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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So I wanted to talk some this evening on the topic of beauty. And it came up for me this Saturday. when we were doing a one day sitting here. And I did a lot of interviews through the day. And I had a very strong sense during the day and that I often do when I see people and especially in interviews on retreats, that kind of context that I wish I had a mirror, kind of special kind of mirror that I could just hold up and show them who they are. Because I often get the sense that there's a lot more beauty there. When I see beauty and everybody comes. And I can't it seems to me like they don't see it themselves well enough. And if only they could see what I see that they would just be great. It'd be pretty happy. The mindfulness itself is often just working. Okay? Everybody's happy. Okay, little one. Little bit louder. You want to run louder? Okay, because I'm getting I'm very self conscious. But that's I guess where it goes. So the mindfulness itself can sometimes likened to do a mirror and in the mirror something that reflects things as they are said, and does so impartially without bias, without blinders, without preference, what's there, something really ugly comes in front of the mirror and they're just reflected without any comments, something beautiful comes across the mirror and the mirror reflects it reflects it as it is. And if something is both beautiful and ugly, reflects both parts of it. And so mindfulness has this quality of just kind of presence with how things are, and seeing things as they actually are without comment without being for or against it. And part of the beauty of I changed. It just just the machine is. So if you have trouble hearing at some point, let me know. But it seems like you know that electricity has its own has its own life here today. So mindfulness is a mirror. And people find it very liberating the quality of mindfulness that is there's a part of their psyche there that can simply independently be aware some people call it being the observer. of whatever's going on, as opposed to being caught by it or reactive to it, or there's other parts of the psyche, which you know, has much more complicated relationship with how things are. But you simply see things as they are without comment is a beautiful part and lends itself to kind of freedom. And however, I think for many times, many times the mirror that we use, or how we use our mirror, might have filters on it or curtains over parts of it. So that you know, we pull the curtain a little bit, and we see certain part of who we are, and we don't pull the other curtain to see the rest of it. And sometimes there's choices about which curtains we pull. And sometimes we pull only the curtains that show us how terrible we are. The negative side, you know, and so some people specialize in pulling those curtains. And so the curtains that show the beautiful side of us they haven't get used gotten used so much that pulleys are rusty. They're hard to get into work and other people especially And in showing the beautiful parts and they often then will deny or push away and not notice the parts that are maybe not so desirable. They need some work and perhaps it needs some more attention perhaps. And but the mind function of mindfulness as they pull the curtains apart completely, and see things as they actually are. And it's it said, I'll say that that

mindfulness it sees that way, is healing is liberating, produces health moves us in the direction of health. And so a lot of what we're doing in mindfulness practices, not only learning how to see, but learning how to see in the totality of who we are not in any particular one way that we think we have to be or think we should be or think we have some limited way. So I often get the sense that when people come to see me that that people are seeing themselves in somewhat limited ways and often not always but often it's that side with a hearing difficulties difficulties with a practice with difficulty with themselves. And that's what they present that's what the words are about. But I often see this tremendous sincerity and beauty many qualities coming through as people talk about them about their about what's going on. And I feel like very fortunate in my role as a meditation teacher because to the great majority of times, people I see the best of people even though they come and tell me the worst. And but you know, they could have come in expressing the truth, they talking about how they're working with something with great sincerity and it's really lovely, that part. So I wish I had this mirror. So what is, you know, What is beauty and where's beauty found? And I would like to suggest that they say more personally. For me, the greatest beauty that's found, is found in the human heart and the human psyche of the mind. And probably the one of the most one of the most beautiful things to be found is a heart which is liberated, which is free. That kind of purity and clarity that can be there for that. But there are other qualities of heart that are also very beautiful. A heart that's filled with love, which some love, compassion, equanimity, generosity, a heart which is has integrity to it, that is expressing and living integrity is quite a beautiful thing to see and to be part of. And to see it in oneself also, to feel the taste the texture of integrity is quite a wonderful thing. I remember how surprised I was, I was one of the first time I really tasted it, that taste of integrity. And, and I was sitting for some time and retreat. And then I remembered some unwholesome unskillful unhealthy thoughts