



# MINDFUL IN MAY

**Dr. Elise Bialylew, founder of Mindful in May ([mindfulinmay.org](http://mindfulinmay.org)) and The Mind Life Project ([www.mindlifeproject.com](http://www.mindlifeproject.com)) and author of The Happiness Plan, interviews Gil Fronsdal**

## **Gil Fronsdal**

*Gil Fronsdal is an internationally renowned American Buddhist teacher, writer and scholar based in Redwood City, California. He has been practising Buddhism of the Sōtō Zen and Vipassanā schools since 1975, and is currently teaching the practice of Buddhism in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

**Elise:** Welcome, Gil, to the program. I'm delighted that you can be part of this. I've been listening to your Dharma talks, and I'm really looking forward to our conversation. Thank you for being here.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Very happy to be here. The delight is mutual.

**Elise:** Just to begin with, I wondered if you could give a little bit of background specifically about how you entered the world of meditation, and a little bit about your context of teaching at the moment.

**Gil Fronsdal:** I was first introduced to transcendental meditation in college. I really liked it for the three months that I did it and became very calm. Then summer vacation happened, and that was the end of that. Then some years later, I was introduced to the book, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, that book by the Zen master, Suzuki-roshi (Shunryū Suzuki), and it was a remarkable book for me to read. It was as if reading things that I knew but didn't know that I knew. It somehow really inspired me. So, then I went to the San Francisco Zen Centre, where the book came from, and I was introduced to Zen meditation.

It was a little bit in fits and starts. I wandered around for a few years, but meditation became very important for me and as meditation became important to me, I wanted to learn how to integrate meditation into my daily life. I felt meditation was great for me, it was a transformative experience, and I didn't want to only have that in meditation, I wanted to be that way in daily life. That was my reason to go and live and practice at a Zen monastery.

**Elise:** How long were you actually in the Zen monastery? Tell us a little bit more about that.

**Gil Fronsdal:** I spent about 10 years as a monastic, as a monk. Most of that was here in the United States, and in Japan. I was ordained as a Zen monk, a Zen priest, both here in the United States, and also in Japan. During that 10-year period, I went to Thailand and Burma, where I was introduced to vipassana. That really spoke to me. The initial attraction was, in vipassana, the meditation retreats are a lot longer than Zen. My first Vipassana retreat was 10 weeks long. In Zen, the longest silent retreat is seven days. So, the depth of stillness I could attain, or concentration, in the long retreat was much more than the seven days. That was what brought me back into the vipassana. I went back to Southeast Asia and practised in Burma, so then, got pulled into the vipassana world.

**Elise:** What do you think it was that really piqued your curiosity? To make you go and move into a monastery, and then go on 10 weeks' retreat. What was it that you saw or that really made you curious in this way? From some people's perspective, that could seem to be quite an extreme thing to do.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Well, for me, it wasn't so extreme, maybe because I was young and unformed, and didn't have a lot of attachments or things to do. But it had its challenges as well to make that transition. It was always in pursuit of living, back then, the language I used was integrity. In meditation, I discovered a kind of integrity that I'd never experienced before in my life. Some people might call it peace. Some people might call it a wholeness or insight or something. But I called it, back then, integrity. It was really a pursuit of how to deepen that or expand that in my life.

To give you an indication of this direction, a little bit after I was introduced to Zen, I went back to Norway, where I'm from, and I lived on a dairy farm for a while. During that time working there, the couple on the farm went away for a vacation and left me alone. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever spent

time alone. It wasn't intentional. It was just that I was in very rural Norway. I saw the mail carrier once down the street, down the road and neighbours were far away. By accident, I found myself alone for seven days. During those seven days, taking care of the cows, milking them, doing the farm life, my mind got clearer and clearer. In some ways, I got calmer and calmer and I was struck by how sharp my perceptions became. The world around me began to sparkle in a way that was surprising and it was all so new. Even more surprising was, I became acutely aware of my thoughts. I didn't think I was supposed to pay attention to thoughts, or that there was anything wrong with the thinking. It was like, "Wow." There was this intimacy with myself I'd never had before.

