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SPEAKERS

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And so one of the things I believe that Buddhist practice asks of us is to study our relationship to change. And different people relate to change in different ways, or relate to different kinds of change in different ways. If things are pleasant, then sometimes we don't want them to change. We don't want them to be different, we hold on, if things are unpleasant, we can't wait for the change to occur. And sometimes knowing that things change is a great solace. When things are terrible, this is going to change, you know, this will change, you know, and it certainly helps with child raising to know that, oh, it's one of those days. You know, or, you know, they go through two weeks cycles, oh, just two weeks, or whatever. And, but some people, you know, look at changes as something you know, they don't like what happening is located hopefully it will provide some kind of relief. And some people look at changes being a problem some people look at are afraid of change. So they are afraid of entering into relationships with all kinds of things because they feel it's going to change it's going to be it's people are going to die when you lose it, it's going to end I've been burned before and there are people who hold back from being engaged in life and participating. There are people who refuse to get involved in our people refused to involve in intimate relationships until really love someone because they're afraid of loving because they're going to die you know the great great but the thing was that there was talk never talked about when people get married is a joyful time. You don't say you know, what you're doing when you're committing yourself to being married for life, is that you basically committing yourself to having one of you die before the other. And, you know, that's not a very pleasant thought. But that's kind of what it's built into the system is there's a there's a certain level of change and loss and some people hold back and don't want to be part of And so sometimes they feel that, you know, having a no heart is better than having a broken heart or a painful heart. I think the way the psyche works is that it's much healthier, to have a hurt, hurt and aching heart a broken heart, than it is to have no heart at all or to be numb. So what's the relationship we have to change? And two things changing? Is the question each of you has to ask answer for yourselves. And Buddhism has a lot to say on the topic. But I think that it's more interesting perhaps to for each of you to look at your own tendencies to think first, what is your most, your most prevalent, most likely response to change kind

of a generic way of just generic change? And then what's your relationship to specific things of change? How do you feel about that?

It's been said sometimes that the I've heard it said that the one thing that most people are all people can agree that they really know certainly if you ask me, What do you know? Absolutely, for sure. And people say it's that things change, that things are impermanent. And some people then we'll understand appreciate impermanence in a lot of spheres of our lives. But sometimes when one one responds to impermanence, is to say, well, things are changing all the time, things are unreliable. So I'm going to find that one thing or those things, which are reliable, which I can hold on to and depend on is being permanent and unchanging. And so many people hold on to all kinds of things and you can just go through the litany of things that you've held on to or your life or other people have held on to you've seen. And there are things we hold on to that we don't really realize we're holding on to until until it's taken away from us. Sometimes it's our help. And we don't even realize the degree to which our health has been a source of security or we've counted on And then it's our health changes and in dramatic ways sometimes. And then, you know, things have changed and you realize maybe your health can't be relied on in the same way. So what is it that is reliable is another question that Buddhism poses each of us to answer for ourselves, what can we rely on? Part of the Buddhist teachings is over and over again to point out how everything is impermanent. And part of that question that the teachings everything is impermanent. is a is a kind of little prod to keep you asking, what is it that's reliable? What is it reliable? Is my house reliable? My friend Ron house house disappeared in Oakland fire is is your bank account reliable? Is your relationship reliable is your health reliable is I like one of the things I liked about sitting here and we're told the valley and one thing I didn't like about sitting here is the fact that we're right on top of the senator his fault. And things can change. And, you know, even the ground is not reliable. There was a earthquake in yucca Valley one year, yucca Valley is a retreat center, which we used for many years for Vipassana retreats. And in the middle of one of the things that happened during the Dharma talk, that there was a there was a series of earthquakes and aftershocks. And one of the comments that some of the people I knew who were there said, was that they thought always the ground was really reliable and stable. And they just saw the ground kind of buckle and wave through, you know, just like it was the ocean. And so what is it that's reliable, if everything is changing? The sometimes we can use change to help us with change. And what I'm thinking about here is that one of the most useful things I found Especially like in meditation or in daily life also is the changing nature of breathing, that the breath, the alternating sensations of breathing in and out this, the expansion and contraction of the torso, the belly, all the various sensations of the breathing are a wonderful place to anchor ourselves in something which is changing. And what what's fascinating about the breath, is to notice the ways in which the breath is held. And if we're anxious or afraid, or in a hurry, or it's all kinds of reasons in which we're holding, resist, we're bracing ourselves against life against change, or all kinds of reasons that the body is being held. And one of the first things I often do in the beginning of a sitting, is I check into my breathing, what how is my breathing and more often than not, I find out that my breath is actually held a little bit. And so then I'll breathe into that. I'll try to relax that a little bit. Let go of that, or just be with that for a while if it seems to kind of tenacious

