

2016-07-03 Liberation And Relief

Fri, 9/25 5:51PM • 39:56

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, tension, buddhism, polarities, world, identity, prison, freedom, relief, attachment, step, liberation, desires, cycles, free, idea, exists, religious practices, release, hitchhiking

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Okay. So tomorrow is Liberation Day, United States Independence Day. And Buddhism is about liberation. So maybe this can be our Liberation Day today. The bloodless liberation, which is pretty nice. I think the world needs more bloodless revolutions, or Liberation's. So I wanted to talk about liberation. And it's a core teachings of Buddhism. And the word that's most commonly associated in Buddhism with liberation is Nirvana, or Nirvana. And there's a, no one really knows how that words be translated into English. But there's a fairly good argument to be made, that it should be translated as release. Or once one scholar calls it translates unbinding. So the release the untying. And so this is a kind of evocative idea that this idea of release, and I think of it in contrast to relief, and what would you prefer, release or relief. If a bird is in a cage, I guess you can give it relief by giving it a better cage. Or you can release it from the cage, open the cage doors, and it can fly away. So the bird is no longer than imprisoned in the cage. So to some degree, we're imprisoned in cages have our attachments, our desires, our fears, our angers our resentments? that we live in. And it's possible to have relief from it. And people go forward to relief in many ways. Some people escape. And they avoid, they run away, they watch TV, or they take alcohol and drugs as a way of escaping as a way of getting relief from the discomfort of their attachments and their struggles attention they live under. So that's one strategy. The other strategy is to get angry and blame rather than escape. And so somehow, the anger gets directed someplace trying somehow to get relief or some comfort or something. to so the idea of finding release, freedom goes back to the earliest time in Buddhism. And there are some marvelous poems that the early tradition composed the disciples of the Buddha, where they celebrated their release their freedom, their liberation. And that's a wonderful collection of verses in that, you know, people are celebrating and delighting in this wonderful thing, as opposed to becoming kind of like released or free, you're liberated. And then just sitting under a tree and, you know, kind of watching your bellybutton or something. You know, it's a, you know, two to six or something to celebrate.

And I want to read one from one of the early nuns, her name is called Sumangala's Mother. And there's references here to her being freed from the pestle. Mortal and pestle, do you know that it's one of the symbols of women's work back in ancient times when they had to grind grain? And so it goes she I probably can't do her justice, but it starts off with kind of great exclamation. free, free. I am well freed from the pestle. My shameless husband, his sunshade, and my pot that smells like a water snake swish, swish. I strike down the lust and anger going to the foot of a tree, ah, what happiness happily, I meditate.

Okay, nice. So, to sit to be free, of hate, be free of lost, you know, is a wonderful thing. The so this idea of release rather than relief. I think it helps to look a little bit at some of the tensions that we live under it in our language and our culture and Interesting and you know, sometimes these tensions people choose, because attention me two different sides. And then people choose one side to live in opposition