When my friends came back, that sense of clarity and of the perception and the intimacy disappeared. I thought, "Wow! That was great." I realised the goal in life was not to be a hermit. That wasn't for me. My goal was to learn how to be alone with others. That was the language I used. What it meant was not aloof, but it meant how to have that kind of intimacy, that kind of clarity and perception, really in touch with myself, without all the agitation that comes in social contexts, contact with people. How could I do that? How could I develop that? That's the momentum that brought me into being a monk: how do you do that?

**Elise:** Later on, just for the context for people, lots of things happened. You ended up having a family, and you've got two kids. What I think is fascinating, and what a wonderful opportunity in conversation with you, is for people to hear then how did that manifest or unfold in the context of then becoming a family person, and coming back into the world and working?

**Gil Fronsdal:** Certainly, the more I went into the intensive monastic life, seemingly, paradoxically, the barriers between myself and the world, the barrier

between self and others, dissolved more and more. The barriers mean my social phobias, my conceit, my ideas of who I thought I had the project myself as being to other people, the social games we played. These began to dissolve and so, there was a greater clarity of mindfulness, of awareness, between my heart and the world around me. These qualities of the heart, of feeling connected, they just grew. It wasn't my plan at all. To my surprise, compassion grew in me. So, this sense of being connected and compassionate for the world grew in that context of being away from the so-called world.

I wasn't leaving the world. I wasn't escaping it or wasn't trying to avoid it. I had no particular problem with the world. I just had this beautiful place to do this deep, wonderful work. I felt so lucky to be able to do this work. You go inward and do it and it was one of the great experiences of my life. To not do that, it would be like telling someone that you shouldn't spend time sleeping alone in your bedroom under a nice blanket because it's selfish. Your self-absorbed, just you and your own sleep and you're cutting everyone else out, and you're ignoring everyone. You shouldn't be doing that. But people do it a third of their life. They're usually not told they're selfish for doing that. It can be delicious. That was my way to get refreshed, to get renewed, to be rebooted, to be upgraded, have the hard drive cleared out. Just to be ready to come back into the world in a more wonderful way.

After those ten years, the next 30 years, I have been actively in the world with family and children, and with lots of students, lots of community. My world is the world of people, and serving them, teaching and supporting. I don't know if it is or not, but my motivation for doing this originally was out of compassion. It came from that time. I would say this is what I do, so it's not like a job. It's not like I do it from 9:00 to 5:00. It's more like I do it from 5:00 to 9:00. This is what my day is. I love it. I'm happy with it.

Is it a selfish life now? Maybe there's some way of seeing that if you stretch the word selfish. But it's certainly a life that's all about trying to alleviate suffering in the world. Those 10 years of monastic life, and this deep inner work that I did, that made me the kind of person who would do the life I live now.

**Elise:** What you said about when you're doing this work, and then compassion naturally arises. I just think it's very interesting that something about spending time with yourself in this way, as you said, takes down the barriers and then there's this natural generosity, or love, or whatever you want to call it, that emerges. We've got into the conversation, but I wondered if you could actually define mindfulness, especially for the people that might be coming to this in a newer way.

**Gil Fronsdal:** I'm happy to. I define it differently from how it's now popularly defined in our cultures, especially secular mindfulness and all that. It might be a little bit of a surprise to hear how we talk about it, but I'm not unique in this way. I think it's important to distinguish between mindfulness as a faculty and mindfulness as a practice. If those two are considered the same, we actually are missing each other. The Buddhist word, *sati* (it's often translated as mindfulness), and it's a faculty of mind. It's a capacity that we have. My favourite translation of the word *sati* is not mindfulness but is awareness. It's simply the capacity to have an open perception of our experience as it's happening in the present moment. In and of itself, it does not involve clearly recognising what's happening. That's a different faculty of the mind that in Buddhism is called clear comprehension. In the popular, secular mindfulness movement, what they call mindfulness is what Buddhists call clear comprehension. Mindfulness practice, the practice of *sati*, in the Buddhist terms, involves using awareness, clear comprehension, and dedicated

engagement with the present moment. That's what the practice is. Those three together is mindfulness practice.