And, and often kind of when the breath has held, I think it's fair to say that it's often an attempt to hold on to something to resist change or impermanence. Fear is often a resistance to the way things are. We don't want things we don't think we want things to be a certain way. or anger can be resistance. Sometimes it doesn't have to be. But certainly resentment is resentment I think of as frozen anger. And it often gets frozen in our body, and often enough frozen with the way we breathe. So it dropped down into the breath and let the breath become fluid, again, is one way to help us not have unhealthy holdings or resistances. To Life itself. I call the breath the great lubricator because there's lubricates life makes life a lot easier to flow and change. And I'll come back to my breath over and over again throughout the day. Even while I'm talking to you. I come back to my breath. And I find even when I'm talking to you, giving these talks There are reactions that I have to what's the whole event that sometimes appear in my breathing. So I drop into my breath and more often than not, I find my breathing, you know, has replaced with attention the holding is in relation to the breath has moved up into the chest kind of up into the, the I don't know what it's called, but the cavity around the above the diaphragm. And I find that it's, it's much better for me to let that upper holding of the diaphragm to be released, and to kind of let the center of gravity or center of weight of my breathing apparatus kind of be lower in my, in my belly. So I find that being with the impermanence of the breathing in a relaxed way and uninhibited way, makes it a lot easier for me to be present for the impairments and change of life around me. And also, I find it very helpful in investigation of understanding what my relationship to change is, because it's not simply just a matter of noticing the holding and letting go of it, but also noticing where we're held And then trying to understand what's it all about? Seeing that clearly, to understand the roots of it? Why is it that there's resistance? Why is it that there's fear or anger or holding on or wanting things to be different. And there's all slew of ways in which we hold. One of the ways which we can use, we think we use change in our favor, is through hope. And things are changing. So we hope that things will get better, we expect them to be better. And hope is a very curious feeling or idea. I've heard a lot of spiritual teachers say that a Buddhist teacher, for example, say there's no place for hope in Buddhism, there's no hope in Buddhism. Buddhism offers no hope. And the reason why they say such things as that hope, is a claim is often based on fear or resistance to things as they actually are. And it's projection into the future, rather than to come in some realistic and liberated relationship to how things are right now.

Now impermanence is a pretty common observation for humans. And you don't have to be a Buddhist to understand the importance of impermanence. Buddhism, perhaps has taken the subject of impermanence, to its limit, perhaps, but maybe not. But the, it's quite common. We have in the Western tradition, Heraclitus who said, you know, we can't step in the same river twice, because everything's always changing. And a lot of the wisdom that can come from life. Learning how to be a wise person in life comes from understanding impermanence and having a new relationship to it. impermanence impinges on life all the time. So encountering death, for example, can bring a certain kind of wisdom there. Pre encountering all the changes that are obvious in life, and coming to terms with that, and having some ease with that can bring a lot of wisdom. As I've often said, at some point, I realized that one of the reasons why elders in our society, people who are getting on in age, why