that I had some weeks earlier. And actually Trying to kind of re evoke them those kinds of thoughts or kind of kind of approach. And it just didn't wash it just come out so foreign to the state that was in and I was became so palpable, that sense kind of just kind of pure in your integrity, that it come from me from all that sitting, not from trying, but just did come. So the beauty that is unrecognized that we often don't recognize. So, in the Buddhist tradition, the word we often translate as mind can equally be translated as heart. And so it's a little bit hard sometimes to translate into English. To know should we say mind to say heart. And so as I say, heart today, I'll just use the word heart. You can translate as mind if you prefer that. But mine has more of a cognitive kind of sense. Whereas hearth is a little more of emotional sense perhaps, that which we put a heart into is that which we kind of have trust and faith or commitment to involve ourselves in a heartfelt way. And so the heart, the cheek does the Pali word is often translated as the heart or sometimes heart mind. And the heart is kind of the cheetah is the overall the cheetah is an activity. It's not a thing. So we're probably part of the problem with using the word heart is is just a noun, something which is as it is, but the heart and Buddhism the cheetah is an activity and that activity has different, it take different shapes are different, it can function in different ways. And so the heart has an often the overall mood or overall overall texture overall. state that it isn't different times. And that overall mood or state of the heart is dependent on many of the ecology of things within that heart. The cart is not a unitary thing either its activities are unitary things made up of many different factors that are operating together and affecting each other. And so whole ecology affects the overall mood or state of that, of the heart of mind that consciousness. And so in the great way in which Buddhists like to look very closely at things and kind of divide up and see clearly what's going on differentiate between all the cool little aspects of what's going on in our hearts. They'll differentiate between four different general categories or classes of hearts that we can have. And the first two are pairs. And the word is akusala, and akusala. And they refer to hearts which are either involving skillful qualities skillful activities, or unskillful. That's literal, literal translation skillful and unskillful. But hearts which are involved in healthy activities, or arts which are involved in unhealthy

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activities, minds which are involved in, in wholesome qualities and the whole hopeful, wholesome qualities and, or a mind which has unwholesome qualities in it. So, if you have a lot of propensity towards hate and anger, and the mind is gripped by its anger, its hate and those quality of anger, angry thoughts and your feelings and motivations are kind of there, then the shape or the quality of the state of that mind is going to be called an unskilful state of mind, or unhealthy is a state of mind which is not conducive towards health. It's rather conducive to unhealthy or disease. If a mind is filled with or involved and engaged in feeling generosity of goodwill, then it says the state of mind is one which is skillful. One that is conducive is healthy, that healthy and healthy producing. It's a healthy state of mind conducive to creating more health. So, a state of mind which is kusala akusala is not only is what it is, but also tends in a certain direction tends either towards further hill or further disease. So, those are the first two general categories of hearts that we can experience the way the hearts can be at different times. The next kind of state of mind or state of heart that we can experience is called the parka. And the parka refers to is called means resultant, back which results because of things before it. So, if I turn off if I turn the switch over there off, the lights go off, the lights go off your you know, that's the resultant of switching Doing a switch. So certain states of mind, certain states of heart, are the results result is a product of things that have happened in the past activities where we've been in the past. So if I, if I sit here and meditate, meditation, for example, and I suddenly feel really sad, that sadness might have nothing to do with the activity that I'm engaged in right now. But rather, something might have happened earlier in the day. Maybe I'm sad about what I said to someone. And so my sadness is a carryover continuation, or product of some activities happen early in the day. So there's a lot of moods, mental states, thoughts that arise for us, which are essential, Buddhists like to say are almost impersonal, in that they're there because of the resultant of things that happen mentum that was set in motion in the past. And sometimes it can be years or decades before something set in motion, and something pops up. So For example, you know, physically if I sit and have my sit down, or before I sit them going about my day and having a great, jolly time, as far as I can tell. And because I'm so busy involved and doing all the things, and then I sit down to meditate, and finally my life catches up to me. And I sit down, I noticed, you know, and I noticed that my shoulders are tense. Or I noticed that my mind is a little bit wound up. If I'm not involved anymore intense activities, then that tension in the mind or in the shoulders, is called a resultant. It just there has to be there because if you do X causes Y, and so it's kind of a cause and effect relationship. So