

2020-05-10 Mindfulness as Refuge, Pasture, and Ancestral Homeland

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So good morning again, Good afternoon. Good day to all of you. And coming down here today on Mother's Day, the United States Happy Mother's Day to all who are mothers express our gratitude to them and appreciation. And coming down here today I was thinking or thinking about this talk. Whenever we're talking about, I had one thing in mind. But when I sat down to meditate and was sitting here now with you I think that I'm still kind of very much in the middle of the current retreat that I'm teaching. And there's very different feeling inside of being settled, tender open. So I'm in a different mood maybe than I usually am when I come down to teach. So I want to share some of the things I said on the retreat, but it's mostly an excuse to say these things to try to express something that expresses something tender, caring or loving or something that'll get warm warmth. subtleness even contentment that I happen to be feeling right now. And it's closely connected to the practice of mindfulness of Sati. Some of you know that these days after many years of study and practice, that I actually prefer to translate Sati, the Buddhist word that's translated as mindfulness. Most commonly, I prefer to translate it as awareness. And awareness is always something that's occurring in the present moment. Even though it might be directed towards thinking about the future in the past, awareness itself is really always a it's almost coterminous with the present. Our experience of the present is coterminous with our ability to be aware. Here we are aware and the Buddha talked about This awareness, this Sati mindfulness in some really wonderful terms. Sometimes he talked about it as a refuge. Sometimes he talks about it as a pasture. And sometimes he talks about it as an ancestral homeland. And I think of these but you know, especially, I don't know if a refuge always has that it has connotations, like a nature refuge is a place of passion. pasture is a place. an ancestral homeland is a place and you feel safe see often in the teachings of the Buddha, the sense that the practice and the references for the practice are very localized, very grounded in the location that we're in. There's languages of being rooted, standing, of being in a place, it's, there's not kind of a vague, ambiguous ambiguity about just being aware, just open aware and just, but there's a sense real sense of being

maybe grounded, connected, localized here. So one of the ways he talks about Sati awareness being a refuge, it's kind of interesting teaching where someone comes to the Buddha and says that something like there are these five senses, seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching the tactile sense. And do these are built are these sense perceptions that we have is ability to sense and experience the world through these five 10 stores? Do they have a refuge? And the Buddha answers yes. The mind is their refuge. And I think one of the things he's he's pointing to in this teaching is that it's I think it's explicit that each of these sense doors has a different domain. A different pasture that I cite goes in a sense goes out and is a, what it takes in what it experiences is site objects. Ears take in or experience hearing objects, sound objects, and so forth. For the other senses. They each have their pasture, where they graze where they pick up things and experience things. And the pasture of each one is distinct. So that the pasture of sight objects is not experienced as sight objects by the ear, the ear hears what is heard, the noise of the sounds that the ear hears to different pasture, different domain different realm in a sense than what the eye See, or what smells or what tastes or what body touches. There's some kind of distinct way the senses work, that's each of them very distinct from each other. But the mind is the refuge the mind is what gathers all these together and holds them together. Mind sees and experiences and knows my knows the experience of each one. So it's kind of like the Clearinghouse or the repository with all these five senses come together. That person is talking to the Buddha then asks, What is the refuge for the mind? And the Buddha says the refuge for the Mind is awareness is Sati mindfulness that the mind takes and all this stuff knows all the stuff in the mind is partly a place of recognition of understanding of comprehension of central clearinghouse or reconstruction of a reality maker of a reality maker in the sense that we take in all the census data and it gets reconstructed in the mind, hopefully, often accurately enough to represent what's out there. But this mind that's working and doing what is its refuge, where is it safe? Where is it protected? Where does it rest in? It can rest in awareness. And this idea that we should be, awareness creates safety or refuge or protection for the mind. We know what the mind is up to Through being aware, and so we can be wiser about what we do. But the idea that there's a refuge for it, there's support for it. And what's nice about this idea that awareness is a refuge for the mind. It doesn't posit itself, me myself in mind which is, be myself in mind in the eyes all a private product of the activities of the mind. And there is something that's beyond in the mind, part of the mind and kind of, of awareness that holds it all. The person that asks the Buddha, what's the refuge for awareness? And the Buddha answers, its liberation, freedom, a deep letting go, that somehow awareness itself is supported and protected by our capacity to let go be open. Be non contentious, be non contracted, to be free. Kind of expansiveness or limitlessness, of freedom of awareness. And then the person asks the Buddha well is this freedom itself have a refuge? sorrow now but the sadhana is the word in Pali and, and the Buddha says that the duration has Nibbana as a refuge. I translate the bond on Nirvana by the word by the English idea of release. So becoming free, is protected by being released by continuing to open to release to free. The release that leaves us with an absence of clinging and Nibbana is about maybe best understood as that absence. The absence of clinging is not a thing. To the mind has Sati awareness as its refuge we learn to rest awareness, trust, awareness, deep trust of being aware of what's happening. And that's a refuge of protection. That Sati is protected by liberation by releasing our clinging and that release that liberation is protected by really appreciating that absence of clinging.

