

2016-03-14 The Four Foundations of Mindfulness The Six Entanglements

Fri, 9/25 3:12PM • 27:57

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

entanglement, thought, entangled, world, fetter, book, emotion, monks, walking, people, striker, knotted, sixth sense, ideas, object, mind, sense, called, meditation, text

SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

I'm going to continue the series of talks that I've given on the four foundations of mindfulness. And we're getting near the end. Supposedly, there's three more talks, we'll see. But certainly we get to the end of the text. And this particular discourse, it's, you know, 2500 years old, supposedly given by the Buddha lays out a series of exercises to do, or ways of perceiving the world that helped develop mindfulness help develop a heightened kind of awareness that is instrumental for setting us free. And freedom from the ways in which we get entangled in our thoughts or feelings, and the world around us. And today, the topic is what's called the Sixth Sense basis. And there's a particular set of instructions for how to pay attention to these things called the Sixth Sense bases. And this particular exercise section of the text is probably the one that's least talked about, and least discussed, or at least read. And this kind of he redid it, initially, it seems really boring. And However, it's probably the one that kind of best represents how the mindfulness practice is kind of most essential. And is talked about indirectly. People kind of say the same thing as here, but it says it's very simple and direct. And I think that rather than calling it this section on the sixth sense, bases, it should be called the second section on the entanglements are the six entanglements. The word that's key you'll see in this text in this section is literally means knot, k n o t. And so to get all knotted up, and it talks about how we get knotted up in the world. So entangled is a good word. The translation translator is usually translated in a very, and one of these kind of Buddhist, you know, there's a particular kind of vocabulary called Buddhist English. And so there's all these English words, but they're kind of peculiar, peculiar way. And so what the word that they usually use for the word knots is fetter. And When's the last time you use the word fetter. Some of us use the word today. Never. And so but you might have used the word entangled, you know, I got really entangled in something today. So, in order to introduce this section, I'd like to do an analogy, that little variation that when I when I do frequently, so I have this striker in my hand, and I can grab either striker can be really important to me. so important that I really want to grip it, I don't want to lose it, I don't want to take it from me. And I could focus on a number of things. But I could focus either on the striker and really hold it tight. Or, I can focus on how important the striker is, to me, the thoughts, the ideas, that beliefs connected to it. And those ideas can really I can get caught up in tangled in those. And because I'm so caught in those ideas, I grip this striker really hard. In between the striker and all the thoughts and things that I have, is a very important thing. And that is the grip, the holding. And what this particular section says is notice that holding that gripping in between what you see, and you're seeing, so there's objects in the world, and they sometimes exists, even if we're not even around, but then we see them. And it can be very innocent, you see something, and that's nice. But in between the object and the seeing they say goes come together, then there can be a knot. And so now that I've highlighted this striker and how wonderful and special it is, some of you now are probably kind of, you know really starting to think about you'd like to have this for yourself and you don't even listen to what

I'm saying anymore because you're thinking just about striker striker and, or, you know, or you're, you know you're entangled with being irritated by me by always using the striker as an example. And so you're entangled with your thoughts about it.

