

2020-03-29: Discovering Peace in Challenging Times

Fri, 6/19 4:44PM • 39:09

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, peaceful, peace, life, question, practice, deep, home, protective gear, buddhist practice, mindfulness, compassion, seeds, masks, world, living, circumstance, bag, sheltered, redwood city

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So again, good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening. Good night. And I appreciate very much the connection through this video to so many people all over. Thank you for logging on. You're here with me at the IMC insight meditation center where I sit here alone with big, empty room, vaulted room. And then I spend my days for the most part, either at home with my family, or here at IMC it's about two, three minutes apart. And it's a pretty quiet life that I'm living. But it's also a very strange life. It's very strange to be sheltered in place. Having very little contact with just by you know, with people taking some strolls down the street and giving everyone a wide berth. Knowing that just two three blocks from my house is a hospital that is short on protective gear for the medical staff. They're asking for more protective gear, more masks. It's hard to imagine that there's a hospital without enough protective gear for the very people who are the lifesavers and to sit quietly at home and not be able to do too much. We're trying to figure out what can be done from home. So, how to be peaceful? Is it appropriate to be sheltered at home and be peaceful? Is it appropriate to be home with challenges from life and find our peace out to be peaceful? Is it appropriate to be first responder to be involved very visually, some people working 24 hours at a time to respond to this current crisis endemic. Is it appropriate for them to find a way to be peaceful in the middle of it? I think this question of being peaceful is a very important co on very important spiritual question for all of us as we go through these challenging times. And maybe it's the task of Buddhist practice, always, but especially now, to understand that where's the peace, how to be peaceful myself? In the midst of whatever circumstance, I find myself, including if circumstance requires a lot of action and maybe even very active, busy action. Where's the peace? And what are the exceptions? What are the protests? We might have? But again, no, yes, that's good for you to say. But you don't realize what I'm up against, or you don't realize how important my whatever is I'm doing is or the challenges I'm under. And if it doesn't make sense to be peaceful in this situation. There can be all kinds of exceptions that we want in the protests. And for those that are those really, those really stand up well to analysis, is it really true

that we sacrifice our peacefulness or not trying to avoid trying to find it, because of the demands of whatever the situations we're in? Maybe I'm not going to say that. However, I do believe that almost all circumstances we can find ourselves in, the more peaceful we can be, the more useful we can be. That if we could find how not to be agitated if we turn it around, and rather than saying, The task is to find how to be peaceful, we turned it around and say the task is not to be agitated. Not to be spinning out not to be so preoccupied in fear or distress or anything, so we can't see clearly we can't understand clearly we can't, the best of us can't come forward. Maybe the task at hand is to learn how not to be agitated. How not to be distressed, how not to be shut down in such a way that we're not available to support or take care of the situation. So in my vocabulary, That's to be peaceful, to be calm. And one of the principles of Buddhism is that we're of a wise life, I would like to say is that the more we need wisdom, the more important it is to become that wisdom thrives in calm states of mind. If we really need to understand what well what's going on, try to calm yourself. The more we need compassion, cultivate calm. Compassion is also something that thrives in a calm heart. So this idea of cultivating compassion and peace, calm and peace is not meant to be a removal and aloofness, a disconnection from the world. It's meant to be the very thing that will allows us to connect more fully and wisely and compassionately to be someone who makes a difference. And in this environment, I think everyone can make a difference to one of the remarkable. We're living through a remarkable period of history. We're in a sense, everyone now has a front row seat, or even more intimately. Everyone now is a participant in creating history. Everyone is a participant in the global unfolding of our world. And people who are sheltered at home might feel that they're not participating. But absolutely, being sheltered at home is one of the most valuable things that most people can do. It's a contribution to the whole society to not be out there spreading the virus. This is what we need to do. There's a story of these two travelers, and they're traveling a long way and they're on a long journey, different journeys, but they happen to come to the same in same little guest house for the night. And they go to sleep and while they're sleeping, they're visited by the great nature spirit of that place. And this nature Spirit says to each of them separately, I would like to grant you two wishes to boons And so, in their sleep, they're reflecting, and maybe because Sleep, they're some of their kind of deepest kind of motivations are what operating. And one of them says wherever I travel wherever I go I would like to spread goodness spread good benefit and beauty for the world. That's my first wish. And the second wish is that I don't want to know how much good I'm causing. The second one responded to the nature spirit and said, Oh for me. I'm so lucky that finally I get my wishes. And I've been wanting this for a long time. I want to be really wealthy and be able to own big castle with lots of servants. And I want to everyone to know how special I am and know. So that was their wishes. So, next morning they woke up came to the front of the guesthouse. And the first one and there were two people there, each of them with a big bag, shoulder bag, backpack maybe. And they said, Oh, we have a favor to ask you. The first person said, I have this bag. And people up ahead where you're traveling, they really need this. This is a really big support for them and I can't pay you but if you do a big favor to others, if you could do this The second person said, I have this bag of really important things. And if you could take this to up ahead, I'll give you lots of money. You'll be wealthy to beyond your wildest dreams if you can take this so each of the travelers then chose according to their disposition, the one who wanted to do good and not know it, picked up the bag that had no financial ruminations. This one who

