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SPEAKERS

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There is a remarkable story preserved in the teachings of the Buddha about a monk who had trouble with his a meditation practice. And his name was Maggia. And he was for a period of time the attendance for the Buddha and the Buddha maybe it was often retreat he was living on some mountain someplace. And with the gears is only attended. And one morning, the Gaea went out for alms as the customers for Buddhist monks and to collect food and collected his food and then had his meal of the day. And then he went for a walk, exercise his legs a little bit, maybe kind of help his digestion after eating He came across a charming mango grow at the edge of the river. And he thought this would be a great place for me to meditate. So he went back to the Buddha and said, I found this really beautiful places and then go grow by side of the river is perfect place for a month to go and endeavor, spiritual practice. May I go there and endeavor and the Buddha says, Wait, wait until another monk has come to be with me. But he doesn't want to be alone for some reason. And Miguel asks, again, you know, I found this really wonderful place to be really good. I still haven't finished my practice. We could really go there. And really plunge into my practice. And the Buddha said a second time nobody just wait until someone else comes. And then a third time McGee asked the Buddha and asked him three times as a kind of a, there's a whole lore about asking three times in Indian religious circles. And that means like, certainly if you're really serious, and so, when he asked three times, the Buddha can say no anymore, he says, Go and endeavor as you like. So Miguel goes off to his beautiful mango grove and sit down to meditate. And then sometimes later, he comes back to the Buddha and said, says, It's really amazing. In one translation, it says, it's really awesome. And the other translation I've seen, he says, comes back and says, it's really wonderful, marvelous. Here, I was gone forth into the monastic life. I'm serious about my meditation practice serious about spiritual discipline. And I find I found these wonderful conditions to meditate in this Grove and sit down to meditate. And as I sit there, I am assailed by three kinds of thoughts. I'm assailed by thoughts of sensual desire. I'm assailed by thoughts of ill will. And I'm assailed by thoughts of causing harm, doing harm. And, you know, my meditation practice is not working, and I'm not getting anywhere because of this stuff is coming. So then the Buddha says to him, oh, for someone who is not yet mature in liberating their mind there are five conditions that Five qualities that bring about the maturity, of liberation of mind. So here we have this net monk who's having trouble with his meditation practice. And even though he has very good intention, he's inspired in his practice. And I think many people who practice for a long periods of time certainly practicing meditation, will go through periods of time where they have difficulty with their meditation. They do. Some people have difficulty from the first day they start doing it. And some people, maybe you're like the monk or quite had Beginner's luck, they're quite inspired. And early time with a meditation practice works really well and then at some point,

might run into some difficulties in practice and mix difficulty continue. Or sometimes people people run into a dry spell, kind of meditation, some kind of stale, uninspiring, or sometimes we run into phase where it just doesn't have any meaning anymore. I mean, made it made so much sense early on. But you know, did it for a while and it just doesn't make any sense has no purpose or meaning anymore. Why are you doing this and there are other things more interesting to do, perhaps. And sooner or later, I think it's often useful to think of spiritual life, any part of life and spiritual life and meditation life to go through cycles, two phases. And so you'll be visited by many phases as you go through the practice over a long time. And then learning how to be wise about these different phases is a very important part of the practice and what to do with practice when it's no longer fresh and when it when it feels stale and uninspired by when you come across something you just really difficult to sit there. strong emotions and feelings of strong thoughts arise or just you know, you keep pulling away pulling you away, just making you really restless or agitated, impatient to get on with things or meditation. Practice is not enjoyable. You can do it do it diligently, but actually the end of the sitting, you feel worse than you did before you feel kind of like your energy level has kind of been drained in the process rather than being revived by the refreshed by meditation, or perhaps maybe even a little bit, maybe a little bit headachy or something kind of strain of pushing or trying so hard. Or there are times when people get really discouraged, for many reasons with their meditation practice. And it feels really, you know, difficult to keep it up because of all the discouragement, you know, why should I do this? And, you know, and there are many reasons for that discouragement. So here we have one story of a monk who was having trouble with his meditation practice, and the five qualities that help conditions and help bring about the maturity of awareness, maturity of this kind of liberation through awareness, I think are five qualities that might be