certain states or certain mind states or heart states are called resulted. And we take it as impersonal and Buddhism because it just the job then in mindfulness just to simply see it as it is, and not to engage in it with anymore. If you feel sad or angry or happy as a result of that. Something in the past, you just let it bubble up there and see it clearly. And seeing it clearly. That's where the liberation or the hell can come. So, was that clear enough? Okay. The fourth class or category of cheetahs of hearts, is what is called Kalia. I think it's pronounced. And this is states of mind, which are not the results of past karma past activities. And it's also neither skillful or unskillful is neither conducive towards greater health or conducive to less psychic or spiritual health. And this is a state of mind, which is that of someone who's liberated someone is liberated someone is fully awakened and Buddhism is said nothing need any more. skillful states minds of mind, mind states doesn't need good qualities in their minds to be conducive towards greater health because they've attained the spiritual health. And so then when they do things, it has no karmic effect in the fact that it doesn't doesn't participate anymore in this moving towards health or moving towards disease. Now, some people will say that this Korea consciousness is something that only arises for people when they're fully liberated some great big bang theory of enlightenment and boom, you know, you got it. And other people will say that, that this is something that everybody falls into. It occurs to everyone at some, some points through the day, that there are times in the day when we have unskillful states, times a day we have skillful states times a day we have this result in kind of

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states that simply arise in times of the day, when some kind of liberating qualities of the mind or liberated mind the purity of mind, simply as there and we respond, we speak. We are the music Some people say spontaneously or naturally in a certain way, that is just kind of expresses that purity, then that natural state of the mind when it's resting in itself, and is liberated. So different opinions about whether that can an ordinary person can have occasional liberated mind or whether it's something that only happens after some big bang theory of enlightenment or some big lot of practices something. So, I shouldn't ask, Are you following me? He was asked rather, someone not following me well enough, are you willing to go along? So a lot of Buddhist practice traditionally is focusing on this pair between the skillful and unskillful states of mind, recognizing and seeing, I'm not talking a little while more later, but why it's important to recognize it. But to make this very simple discernment, the state of mind or activity of mind that I'm involved in now is unskillful. It's not it's unhealthy, or another one is healthy. What you're asked not to do. And be very careful about not doing is when you notice that you have an unhealthy state of mind. You don't want to attack it, or feel self judgment or self criticism or low self loathing because of that, because then you're doing other unhealthy activity on top of unhealthy activity. And so then you're, you know, you're digging your own grave. And so you try to keep it really simple. That's why the mirror is a really wonderful analogy for mindfulness. We just see it as it is no comment, you see it clearly. And so then there's lists, okay, so that's what those are general categories, classes, of minds of hearts, and you can have those three, those four kinds. But those four kinds are made up of an ecology of many different factors that work together. And so, rather than being a very simplistic division between skillful and unskillful, you have to actually look at the subtleties of it. All of all different Mental factors that come into play and play with each other work with each other to create, whether it's skillful or unskillful. And so this is where the ancient Buddhist spent kind of brilliant, and looking at how the mind works. And kind of try and understand how all the different mind factors kind of bounce off each other and influence each other. And they came up with 52 in our particular tradition of tera, vaada tradition 52 kind of mental factors that go with that go into shaping the quality of the mind at any given time. No, these 52 factors, something like 11 of them for seven of them. Seven of them are always there. Regardless the kind of mind you have, whether it's skillful or unskillful, whatever you have mind always has these seven qualities or factors active. One is something called contact. Like if you see something you're seeing making contact with what you see. So that that's considered kind of a mental factor. And then there's perception. You perceive what that is. And then there is the kind of what's called the feeling tone the bandana. And then there's the intention in relationship to that. So it's very interesting. I would also say that every mind moment has some intentionality as part of it. And then there's something called lifeforce life energy vitality, that's part of that it's considered a kind of a quality of heart. And then there's the averting of the mind of bringing the mind to focus on something. Also, there's one pointedness of mind, the ability of the mind to not just revert and pay attention to something but then have one pointed attention on it. So those are considered to be always there. Then there's some factors in mind which are sometimes there and sometimes not. And these are, I won't go through another important don't get lost