they're considered to be wise, is not because they've had a lot of experience, which is what I thought before, as probably part of the reason. But it's, it's from their proximity to death. And as you get a sense, closer, you sense that your death is really close. You know, it's only a few years or whatever you can kind of imagine that, you know, when I was 20, I couldn't imagine my, into my life, but now I certainly can. And that proximity to death creates a different context for understanding our lives, and can bring a lot of wisdom about how we relate to things and wisdom has a lot to do with our values and priorities and the meaning that we assign to things. Meaning is More impermanent than a lot, because meaning is quite flexible and changeable. And often when we relate to reality, we're relating through the filter of the meaning that we apply to it. But meaning is, you know, can be changed quite quickly. And then how do we relate to changing meaning of things? There's a great story that you've probably heard many times, I've told of something like, well, it happened in Afghanistan, this one this time. And there was a guy who had a farm you know, in the off in the dusty mountains of Afghanistan, and he was old guy farmed it with a son. And one day his son went up into the mountains and found a wild horse that was just free up there and he brought it home and it's quite wild and the neighbors said, Oh, you're such a, you know, Lucky farmer. You've been eking out an existence for so long, you're so poor, and I don't know how are you going to get by the season with your old worn out donkey who's going to plow but now you have this great big stallion who's strong and you're so lucky and the old man says, We shall see. Or maybe so. And then the young son tries to tame the horse and is thrown off the horse and breaks his leg his neighbor say, Oh, you're so unlucky, how are you going to manage without your son to help you do all the work and this must be really terrible and the old man says, We shall see and then the neighboring warlord declares war on that county and so all the young men are constrict conscript constricted into the army. And but the young man's son has broken his foot so we can't go fight so the neighbors Oh, you're so lucky all the other young man got going off to fight and they're probably gonna die. And your your son's gonna stay he only has a broken foot is probably going to be fixed by the time the war is over. They only last 200 days around here. And, or whatever and so then Then then says Of course, we shall see now this story has no end. Because it just goes on like that, you know he has certain equanimity about the meaning we apply to the changing circumstances of our life we don't know until how things are going to work out

in the ancient India's ancient religions of India, there are different people who were very cognizant of the fact that life was impermanent and the there was relate some of the religious traditions rose in relationship to the that understanding and somewhat simplistically, you can understand that one of the religious responses to impermanence in ancient India, where it can be described in a very simple equation. The world of impermanence equals suffering. If you have that understanding that the world of impermanence is the same as suffering, then if you want to stop suffering, you have to in some way or other stop the world of impermanence. And so the these often, religions of transcendence arose from this kind of understanding that there's some transcendent reality that you could relate to that was completely separate and different from this life that we're part of. And where there was some kind of transcendental state of consciousness which in some transcendental plane of heavenly kind of plane or there's various kinds of transcendental kind of goals that people then established because they had to somehow not relate to not be involved in this world of impermanence. If the two were connected,

equated the Buddhist, the Buddhist kind of equation is an equal appreciation of impermanence and equal appreciation is a lot of suffering. But the equation in Buddhism is suffering plus clinging Equals No. impermanence, plus, clinging equals suffering. And when you have an equation like that, or perhaps, perhaps if you actually, the Buddhist is a little bit different, it's impermanence, times clinging, he will suffering. And because he's magnified by, by our clinging. But the so when you have an equation like that, you don't have to get rid of the world of impermanence necessarily, what you have to do if you get rid of the clinging and he's getting rid of the clinging, then they the suffering falls off the equation also. And that's the task that Buddhists have taken in relationship to the world of impermanence, is to understand where is the clinging, where's the holding? Where's the resistance to the way things are? And to the changing nature of stuff, to phenomena to experience? How do we relate to it? So to study in our clinging in our attachments, so if certainly we can be very fond of this place here. And, and a little bit sad about leaving it. But there can also be a tremendous suffering and built in with it being attached to this place. And or maybe maybe persons attached to the kind of meditation they have in this place. And so this place is not so important, but it's the kind of meditation they have here. I mean, this is the place where you can meditate you can listen to the equestrian announcements. And it just, it puts you just in the right mood and it keeps you focused. And they don't have any like that they're in Redwood City. And so we're attached to certain mood perhaps that we have that we like and we'll have our own environmental are on environmental or environmental peculiarities with that site. And but mostly you'll notice them if you come between 10 and 12 on Thursday or Friday. You have to come and see. It's a very quiet environmental peculiarity, but it's quite dramatic. What do I tell you? You know, we're right across the street from Planned Parenthood. And at 10 to 12. On those days, there's one man with a couple of people, usually, in particular, who show up with anti abortion posters, and the posters are really quite large and they're all the same thing. And they're quite gruesome photographs. Looks like what's an aborted baby? I don't know if it's aborted But anyway, it's, it's it's a quite gruesome photograph of, of a large embryo cadaver. And so that's, you know, quite something to deal with it go by there and I introduced myself to them, we first

had a chance to try to have, you know, be friendly. And so the world of impermanence and change, and how we relate to it.