helpful to look at. Remember Did a maybe in all situations where we're being challenged by our meditation practice or find difficult to do? And so I'll just go through these and then talk about them a little bit, and then maybe talk about some other ways of understanding the difficulties and maybe some of the ways of working with it. So the Buddha said in reply to this monk, the first quality is having admirable people as friends, companions and comrades. Another translation would be good spiritual friends, to have beautiful people, horrible people. as friends, companions and comrades, and the second quality is being virtuous. Living a virtuous life, living a life of integrity. Lately I've been making a terrible pun on the word enlightenment. And saying that the prefix is all wrong. It's not that I should two different different letters should be the front of enlightenment. And the letters should be geo instead of em. So go light. And, and it's terrible fun. But it also points to something that if we can go through our life likely be light about ourselves about our life itself. I think that that's one of the things a lot easier to meditate to be engaged in spiritual life. And if we're heavy and burdened by our life or troubled by it, and part of the function of living a life of integrity is to help us live a life life that's light and you can live in a life not filled with remorse or regret or worry or fear, embarrassment or shame, or just preoccupation with things. So to live a life with which is virtuous to deliver life, which is light. I also like the word light because rather than burn You're here because we tend to narrow the meaning of virtue, a virtuous life, to maybe a moral life and ethical life. And for the Buddha, the idea of virtue was much broader than that. It had to do with all the ways in which we act in the world that are supportive of not supportive of developing our inner life for developing liberation through awareness. And so, to find a way to live likely, and one of the things that I think challenges a lot of people in the kind of lifestyle that many people live here in the modern West, is being overly busy. It seems to be epidemic, contagious. This phenomena of having so many things to do, and so many readers have so many opportunities and so many things that can be done in so many messages that we should do them all. And I know a lot of people who just really busy fill their time with activities all the time, and many of them will worthwhile. And if meditation practice is just an appendage to a very busy life, it can be very hard to get real meaning from the meditation practice.

Certainly some of the deeper meanings of it that's possible in the deeper value of it. And so the go light implies not you're simply living a virtuous life, but it implies living a life. So that meditation practice maybe is at the center of it, or there's enough space around the meditation practice. So the meditation practice can really have a meaning in our life rather than just kind of shoved into the corners of our day. I think that if you, if a person is very busy and active and having a lot of active things going on their life and they sit down to meditate, the mind's gonna keep racing. And if your meditation practice is 30 minutes long, it might raise the whole 30 minutes. But if you have enough time, before you sit down to meditate to have a cup of tea, or go for a little walk or look out the window for 10 minutes, and let somebody think settle away. Then you sit down to meditate, the meditation practices, you know, it's gonna be much more more valuable than if you just spent your time 30 minutes your mind racing. So to go live to create a context for your meditation practice that there's time for it, you're going to kind of relax before you even do it kind of open in something. So some people like to do meditation first thing in the morning because of that reason there's less going on the mind is not churned up so much. So, to live a virtuous life, a life life the third quality is to be able to hear at will easily and without difficulty talk in this translator has a talk that is why I would read the part first censored attendee talk that is that is conducive to the opening of awareness. So nowadays, we connect them and if you didn't have books, so all The only way you could do was hear things here teaching. So, but maybe we could say now, you know, to have, you know, libraries and bookstores close by a lot of books available or to have tapes or be able to hear, but to be able to hear directly from someone. There's a qualitative difference between that said, then being able to just read about the Dharma. So be able to hear at will easily and what if difficulty talk that is conducive to the opening of awareness. And the word that I dropped out, is in this translation, talk that is truly sobering. And I'm not sure if that's, you know, the right word. Maybe it's a good one, but I haven't looked at the Pali word and other translator has this as a word talk that is self effacing. So some word there, but conducive to the opening of awareness. And then he gives examples, that is so what do you think? And before I give you these, what do you think is the talk that is conducive to the opening of awareness. So, in other words, to, to hear talks, and Dharma talks are something that is inspiring, is certainly something that keeps meditation practice going and fresh and alive for people. But not just inspiring, because inspiration itself can be a dead end. And that's one of the reasons why some people have