wanted to be wealthy, and special, picked up the second bag. And as they went their way, they're both content and happy that they got their wish. Or what they didn't know was the bags were filled with seeds and there was a little hole in the back of the bag. And as they walked, that these little seeds would drop out of the bag. And the one who was doing good in the world, these were all beautiful flowers and seeds of fruit, fruit trees and vegetables and things. As he went these, these, these seeds would fall out and hit the ground and many of them would to germinate and sprout and grow and become really helpful and valuable and beautiful for the for the communities that he passed through. But he never knew he never looked around. He didn't know what it was what was happening. But he was doing a lot of good and the second one had a bag full of very big seeds of weeds, noxious weeds, vines that grow and take over everything. These are big seeds and so as he was going along He didn't know that out of the back of the bag, the seeds were falling out. But everyone else watching him knew the seeds were falling out. And he they'd be angry with him and upset with him, but he never got the message that it was his seeds. And as he went along and went along, he was dropping these noxious weed seeds. And that's what grew. He got wealthy, because he was given a lot of money, and he was able to build this castle. But the cost of it as he walked through the countryside was much more expensive than the value of his castle. So I tell you that story, because those people who are not staying sheltered at home some people in this country, the United States are doing it because they feel that they should be free to do do whatever they want. They don't want any kind of restrictions in their life. They want to go out and party and there's been some amazing stories of people who just blowing off ignoring the idea of sheltering at home. I don't think it applies to them. It's imposition of the government on personal freedom. And it could well be that the people who are staying involved and circulating around, do not get sick. But they might not see what seeds they're dropping off behind them. They might not see that, actually, that they've touched some object that carries the corona virus, and then they pass it on to the next person and next object. And the spread of this virus by unsuspected carriers is the very thing we're trying to prevent. And there's sad stories already of people who have their sore stories of medical people who gotten the virus and didn't know they had it, and then spread it to the patients. They're caring for their stories of people who went traveling to a place and came back from a place where the virus was and didn't quarantine themselves, and then it spread into their communities. So it's a, one of the big contributions we can make at this point, is doing nothing, really nothing. And it's hard for some people to live with that. It's hard to be limited. It's hard to be restricted in situations some some of these shelters at home situations are not easy at all. And it's hard not to want to go out Try to figure out what to do. I looked for a request for volunteers and their local soup kitchens. were feeding some of the poor families of Redwood City. And they're doing a great job making bag lunches. They don't serve lunches anymore. They serve bag lunches people pick up. And little bit Am I surprised? They not. They don't want any more volunteers. They have enough volunteers. And so they can't go there to help out. And so this idea of staying home so it's a contribution, but how to use it well, how to find our peace, how to practice. How to have our compassion for the first responders that people are out on the streets, helping people. I saw statistics recently that for firefighters 80% of what firefighters do in this country, many of them maybe urban ones, is go to medical emergencies. And how many of those medical emergencies are, you know, they don't know what they're going to come to and, and some of these fire departments don't have enough