Some people define mindfulness by those three things as if it's one thing. Mindfulness, for me, is awareness. That initially is just awareness, but as the practice deepens, becomes lucid awareness, where the mind is very clear and lucidly aware. So much so that the capacity for lucid awareness is almost like recognised in and of itself. We can be aware of awareness. It's an awareness that does not need to have clear comprehension. It's an awareness which is non-reactive, that is spacious, and has room for everything. Because it's non-reactive, it's equanimous. Lucid awareness is very equanimous and non-reactive when the mindfulness is developed, when the sati is strong. I don't know if that was too complicated for someone who's new.

**Elise:** No. Maybe if we can explore that a bit further. I don't know if it would be helpful. You raise the metaphor of water. I don't know if that can be used in this context to help listeners understand the clear comprehension or awareness. Does anything come to mind.

**Gil Fronsdal:** The Buddha used water quite a bit as a metaphor for the mind, and different metaphors for different states of mind that people are in. When the mind has this lucid awareness with which we can see our world in ways that are liberating, then he used the metaphor of a completely clear, still, mountain lake where you look in, and it's so clear, the water, you almost don't see the water because you look right down into the bottom of the lake, and you can see the rocks there, you see the fish swimming around. It's just crystal clear.

The mind becomes crystal clear like that. The mind is like a lake, or like an ocean, or a vast, open, clear space. It has a vastness to it, a spaciousness to it, where whatever occurs, the uniqueness and specificity of our experience can arise and bubble up, but it's not latched on to, it's not pushed away, it's not

appropriated for personal desires. We don't make a self out of it. But we see everything that actually exists. It actually has some kind of direct part of our sense data or direct experience. It's seen with a clarity that you see those stones on the lake bottom or the fish slowly swimming through the lake. The metaphor here is that the lake stands for awareness.

**Elise:** The things that come into the mind, like thoughts, feelings, that kind of thing, does that become turbulence.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Not necessarily. The thoughts, and the feelings, and the sensations we have, could just be seen with such clarity and non-reactivity that there's no turbulence. It's just like seeing the rocks or the fish in the water. However, if you try to ride one of the fish, say it's a dolphin or something, and you try to ride it, it's not going to like you being on it. It's going to thrash about, and you're going to make waves. Then it's all going to become not only waving, agitated, but probably stir up the mud, and you won't see any lake. It happens as things occur, and we react to it. That's stirring up the mud.

**Elise:** I wanted to move to the concept of thoughts because I think it flows on well from here. One of the biggest misconceptions I think that comes up for people is that meditation is about, somehow, stopping thoughts. Can you speak to this and just clarify this for the listeners?

**Gil Fronsdal:** People can dig their own graves with their thinking. Thinking can be very, very dangerous. The loops of thinking if people get caught in, rumination. They say that most forms of depression, except ones that are physiologically caused, are because of excessive rumination. A lot of things like resentments are stuck in loops of resentment because you keep thinking and reviewing. So, thinking can be really deadly, literally. But thinking also is fantastic. Some of the great nobility of human beings is through the medium of thinking. I have a very friendly relationship with my thoughts. I enjoy my



thoughts now. I didn't use to, but I enjoyed my thoughts. I'm happy to think and I don't have a problem with thinking, usually. Sometimes I get a little bit more interested in my own thoughts than the person who's talking to me and that's not so good. (laughter) So, that's where mindfulness helps. Thinking can actually be a great help for meditation. It is not the enemy of meditation.

There are times in meditation where thinking, at least most forms of conventional thinking stops. Tremendously beautiful silence happens. But to set that up as the goal, or expect that that's supposed to happen, just leads people astray. What's more useful in meditation is to think that our thoughts occur at different levels of intensity and as we meditate, we're lowering the intensity of it. So it's like having a speaker on at full blast, and you go into the room, and it's blasting music. Just because it's so loud, it's not pleasant. You try to cope with that for years, until someone tells you, "There's a knob. You can turn down the volume." "You can? Really? You're allowed to do that?" "Sure." So, you start turning down the volume. "Oh that's a lot better." Then you realise, "What about at night?" "Well, you could turn it down even more at night. You'll sleep better." So, you learn to turn it down, turn down the meditation.