difficulty with meditation practice is that they've been inspired in ways that are unrealistic. And so they engage in the practice and they feel really great hope and vitality first because they're involved this great idealistic thing, but it's not going to go there. Your Mind your heart. And so, you know, after a while, you get discouraged on not getting there. Nothing's happening here. You know, it's two o'clock already and I'm not fully enlightened. And so, so, be very careful about how we get inspired and what we get inspired by And some people are inspiration junkies and, and they just don't have much of a real core to the spiritual life themselves, but they go around and just get inspired all the time and they feel kind of void you know hopeful by that and and, you know, it can be a dead enemy discouraging after a while, or it could just keep a person hovering for a long time, but it kind of inspirational level and never really develop some core inner strength or core meaning for themselves and what this spiritual life can be about the practice life can be about. So this list is interesting. This is a talk that this is the kind of talk the Buddha thought was conducive to the opening of awareness. Talk on modesty. How many of you inspired by talks on modesty, that just kind of really get you revved up and ready to go. Talk on modesty on contentment. On seclusion on non entanglement on the arousing of persistence, on virtue, on concentration, on discernment, on release, and on the knowledge and vision of release. So he's kind of laying down a sequence here, which is often does have kind of almost steps to a spiritual life, you know, many kind of descriptions of kind of steps or paths that are somewhat built on each other. And it could be seen this way here kind of building on each other. So, I'm kind of quite happy with modesty and

contentment comes first, that somehow that we're looking to be inspired in practice. The first mirror is turned towards you directly, not on you know, some great ideal of what you can attain, but rather than some very simple thing that you can do for yourself, change yourself. And maybe the word modesty doesn't work for Many of you, but maybe there's some other word like that, that makes you maybe happy, maybe feel at home feel like you're not chasing after egotistical identities or stressful ambitions, but rather some sense of kind of being at home or being modest or not being puffed up or not being assertive or aggressive or, I don't know, whatever it is, but some way that you've been, you've been changed in a way that inspires you. That's the first thing rather than saying, you know, go out and hear some, you know, rip roaring talk about how beautiful enlightenment is. The first thing you should learn about this modesty or something like that. Rick Warren talk on modesty. And then the second is contentment. And I've been told that some of the Silicon Valley corporations would not hire someone who showed up for a job interview, and said that one of the strong spiritual qualities they've cultivated is contentment because What you want people who are not content because you want to have ambition and drive and you want to get someplace you know what your company is almost content, there's not going to have that kind of drive. And so maybe don't tell your boss you know, what your spiritual life is about. But some things one of those beautiful qualities a person can have is the quality of contentment. Some people are afraid of contentment because it feels like contentment is not going to allow them to be creative or have some kind of great enthusiasm for different activities in life. I don't think those that follows necessarily, you can be enthusiastic Lee involved in things and still be so content, really content in yourself. The enthusiastic involvement doesn't come out of neediness or contrary to fill a hole or an emptiness, but rather comes from you know, being really centered in yourself and then from that, from that tenderness comes activity in the world. Not from it an attempt to fill some hole that we have And then the word seclusion is a fascinating one, I like to call it in Independence, sometimes translated as solitude, with some ability both physically in real life terms, but also in, in, in the mind to be dwell independent and separated from all the things we get caught by and caught up in. A meditation practice itself is kind of often described in the tradition as kind of seclusion process, we go off into a room quietly under require three by ourselves, and we close our eyes, and we will fully let go of many of the concerns and activities that normally we do maybe unhealthy things we do in normal life for a period of time. So we can kind of regroup, find out what's really going on with us ourselves, and plunge deeper into our psyche. Can we can we stay continually involved in all the activities of the world? Probably if you read newspaper every day, all day. And that's all you did. You probably not going to drop Deeply down into yourself that if you sat under a 300 Park for the day, so sometimes we need to separate ourselves from some of the activities of our life to really be able to get some depth. And so that's what the word seclusion implies. The non entanglement letting go of the ways we're attached or entangled with things, at least temporarily, talks on arousing persistence. So this is being persisted in their practice, they can maintain continuity of practice all the time. And this is one of the really important keys to an ongoing meditation