in all these lists. Then the next one is more interesting because this is those mental factors which are themselves considered unhealthy. And then there can be some discussion or some controversy or debate about are these really unhealthy or holiday unhealthy or something like that. But they're called unskillful. They're not, you know, not conducive towards spiritual health, towards freedom, reduction of suffering. And, and so I'll give you this list of what they are. And there might be one or two of them that relevant for you occasionally. Ignorance shamelessness or lack of conscience, recklessness, restlessness, attachment, wrong view, conceit, aversion envy, stinginess regret, sloths, torpor and doubt. So, those come into play. And they can, they can, they can appear number them together in different ways, or they can have a full blown attack of all of them at once or something perhaps. And, and so and when

these are operating and playing, and they come up in many different ways, sometimes they're intentional, we pick them up and act on them. Sometimes they seem to be no intention of our own, but they seem to be there and, and they kind of sometimes the mind feels very contracted and tight or the heart feel squeezed. Or if you really feel these very powerfully and very sensitive to them. It feels very uncomfortable to feel some of these states. And, you know, people will come in and talk about how painful some of these things can be. And when the when the heart is gripped by these factors, then, the unfortunate thing is that they then tend to be conducive towards greater states of disease. So it's not a judgment, it's not the onus is not on involving the judgment of good and bad, it's not a moral judgment on these, that you're good or bad person if you have these, it just kind of a matter of fact thing that this is where if you understand what the illnesses if you want to get healthy, and here the point is that these are the factors of illness that lead towards further suffering to lead towards greater stress or being burdened or suffering in some way. And so, part of the mirrors to see these things very clearly. Now we come so that was the that was the Aqua slice the unskillful factors of mind. And those are the ones when they come up and appear that shaped the heart into an unhealthy heart to unhealthy state of heart. So, skillful heart unskillful heart skillful factors, and you think then that we would be the opposite would be the unskillful factors and the opposite would be the skillful factors but they don't use the word willful as the opposite of unskillful factors, they use the word in Pali. So Ivana and so, bond has often translated as the word beautiful. And sometimes it also has the meaning of to shine to be resplendent to be kind of luminous. So these are the beautiful factors of mind. So, there's the unhealthier unskillful factors of mind. And there's the beautiful ones. It's not great. So this is where we come to the heart of the talk was because it was inspired to talk about beauty right? So here are the beautiful factors of the mind. So when you see the one of the ways to see beauty in someone, or perhaps you can listen to this list and see when you see we use notice see someone and you see them being really beautiful. In some deep kind of in their hearts, the hearts of beautiful their psyche or soul is beautiful. Are you seeing these these factors in some way or they operating in some way or different combinations of them, perhaps so this is this is the list of beautiful mental factors trust, mindfulness, self respect, a healthy kind of remorse. Non attachment, non aversion, equanimity tranquility, lightness, pliancy, wilderness proficiency, uprightness. That's part of the list. And so trust, I think is a beautiful quality. Sometimes it's translated as faith or confidence. But if you have, you can repeat what I said, this idea of being heartfelt about something. If you really heartfelt about the work you do or heartfelt about the relationship you're in or the activity you're involved in, there's a kind of beautiful quality that comes along and if your heartfelt About, it kind of implies certain kind of purity or beauty, I think that it would be heartfelt to have you're trying to trust something you have to trust in something and heartfelt way is considered to be part of the beautiful, beautiful aspect of the heart. Mindfulness itself is considered to be beautiful and beautiful aspect of the mind or the heart. And so what the tradition will say is that if you are mindful of unhealthy states of mind, you're meeting the unhealthy states of mind with something beautiful, something healthy. And many of us become self conscious very easily. And we confuse self consciousness with being mindful. And so and so, then you know, subconscious is kind of, you know, leads to, or more often than not kind of to lack of health is kind of We kind of Barris out very, very ourselves in all associations of being self conscious. But when there's pure mindfulness, we're meeting something with with health with beauty. And then there's a self respect, which sounds like a nice thing. What it refers to is that is the part of the beauty, beautiful aspect of the heart, is that if you feel or sense the beauty of the heart to the beauty of your integrity, there's a there's a factor of the heart that says, I don't want to violate that. I don't want to transgress a bit. I don't want to soil that. So you know, if you're feeling really good and clear and clean and some very beautiful way someday, and your best friend comes along and you just make this you know, for no reason at all. You make some awful lie to your friend. You probably feel like it kind of tugs against