to the other side, which a then we live in tension opposition is tension. And so there are these polarities, and one of them is to be an individual versus being in connection and community. And we have different cultures who emphasize different sides of these polarities. But here in United States, these can exist in quite a strong tension that comes partly in America, there's sometimes a strong tendency to emphasize individualism, but individualism by itself, if you take it too far, it leaves you pretty lonely. I think of it's kind of like, someone insisting, you know, I want to be my own person. And I'm not gonna have anyone else, tell me how to speak, I'm going to speak my own language. Well, that's nice. But language, the purpose of language is to communicate with people. And if you really insist on that kind of strong, you know, stance, I'm gonna speak my own language, no one's going to tell me how to speak, then, you know, you, you're left alone, and you're not able to communicate. But then you can go too far over overboard the other direction, and emphasize conformity and just being completely giving up any sense of into individualism, giving up a sense of who you are. So that you kind of fit in to the society, people around you. And that also can feel uncomfortable at times, it can feel comfortable as well. But you can kind of swing too far that way. And so is there in that polarity that between being an individual and being a member of a community, where, you know, where do you fit in the spectrum back and forth. And I suspect that we all fit different places along the spectrum at different times. But my proposal is that anywhere you fit in that spectrum, exists a little bit in attention, especially if you're not fluid and flowing freely back and forth as situation allows. And if you're trying to hold a stance, I'm this way, this kind of person, and then you know, it doesn't flow with the, with the circumstance and what's going on. Another polarity that people live under, is between tradition and innovation, tradition and progress, that many situations in life, certainly religions, even like here at IMC that exists here, from one point, so if some points of view, were pretty innovative here, then they go to the history of Buddhist groups. But then if you don't know about the rest of the Buddhist groups, and you've come here for a few years, you kind of think, well, these people don't change. You know, they think that they should get on with it. This is the modern world, and you know, and just look at our website, that's, you know, if it's nice, we should innovate and, you know, and so, and so there's, you know, there's a, you know, depending where you look, you see this tension between tradition, maintaining the tradition, we always do it this way, we should do it this way, it's important to this way, and someone comes along and, and, you know, says what we should do differently and change and develop and grow. That tension sometimes exists within individual families. Sometimes the elders are considered more traditionalists, and then the young generation comes along, and they want to do something different, different. And so there's a tension there. It can be quite strong among immigrant families,

an immigrant family person. And so there can be, you know, the old generation that has a particular way of doing things and from maybe the old country, and, and then you come here and, and then the new generation wants to do things in different way. And there's a tension exists. And that tension can exist in within individuals as well. Do we, you know, how do we do? We do do things the way we've always done it, the comfort and the relief of that? Or do we do something new, that is maybe more frightening? Or do we do something new because that's where the relief is, you know, to be free of the old bounds. Tradition sometimes is very claustrophobic, and sometimes it helps create security and stability. Innovation sometimes is risky. And innovation sometimes creates a whole new possibilities, that's a wonderful relief to have. So, where do we fit along those that spectrum? You know, and how are we fluid may flow back and forth between those things? Or do we have if you have an attitude or a policy, this is who I am, then we can start living in, in tension with this bigger kind of flow. In other interesting polarities that between discipline and allowing people who are parents, I think, either struggle with this or diluted. Maybe that's not fair to say but least that's this is it says something about me maybe? You know, so how much do we kind of, you know, have discipline or standards or accountability or insist on things being a certain way? And how much do we just allow things to be in love people to be as they are? When is when is it time for radical acceptance of everyone? And when is

it time to have expectations that certain commitments are upheld? How do we manage this wonderful range? You know, it's kind of inspiring to me that this week, suddenly, I don't know if maybe I wasn't reading the news or something. Until this week, suddenly, this week, the military announced that they're going to allow transgender people to serve in the military. What I mean, I thought military would have years and years of discussion, like they did for gays and lesbians. And then suddenly, it's just like that, that was me pretty happy. I was delighted at that. So to allow and accept people to be for who they are, and have space for that, without question is a pretty fantastic thing.

