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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

So some of us just came back from sitting a weekend retreat, Memorial Day weekend retreat edgy Koji, which is a marvelous little Zen center up on skyline. And, you know, long Ridge preserve where the open space preserves, it's right in the middle of it, and it's a lovely place. It's kind of protected by preserving around and has its own little pond. Actually, it's not a little it's a big pond. And, and very rustic, was built originally as a as a alternative high school in maybe the 60s. The Quakers built built it and it was called notice Pacific High School. And apparently, you know, pretty alternative, probably one of them alternative wild, high schools in the country at the time. And, and then, some ways the buildings have been changed a little bit to change but you get kind of a flavor, that time. The alternative 60s, little bit And you feel like you're very close to the woods there. Because the meditation hall kind of is kind of part of itself in a platform to kind of you kind of you're up in the tree up into the trees almost. And the trees come close to the meditation hall. And it's lovely to be there partly because of being in the wilderness and the nature and the simplicity of the place. It's, I think it's very, very helpful and conducive for practice. Some people don't think it's a little too rustic. But I love it up there. And being at the Zen Center, the Zen center this weekend. I find myself giving littles a lot of Zen stories, talking a lot about Suzuki Roshi. I've never met Suzuki Roshi, but I've practiced for many years and with his students, many years of practice San Francisco Zen Center. And so I want to kind of continue or pick up on some of the things I was saying Retreat that come from Suzuki Roshi. And that's why I went up to get this. This was given to us at the opening here at the IMC a year ago last January, and it's a calligraphy by Suzuki Roshi. And then there's a it's a photograph of the calligraphy. And it's Suki Roshi writing the characters for beginner's mind. And he's very famous for this little expression beginner's mind. And it was given to us by Mel Weitzman, who was student of Suzuki Roshi, and he had it the male had for many years in his own office, and they took it down off his wall to give it to us here. And so I'm very happy with it and we still haven't installed it. We should do that now. someplace. And Suzuki Roshi, at least for the West in America, I kind of coined the word beginner's mind. And the importance of it, the importance of things, fresh minds, willing to see things new, always

kind of always putting aside your preconceived ideas about how things are, what can be done, what's going on, and being able to see things in a new way. And he was a little bit the contrast was against the experts mind, which, you know, the analogy doesn't work so well if you push it too much, but, but the analogy is the expert is someone who knows what's what. And you know, you can't do it in a different way. And we've all probably had that kind of experience of going to someone who says, No, no, no, I can't do that. We know. And they're the expert. And then there is another way and because the beginner sometimes can see it, so they have this beginner's mind. And so he actually they named the San Francisco Zen Center on page Street in San Francisco. The name of the temple there the Buddhist name hardly ever used is host Shinji, which means beginner's mind temple. It's a place to begin. Mind. So there's a story about Suzuki Roshi. In the zendo, one day, the way I kind of understood his story was not sure exactly how it happened unfolded, but kind of my mind, he remembered being told is some people I think we're about to leave the zendo or the Suzuki Roshi to go someplace and do something. And in any case, zuki Roshi said, the most important thing is, and then it was long pause. And that woke people up, you know, they've been studying this situation for some time. And to be told, you know, it's zen, you know, you're really trying to, you know, really understand, you know, the true nature of reality of your kensho and Satori. And really see into the depths of what's Buddhism is really, you know, in zen, it's a little bit enigmatic, a little bit hard sometimes to understand. So, finally was going to tell you that, you know, the most Important thing.

So everybody kind of paused and waited to hear what this thing was. So then he repeated, the most important thing is searching for the most important thing. And it can seem like a cruel joke to say that. But I think it wasn't meant as a joke. I think he meant to offer something very significant. And there's maybe what many ways to understanding it, and maybe some of you look off for your understandings. But one of the understandings is that it's the very search for the truth of the first search for understanding of what's really happening, that that search the search, the practice, of searching, is, in a sense, the fulfillment of the search or the fulfillment of being human being or the fulfilling fulfillment of practice. Leeson Soto Zen which particular kind of Buddhist tradition the idea that You're that you're sincere endeavoring in the practice itself is a fulfillment of the practice. So you're not obsessed or consumed the idea of trying to get some kind of goal beyond this moment of practice here. And in fact, to kind of have some kind of long term goal for the practice. And it's so easy that the cloud the mind, cloud, the present moment, and get into fear with really waking up and being fully awake here now. And so the process being fully awake is not so easy to do. But the practice of endeavoring to do that endeavoring to wake up and be present, that is the fulfillment of the practice. So, to search for the most important thing is the most important thing. And Heaven forbid you ever find out what important thing is, because then you get complacent, then you stop searching, then you start doing this wonderful thing. You know, looking and

