well. So if you want to be happy One way is to be generous. If you want to have good relationships with people, be generous. If you want to strengthen your meditation practice, be generous. If you want to go on the fast track to liberation, be generous. If you want to help our society, be generous. generosity is like this great thing. So that's my thoughts for

today. So we have a few minutes, a couple of minutes here talking five minutes or so if somebody would like to ask something or share something, make a comment. Please do. We'll use the mic if they stare Okay,

so um,

I find myself last month and a half, I kind of left my job and I've had people, you know, I got to lunch with somebody and you know, I have savings. I'm not like hurting for money, but they're they want to pay for the meal or something and maybe not related to me leaving my job, I don't know. But remember one person in particular, she's like, Can I pay for your meal? Please, please. Okay, if you insist. Yeah. Awesome. Thanks. And so I felt really generous. accepting her generosity. That was pretty cool.

Yeah, it is cool. It is an act of generosity to receive someone's generosity. And I remember once when I was offering a friend many years ago, who's leaving the country on a plane going back home to Europe, and I offered to give her a ride to the airport and she saying no. And I wish and I cannot be happy to do it. You have to take a taxi or whatever. No, no, no. And I felt Wow. If she knew how good I felt about the being generous, and you know, doing this for her, she would jump at the chance. But she didn't, it was clearly clear, she thought it was gonna be a bother for me. And it was the opposite. So it would have been generous for her to have accepted it.

Go have a question or comment? Yeah, the one time that I have really had trouble with generosity is like when I'm in the city and see all these homeless people and I'm never sure what to do about that. And somehow it doesn't seem like walking through the city with \$50 ones in my pocket, you know, handing him out all the time would necessarily be helpful to them or to them or to me really, or to this or to this or to the society. So the way that I cope with That his plan on making donations to shelters and food kitchens and stuff like that, but maybe you have some other other people have other ideas because I'm sure I'm not the only one that struggles with that issue when you're walking around, it's good, it's good. Thank you for bringing that up. So, with all things that we do, it should be mixed with wisdom, which should be included in so generosity should be practiced with wisdom, there can be a naive or blind generosity. And so wisdom has a lot to do with understanding the context of the situation, the purpose of why we're going to be giving and the consequences. And so we take that into account, then you don't want to squash Your generous impulse if that's what it is. But if you take into the wider context, where's that generosity best, best gone where's the best given to and so it might not that situation, it might not be wisest to give it to the person, especially the person that goes and buys alcohol or something. Maybe it is wise to give it to them or maybe it's a different way. That's wise. Sometimes people have asked me for money because they're hungry. And I didn't give them money, but I took him to a restaurant and bought them food. And because I wasn't part they want to make sure it went to a good food. And partly I wanted the human contact, I thought it'd be nice. So it's one thing to give money for food. It's nothing for the person to sometimes people want. People lack human contact and connectedness and so I've bought people food, or perhaps it's wisest, in some situations to support the local soup kitchen or support. Some, someone has a service to the homeless, because they can use that money more wisely than some of the homeless can. And also, part of understanding the wisdom part is to also understand what makes you your heart sing what brings you joy, because maybe it's slightly better to give to the person, but it makes you happier to get to the soup kitchen and your joy in giving is considered very important in Buddhism. In fact, the Buddhist Someone asked the Buddha Who should we give to? And he said to whoever, wherever it brings you joy. And then somewhere else he said, I should only give if it's if you if before, during and after they giving you have joy. So, you know, it might be better for the pert, you know, the money is better spent for the person to give it directly. Or maybe it's better Is it better giving it maybe it's better giving it to the soup kitchen or this, you know,

public service agency or something, they can use the money better, but it makes you happier to give to the person. So that's part of the context here. So considering all these things, and is the wisdom factor, you have to take into account and but the important thing is, what I would suggest is in conclusion to your great question is that is that if you recognize a genuine impulse to be generous, as opposed to obligation to give that nourish that impulse, but doesn't have to doesn't mean that has to Go to the person you the homeless person, right? But nourish that gender, gender generosity. Take time open to it, and then use your wisdom to consider how it's best acted on to be one more, yes, there will stop.

Hi. I'm not actually sure this is generosity, but I think of it as generosity. And there have been a couple of times in my life where I've had like discussions that lead into arguments, and then somebody wouldn't talk to me for a long time. And you know, over time, I would think well, are they ever call me again? And everything? Well, somebody's got to be the generous one, so to speak. And it's so hard. That's the hardest generosity I have, is like when I'm somewhat angry or my feelings are hurt or something, too. You have to do the opening thing. Anyway.

Yeah, I can imagine that no, I know that for sure.

Is that generosity?

It could be definitely. And, you know, many, many difficult relationships are improved by acts of generosity. I've had I've, I've advised a lot of people who had difficulties with some in law, who wouldn't talk to them it was very difficult kind of in law kind of relationship. And I suggest next time you go visit your in laws, be sure to bring a gift to do something and also through your words so you very simple but be generous in your in your, in your words, and that was you know, that was a really great what you're doing or compliment them or something. And I don't know if every time but a good number of times when I advise people to do that they come back and say it's miraculous. What happens. So you know, one way to break the ice they Don't call the person up, but you send them a card, or you send them a little gift. And maybe that can break the ice and make it easier to call them in afterwards. So to be generous, it's a good thing. And there's no obligation to be generous. This talk was not supposed to be a heavy deal. And now you should go out and be generous. There's no obligation to be generous, but it's a good idea. It has a lot of benefits. So hopefully you'll enjoy it. And so today there's tea right today so lovely. If you stay, some of you will talk to you, you know, your fellow people here today. We don't get a chance for that very often. So you met some people, maybe you want to continue the conversation or the continued conversation, the theme with other people or something else, but you know, you're welcome. And I hope you enjoy the morning and the week. Thank you