The person that asks the Buddha and does Nibbana, this absence of release, have a refuge. And the Buddha says, Now you've gone beyond the realm of questions are beyond what's can be answered or asked appropriately. So the idea that it's a refuge, mindfulness awareness is a refuge. Sati is a refuge. Elsewhere, the Buddha talks about Sati being a pasture and the word for pasture is gocara, "go" is the Pali word for cow, the indo European languages, there's a continuity there connection, they're all have the same route. And something as central as important that historically until recently, for human culture as the cow, some words don't change much. And so in English we have cow and Norwegian is qu. And in Pali it's go. I think these words are deeply related. I kind of love this family connection. And "cara" probably is related to our word chariot. It means to go or to wonder. And, and where the cows wonder where the cows go. Now, if you ever spend much time with cows, when cows wander, they're grazing. They go to where the grazing land is, and they're constantly grazing and grazing unless they're sleeping, chewing their cud. And so the word gocara then is usually translate sometimes translated into English as pasture. Sometimes it's called for other animals, the goats are of different animals is their feeding grounds where they go to feed. So when the Buddha says that, he says explicitly that the four foundations of mindfulness, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feeling tones, mindfulness of the mind, mind states, and mindfulness of the dynamics, inner dynamics of clinging and freedom that these are the pasture for practitioners. So, not only is it a place where we can be, it's if we really want to delve into the world of practice. Then we want to stay on the pasture. We want to stay in the place where the practice is and to know what the past Your is allows us to graze there, allows us to be fed there to be nourished by it. And certain ways of being with our experience provides us with a contact with reality that can be nourishing and deepening and settling and unifying. And other ways of being in contact with reality are fragmenting dispersing contracting. Far from nourishing, maybe even the opposite, stressful. So if we say that we're sitting in meditation, and we're filled with anger about something or fear about something, then the we're thinking about that we're thinking about how this person said acts and I should have said why and, and I'm going to get back on that person or that person's no good. I have to talk to other people and, you know, and just kind of reviewing the story. That's stressful. That's kind of knocking nourishing way of thinking. So we ask ourselves, where's the pasture? At this moment, the pasture is the direct immediate experience of our anger or fear or whatever it might be, as is experienced through the body. So it's not a denial of anger or fear or happiness or anything, but rather, where's the place we can be with that experience. So that instead of being stressed, and denourished and nourished by it, we get nourished in some deep, important way to feel it, experience it in an embodied way. And then now we're not lost in the story. experienced the feeling doughnut of it pleasant or unpleasant. really feel and sense and take in the mind state is operating. When you have these preoccupations that lends itself to a pasture to a grave To a nourishment that's supportive for us, or pay attention to the ways in which we're caught and clinging to something, and to where the freedom from it is. So here we have this idea of pasture, of being nourished and being fed. And then the final kind of want to talk about today's this idea of the ancestral homeland. And here again, the Buddha says that the four foundations of mindfulness so Sati awareness for foundations for awareness is our is our in ancestral homeland. You know, I don't know what associations you have with this, but I love this idea. It's like, it's our home, the place where we're from, and when we're there, we're like, not just a house, that's our home, but the very land that we're