So, in fact, that kind of emphasis in Buddhism that the practice is important, more than almost the realization is again particular to De Soto Zen tradition of Mahayana. And somewhat different from our own tradition here at IMC tera, vaada tradition. But I think that there's something very profound in the Soto Zen approach and it's well worth kind of considering a little bit and this reminded me of a story

that Lou Richmond has told me he maybe he's told you he's come down here and talked for us sometimes have asking Suzuki Roshi. If he practiced though, could he expect to get enlightened? And Suzuki Roshi sensor was if your practice is sincere, it's almost as good as getting enlightened. There's something about the sincere endeavoring sincere engagement in the practice. That is almost as good as being enlightened. And I've known people who have had some experience of enlightenment, some taste of it. And it was marvelous for them in some ways, but it didn't really Polish their character completely. In fact, sometimes it led them to become a little bit arrogant. Look at me, you know, and so some sometimes people don't stop practicing Oh look, I got something here. And I got some understanding some realization someone you know, and they stopped practicing and do they settle into their complacency or their arrogance or their their surety they they think they know they really know how things are. In other one of securities teachings, and they actually there's a recent recent book by him that was, was given this title was at one point he offered to define Soto Zen in in three words, And so we kind of think, you know, Buddhism or Zen in nutshell. In other words, we're not always so now you know, he has great world religion, you know, zen, you know, and Buddhism and it can be all boiled down to not always so and but I think it's a very profound thing not always. So, it certainly is a kind of rephrasing of one of the central realizations of Buddhism emphasis in Buddhism is the emphasis on impermanence and impermanence is really at the foundation of Buddhist teaching Buddhist doctrine, Buddhist practice to this realization, somehow a radical coming to terms of radical penetration of the world of impermanence, so, not always so, things are always changing. You can't expect things to always be So, but I think it has other meanings also, not always so, when you cook when you when you come to some understanding of how things are it might be true for That moment there's not always going to be so and so is beginner's mind is always ready to let go of your fixed understanding understanding how things are and be open to other possibilities coming in that things might know things might not always be so and so the next day you don't expect it you know, that the bus you've been taking every morning at eight o'clock, you know, you know so disappointed, so surprised when it doesn't show up. Because after all you can expect it's not always going to be so there's an expectation that life is always changing. It's not all you can't depend for consistency in life, for constancy, that the things are always going to be the same not always so and so part of the ease or the peace in life that kind of wise living this insecurity was pointing to was carrying with you this little bit of attitude, not always so there's a marvelous story that is told many times about Ajahn Chah having a favorite cup of teas beautiful cup, beautiful teacup and Someone may be challenging him at one point about, you know, how is it your great enlightened master? And how is it you could be kind of attached to that cup of tea that teacup? And he said, No, no, I'm not attached to it. It's my favorite cup. I like it. But in my mind, it's as if it's already been broken. You know, so he's appreciating moments there. But he's, you know, he's not holding on to it. He sees its impermanence.

And so, I think it's often in religions, in Buddhism, people are looking for some kind of certainty. They're looking for some understanding. Now, I really know what the truth is. They're looking for the truth. And it's sometimes very relieving to have someone tell you what it is. And some people will carry it around some religious doctrine or creed or belief. And it's much much in Buddhism as as other religions and hold on to this as the truth. Now I really know and it's kind of okay. hold off for yourself,