At some point, you learn to use your thinking, say it's like sandpaper. You use coarse sandpaper for rough wood. As the wood gets more refined, more smooth, you use finer and finer sandpaper. So if your mind is coarse, you use sandpaper. Use thinking that's more refined than your agitated thinking to quiet your thinking. As your thinking gets quieter, the practice, and how we think about practice, we make that quieter so that it brings along and quiets the rest of the mind.

As you think about meditation, think about your breathing, focus on the practice. Let's sit up straight. Let's look at the breath. I wandered away now.

Let's come back. You adjust the volume of that. That you can have some control over. You adjust the volume of the thinking that keeps you engaged in the present moment and then the rest of the thinking quiets down and joins it. Then you keep quieting the thinking mind. With time, as you get concentrated and more mindful, the mind gets quieter and quieter and whether thoughts are supposed to completely stop or not, that's a very personal thing. I suspect that half the people who say their thinking stops in meditation are not paying really good attention.

**Elise:** In some ways, for the listeners that sit down, and they've just got so many thoughts, it's a positive thing that they can even recognise that there are thoughts. That shows that there is awareness. What would you suggest, in a very practical way, for people when they sit down and, let's say, begin a breath, meditation, coming to the breath, then using the breath as an anchor- and then the lists start, or the planning. What are some techniques or ways of being in relationship with this that we can use in practice?

**Gil Fronsdal:** For different people, different things work best. One thing is to clearly recognise that you're thinking, and to experiment to learn how to recognise it in a non-reactive way. Learn to recognise without being for or against it. Just a matter of fact, "Oh my mind is out of control," as opposed to, "Oh no! My mind is out of control. It's hopeless." Just, "My mind is thinking, is spinning out a lot." Recognising it with a calmer, more stable mind. The idea of using the recognising mind, so we recognise in a calm way, is part of what we're trying to learn here. It doesn't stop the agitated thinking or the planning, but it does introduce a new element into the ecology of the mind. The calm, direct recognition of what's happening.

Then the person has to decide, "What do I do next?" One possibility is to have something like the breathing to focus on and just don't be bothered by your

thinking. If it's easy to let go of it, let go of it. If it's not easy to let go of it, let it just recede into the background. Sometimes it is best not to worry about it. Don't get involved. If you're a person who's bothered by their thinking, if they're upset that they're thinking a lot, they're actually adding fuel to the thinking. The very thing that they don't want to have, they're actually feeding by being in a negative relationship to it. Don't you be bothered. Just let it be in the background.

If it can't be in the background, then there are two directions we could go. One is to turn towards the thinking with mindful attention. The other is to have a more dedicated practice of concentration on the breathing or on something else. Now, if you turn towards the thinking, one way to do it is to be mindful of the different component parts of thinking. Thinking is not a unitary thing. It's not the one thing. It's not the thoughts.

There's a lot of things involved when we think. Especially if there's compulsive thinking, there's a lot of energy. So, you can feel the energetics of it. If a person thinks in a voice with words, what's the tone of the voice? Is it gentle, and kind, and sweet, or is it harsh? If you think more in images, what's the quality and character of that imagery? Is it a sweet, nice theme, or is it that it has a quality of danger or something? What's the feeling of it?

Another component part of thinking is the physical component. The more compulsively we think, the more likely there's a physical correlate or expression of phenomena of thinking. You can see it in people's faces when their forehead gets all furrowed up in thinking hard. There can be a lot of energy in the forehead, around the eyes, sometimes the jaws, in the head. I get these buzzing, swirling sensations in my head when I think a lot. It might be someplace else.

The advantage of feeling the physicality of thinking, really getting sensitive to that, is that usually what we feel then is where there's a contraction or a tightness, a constriction. Then it might be possible to relax the thinking muscle. If we're only engaged in the content of the thoughts, we don't see where we can relax it, and if we can relax the physicality that's feeding, or supporting, or encouraging the thinking, then it's equivalent to no longer squeezing the toothpaste tube. If you keep squeezing it, the toothpaste just keeps coming out. You can wipe it off the top, and it will keep coming. You have to stop squeezing it. If you can stop squeezing the thinking muscle, then you'll have much more success in the mind getting quiet. Feeling the physicality of it is really helpful.