practice. There's value of doing meditation practice, you know, I would say, there's value of doing meditation practice that, you know, just once, there's value. And so I'm never going to say someone comes to me says, You know, I only have a chance to make it once in my lifetime. Is that okay? It's a sure. It's like the, you know the story about the monks in the monastery. Who's I wanted to smoke. I say during intraclass sometimes the monks to monks want to smoke in the monastery so they go to the one says I'm gonna go ask the abbot and he asked the abbot Is it okay to smoke or while I pray? And they said no when you pray, just pray. And so he leaves the office kind of dejected and the second monk says, Well, let me get have a chance to ask the abbot. So he goes in and he comes out smiling and says, no problem. We can smoke. What would you say? I asked him, is it okay to pray while we smoke? And, and the abbot said, of course, you prayed all your activities. So meditating just once is probably great,

but meditating, you know, persistently all the time in a regular basis every day. My daily practice is really helpful. A lot. Sometimes, it's like maybe exercising or eating good food, healthy food. It doesn't. Not always enjoyable to exercise, but you've experienced the benefits afterwards. And meditation practice can be that sometimes that it's not enjoyable to do. But some people feel Wow, it really makes a difference in the rest of my day. And so people will maintain it in regular basis because of that. But the to listen to talks that inspire you to be persistent, to be consistent to keep it up day after day after day, is a very important way of being inspired to keep going when things are difficult. some difficulties will work themselves out on their own. And the persistence is really the key. Sometimes we get caught, we ride our difficulties very closely. And we think, Oh, I had to fix this. I have to solve it. It's so important. It's so desperate about it. And all you need to do is to stay attentive and aware in the middle of it. And be very honest about it being there necessarily to fix it and sometimes to be caught by the By the fix it virus, fix it bug that people get get just makes our meditation practice so much more difficult. But if you stop trying to fix your problems in meditation, just try to be aware of them and maintain the persistence through time. You'll be amazed how many things just kind of dissolve on their own and don't need to be fixed. Then the other virtue concentration, discernment release as a third, the fourth is to be persistent in abandoning unskillful mental states and qualities and being persistent and cultivating skillful qualities. So this is a very important idea in Buddhism the idea of skillful or unskillful but by just Having some discernment in our life are those qualities, states activities that help move us in the direction of greater health, spiritual health, mental health, in this case, and those who move us away. So if we live our life, it's very stressful. Sometimes it's more important to evaluate our life and see or the ways of changing that than it is to meditate. If we're trying to simply to meditate in order to de stress, then we go back into stressful situation over and over again. After a while, you might get discouraged by it all. And so to evaluate what is it that's healthy, and what is unhealthy, in the way that I live my life and about the way that I use my mind, the way I use my feelings, my motivations, what's healthy and unhealthy and the way that I use my, my speech and the way I talk. So to evaluate things by whether they're healthy or unhealthy, and start start to move our life in the direction of that which is healthy is considered the variable quality that supports meditation practice or this maturing of, of the awareness of liberation through awareness. And then the last one is, is discerning, being wise about seeing directly into the arising and passing of things. And this has a wide range of intensities or, or, or it means to have some sensitivity to how things arise and pass sensitivity to impermanence. And for some people, this can be very dramatic when they're aware of death. And death can be very arousing to in a person's spiritual practice. And oh, yeah, this is important, I got to do this. And to be reminded of that, not not in a morbid way, but in a way that really inspires us that this life is precious. And, and so you know, maybe it's more important to actually get serious about some kind of spiritual practice or meditation practice than it is to play Solitaire one more time on the computer, or something like that. And so sometimes the reflection on impermanence and in life and death can make a real difference to kind of put a little bit fire underneath our meditation practice. But then, in a very refined way, to start seeing the arising of passing of things, in the moment to moment it way which things arise and pass. And this is hard to kind of imagine what this is what this means, unless you've developed your meditation practice for some time. But it's really remarkable how a lot of things that happen in meditation experience or, you know, normal things, our feelings, our thoughts, our body sensations, many things that even can trouble us or inspire us have a quality within them, that they're actually not. They're not really constant. But with a strong concentration, you see that they're actually almost like flashing into existence. They arise and they pass very quickly. Your relationship to those things be very different when you see the arising and passing moment by moment, and it actually can be somewhat disconcerting at times to see it, but also can be quite inspiring. Because you realize that there's nothing there that has any persistence, any any constancy there to trouble you or to get in your way