but then you bought bug your neighbors, you know, this is the way it is, you know, you tell them and as you grow, she says not always. So, it's not always so, and I think I believe and when he talked when he talked about not always so, even said this is not always so. So, what does that leave you with? So, they have this openness that not always so and not to fix them has to settle on some fixed view an idea of how things should be how they things are had beginner's mind and this idea of you know, sincere practice is almost as good as enlightenment is kind of like this beginner's mind not always so to kind of see what's happening now what's true and now at this moment. So one of the very important ideas in in Soto Zen as I encountered as I learned from my teachers, is encapsulated in a term Japanese term called Genjo Koan and Thomas Clary was twice slated a lot of Zen literature translates, again, Joe Kahn as the issue at hand. And that's where I got the title for the book of mind which is on the table, the issue at hand. But again, Joe Kahn is understood co on is some enigmatic question or statement that sin masters make or have recorded and saved in their books. And they supposed to grapple with this enigmatic statement. Does a dog have Buddha nature is, is Why did Bodhidharma come from the west? What's the sound of one hand clapping? The whole state halls, you know, hundreds and hundreds of these kinds of statements. And so Zen students was to grapple with this and come to some kind of resolution, some kind of realization, some kind of transformation through this kind of grappling this kind of statement or question. That's what a colon is. And gancho means something like that which is being actualized in the present moment. So the con of what's being actualized in the present moment? So it's the question you have to carry with you to quit. What is this? Every moment you carry with you this question, what is this? What's going on now with this fresh mind is beginner's mind as if you've never seen it before. There was a study done in the 60s, a psychological study. I supposed to call that the wired up different meditators with electrodes to see what happens to their brainwaves. And they did this to Zen monks in Japan, and they did it to meditators in India, Hindu meditators, Hinduism and yoga traditions in India. And one of the interesting differences that they saw between the Zen monks had many years of meditation background. And these people doing other meditation practices was that they would have them go into the meditative state. And then they would ring a bell. This little thing. And then I don't know how much later 10 seconds or maybe a minute later that ring a bell again being the measure what happened to the brainwaves and with the nones and meditators, after a while, as you kind of expect for human being, the mind got habituated to that sound. And with time there was less than less a response and the brainwaves first was a big movement in the brainwaves and then less and less and less and less until finally was no, you could ring the bell and was no react, no reaction at all. In a Zen monk. There was no habituation going on. Every time there was the bell was rung, it was like it was being heard for the first time. The brain doesn't move. So some way that sounds like you know, wonderful, you know, just just freshness always makes me fresh. Some of you might think, oh, gee, you know, you know you'd like that, you know, the, you know, the irritation of the drop Creek drip dripping from the sink, you know, that you want to be habituated, you know this. But instead of being fresh and kind of beginner's mind seeing something new again, Joe Kahn, what is this? What is this? What's happening now?

There's no there's there's a kind of a Zen kind of Cohen story that's told of a monk who goes to a Zen master in China. And this is an venerable old master because he's been teaching and practicing for

decades. And so the monk asks, What's the teaching of a lifetime? You know, after all this lifetime of teaching and practice? Can you give me like one real teaching, you know, essential teaching essential teaching something? And the Zen master responds, answer is an appropriate response. You know, so you know, again, all of Buddhism is beginning to be condensed, you know, into some essential pithy, Colonel statement, truth. And he says, an appropriate response. It doesn't give you much to hang on to does it? Except it is an encouragement to this to the skin joke on this question, you know, what is this? What's the appropriate response here. And this is a very valuable part of Zen creating that I got is that understanding, like understanding what reality is in this moment, extending myself in this moment, the insight that can come with practice, it's not enough just to have insight. There needs to some point to be a response to the world. Or some people say the manifestation of your insight, a manifestation of your compassion of your love, that the realization is only half the story. The other half is the is the manifestation of it in the world and You know, it's one thing to feel, you know, boundless love for all humanity. In the privacy of your own house, you have to face anybody. And it's something else to manifest it to your neighbor and to your, you know, family into the people and strangers and difficult people in your lives, to manifest it, to do something with it. It's one thing to discover freedom sometimes when people can sit in meditation and experience great states of freedom, where they can let go of so many things that preoccupy us concern us worry us, things we're afraid of. And it can be very, very relieving, very liberating feeling, a wonderful feeling in meditation to feel this freedom. And the Zen teachers will say, that's fine. And they'll kind of yawn You know, I've heard that before they say, they say, well, that's fine. But let's see how you manifest it. Can you manifest that freedom in your life? Can you be debt free as you enjoy Ah, in the activities of your life. Remember I asked was the teacher once? How do you know if someone's enlightened? And he said, You watch them for a long time and see if they're helpful to other people. And I thought that was a very nice answer. I was inspired by the answer. It's an inadequate answer. Not always so right. There was a great answer.

And there was a bumper sticker up there at the retreat. Remember, they'd never seen before. Maybe you've seen it before. I don't remember exactly. But the bumper sticker said something like something like happiness comes from taking care of others or cherish others remember it said cherish others to be happy. Features others to be happy care for others, you know. And so this manifestation and the beautiful thing is that is that as you know, the degree of a realization or freedom that we attain through practice or love or compassion, we can experience you know, it comes in degrees and you might feel experience just a little bit, maybe just a hint of it at first. And, but then if you try to manifest it that's both tests, your understanding your Realization, your which come, but also in the attempt to manifested is a kind of feedback loop where it actually reinforces or develops or helps, what happens in meditation. And what happens meditation then reinforces working with the manifestation and they go wonderfully, it's wonderful way of kind of building in practice and practicing build a lot faster. If you know you're both the manifest manifesting, manifesting aspect is happening. The realizing aspect. So inappropriate response. So what is the appropriate response? So in Soto zen, there's the idea that there's never any end to your practice. And they might recognize that a person has enlightenment experience and has a great enlightenment experience. But they'll never think that that's the end of your practice. Because your response to the world you're responding to the world is always the world's always changing. It's