**Elise:** That's really helpful.

**Gil Fronsdal:** The other component part of compulsive thinking is, almost certainly, there's an emotion connected to it. Planning, more often than not, has fear, anxiety. It might have to do with memories. All kinds of emotions might be connected to memories, some of them good, some of them painful. There might be resentment, or there might be a longing, or there might be appreciation, or good feelings. If you can then bring mindfulness to the emotions connected to thinking, because I think of the emotions sometimes as much more the heart of the matter. These thoughts are really like a signpost. They are telling you, "Hey, you, pay attention over here," not to the thinking, but to the underlying emotion from which the thinking is coming.

**Elise:** Would you speak to that as well? I know for myself, when I began this practice, the idea of sensing emotion in the body, being a cerebral person, initially, was completely confusing. "What? Feeling emotion? What are you even talking about?" Could you give some guidance? Let's say someone is sitting in practice, and they're focussing on the breath, and then all of a sudden,

there's planning or a memory, then how would you invite them to bring mindfulness to emotion? What do they actually do?

**Gil Fronsdal:** Start by noticing what's been activated in the body. What sensations, what energy (people call it), gets activated in the body when you have that emotion? Sometimes it's in the head, sometimes in the belly. Sometimes the chest gets all constricted. Sometimes we get hot, we get cold. Different parts of the body get activated by different emotions and so that's the beginning of feeling in the body. You might not know what emotion it is, initially, but you certainly feel the body's been activated, or tense, or tight, or a lot of sensations and that's the beginning. In time, you'll begin to identify the emotion, that's part of it.

**Elise:** Another thing that comes up a lot for people- it's a similar theme, is this idea of when discomfort comes up, how do you manage it around breathing, and when you focus on the breath, how it can become very uncomfortable. There's an invitation to just allow things to be as they are, not interfere with the breath, but then as soon as that's happening many people experience a sense of, "I cannot "not" control the breath." What suggestions would you have for someone that's struggling with this battle of the breath suddenly feeling very uncomfortable when you bring attention to it.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Don't battle it. Don't battle the discomfort. I think it helps to let go of any idea that you're supposed to not control the breath, if that's what you're doing. All you're asked to do in mindfulness is to be mindful of what is and if you're controlling your breathing, think of yourself as getting a PhD in learning what a controlled breath feels like. You can develop lots of mindfulness with a controlled breath. Don't fight it. Don't feel like you have to have some special spiritual breath. Just be content that this is what you're

given, and this is what you're working with. Generally, with that approach, after a while, the control falls away. It will come back, but that's okay.

**Elise:** So many people come to meditation because they have this idea, "This is going to calm me down. This is going to make me feel better, feel a particular way." Then they sit down, and they discover it can be quite agitating, or it actually is the opposite of feeling calm. It actually is the opposite of feeling calm.

**Gil Fronsdal:** I have to say that there are some people, they sit down to meditate, and they do find themselves getting calm. It's life-changing and lifesaving sometimes to realise that they can sit down. People learn different techniques. Some techniques are a good match for certain individuals; some are not. It's a little bit like the lottery, learning the right technique for yourself. Calming is going in the direction of health for many people, it's a good thing.

There are people, and I was one of them, for whom, initially, that was not the case, as you're talking about. So, it's good to remember, sooner or later everyone's going to have a meditation where it's uncomfortable. Everyone's going to have a meditation where they're agitated. If you're a human being paying attention to life, you'll have it.

Mindfulness is not about being comfortable. Mindfulness practice is not inherently about being calm. Mindfulness practice, inherently, and the power of it, is learning to see what is actually happening. Learning how to see without reactivity. So, if you're controlling your breath just see that that is happening without reactivity. If you're filled with ideals about what's supposed to happen and the ideals are not happening, and you're upset with yourself, rather than trying to change that, or fight that, or battle that, in a sense take a step back, turn around and look at yourself. See that you have ideals. See that you're struggling with yourself. See if you can recognise the struggling mind. See it

for what it is. “Wow! Wow! I’m struggling here. Boy! Am I over-agitated!” To realise that in the recognition is where the peace is found, so the exploration is, how do I turn around and recognise when I’m agitated in such a way that in the recognition, there is no agitation? That’s where the art is.