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your heart if it rips against your heart. No, it just doesn't feel so good. If you feel you're up against saying a lie like that, that part of the heart that says, Oh man, you know, I have so much self respect there's so much respect for this beautiful heart that I don't want to go that far. I want to protect this beauty beauty in some way. That's considered a factor of the mind. And then there's this healthy remorse or regret is considered very healthy health producing function of the mind. If you do a transgression if you do harm someone, intentionally, maybe not intentionally, harm someone to feel regret for what you did. If you go out and large your best friend, stay with your best friend's lover or something. And then lie about it whatever and then you go walking down the street you know whistling Dixie like this is the best thing ever. You know, you robbed the local bank and you think it is the best right there you you know your rear end some car that's parked and you drive off and you look into a nominal damage to my car but too bad that cars total you drive off in this tonight. You're happy right? That's considered unhealthy in Buddhism. And that part that's part of the psyche of the mind that recognizes that this was an unhealthy thing you just did. That is a healthy part of the mind. So that's called this healthy remorse. It's kinda doesn't feel good, but it's still beautiful. And then non attachment and non aversion. And non attachment is almost synonymous with generosity. That's with a tradition says. So this impulse towards being generous, is a beautiful factor of the mind. And non aversion is almost synonymous with low. So heart that that expresses itself in kindness and love. Is it beautiful hearts, beautiful quality, equanimity is a beautiful quality and these others tranquility, lightness, pliancy, wilderness proficiency and uprightness. And then there are Seven more factors that are beautiful. But these are differentiated from the first list because the first list and this is amazing. I don't know if this is true. But it's very interesting that the tradition will say this, the first list of beautiful factors that I gave you, it said, they always arise together. So if you have one of them, you have all the others together with it. And perhaps as a matter of degree, you know, so if you have, you know, generosity there, you might be very strong, you might not notice that the other factors are there operating maybe in the background, because they're out, you know, you know, in the shadow of the, whatever hidden by the strength of the generosity. But all these other factors are there at the same time. And they come along and are strengthened by any of the other factors. So remember that mindfulness was one of the beautiful factors. So mindfulness itself, when mindfulness arises, it brings along All these other wonderful factors, it strengthens them. So as you cultivate mindfulness, you might not have any intention of any wish to be more beautiful than you are. But as you practice mindfulness, and mindfulness can seem very dull and plain. And you know, you know, just, you know, recognizing what's happening in present moment, what's happening, present moments are very interesting. And just kind of plugging away just noticing, noticing, noticing. And it can seem very, very wonderful. But the accumulation of doing that over time and the momentum of it, it becomes kind of like a magnet, or bringing these other beautiful qualities with it over time. And I've seen that in myself. And I've seen that in many practitioners, that some of these other beautiful qualities seem to come along and grow in them as they continue doing the mindfulness practice, even though they're not trying to develop these other qualities. So I don't know if it's true. They're all these qualities arise together, but I would like to believe it. But so these things rise together, and then there's some factors beautiful factors, which don't always necessarily always there, but they rise sometimes maybe depending on causes and conditions or something. And so these are considered factors of mind. And I don't know it seems a little bit odd the next list to me so part of the first three of them, they're factors but so it is. The first one is abstinence from wrong speech. That's a factor of mind, meter, Another one abstinence from wrong action is considered to be a certain factor of mind and there's a little kind of, you know, DNA down there and that part of the corner of the you know, abstinence from wrong action that gets awakened sometimes. And then abstinence from wrong livelihood is considered to be beautiful mental, heartfelt factor. The next Navy or more more obvious beautiful compassion, sympathetic joy and wisdom or