always something new. The person that you've known every day of your life next morning when you wake up, is it really a different person? And you still treating the person as you've always treated the first. Are you willing to kind of have that beginner's mind? You know, meet that person new. You don't know what's happened to that person overnight. And into this beginner's mind, No searching was the appropriate response here. Given the person might be new, be different. So since its shake, world's always changing, always. So the practice of fine finding the appropriate response, the practice of finding the expression of freedom, expression of compassion and love, in any particular situation is always changing always takes a different form. So and so does then there's no enter practice. Because practice is that manifestation. In our kind of terrible tradition, there's often much more of the sense that there's an end to practice and people who get fully enlightened there's expression, so they say, they've done what had to be done. So you know, then they're kind of enlightenment retirement, enlightened retirement. I think it's not so different, that the traditions are just they have different ways of talking different emphasis. And in fact, enlightened people in Thailand in different places, are very much engaged in responding to the world. And, you know, the ones I've met seemingly have a kind of freshness to them where they don't kind of see things always in the new way and in the same way, but really rare to see things new and fresh and not holding to fixed views and doctrines.

So what does it take to have a beginner's mind? What is it? What do you have to relax? What do you have to let go of? What do you have to free yourself from in order to have a beginner's mind in order to meet next moment freshly and be interested in it? So what is this? What is this? And I've kind of learned, I still having to learn this lesson. But I've learned so much painfully at times in my life, where I've encountered someone that I know and maybe sometimes sometimes when I haven't even knowing them, but had some assumption about who they were based on past experience, and then treated them that way. And it kind of it wouldn't normally would have been okay. But I wasn't tuned into the fact that something had happened to them. A friend of theirs had just died or something that happened once. And I was treating them as if, you know, I hadn't taken the moment to see what's new with this person. What's the appropriate response here? What's the new thing that's occurred here? It was operating, I was operating an old idea of what was happening, what was, who the person was and what the situation was. So what does it take to meet your day fresh, meet the next person fresh, new, next moment? What do you have to let go of? What ideas of security what ideas of identity of who you are who you think you have to be? Do you have to let go of and relax? Not always so implies to yourself Who are you? You find that you use great search to find out who you are and you find you know who I am now. Then you hear Suzuki Roshi saying, not always. So, you know, you wake up next morning. It's not the person you've been living with your whole your whole life, but it's you. Are you the same person as you were the day before? How do you know? What gives you the idea of constancy of continuity that is that you are the same person as you were the day before? upon what authority? Do you take that to be the case? Has anybody told you that? There's nothing in the manual of being human being that you're supposed to be the same. Maybe you changed. And some of you are old enough to probably have seen yourself change quite a bit. Over the years, I've seen myself change. And it's quite interesting to see yourself change. And sometimes it's interesting to go back to places where you've been many years ago and see yourself how much you have changed and how you see

things new. I find it a little bit humbling for myself to have to see in the past changes. And wonder what's happening now? Am I changing now that I don't see? Because I'm sure it's happening in ways they don't even see. So, the idea is that meditation is supposed to help with this process of meeting things fresh, letting go of old assumptions and biases and preconceived ideas and being willing to let go and just be present. What is the appropriate response now what is it to be present now? Once again, Joe Cohen Now, what's the issue at hand now? And one of the lessons I got from Zen practice, was in order to really do this thoroughly and well in meditation practice. It's really best let go of ideas of goals and accomplishments and where you're going in the practice and attainments, levels of concentration, but to really try to meet this next moment, fresh new completely, to have the complete. And then one of the things that you learn from zen, I think one of the things that seems to come with Zen practice is at some point, the realization and manifestation are the same thing. They're not separate from each other. So it's not a matter of realizing, understanding, and then acting in the world. But the two arise, occur together, that there is no realization without the manifestation, and there's no manifestation without the realization. So it lends itself to kind of approach to life lends itself to certain kind of I was going to use the word magic, I know if that's the right word to use. Magic, you know that life is always new and fresh and interesting. And what is this life we're living? to look into? And I find often you know that meditation is one of those ways I could do that. Sometimes I'm amazed, open my eyes and see the same thing I've seen many times before. And it seems so new. What is this? So those are my thoughts for today.