But as we know, with the military, and gays and lesbians took years and years to have that level of acceptance, so how do we, you know, so how do we navigate this world of, of allowing discipline, acceptance and discipline, there's a so these kinds of tensions, these kinds of, you know, if we live in them with a policy with an idea, tend to create tension. And those tensions tend to create a reactive syndrome, a cyclic syndrome of such things as cycles of desire, wanting things to be different. And so we push and pull. And sometimes we insist on having a new way, and we get our way, but just getting your way, is only temporary, because the spectrum the tension, the dynamic still exists in the whole thing. And so I'm surprised a little bit because I'm, you know, becoming now I guess, the senior generation, you know, I'm still I'm still kind of my self image, kind of, sometimes it's slow to change, right. So I, you know, I was a hippie, you know, and, you know, Rebel and, you know, and radical kind of in Buddhism was going to Buddhism was like a radical thing, stepping out of society, and culture, counterculture, and all that. And now, I'm like, Berge, wine. You know, and the Buddhism here, we have a center, and now I represent, listen, people's eyes, I see. Now, sometimes I represent, like, you know, this old guard of conservative people, you know, who's not innovative and new, and you know, and the people are, right, there's people knocking at the door ready to overthrow me. It's great. It's the way it's supposed to be. But my self image has been slow to catch up. You know, I'm still back there, my hippie days. So, so, you know, the young girls are here, younger, please be patient with me as I adjust to the new. So this idea of you know, so you know, so there's this cycles of reactions of wanting something something different, and then things become different, and then they become status quo. And then there's reactions against that. So the fact that there's a cycle begins over again, and scholars of religion have pointed out that this is a common cycle that religions go through that, over generations over centuries, that their religions get established the reactions against them, their little offshoot groups that break off, those off, ship groups grow and develop, and then they become big, and then people say, no more of that, and they break off again, and this cycle of kind of, you know, doing that so always this tension always just, you know, somewhere we intense sometimes it's more happy part of the tensions, cycles, sometimes less is more. There's cycles of identity being someone trying to you know, I need to be this kind of person. Partly when, when there's this status quo was very strong and if people are expected to conform, then becomes very important for people to rebelled against that to stand out and be someone when the status quo was quite fragile. And it was called poker because status quo then society is fragile and a lot of change. Then insecurity, then it becomes much more important to, you know, maybe to be someone in you know, to, to have stability and not break out of what he is. But to fit into it. It's been pointed out that teenagers growing up now, I don't know if that here in the States, some of them the amount of drug use and alcohol use has dropped dramatically. And they think part of it is that they're growing up in a much more insecure world. And so they're much more concerned about, you know, security and safety and jobs and getting something than it was when we were hippies. I mean, it was bad enough, there was pretty bad back then, in many ways, but there was also a lot of stability for people, especially white people like me, and, and so there was kind of this freedom to be able to kind of go out and do, you know, go out and hitchhike around the country and not not have a job drop out of school. And, you know, I lived for six months, on \$100, hitchhiking hitchhiking around the country. And, and, you know, staying in communes and just kind of whatever my favorite things to do was to hitchhike up highway one, it was so great was like so great, I used to be disappointed sometimes, if I got a ride too quickly. Because I just love just standing there and highway one looking

out over the ocean and just like wow, it's like, you know, then then I would sing Janis Joplin song. But freedom is just another word for nothing like that, nothing less left to lose. And I was so great. And I can't imagine my teenage son hitchhiking up how you're one thing that is a whole different era.