at home in, maybe safe in or grounded in or this is where the roots are in. I meant some set I don't know now maybe eight years ago, I went back to a place where I grew up in Italy, lived there for five years and hadn't been back for maybe 50 years or a long, long time. And it was quite something to be back at that kind of childhood home ancestral home in a sense. And as soon as I got to some of the places I was familiar with the smell and the lighting, and the kind of, you know, all this, I remember this, it was like, wow, this was like an embodied sense of being nourished by a place. So the Buddha tells a story. He says kind of an analogy story. He said that, in the foothills of the Himalayas, there is this berry of jungle forest area, where there are lots of monkeys. And this this jungle area is their ancestral home. They've lived They're for guests long, long time and, and as he said, would have said as long as they stay in that jungle, it's kind of in the foothills, maybe certain place that they're safe. Hunters don't come into that jungle, maybe it's too dense or maybe it's a little bit too difficult to get up the mountain side of the hill or something. They're, they're safe. But if the monkey's go wander up further up into the Himalayas, where it's high, steep cliffs, and maybe very few trees to hang from hold on to, he said, then that they go someplace where they're not safe, they can fall and hurt themselves get killed. And if they go in the other direction, and they go out onto the plains of northern India, out to the foothills in the jungles, where it's more open and flat and people live, that that's where the hunters can catch them. They're exposed. They're not safe high up in the trees where people not going to get them I suppose. But if they stay in their ancestral homeland, then they're safe. In the same way, practitioners of mindfulness, they're safe when they stay in the central home, of Sati of awareness. That present moment awareness, present moment, attention being grounded at attention in a place here. Now, the place where we're standing, our feet are on the ground where our bottom is on our cushion or a chair. There's a place a location for where wareness resides in this body, here now to really be here and feel it the first foundation of mindfulness, then we're in our ancestral homeland, in that mindfulness of these things, and there were safe. And it may be if we exclude it doesn't say this, but if we extend the analogy, that if we go out into the place into the world of people and we lose our groundedness and our attention, we get preoccupied and swept up in the crowds and the concerns and activities and what people are saying and doing and, and we're part of the arguments part of the, all the worldly pursuits that people get caught up in and lost in and, and kind of lose themselves lose their clear, grounded presence. It's very easy to be dangerous, we say and do and activities which are not nourishing, not supportive actually can be harmful and that we later regret, we can lose ourself in the world. It's like being, you know, well grounded and centered in meditation really feel present, and then deciding to go to be fully absorbed in all the activities of Las Vegas. You know, and pretty soon we're frazzled and not so connected. And then the going up into The high wilderness of Himalaya is where it's where it's, you know, cliffs and mountain sides is maybe to go into the wilderness or the Baroness where, where we disconnect and a different kind of way we're not in society, not in the world, but we're not grounded in ourselves either. But maybe we're in the high cliffs of fantasy and dreaming about the past in the future and something which you know, is kind of very far removed and a pie up in the Himalayas high up in our thinking mind, disconnected, again, which also maybe dangerous place. So, there is a refuge, there is a pasture to be nourished and there is a place in which we're safer I ancestral homeland. All three of these things, is referred to as Sati as mindfulness as awareness. These are very to me very warm, very nourishing, very inspiring, very embodied.

reference points for understanding what awareness can be for us. What's mindfulness can be. That mindfulness is not a duty. It's not a tension in the mind. It's not a lot of work. It's the place where we can relax. The refuge where we're safe and awareness can open, relax and just be itself we can do awareness, which is not the work. It's not like the muscle of mindfulness is pushing and trying. It's more like the place where awareness can operate naturally just relax trusting awareness, we trust awareness. And more than do awareness. We allow awareness rather than work awareness. Allowing that awareness because it's a refuge, we can relax in there, all the doing and of the mind, the thinking muscle can relax so we can just trust the inner intelligence. And then it's also a pasture where we can graze, we can be nourished by our experience. Imagine being aware, and what we're aware of feels like food coursing through our body. This is good. This is subtle. This is comfortable. This is nice. And then it's our ancestral homeland that we're home that here we can kind of let go of our self preoccupation me myself in mind. Because now we're we're at home We're here. We're allowed just to be who we are. What a great thing to sit in mindfulness and meditation. And really, you're allowed to be who you are, in all your ways. Experienced Not a lot of people have society and people and situations, all them sometimes work against or deep, allowing ourselves to be who we are. And in doing that, coming to a deep, deep appreciation for ourselves and deep care, deep love deep support, not because we're selfish and conceited, but actually the opposite. Because we're really present in a deep way. So here we are. Here you are. You're in a location, this thing to this. That's location, to be grounded, to be centered to be here to really be present with your body. It's in this location always in this location, always in the place you're at. Where the refuge has found this refuge of awareness of mindfulness, awareness of the body, awareness of the feeling tones, awareness of mind states, and awareness of how we're caught and how we're released. May it be that you are divided and happy with your capacity to trust awareness, trust awareness. So it becomes your support. Thank you.