And completely inadequate talk, right? Because it's not always so. So what do you think about Suzuki Roshi statement? The most important thing is to find out what the most important thing is. What do you think of that? How do you understand that? Maybe in ways I haven't expressed myself

The most important thing is always the same important thing.

Beautiful. So the most important thing is always changing.

So the process is important nothing destination. Yeah, beautiful. So sometimes I emphasize that spirituality has a lot to do with how we are more than what we are, where we're going. How are you at this moment? What's the process? Thank you.

searches ongoing like creation itself.

The final answer

might and

may not be necessary, but

I think that any kind of final answer and it you know what I'm about to say probably isn't so too but any kind of final answer. Final understanding what reality is reality is always changing and unfolding and evolving and stuff like there's always something outside of that understanding. And so then, you know, sometimes it's the next generation that comes along and says wait this something outside of that understanding something beyond that. And so then they, you know, those old guys, they don't understand, you know, they're stuck in their fixed views. And then sometimes it takes a new the new generation to kind of be able to see things fresh and new. And question the fixed views.

Yes, it's focusing on searching.

So, so focusing on the searching rather than than knowing. Yeah. It's really I find, I found that it's when it's going well, that the endeavoring of practice the curiosity, the interest investigation, the discovery Even even when there's nothing to be discovered yet I haven't realized anything just the very endeavoring to do that is deeply satisfying. I think maybe it's, you know, innate capacity innate, you know, with faculty have many people is this Faculty of, you know, interest, you know, discovery. What's this? What's this? You see it's, you know, really dramatically sometimes in young children

Yeah, I find it very humbling.

just seems like the more I do the practice, the more humble I become.

Less Sure.

Anything.

Like getting dumber

getting. We don't put that on the advertisement. So she says she finds that the practice makes her humbler in a good way. And then less than less than she's sure about things. And is there a appropriateness in becoming less sure about what's happening is there is there's a wisdom to that. Maybe, you know, it could maybe ideally, I hope, that kind of humility or that kind of not knowing kind of community can go together with a greater understanding. They don't they don't exclusive of each other, as we develop more understanding and clarity but what this life is that we're living, that it can go together with a sense of, you know, how much you don't know or that things are always a new and fresh. Yes.

Because you don't have as much expectation of certainty.

say, Well, I don't know, I don't know.

You're just not setting yourself up as much. Yeah, that's true, though.

Some people who are so sometimes have a very difficult life. The idea of not having certainties causes more suffering than having certainty. And sometimes as an intermediate phase in the person's life, it can be very useful to have something you really hang on to something's really sure and stable. And I've known people who it is dangerous because you never know whether what you're holding on to is reliable. But sometimes it doesn't always cause more suffering. It can be intermediate to lesser suffering to hold on. But ultimately, I completely agree with you and Suzuki Roshi in his chapter With a guy in his book, The chapter is called, not always so encourages us to practice as if we're dying. And he says as if you're dying, there's nothing anymore you can rely on.

Don't seek to be like Jesus, seek what Jesus saw. Nice, beautiful.

Yes, everything that we discussed, we still come back down to the most profound question. Are we the same person today as we were yesterday?

Give me an answer for us.

never wrong,

never

gain the clarity and wisdom.

It's a learning experience.

So it takes a certain presence then presence of mind to Discovering what's new, who are you? And it's in Soto zen, then they have a kind of different kind of way of talking about itself, then the Theravada tradition Theravada tradition tend to talk mostly about the self is there is no self. And that's kind of the kind of the worldview The, the frame of reference that they're kind of using the word self in. And so there's then the kind of things evolved quite a bit in Buddhism. By time Buddhism came to Japan, they have a different frame for understanding self and what they're talking about. And, and sometimes in Soto zen, they'll say that the self is relational, that you only really discover who you are, who the self is, in the manifestation in the relationship in the activity of engaging in the world, the in engaging in the world, the world mirrors back who you are. So Zen master Dogon is a very famous quote, our very statement is, it's become very famous to study Buddhism is to study the self to study the self is to forget the self. And the last line is very interesting. And it's usually Miss translated into English. The last line should be translated literally. To forget the self is to be confirmed by all things to be confirmed you find out who you are when you forget yourself and that all things tell you who you are. And that's always going to be new.

Anything else? Do we settle that matter? well enough for one night and so this is the beginner's mind.
If you want to take a look at it, it's right here. Suzuki Roshi is calligraphy Thank you very much.
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