protective gear, if they end up supporting someone helping someone who has the corona virus, these first responders, holding them in our hearts in our care. appreciating so much how this is a societal effort, a global effort. We're all in it together. I can't think of anything that's been as clear and dramatic. That puts us all in it as a community, mutual mutual peoples all of us cooperating almost working together, all of us, all of us one way or the other affected by this virus. And it is a time of deep soul searching. The ethical dilemmas that medical professionals or leaders are living with that government officials are trying to deal with trying to find how to use limited resources to the best use for everyone involved. And because they're limited resources, what are the ethics of who gets it and not gets it? The medical resources, what are the ethics of us living our lives? I've been told that one of the contributions that people who are not sick can make is to not have an accident that requires us to go to the hospital. I've been told that in France, people are not allowed to ride bicycles anymore. Because of the danger of bicycle falling off the bicycle and needing to go to the ER. The artist can't handle anything more. So not only do we show They're in place, but we try to do the kind of things that aren't have no risk of injuring ourselves of being careful as a contribution to others. So this is difficult times it's hard to understand from day to day, there's so much uncertainty, so much waiting for many of us so much. Circumstances changes dramatically in all kinds of ways. And the question is, how do we spread good seeds, seeds that we don't even see? You don't even know how we're benefiting the world we stay at home. We don't know what we are avoiding spreading and the harm we're causing that we would have caused if we left home. So how do we feel content with this or peaceful with this? How do we find our peace? So I'd like to is my heartfelt wish that one of the things that Buddhist practitioners are doing is using the practice even more now. This is a like one of the I like to believe that Buddhist practice was designed for times like this. And that Buddhist practitioner shouldn't be surprised that this is happening. In fact, I don't find myself surprised. I'm surprised that the particular shape this has taken. But here's an interesting change that I have had over my lifetime. And that is a practice these 40 years that I've been doing, doing this Buddhist practice, I've certainly become more peaceful, feeling more at ease in this world that I live in. I certainly feel more prepared or more capable of living a wise life than I did before. And as I've had more ease and more peace and more wisdom, Kind of parallel to that growth is a growing expectation that something like this is coming, whether it was going to be a war or some natural catastrophe or something that kind of kind of in a relaxed way can Yes, of course, this is what to be expected. This is what happens in human on this world that there are earthquakes there are, unfortunately there's wars way too often. And that, you know, that kind of expecting this to happen to some degree. And now what's happening. And so this kind of balance and I think I don't think it is a coincidence that the more peaceful I become, the more at ease I become happier become in this life. The same time through Buddhist practice, I become more expectant or more, more kind of, of course, course things are uncertain. Things are much more uncertain than most of us are willing to admit. with ourselves, our personal lives, personal lives and health can change on a dime can change from day to day. All kinds of things aside, it can change from day to day or personal circumstances can change from day to day radically. And this is growing sense of the uncertainty of life that's come with Buddhist practice, and the same time being at ease with it. It's still a task. So the task how do we find our ease? How do we find peace in this difficult times? And that means a lot of deep looking at ourselves a lot of honest looking, how do we get agitated? What

are the belief systems that beliefs that we're operating under? What are the underlying assumptions we have about life and what's important and what the dangers are? When we're trying to predict protect? What is it that we feel inside is threatened? Is what is what is threatened really something that needs to be protected? Is there some freedom that we can find? Where in the freedom the freedom itself is not threatened by anything? Or some of the things we're holding on to for security? Some things we're holding on to talk to for certainty? Is it really appropriate? Is it can we really expect to keep those things safe and secure and is there What if insecurity is built into the very fabric of this universe and that Buddhist practice points to a piece that's very possible in the midst of insecurity and more than insecurity, what if things do take a terrible turn, things get really difficult for all of us. Does that mean that the more difficult it gets, the more we give up the practice of peace, where we gave up the practice of rooting out our attachments or clinging, the ways we close down the ways that all the ways in which we might respond unskillful Lee with aversion and blame and anger, or with this stress and, and, and anxiety and collapse with desire and greed and selfishness, you know, to really kind of, this is the time to really take an honest deep look at ourselves and to feel I was Hope confident, really confident that this practice of mindfulness is practice of looking at ourselves as practice of finding where the pieces, this practice of really learning to let go wherever attached and caught this, we're being asked to do this at such a deep level in our psyche in our hearts, that you know that hopefully we're, we're, we're ready we're willing to do this now. This is the time. Some of you have gotten a lot of retreats, some of you wish to go on retreats. And the more challenged we are by what's happening right now, in our society in our world, the more valuable this practices. The more distressed you are, the more upset you are, the more afraid you are. The deeper the more valuable it is to bring your mindfulness your attention. Your compassion to really connect and see what's going on. And the reason for that is, the more the distress is, the more the difficulty is, the more it represents something really crucial and deep inside of you. It arises from your depths, depths that really need us steps where the practice is really meant for those depths. And if we live our lives comfortable, and go our life could comfortably from day to day. And we're only using the Buddhist practice for the minor stresses of their everyday life. We're really not engaged in the depths of what this practice is really about. In the core of our being and the very places where we're most attached to life and being alive attached to identity and being someone attached to security, attached to comfort attach to you know, all Relationships are, status are all kinds of things. The more challenged we are, the more this practice is meant for for us. And the simplest way of holding that as a question for ourselves that we can carry with us through the day is the question. How? Where is the peace now? How can I be peaceful with this? It might take a while to discover that but just to ask that question might begin might help you to begin noticing the small places of peace, the small little explore little movements that's possible. Then even asking that question is a stepping away from being caught up and entangled. To ask that question, clearly. with sincerity is a pulling ourselves out of being stuck in the mud of our lives. out of the mud is born the Lotus out of the messiness and challenge with a lot of our life is born something that's precious and valuable in our hearts. And to ask that question, how, how can I be peaceful right now? Is it can be the beginning of that coming out of the mud, pulling the head out of the sands, beginning to look around and feel even in that question is the beginning of some peace, have some freedom, have some calm something, and then to build on that, use your mindfulness and look around