**Elise:** That’s wonderful. Really helpful. It moves on to this question about the hindrances because this is what we’re talking about. Would you mind explaining to the listeners what the hindrances are? I know it’s a huge topic. It’s a book in itself. But just to touch on so that people are aware that when they start to bump into these, it’s a normal part of the practice. If you could perhaps choose one of your personal favourites from the ancient texts that you could share and point out how to navigate and manage it.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Everyone has the hindrances. It comes with being a human being. It’s important not to take them as personal failures. Every meditator will encounter them. When they come, it’s your turn, as opposed to it being a personal failure. The original meaning, the Pali meaning of the word is not hindrance, but rather a covering. It’s what covers things over. It covers over our wisdom. It covers over our ability to see clearly. Since the goal is to see clearly, you don’t want anything that gets in the way of that. There’s something about the preoccupation with these five that they become black holes of the mind. If you get too involved in these five, the attention gets sucked into it like light into a black hole, and the light doesn’t come out. It doesn’t really work to develop clear, lucid awareness if you’re in the black hole.

**These five are the essential desires; ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt.** It’s also useful to think of them in the Buddhist teachings as emphasised because they’re the primary mental forces which interfere with the mind getting subtle and concentrated. Since that’s one of the goals of practice, a subtle and concentrated mind, we really have to learn how to work

with them, and work through them, work past them. One of the values of letting go of them, or no longer being in their grip, is that it can feel like a delight. There's actually a joy that comes when we're finally free of them because as long as the hindrances are operating, we're actually not free. We're enslaved, in a way, by these forces of the mind that have taken over. To really understand how limiting they are, and then have that limitation fall away, brings a lot of feeling of goodness, of health, of happiness that really is inspiring for the continuing meditation practice and deeper sense of concentration. Build on that inspiration.

**Elise:** In the actual texts, are there other suggestions around the hindrance of desire or how to manage this? Coming back to the practicalities of actually being in meditation, someone's practising, and then a thought comes up. "I just have to get up." Whatever it is. What can you do in the face of these moments?

**Gil Fronsdal:** There are two different directions that a practice can go with these things. One is to turn towards the challenge, and the other is, actually, to turn away from it and practice concentration. At different times, one is better than the other. They both have their strengths and benefits, and they both have their disadvantages and you have to be able to understand both and know how to navigate them. If we're only avoiding our problems, then we don't learn about ourselves. But if we're always dealing with our problems, that can reinforce the idea of conceit and self-centeredness: "I have to fix my problems. I have these problems. Let's engage with it."

I don't know about Australia, but in California, we tend to have some over psychologised people. Everything is about their psychology, their emotions. They're always navigating, negotiating it, working it, developing it, and telling everyone else about it.



There are these two different directions. We do it at different times, depending on what's needed. Sometimes it's useful just to avoid that. Pour your heart and your love into focusing on your breathing. Just don't bother with it, and don't make a big deal of it. Just really develop your concentration.

The other is, in fact, to turn towards it. Just like turning towards thinking, we talked about earlier. You turn towards a desire, and you would really get to know it well as a present moment experience. What does it feel like physically? If it's a strong compulsion, there are probably lots of sensations in there that are activated. Really bring yourself close in to feel that and be present to it.

There might be beliefs that come with all kinds of thoughts: Beliefs that "I'm going to die if I don't get this," or, "I'm not going to be loved if I don't get it," or, "A sign of personal success in the world of being a worthy person is that I have this kind of experience." So, there are beliefs that get in the way that are driving. We are discovering what those beliefs are.

Then there might be emotions. The more compulsive the desire is, the more likely that there's an underlying emotion. Just like we're thinking, it's so good to drop down into the emotional realm, a hugely important, useful part of meditation practice, mindfulness practice, is to learn how to be mindful of emotions in the body; not to learn how to be aware of emotions through our psychology, or emotions, and sense of self, ideas of who we're supposed to be, but to drop out of the head, in a sense, and feel the emotions in the body and allow them to unfold. I like to think, our emotions are actually quite intelligent. That intelligence can operate if we get out of the way.

**Elise:** The question you could pose to yourself (for the listeners), if you're in the grips of this desire, to access it in the body would be what? What would you ask that would help to bring awareness to the emotion?