The issue of impermanence. So I was going to start earlier to say that there's a lot of wisdom that comes from impermanence, and, and the Buddhist there's a lot of the Dharma talks people talk about impermanence. They're getting away teachings on impermanence often about it. And you'll hear people give talks on you know, on being with their their father when the father was dying and how that affected them and open their hearts or the understanding and wisdom that they came from that be in the the, in the Buddhist tradition there's a distinction can be made between wisdom and insight. The Wisdom is part of human being and the insight part. And the insight comes not just simply from the kind of understanding that can come kind of conventionally from being part of the impermanent world. But insight is when we, we entered very deeply into the world of impermanence, when it's not just simply kind of large things, conventional things we see is changing. But how we see that a moment

moments sensations of our experience changes over and over again, when we see that our thoughts arise and pass and how impermanent they are. When we see impermanence, almost at an atomic level, is when practice enters into the realms of insight. Then it's at that level of very deep seeing of impermanence that the mind can notice where the most subtle forms of clinging exist. And it sets the stage for the deepest transformation of release, releasing the deepest kinds of clinging that we have. Wonderful of my first Zen teachers, gave the meditation instruction, placed yourself in your senses, and then give up control. And this is a great instruction. And this is partly one of the things we're asked to do and be passionate practice. Because the practice is some degree very much founded are based on being in our sense of being in our sensations in our body, our tactile sensations in our body. And if we can really be present for those in a very intimate way and give up control, you'll enter into a phenomenal world of impermanence and change. And then we learned to kind of go with that or surrender to that. The more deeply you can surrender to that impermanent flow and sensations in your body, the freer you'll become a venture to say. So whether it's the wisdom side of understanding impermanence, or the insight side, to entering into this deep insight is really to enter into the flow of impermanence, not simply to relate to it. Both I think can give birth to a lot of kindness. And I think that kindness is one of the things that the world needs the most of. And I've known a lot of people, including myself, who have encountered impermanence in the form of people dying, or September 11, for example. And one of the things we really feel after that that's really important, how we relate to my neighbors and my family and my friends. And maybe I haven't told them recently that I love them. And maybe I don't know, you know, I don't know, you know, maybe I won't have a chance if I don't say it now. And let me say it now. Let me call them up and say it now. Or maybe it's more important to be kind to someone because you knows how long you know who knows when things will change. As really precious, we see that you see the impermanence of things not quickly, life can disappear. And we realize how precious it is. And rather be rather than being closed up and numb by that, it's an inspiration to really enter life more fully, and perhaps, to be kinder to the people we meet, to meet with more love and care. So I think one of the things that's born from the wisdom side of seeing impermanence, hope is kindness. And the same thing I believe, is born. From the insight side. As we kind of surrender to the actual experience of impermanence at a very deep level, the places of holding and restrictions that we have in our heart gets released, we can't hold them anymore. And then the natural love or kindness or tenderness of our heart, shines and goes forth naturally by itself. And I think that born out of impermanence, is that Hart's capacity to be kind to be loving. So rather than seeing impermanence as being bleak, Or being frightening because the loss that's inherent in suffering, the entering into it, it's kind of an acceptance of it entering into it, not resisting the way things actually are. Gives it gives a chance for the beauty in our hearts and our minds to shine forth. And part of that, I believe, is kindness. Part of it is gratitude and compassion. So I feel phenomenally great grateful for this room for Portola Valley Town Center, all the town of

Portola Valley, for letting us use this for these three, four years. And, and they've been very generous to us, giving us giving us a discount. And they've been very accepting of us letting us come here. And we've even had the mayor of Portola Valley coming sitting with us. That feels, you know, like we're been very much included and welcomed here I feel and also very grateful for all of you who come

here. I've been very fond of Sunday mornings here and it's been a lovely place and a lovely environment kind of, kind of semi rural to come Come and sit in and, and, and, and you've all come I felt with great kindness and attentiveness and dedication, sincerity. And it's been really lovely for me to come and sit here and sit with all of you. And for all of us to be all of us be practicing together. I feel it's really a fortunate thing in life, to have other people to practice together with. And I'm practicing with you as much as you're practicing with each other and with me, and I'm very grateful for all of you for these years of being able to practice together. And I hope that in the years to come that the implement of life, hopefully will flow in the direction of all of us practicing together for a lot longer. So thank you very much