And so what that text says is that there is objects in the world that you can see there's a seeing of them. And then there's the fetter. Between them, there is the, what you can hear the hearing, and the fetter or I want to use the, I'm gonna drop the word better not or the entanglement. And then there's what you taste, there's a flavor and the tasting of it, and then there can be an entanglement there is smell, and the smelling of it, and then there can be an entanglement. And there's touch, you know what to make, you know, in your body. And there's the awareness of the touch, and there can be the entanglement. So there's the five senses. In Buddhism, they posit a sixth sense. And it's very interesting idea, there's a sixth sense, because with like, with seeing the eyes or a sense, I can see this book that's here on it. And the book in my eye are two separate things. By turn my way eyes away from the book, I still can see, the book still exists, but I no longer see it. But I turn towards it, and I can see it. And I can see that it's separate for me. And I can have a relationship with a book, or I can just see it as a book, or I can get entangled in it. So the same kind of perceptual relationship can exist with what goes on in your mind or your inner life. So you can, it's possible, especially with training, to really see or perceive that you're thinking, when you're thinking there's a thought. And there's the perception of thinking. And that perception is distinct from the thought, just like the book is distinct from the seeing, I can have a feeling and emotion. And like so clearly know that I'm having an emotion, and that knowing is distinct from the emotion. And I can have beliefs, I could have, you know, just the whole all the different things that go on in our world. So it's kind of like the mind's eye, they can see what goes on in the mind. There's hoser the sixth sense. And what's what's very important about this distinction is that the same relationship, relationship can exist, with the things that exist in our mind, or thoughts and emotions and all that as I can have just looking relaxingly at the book, there's a book and I'm here and the books not bothering me. And I'm not bothering the book, it's just just I see it, and that's what it is, that can be a thought. And you can see it this is just a thought distinct from the perceiver perceiving. And just a thought and, you know, you don't have to do anything with it, you don't have to get involved in it, don't get entangled in it, don't have to be bothered by it, don't have to judge it, don't have to assign meaning to it, we have to do anything, the fact that we have a thought just thought bubbles up. And then, and then at some point, it goes away. But we can see it that clearly. And that's very different than how people, some people live, where we're kind of identified with our thoughts or feelings. Were not really so distinct from it. It's almost as if we are our thoughts. I think, therefore I am. But you'd also like you know, progress are so closely connected or to it might not be clearly thoughts and might not be clearly, emotions, or inner feelings are intuitions, it might be some kind of composite of all the kind of inner workings that are kind of all jumbled together in soup. And we don't quite see what it is, we don't quite know what it is. But we kind of are it. And what that means is when you think something, some people think something, it must be true, because I thought I thought it and whatever I think must, you know, somehow it did. Sometimes it's not much questioning of it. Sometimes there is or there's some kind of non questioning of some aspect of our inner life that has to be there. If we're going to suffer if we're going to have to stress or distress, some way that we've gotten entangled with something in there. And so we're closely meshed with it. The ability to see the inner worlds make a distinction to tease apart the soup. So we start seeing the particular component parts of this whole inner life. And to see it Oh, it's just a thought. It's just an emotion.

But the just isn't diminishing or dismissing it. It's just Oh, it's simple. It's a simple part. It's a simple emotion. And there's no there doesn't have to be there. Automatic instinct to get involved already be pick it up, or get pushed around by it or react to it, just there. So an image that's used as sometimes in Buddhism is, when the mind is quiet enough, peaceful enough and spacious enough that a thought can

arise and pass through the mind. Like a cloud, small cloud passing over an endlessly blue sky. And that guy, nice. So he's, well, there, it is, right. But, you know, we sit here. And, and, you know, maybe, you know, I evoke something rather unfortunate, I don't know if it's the case, but they'll try. You know, I can ask you to remember your first girlfriend or boyfriend, you know, the first partner or something that, you know, stood you up or something. And now, you're not gonna listen to me at all. Because, you know, it's not just remembered, but it's not just, you know, the, you know, an innocent thought that floats through, it's like, that's interesting, you know, God, how could he have reminded me I can, I'm not going to be stuck in that all day, you know, and, and, you know, an example of being entangled and caught, you know, with it, as opposed to just just a thought, but it's a very powerful thing. To understand and to read even more, so to realize that there doesn't have to be an entanglement, right, with a thought we it says, We don't have to get involved in it more than just to see it going through going by just is there an emotion, we we, it's possible to just see it arise and pass just without being caught in it. The first one of the first times, I clearly saw this in a way that was really significant and inspiring for me to see was I was in a meditation retreat. So my mind was kind of quiet and spacious. And I was doing walking meditation. And we were really walking meditation as we walked back and forth about 20 to 30 paces, and people usually stick out their walking spots, you know, so you don't know where you're going to sit, you know, where, you know, walk for 20, you know, you have about 45 minutes to walk back and forth. And so I found my place. And I'd used it before in the retreat. Sometimes people like the already claimed it for the retreat, don't know what else should be there, right. But I wasn't that attached to it. But I was walking back and forth. It was a length long hallway. And I was walking down part of it back and forth. And this, I saw, I noticed this other person was came into walking slowly, you know, walking meditation, like a throw, he's gonna walk right by or something, and then he got into my lane. But if I was in my head, I was there first. Right? And so this is curious now that well, he certainly is going, you know, he's just trying to get someplace else. He's just on his way through. And I turned around and like game of chicken or something, you know, like everywhere. And so I got angry. So some of some of me got entangled with it. Okay, that's certainly did that. But the anger just rose. And I didn't get involved in it. I didn't pick it up. I didn't judge it. I didn't judge myself because of being anger. It was just like this smoke or this, this, you know, cloud, you can just add that to the physical feeling kind of Was it a rose from someplace in my torso, I guess, went up to my head where it could get me do some damage. And it just kept going. I thought, Wow, it's like Teflon mind. It didn't stick anywhere at all. It just it was just anger. I knew it was anger. And that's all. And that was different than how I would have been in the past about anger, because anger is pretty captivating. It has authority. And it's really important. And it's me. And you know, a number, right? And it comes with all kinds of ideas about how you're supposed to act and beef, you know, so. So that's, those are all called entanglements. We can attend, I got it. But it was no entanglement. So just there it was.