towards moving towards liberation. I don't know if I can reconstruct you construct this little story. This little event that I did when I was guiding someone in her meditation practice. She was a longtime Zen student, very strong concentration. And I was teaching her a little bit about the passive practice how you could do it. And, and we were sitting next to each other and she was sitting in meditation and where I was kind of talking to it through it and she was telling me what's going on, she was meditating. And when something like this, she said, Oh, I feel so anger and such was a common theme for her in her life was anger. And I said, Okay, feel your anger. Where do you feel in your body? I feel this tightness in my stomach. Okay, so stay there, feel it. Notice what happens. After a while. She said, Oh, if one goes away, and then one is up fine. And then what's happening now? Well, no, I'm not feeling a bit afraid. Great. Where do you feel your fear? I feel it You said somewhere else. And the fear went away after a while. And then she said, I'm feeling confused. Because these things these things are just keep going away. She's used to them. She's always with her. You're normally and she her identity was tied to the finger and little bit of fear and she was unfamiliar with a being disappearing so quickly. So I'm confused. And I said, Okay, be aware of your confusion. And then she kind of opened your eyes and looked at the bewildered way. Like I've done this trick. The confusion has gone away. And like to shoot, you know, there's no place to stand. There's nothing, you know, no place left, you know. So the idea that, you know, at some point in meditation practice, see how things are so impermanent, that there's no place for us to stay long enough to make a conclusion that life is this way. Or I am this way. Isn't that something. So those are the five qualities. And the first one is to have good friends, and are some good comrades, companions. And I liked it that they extended to all three kinds of friends, companions and comrades. Some people who are here the context of good friend means someone who is engaged in the same practice you're involved in, so that you can be inspired by them encouraged by them, get feedback from them, learn from them. And that's the first quality that Buddha gives It's important for the maturing of practice. And so coming here to meditation group is very important going on retreats can be very helpful, very important for that reason, because you realize other people doing the same thing and you're inspired by those people. But also having maybe one or two companions or buddies or someone that you can check in with on a personal level from time to time. Sometimes it's a teacher, sometimes it's just someone who's a field more like a peer in the Dharma with and you take them out for coffee and say, you know, I'd like to hear a little bit about how your practices are perhaps going or your experience of practice, learn from them little bit or share your experiences a little bit can be very, very valuable. If your meditation practice is not enjoyable, or valuable, then you need to look at it more carefully and seriously. There are certainly times when it's not going to be that way. And then you have to keep just keep practicing, but if it persists for a long time, That way, then you want to do some very careful evaluation. And one of the ways to do it is to come and talk to a teacher about it. But you know, explore why is it you know, enjoy? Why isn't Why isn't nothing enjoyable? What is it, something about the way you do it the technique perhaps or the attitude you're bringing, maybe you have too high expectation or maybe you're too hesitant or maybe the hindrances are coming into play too much. Or maybe you haven't set up the conditions around yourself around the meditation time to make meditation really enjoyable. Some people find meditating in first thing in the morning, maybe before anybody else was woken up to be very deeply satisfying because there's simply the peace and being left alone and the quiet that involved and so it's very enjoyable, the whole time because of the context that has been created for. So that's what the Buddha said to Maggie. Then, on realizing the significance of what he had just said, The Buddha then exclaimed and this is this this sutra is in a this this course is in a collection called the inspired utterances. And because every once in a while the Buddha would be inspired to just produce a poem on the spot, just boom, you know, back in before they had writing and writing stuff, and people are much more poetic just spontaneously, and so he just kind of compose this poem just inspired by his