So who we are our identity and who we need to do me to be changes over time and circumstances with our society and with family situations, and so many different things in and personal situations. And so, all the changes, if we hold on to particular identity or hold on tightly, to like, we have to be this kind of thing, we can find relief from that we can find meaning in that we can find benefit from that. But is there a real release is there freedom from found it from that. And the idea is that in Buddhism, that relief is different from release. And sometimes getting what you want, is not real release. And so it's not real freedom, just to get what you want. Because if you if you get what you want, the underlying dynamic of wanting is still there, if you get the identity, you want the underlying dynamic of wanting to have an identity of needing time identity is still there, if you get if you so the idea Buddhism is to for real freedom is to go deeper and deeper into ourselves to see underneath what is driving what is driving all this. And in finding the drive deep down and being freed from that is the goal of Buddhism, in a sense, to be able to step out of the polarities, and step out of the need to some deep need to fit into these polarities of, of being individual or being part of a community stepped out of the polarity of, of belonging and not belonging, being right or being wrong between having an identity and not having an identity. Not that any of them necessarily wrong. But we don't, they're not necessary to the place where the heart can rest where we can be. And for the heart to be able to discover how to be at peace and at rest. Without the desires, no wants and without the ideas we have of what should be is a wonderful gift to ourselves and the world around us. So in Buddhism, the Buddha taught that there are four primary prisons that people put themselves in this kind of dramatic language is called prisons. And so I'll give you a sense of what these are. So if and I'll do them the non standard list sequences of standards leading up is a different sequence. Because if I start with the first one, people will stop listening. And so let's do the first for last output. So the first one I'll say, is the prison's of, of ethics and religious practices. So that's a little bit kind of intriguing. They're usually translated as rites and rituals. That's too narrow of a word. The word is sila, which usually ethics or precepts, virtue. And then vata, which means, observances or practices, religious practices people do. And so those of you who have kind of been, you know, kind of hesitant about Buddhism, you just thought, Oh, great, this is for me, no more ethics. No more, no more, you know, practices. It's not a rejection of ethics and practices, but rather recognition that sometimes people put themselves in prisons around this, they have very constrained and tight ideas about what is has to be the Orthodox rules, this is what needs to be this way. And are these are the practices you do these practices, these rituals, then everything will be okay. Sometimes this can be magical thinking that, you know, you believe things which external kind of rich rites and rituals will do it for you, and set you free, that have nothing to do with setting the heart free, and sometimes has to do with being excessively kind of control of the situation. And I've seen a lot of Buddhist groups, and I've been around Buddhist groups for you for my whole adult life. And I've seen people getting too uptight about keeping rules that this is how you do it. And so it's a kind of prison that people put themselves in. And the art of it is how to live an ethical life and how to do religious practices, without letting it be a prison, without being caught in it stuck in it.

The second one is prisoners that have our opinions, usually in English is translated as views, but are the opinions that we live in, under the stories we get attached in, that we kind of used to paint or understand our world. And so we have all kinds of opinions about ourselves about others about the world. And sometimes it can be very tightly held. And not only can be a prison for ourselves, but it can be a prison for other people who have to kind of deal with us, especially if we have any authority and power over them. That you know, how we see the world understand has to be the way they have to live as well. And so, you know, in a time of politics, and national, political, presidential elections, we know

it's rampant the world of opinions, and how strong and tightly they're held, and how oppressive it is. You know, and we have suicide bombings around the globe. And some people very strong stories, ideas of us, but what is that support those that allows us to be there, very caught in it. And so then we have personal stories in us. There's one of the epidemic epidemic, kind of generic, to say, kind of generally, epidemic of us that seems to exist in the United States, his views that somehow I'm wrong or bad or unworthy. And I as a teacher, who meets with lots of people, surprising how many people I meet, who have some kind of view of themselves as somehow being tainted or wrong or inadequate or unworthy. And it's a view, it's an opinion, it's not built into the system, that that's the case. And But somehow, there's something about the modern culture that kind of seems to kind of support this view, or this idea. Some of it has to do with the American society, maybe Western culture itself, in the last hundred years has become very psychologically oriented. And so tend to look into our psychology has both benefits, and to understand it, but it also builds up a certain kind of self consciousness that is so easy, the hijacked by all kinds of very strong opinions and ideas about, we have to be a certain way. And if we're not up to snuff, then we're somehow wrong or bad. The third prison, which is related to the second second being views or opinions, the third one is the prison of self. So that's, to great degree self also as a view, we have an opinion about who we are. And we have attachments about needing to be and prove ourselves to be something or not be something. And so we have stories about ourselves that we want to live by. And if the world doesn't accommodate that, or support that or, or threatens that, then that can be difficult, or we stories we live by that are painful into themselves. And so this whole idea attachment to self, self identity, self definition, we need to prove ourselves or apologize for ourselves or defend ourselves or assert ourselves can have its roots in attachment to self, the prison of self. And then the fourth attachment, the fourth prison, when I saved for last is the prison of sensual desire. And not that any of you are caught in any kind of world of sensual desire, but sensual desire, from some people extremely strong prison, it can take the form of sexual desire, but it can take the form of all kinds of craving for pleasure for sensuality, of every type, some confusion around happiness, and, and, and pleasure that exists. And people get attached to pleasure thinking, that's how they can be happy. And the more intense the pleasure, they think, the more happy the heart will be. And generally, people who kind of pursue the path of pleasure, confusing it for happiness, do not end up happy, they end up kind of alienated from themselves, they end up kind of overly kind of alienated thing they don't, you don't really know yourself, if what you know, is pleasure only. So to be happy, as a woman in the poem said, she was sad, happy, then we require some deep knowing of ourselves, deep connection to what's here in ourselves.