So, the instructions for this exercise in the text is to know that when you're in front of some object that you're seeing, to know there's the object and then to know that there's a seeing of it. And if it's there, to know the entanglement, to know the fetter to know how it works. caught up in it involved and we picked it up were somehow ruminating and thinking and wanting and not wanting and, and, you know, involved in it. And, you know, you can do that with all kinds of things, right? So there's site objects, you know, you could see an object or see a person that looks very desirable. And, you know, you could just see desirable person, attractive person attractive thing. And just, you know, it goes right through, you know, he, you know, people are like a dime a dozen around here, they come and they go, and, you know, just, you know, there's the person, and, but then there's the entanglement. It's like, Oh, you know, let's see if they have a wedding ring on it. No, no, no. And then, no, I wonder, you know, person free, what would you do?

I know, so. And so you know, it's entangled, right? So instead of that, to just look at that, so I did co on practice with the American Zen teacher named Aiken, Roshi is deceased now, but his time is very famous, and teacher, and co on practices, you're given these enigmatic kinds of enigmatic questions or statements that you have to respond to. And sometimes you go over back with response in meetings with him the interviews, sometimes last 30 seconds, you know, because you give your response, and he just points to the door, and back, come back next time. Try again, like the key one, the really the entry point co on question. And his tradition was the question, Does a dog have Buddha nature? But you're actually given the answer as part of the quest? And the answer is mu, which in Chinese means no. But that's almost seems to be almost irrelevant to your answer. So people will try for months and months, and then come back. But how do you answer this question here? How to stapler, why do you respond to it? And then once you pass that, then you go through a series of other ones. And as I remember, was many years ago now. But there was one that had something to do with seeing an attractive person. And as attractive persons walking down the street and smiles at you. So how do you respond? So I passed that one quickly. And he was happy with my answer. I said, You smile, and you keep walking? Anyway, that's what I don't know what you think of that answer. But it got me on to the next question. And so this idea that, you know, we don't have to get involved, we can just appreciate it and continue and let things be. So we can see something outside the object, see that that's an object, we can know that we're seeing it. And then we can know the quality of that seeing how are we involved? There we contracted? Are we tied to be stressed? Are we resisting with our eyes? Are we you know, eyes popping out of our eye sockets, you know, or what is going on there with our with our eyes and all I kind of mental kind of phenomena. And then there's a sounds and smells and tastes in the physical sense world that we can touch. And it's possible to kind of see these three component parts. And the most important one is the entanglement. The act, well, you know, that we had this extra activation that goes on extra kind of, you know, swirling or agitation or involvement. And how you know that you're entangled is if your thoughts in relationship to whatever the object is, you can't easily put down. You can't just let go of it and go on to the next thing. So attractive person walks by, and maybe you smile in a nice, friendly way. And then you continue to think about it, then think about it, think about it. So there are there's a story, I can tell you, this famous Zen story. Two monks, two Buddhist monks in ancient China were traveling to across the countryside to a new monastery. And they came to river, shopping, somewhat shallow river that they had to cross. But there was a woman there who somehow wasn't able to cross it by ourselves. Without maybe getting her dress squared or something. And so she was totally distressed. And so one of the monks have just picked her up and carried over and put her down and continued walking. And so the two monks made it made it to the next monastery. And just before they got there, the monk who didn't do the caring, kind of finally couldn't contain himself anymore and said, How could you have done that? Because one of the rules that we have as Buddhist monks, we're not allowed to touch women. So how could you have done that? And the man who did the carrying said, I put her down by the river? Why are you still carrying her? So this second monk was entangled, maybe their sense of self righteousness, or his attachment to the rules and regulations? Or, you know, I don't know what, but, you know, so they did, you can't put something down easily. And that's something that meditation can reveal pretty dramatically.