**Gil Fronsdal:** What part of my body is activated most when this emotion is present? Where is there attention? Where is there heat? Where is there vibration? Where is the contraction? Where is there tightness? Where in my body do I not want to bring my attention? Those kinds of questions, then, can help you begin exploring the body and find out where. It's interesting to know where the centre of gravity is for this emotional life, and to allow it to be there.

The metaphor, the image that I use for this, is allowing the emotion to be there in the body. Once you recognise it, where it's activated in the body, imagine that the awareness is like two cupped hands that come from underneath and just hold it there in a loving way. We're giving it permission to be there. If you're filled with rage, find out where that rage is in your body and allow it to be there. Give it permission to be there and see what happens. Allowing it to be there is very different than fuelling it, feeding it with just reviewing the story over and over again: "He said, she said," "This happened....I'm going to do that." That's feeding it. Letting that reactive mind become quiet and instead, lovingly just feel the rage. Allow yourself to be a volcano of rage.

**Elise:** Thank you. That's such a helpful, specific thing that people can do, which is so opposite to what we do when we're not trained in this area.

**Gil Fronsdal:** What does it mean? One of the reasons to develop a regular meditation practice, to learn how to have a good posture and meditation, learn how to be really present with your posture and body presence in meditation that comes from doing meditation day after day for a while, is that we make our body, and then meditation posture, into a temple, into the temple that can hold our inner life. Whenever strong emotions come up – nice ones, wonderful ones, strong desires, hates, fears, whatever might come – we have this place, this sacred place we can go, our temple, where we can sit, and allow it to bubble up, and to flow, and be there, and evolve without any idea of right and wrong.

Murderous rage. You're not a bad person because you have murderous rage if you go sit in your temple. Just allow these things to be there, because you know how to meditate and be still in meditation, not to move, you're not going to hurt anyone. You're still. It's the equivalent to the exercise of sitting in a chair and not moving for an hour while you have a strong compulsive desire. You're allowing something very different to unfold than if you're acting on the rage.

**Elise:** I wanted to just close the conversation and thank you so much again. So many wonderful insights. I wanted to ask you a story, that perhaps comes from the ancient texts, that you've often come back to that highlights something about meditation, or a lesson, or a teaching.

**Gil Fronsdal:** I'm happy to. One that builds or speaks to what we've been talking about here is this wonderful fable that's told. Once upon a time, up in the heavens: there are lots of heavens in Buddhism, one of which is ruled over by a great God called Brahma. The great God Brahma has a great palace. The great palace has a great throne.

One day, Brahma is away from his palace, away from his throne, visiting his various realms. An ugly little runt of a troll hobbles into the palace and jumps up on the throne. Now, an ugly little runt of a troll is not supposed to be sitting on the great Brahma's throne. The gods of the court begin saying, "Don't be up there. You can't be up there." But the troll doesn't get down. They start getting angry with him. "You shouldn't be up there. You can't be up there. Get down. You're terrible. You're bad." All the ways of being angry with him.

As they were angry with him, the troll started to grow. This ugly little runt of a troll grew bigger and bigger and more beautiful, warmer, radiant the more as this went along. So, these court gods said, "We don't know what to do here."

So, they went to find Brahma, explained to him what happened. He said, “I know what this is. I’ll go back home.”

So, he went back and went to his palace, and stood in front of the now big, strong, powerful troll sitting on his throne. He put his hands together in Anjali, and he said, “Dear troll, I’m so glad you’re here. I hope you’re comfortable up there. We’re here to be your friend.” As he was respectful to him, and bowed to him, and was being kind to him, the troll shrank, he got smaller, and smaller, and smaller, until finally, he just disappeared.

Then Brahma got up on his throne, and he explained to everyone, “That was an anger-eating troll. The more angry you are, the bigger it will get. You had to stop feeding it.”

**Elise:** That’s great. That’s wonderful. What a wonderful way to end. Thank you so much for your time and your insights. Really wonderful conversation. I’ll be sure to share with the listeners where they can find you. Wishing you well.

**Gil Fronsdal:** Very nice to talk to you. Bye-bye.\*