And that's one of the reasons why in Buddhism, we practice Stopping, stopping the cycles of tensions, the perpetual cycles of wanting and not wanting, perpetual cycles of identity and proving ourselves or acceptance and acceptance and discipline, belonging, and being an individual, there's all these movements of the mind, that can turn away, spin around and go, go go, that seems so deeply important for us, that we, we don't stop them. And we just constantly kind of spinning and wandering around in this, in that in the spectrums of tension between all these different polarities that can exist, trying to find just the right balanced find the place of, of ease, or freedom or happiness or well being. And the, the suggestion in Buddhism is that the solution is not found in the, in the tension, the solution is not found in the world of the problem itself. But there's a way of stopping and stepping away. Now not it can be metaphorically stepping away, doesn't mean you have to abandon the world, but can be you know, that's what we do, when we sit down to meditate, we do is to stop. And from before a few minutes, step away from the spinning of the mind, where we're navigating, negotiating the tensions that are inherent in our culture inherent in the kind of the conceptual mind that's inherent sometimes in the deeper drives for, you know, satisfying a lot biological urges that we have. And so to find some way to kind of stop all that to become still nuts, nuts, not because stillness in itself is the point. But because if we can get still and quiet enough, we can start seeing much more deeply that the cages we're living in. And if we can't see the cage, the bird doesn't see the cage it lives in it thinks the cage is just great. You know, it'd be

nice to have a little bit, you know, nicer. I don't know what birds like, you know, a bigger bar to stand on. But that's all the bird knows. But if we get still enough, then we start seeing that how these ideations desires, attachments, anchors, resentments, cleanings, we have work, we can see how we're attached to our opinions. See how we're attached to the self ideas of self. See how we're attached to using rites and rituals, practices and ethics as a way of kind of holding on or clinging or so way of supporting our identity. And then we can see the prison of sensuality, that we're caught in this prison of pleasure that to be caught in and be still and still and see it. And then but to see it into some point. Recognize that we don't have to relate to we don't have to identify with we don't have to participate in the world, the mental world, the social world. of Pursuing pleasure being a self being not to self, have opinions and views, we don't have to participate. At least when we're sitting and meditating, we can step away. And we can see all those things operate. And then not participating them. But seeing them operate seeing them, they're seeing that world. There is in there as found the freedom, there's freedom to be found in the seeing, there's freedom to be found in recognizing, oh, this is what's going on. This is what's happening. And that's a phenomenal thing to do, to be able to take our power of observation, our power of aware awareness, and have it become still enough and strong enough that the awareness is not entangled with what it knows that knowing is no longer caught in the grip of what is known. We still know but knowing is separate. And so step two, be still quiet. So that the our awareness has a chance to become strong.