and see and sometimes you'll be able to identify where the calm is where there's greater peace and relaxation. into it and open to it. It's not so far away. And sometimes it seems far away. But what is it that I bring to it? what I bring to the situation that that contributes to my agitation that makes it more difficult than it needs to be? Maybe it's hard to ask that question and answer that question. In the midst of challenging personal situations at home or elsewhere. But perhaps there are moments here and there maybe when you go to the bathroom, or maybe when you first wake up in the morning, where you can do some reflection, some looking. Where's this? What am I? What How am I contributing to my agitation? What am I caught up in? What am I resisting? What am I not accepting? What am I doing here? I don't offer you the practice question of where How can I be peaceful in this circumstance, as a way of passing Simply accepting the situation and kind of conforming with it going along with it. That's not what I mean. I hope that what we can do and becoming peaceful is to be available to do the right response to what's needed at the time. And what that response is, we'll have to find out day to day from hour to hour. We're living in a radically different world than we lived in just a few months ago. And I hope that all of us will engage in what's happening in this world at this time. So that will come out of it the other side, and have become better people, both as individuals, and collectively. May this question, how can I be peaceful with this circumstance? Be a question that supports you to become the best possible person you can be. For now and for all times, so that we as a people, as a global family can really feel that we're here to support each other, to benefit each other, to care for each other. And to really feel our mutual care, compassion, love and support. We're all in it together. I think we're hope we all support each other. May this Buddhist practice, help all beings, May all beings be safe. Thank you very much for my reflections or listening to me. There's maybe a couple of things that I'd like to say. One is for the this wider online community that we have Starting tomorrow, I'm going to offer a nine day consecutive day introduction to mindfulness meditation series one hour a day in California from 930 to 1030. Monday through Friday, this week and Monday through Thursday the following week. And I thought of it because there's a lot of people who are at home and who maybe who normally would like to take a mindfulness class, but maybe they can't go out in the evening or there's personal circumstances don't allow them. And it seems like this would be a nice time to do it every day and really settle into it and get the basic instructions. And so maybe some of you or maybe you know, someone who have been wanting to learn mindfulness and we'll do it in the same format here on YouTube. And there's more information on the website. And then, for your local communities, for people here on the peninsula in Redwood City, local hospitals here really need more protective gear. And the county is trying to collect it for all kinds of places and if you have protective gear that you know masks and nitrile gloves or whatever that you might have, you might want to bring it to the hospital in Redwood City, they're collecting it downtown. If you go to the county's San Mateo County website, they'll talk you tell you where the collection places, but every county wherever you live, I bet there's a lot of places that needs supplies need things. And if you have any access to it, or if you have a sewing machine and now people are apparently starting to make masks because of the shortage of it and I've heard that some of the fabric stores are beginning to give away material that's appropriate for making masks and maybe could as those of you who are soldiers can sew protective masks and give them to the people who need it. This is a time for all of us to make our best effort. So thank you all very much. And I hope that you take good care of yourself and have a lot of compassion

for yourself and for those around you and your loved ones. And I look forward to being in community with you again. Thank you