Because if you sit down to meditate, and do you have thoughts and concerns that keep persisting through the meditation, maybe you can let go them for a moment, but they come right back. Or maybe you can't let go. That's it. As soon as your can't drop something, put it down easily. That means that you're somehow rather entangled, you're caught in it. And when you're caught, you're not free. You haven't found independence. When I had the anger arise, I was independent from the anger it arose in the past. If I see the book, I can see the book. And I'm seeing it I see there's no entanglement. I'm independent from the book, the fetters keep us chained or locked in. So that's why did bad and that's the word fetter kind of means like a chain that we're tied to. The Buddha used the analogy of two oxen

that are connected with a yoke. And it is not the either oxide in neither oxygen is in is in tangling or yoking, the other ox, but it's the yolk between them, that keeps them kind of bound up. And so it's not the book. It's not the seeing of the book. But it's the yoke that I put between them, the entanglement, that's where we lose our freedom. And so the exercise is to see those things, understand how these work, this entanglement, and to learn to drop the entanglement. And that doesn't mean that we have a judgement about the world that we live in, will be See here, do all that. The book is the book. And I don't I in fact that I'm entangled in the book, doesn't mean that the book is bad. It just means that I'm hurting myself with being caught up this way. If I, if I throw away the book, in order to get rid of my entanglement, that's like throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It's a perfectly good book. And I just can't deal with my entanglement. So I just get rid of the object. And not not a quite a few spiritual people and Buddhist practitioners sometimes take that approach, just get this thing away, this thing is bad. Get it away from me. And one One consequence for some people occasionally, is they want to be hermits. Because the world is bad and, and they think they have very negative evaluation of the world. not recognizing that the world in a sense is neutral. But it's our entanglement that causes a trouble. And so ox one doesn't blame ox two, right? That would be kind of silly. Just the yoke that's holding between them, that keeps them you know, locked to each other. So we don't blame the world. We try to understand what we're doing and our relationship to it. And that's where we find can find our freedom. And that's easily enough said if you're talking about books and things in the world, but it's much more difficult when we look at the mind. Right? Our our beliefs, our opinions, our ideas, our memories, our conditioning, our habits of mind are our emotions. This can come with tremendous force, tremendous sense of authority, sense of rightness that this is the way things are we negotiate the world and find ourselves safe in the world and get what we want in the world often through the vehicle of our ideas and thoughts and perceptions that exist in the mind, our emotions and feelings. And so we have a long habit of really relying those and kind of getting them right and fixing them and working through that filter but often at As this is kind of a primary kind of locus is of our suffering, the way that we get entangled with this inner landscape of thoughts and ideas. And so it is possible to relax to calm down enough. So that we can start seeing clearly what is actually happening, you can see the rising of a thought. And we can see how we get involved in it or don't get involved in it, we can see the arising of an emotion, we get involved or we don't get involved, we can see the arising or perception, this very simple concept of what it is, we can see how we get involved or how we don't get involved. And as we learn to see that this involvement, the entanglement doesn't is not required. It's possible just to let things be very simple, a thought a thought and then are feeling a feeling, then it's possible to discover there's freedom in that simplicity.

And I like to say there's also a lot of respect, because there's, there's a kind of a deep respect for the things as they are independent of how we start manipulating and working yet and reacting to it, just letting it be. And so one of the texts that in our kind of Buddhist tradition, it's almost like a liturgy of our our tradition is a famous text that that call are called Buddhist teachings to buy here. And there was a man who asked the Buddha to give the teachings in brief. And so, the Buddha said in brief in the scene, and what you see, let there be only the scene in the heard that therapy only the heard in the in the sense we know all the other senses may be led to be only the sensed. And in the cognized. What you can know in your mind, let it be just be the cognized. So nothing extra nothing, no added layers, no entanglement, just to be very simple in the herd, the scene, the scene, the herd, the herd, in the sense, the sense in the cognize, the cognize. If you can do that, then there'll be nothing in it for you to be caught up in. And if there's nothing in it for you in that, then you won't locate yourself in it or separate from it. You won't, you won't find yourself, they won't be there and they won't be a here and that's okay. So we need to turn it off and on again, because it's that time when something funny goes on machine