And that's why we emphasize mindfulness, let's be mindful this present moment, but see it to see what's going on, see what's happening. And it doesn't have to be any rejection of anything. But there also doesn't have to be any acceptance of anything. Because rejection and acceptance belong to that world of tension, the spectrums that we get caught into, to emphasize acceptance, accepting acceptance is valuable sometimes, but it's still in this world of tension isn't there's no freedom to be found there, there's a lot of relief to be found there. And it's the necessary relief sometimes. But the ability to step back and become free, requires the ability to find a place within ourselves in our hearts and our minds in our, in our awareness, where we can observe with neither acceptance or rejection, just observe, just see what's here. And that also goes along with to see ourselves see what's happening here, without needing to be anything. And without needing to not be anything. Isn't that nice? So it's not to be something but also not to be something that I say that right? Did you get the idea. And so just to observe, oh, this is how it is, this is how it is. And in that knowing in, that's where we begin finding Freedom, freedom to be present and aware and alert, but not tied to anything, not requiring anything. And this is where the attachment to self becomes very important to notice. Because it's very hard. Attaching yourself is one of the last things that people hold on to very strong. They can wait, wait a minute, wait a minute, if I let go of that, then I'll die I'm gonna be here. But it's possible to have very clear awareness, very clear observation, knowing without having a knower, who knows? And what value is that for you? Because it's about all about me, right? And if I'm not here to know it, what good is that. But if freedom is found, in this place, where there's not even a knower, it's just just knowing. And we so that's a way of stepping away from the polarities, the tensions that are built into our minds built into our culture, built into this whole world. I don't think our worlds can not have these tensions that I've talked about earlier. They're inherent. But it's not possible. It's possible to not only live in that it's possible to live in freedom. And when their freedom when we have freedom, then we can participate in the dynamics of our culture in our society in a much freer lighter, easier away. So to become still and quiet instead, and not to deny what the mind does the desires and the fears and identities and the drives not to deny the prisons that we're in, but to step back, step away from it and see it and in this seeing find freedom. And it's a freedom that does not require things to be different in how they are. But it's a freedom that's kind of steps away from it to the classic metaphor in Buddhism is the Lotus that grows up out of muddy water. And the lotus petals are such that no mud sticks to them. But the Lotus comes out of the mud grows out of it. So we grow out we live in, we're grounded and connected and rooted in this world that we live in. But there's something about the awareness than knowing that find its

freedom. Now, this is a gift to the world, and a gift to ourselves. And we become then in the ancient language, someone who is the word and ancient word is spelled in Roman letters are an inhibitor in light of letters is tadi, tadi. And tadi, it's translated into English. as such. Such, there's no other way, a word that sometimes use for this in the ancient language, Buddhist language tuffa, which means thus.

So when you when a person becomes free in this way, I'm talking about today, with without need of definition, without need for being someone, not no need to be not someone. Then if you ask them, who are you? The answer can be, I'm such, um, this, which doesn't tell you much. That maybe that's the point. Because why do we have to define it so much. And I think it's a gift to other people, to be able to see them as such, oh, they're such. And that allows them, it gives them the freedom to be as they are for that moment. People can be so many different ways, and people can change and morph and over time, and to be able to see them not with history, not with identity, not with bias, not with culturally conditioned, you know, categories of who they are, but allow them just to be this. And ideally, like places use the military as an example. It's, it's great that the transgender people now have a place in the military can be accepted. It's great. Finally, I mean, it's much better than before when they weren't. But But there's one step further to go. And that is, wouldn't it be great? If we don't have to be straight, or gay, or transgender, we don't have to have that identity. We can just be such, and we can have the freedom to be as we are, and no one's gonna question it. Okay, as long as we don't hurt each other. Just be because I think that I suspect that you know, as freeing and meaningful It is to be have a place in society we recognize as being transgender, it's still a label that people are put on, and it's culturally conditioned label. other cultures have had different ways of dividing up and categorizing people and, and we have the unique ones in this culture here. And then we try and we're living under them thinking this is the way it has to be. But, you know, to really recognize how much of these convention is ideas or conventions and ideas and culturally conditioned begins, begin to appreciate how much we're living under the weight of these tensions, that we live in ideas and views. And so to just be such, to be this, and allow other people to be such an us, I think is a gift. We can just be who we are. And hopefully in that allowance, being such we have freed ourselves of our greed, our desire, our limitations, our self criticism, self loathing. we free ourselves from all that causes of suffering. And being such we can be like this woman, there's none. Going to the foot of a tree. Ah, what happiness happily, I meditate. So Liberation Day, may today be your Liberation Day. Thank you.