own teachings, I guess. Little thoughts, subtle thoughts. When followed, steer up the heart, not comprehending the thoughts of the heart. runs here in the air, the mind out of control, but comprehending the thoughts of the heart. One who is ardent, mindful, ardent and mindful, we strange them. When followed the stare of the heart. One who was awakened, lets them go without trace. So please don't let your thoughts steer you up. Don't pick them up. Leave them alone. Because someone who's awakened that you like the thoughts are let go without any trace. thoughts arise and they let go of and there's though they leave no momentum, no trace of themselves in the mind or energy in the mind. momentum. No feelings, no emotions, no further thoughts. So maybe that's enough. For today, unless you want more feels like enough. If you guys have any questions or comments feel like Miguel. Does he drop it? Does he finally get it? I don't think he you know, there's no yeah, you know it it doesn't doesn't go that for me doesn't doesn't say. Yeah. In some of the longer discourses at the end, there's a little comment about how the monks or nuns are the people, the audience received the teachings. Usually they're happy. Sometimes they're enlightened. But at least in one discourse, they're unhappy. And that's always good for Dharma teachers to remember that. At the end of a Dharma talk, the audience isn't necessarily supposed to be feeling happy. Even the Buddha, you know, got people feeling unhappy at the end. So one of these days I'll get you really good and unhappy. Yes. And what's the penalty for giving a talk like contentment? Sorry. That's quite interesting. And whether it's maybe something subversive about Buddhism Yes. devalue yourself. Yeah. Yeah, sometimes meditation With meditation practice can do for us has no economic value. And it has no value in the kind of society sometimes people live in. It doesn't, you know, it's not making you more money and it's not, you know, educating you about, you know, latest, whatever that, you know, information that you need to have, or there's always things that you know, other people value, you know, doesn't make you more interesting at cocktail parties. Nothing is nothing seemingly, but I've noticed sometimes when people meditate, there's a kind of a, sometimes that kind of beauty that seems to shine, shine out from the inside that and even when people are deeply contented in a very nice way, there's kind of beauty that shines through that. And, but it has no you know, it's hard for you to be valued. So I agree with you can be hard. That's why having friends or companions is very helpful, very important, so that we don't realize that we have more support for that change. Yeah. transcendental meditation, study meditation. Maybe someone will go there to check their Redwood City police records and see if the crime diversity st has gone down since we moved here. The interesting thing about, you know, the meditation having meaning and value in, in the Zen tradition that practices, they sometimes like to say that Zen had no meaning at all. And, and, and part of the part of the value of saying it has no value is that the mind is so conditioned to always go after something, to want something, even even beautiful things, wholesome things, with the mind really going to be free. It has to stop going after things. And so for the mind to do an activity, which is meaningless, goes, pulls the rug from underneath all the neurotic attempt to try to get meaning. So in zen, they like to kind of tell you, there's no meaning and you go there and you struggle you struggle with that. In our tradition, we like to tell you there's some and so and so you don't get to struggle as much. But maybe that's You know, maybe that's good for beginners, you know, but sooner or later, sooner or later you have to see there's no there's no meaning but sooner or later you have to let go of all meaning. Not that there isn't. There is no meaning but if a mind is concerned about it, it's an obstacle. Yes. Yes. Sometimes it gets worse sometimes. It's like a trapped rat that that wants to trap kind of runs around even faster. get tired Sometimes, you know, it can be very frightening for the ego or for a normal kind of way the mind works to be challenged to realize there's another way. And sometimes as we meditate, the mind quiets down. And whenever we get agitated because we realize we have to pay attention to something that's quite painful, that we don't really, sometimes it's painful memories, sometimes it's painful, painful feelings and all kinds of things. And so sometimes it seems seemingly, we go backwards in meditation practice

rather than forward because we have to go through this period of dealing with things which we've been ignoring for a long time. running around, exhausted everything that it is sometimes it's sometimes Yeah, sometimes it's there's we hold on to being wounded because because last minute George yes later produce. I think I think persistence is very important. And also keeping the practice very simple. That the only real goal is just to be mindful. If you if you set up any other ambitious goal, it often will get in the way and cause discouragement, but just be mindful and trust the mindfulness. So the mystery of that. It's very profound way of practicing. Sometimes, if you find meditation practice a challenge for many reasons it can be a challenging one solution to that challenge is to do more of it. And sometimes people said, you know, if you don't sit long enough the daily sitting practice and they sit only long enough and not long enough to kind of the kind of daily stuff, the agitation kind of do settle down. So they never kind of gone beyond the level of the, you know, settling the agitation. So if you put if you sit longer, then you can settle the agitation from the day, and then go into some other interesting place with a meditation practice. or sitting longer, you can see more clearly what's going on. So you might try that if you're finding self challenge sometime through meditation practice, try sitting more. So thank you very much. I hope this was useful.