discernment. So, depending on the circumstances these arise or not, you know or not. So these are the beautiful part. So, beautiful factors in mind. Remember I said earlier that you would think that the ACO so other unskillful factors in mind would be matched with the, or somehow in relationship to the skillful factors of mind. But instead of skillful factors in mind, they call it beautiful factors of mind. Remember, well, the reason for that is that someone who expresses an enlightened mind can have these beautiful factors as part of that enlightened mind. But, when it happens in an enlightened mind, they're not skillful, or they're not healthy producing. They don't have that effect because they don't need to anymore. I was gonna draw karmic effectiveness. So they don't want to call them skillful. But they're still the same factors. So these called the whole bunch, they call them beautiful. So if you've ever wondered, what an enlightened mind is, like, lightened heart is like, and the tradition says, is characterized by having these, these factors within it. And the ecology of enlightened heart is to have these wonderful things operating in there. It's not great. Now you know what it's like. And now, every heart that is not liberated, has the potential reality of all these things I've listed today. So as someone who's not, you know, fully enlightened, or partially liking the cleric, you know, in a way, that's really done the work About brooding, the unskillful states has the potential for unskillful factors of being their unskillful states. And probably some of you today have had an unskillful mental state one or two, three or something, it's probably happened, it almost happened. So you kind of recognize it a little bit, you know, it's a potential possibility there. And there's the possibility potential of the beautiful states being there and horizon. So this is part of our potential reality. So when we look at a human being, we look at someone else. We see them at the surface of who they are. We also can notice the potential reality. This is a potential they have all these different aspects of themselves. And what do we choose to look at the most when we look at someone else? I know some people who choose to look at the negative so called the unskillful. And they relate to people that way, maybe because that's what they're expressing the most. But I know other people who like to choose to look at the beautiful And I have one friend from you know, James Burrows, who loves to do this. It's kind of like his practice. He likes to look at the beautiful aspects of people, because he believes if he looks at it, he draws it out of them. So they're more likely to act that way. So he's kind of like a mirror for that part of them. And but how do you look at people, they can lend itself to kind of pollyannishness, to always looking at the positive and look at the good qualities of someone. It can involve a kind of denial of what's you know, ugly or unhealthy. But if we remember that the function of mindfulness used to be a mirror, but can the mirror be clear enough to see it all? If we see it all, then what how do we relate to the person who we see the beautiful and the unskillful or in ourselves, and if we see the difference or see these factors there, then one of the ways of practicing a Buddhist spiritual life is to not just simply keep it at the level of the mirror, but use your wisdom. Use your discernment to try to strengthen or develop or give, give greater engagement to those which are skillful and beautiful. So the story that was told after 911, maybe many of you heard many times now, but the Native American Indian grandfather was talking to his grandson. And he said, there are two wolves inside in the fighting. One is the wolf, the wolf of anger, and the other is the wolf of love. And the grandson asks, which one granddad, which one's going to win? And he says, whichever one I feed. So in recognizing the unskillful, and the beautiful, which one is going to win out for you? Which one's going to define your ecology of your heart or the state of your mind? And which one do you which ones do you feed? And there are times when we feed these things, and we don't have to feed them with the unskillful They can keep feeding them or choose to feed them when they're skillful, and develop those qualities. And so traditional Buddhists will often spend time actually doing things like acts of generosity, trying to live an ethical life, trying to have compassion, developing a loving kindness, developing these things, so that can feed and develop the and strengthen these beautiful qualities of hearts. However, Buddhist spirituality at its ultimate level, and its ultimate purpose is not about developing skillful qualities. It's not about developing the beautiful things, you know, more

and more skillful. The point of Buddha spirituality ultimately, is to become free, And freedom is not the same thing as becoming skillful. However, becoming skillful or cultivating these beautiful states, it's best to have a high degree high enough degree turns out to be one of the best platforms from which to dive in to the liberated state. It's much harder to do it. If you're kind of in, you know, in the state of the heart is unskillful. That's why it's considered unskillful. Because unskillful for the purposes of reaching liberation. So, I wish there was a mirror. For all of us, there is a mirror that mirrors mindfulness. They wish I could just shine your mirror because I see so much beauty and people and it just makes me happy to see it. And there's a quote by Thomas Merton that I like, it goes something like I have to paraphrase it wildly because I'm with me, I don't remember. So when he says something like I see the secret beauty in all people. And the greatest problem I have is I just want to fall down and bow in front of everyone. So if you can't use a mirror and bow so I hope that this was clear enough tonight, and not too complicated all this stuff, maybe gives you a little sense of beauty and appreciation of it. And as I said in the beginning, one of the most beautiful things or the most beautiful thing I know, is, you know, is the beauty that exists in the hearts in our hearts, more beautiful than any piece of art or anything that I've ever seen in nature, as if it's different than nature. It isn't a fearful thing and Then I hope that this practice of ours helps all of us to to let that resplendent shining luminous part, be something that we can all enjoy for each other sick. Thank you