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SPEAKERS

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So this will be the last talk I'll be giving for a while because for the month of March, I'll be teaching a spirit rock teaching a month long retreat there. A few people from IMC are going to be there as well. Sitting the retreat. It's one of my one of my favorite things to do is to teach this retreat. It's really quite awe inspiring. What can happen when people spend a month on Silent Retreat, meditating most of the time. So I've invited a whole series of speakers to come and talk while I'm gone. So both for Mondays and Sundays in the mornings we'll have guest teachers This evening I wanted to give what might be called more of a Zen talk. Further reason Zen talk is it has to do with a very important theme of practice that I learned at the San Francisco Zen Center. That's where I picked it up and was a very important part of the practice there and how I understood my Buddhist practice. So in that Zen kind of Zen talk, I'll start with a Zen story. And that is, Can people hear okay? So, there was once a young man who wanted to enter into a Zen monastery in Japan. And he showed up at the gates with great fire determination And asked for permission to enter into the monastery. So he was given an interview with the abbot. And the abbot asked him, Why he wanted to come and become a monk. leave the world behind and engage himself that kind of full time spiritual practice. And the young man said, I want to find out who I am. And that said, that's the wrong question. You can't come into the monastery with that question. Come back some other time. And when I was in Japan many years ago, I was having a conversation with someone famous rinzai Zen master I visited was visiting his temple and translator I spoke a little bit of Japanese. And I asked a question, feel discussion. And then out of the blue, the abbot pointed to the door and for me to leave, and he said, Come back 20 years before and you know, the Japanese was not that complicated what he was saying. But they translator you know that's true what you said what you said, Come back, get me come back 20 years before that's the door and leave now. So, I had no choice, no choice but to leave very abruptly. So, this young man came to the monastery and the abbot said, You're asking the wrong question, you can enter the monastery and come back so the men so the men came with a question. And the idea of questioning is very important part of the Zen practice I was trained in and having a question, entering it entering into any situation with the spirit of a question. And the spiritual quest, the word quest in question are cognates the words

that closely come together. And so the spiritual quest, the seeking, has extensive questioning, and it's at least in Zen questioning, what is this what's going on them questioning and questioning is very important, because questioning the right kind of questioning is what keeps us fresh, open. open to new possibilities. One of the great difficulties of any spiritual life is stagnation and difficulties is his certainty. I think now I know what's what is. And the questioning having it always be ready to question kind of breaks through stagnation breaks through the kind of false certainty though now I know what it is. There's a saying I came across many years ago that said, it says something like trust those who are seeking the truth, not those who have found it. And then there's a separate story. It's goes in our circles quite a bit of Mara, who's the Buddhist devil, whose job description is to stop people from getting enlightened, was out wandering around with an attendant and they came across a monk who was doing walking meditation that's outdoors back and forth. And suddenly, it was like the monk saw something in his mind. laid off with great understanding and realization. And the attendant said tomorrow mom's Look, don't think we should do something about this month, he seems like he's understood something. And Mara said, Oh, don't worry about him. Soon enough, you'll turn into belief. And then there's the idea that you find very fine, some religions, some spiritual traditions, including Buddhist ones, that doesn't Buddhism is not exempt from this kind of fundamentalism, which can be defined a little bit like when they don't encourage you to seek rather than encouragement is seek no further. This is it. We have it for you. We have the answer. Seek no further. So questioning, Krishna keeps us fresh keeps us open. Keeps us exploring. And it's kind of like there's always more there. I like the little saying that goes Bye bye. Per sticker that goes, reality is not what you think it is. Then you soon as you think you know what reality is know what, who you are know anything for some certain way, there's always going to be something that's outside of that knowing. And then you can stay within the circle of your knowing, or you could kind of use questioning to find what's beyond that limit of what I know, what is it? What's going on. But I think that that's one of the great offerings or gifts that idealistic young people give to those of us who are old and set in their ways is they show up young people show up with a scene somehow or other and they're not going to take the old information, you know, the, the truths that the previous generation has found. They're not going to settle for that because always live are always ready to question that and go beyond what's the outside look Beyond that, it's a great thing to always be questioning and looking what's beyond. What is it. At the center in San Francisco this whole idea of questioning is sometimes in castle encapsulated in the idea of beginner's mind having a beginner's mind. In fact, the temple of Samsung's Zen center page Street in San Francisco, the temple name for San Francisco Zen Center, so almost never used, but the temple name is a beginner's mind temple. And the idea there being that the beginner's mind is a person whose beginner's mind is not set in their way. Experts must be set they seem to know what's what, supposedly in this idea, and but the beginner is always ready to kind of question for the beginner often there's new possibilities open up, the expert wouldn't see because the expert kind of has a set way of seeing things in real life. It doesn't exactly work out that way. But the principles principle is they always keep them the beginner's mind. So then, Young man came to the monastery with this question. And who am I? Which is like one of the great perennial questions. And the abbot said to him, that's the wrong question. And then what I didn't tell you was the young man said, but but but I read all these books, nice books in here. This is the great question. You have to kind of penetrate this question. If

you penetrate this question, you get real hard realization. And the avocet books, what do they know? Go away. Come back some of the time. Come back with a real question. And so the young man left and came back the next day, haven't thought about it for a while. And he said, I have a question. He said, Well, let's hear it. I want to discover what is true. What is truth. out, he pointed to the door out. So the young man hung his head down and left thought about it for a while. And this time he thought about it a couple of days and came back and said, Okay, now my question is, you know, what is liberation that this core of Buddhism liberation? Well, that's my question. That's what I want to pursue. That's what I'm seeking my quest. What is liberation? out? out? So this guy he does poorly, I couldn't understand what was what he thought he was sincere. He thought he was really into it. And he had these questions, his burning questions and he wanted to get to the bottom of life and this just wasn't buying it, what's going on? Okay, I've got to really take this seriously. And so he went out and he started wandering around a little bit trying to find the wisest people he could find. And he asked them what's what's the question? What's the really important question I need to have so I can go to the monastery. So some some Navy. This guy found some of you. What do you think is the question? Yes. So that's one wise person's response. So other possibilities What am I going to find here that I won't find outside? What will I find here that I won't find outside the temple? is a good question. But Abbott is very strict. So what else? No stairs to try. Yes. Is there another temple nearby? Is there another temple nearby? Yeah, happy to say yes. Get out of here go find them. By all means sometimes sometimes it's very hard to get into Zen temple they just kick you every test they can they kick you out. No and I came to practice in a Zen monastery in Japan. I came to live there for a while. And you show up in the gates and the first thing they do is they have you just stand at the gate they will like you come in and you just stand there and maybe because I was a foreigner, they maybe they don't know what but they didn't let me stand there as long as they normally would. And in some traditions insane is three days is to stand there. So Neil, there's just kneel there in front of the temple. And you know, it's quite a gruesome thing and you like to sleep at night, open up the gates and go to a guest quarter just inside the gate for you to sleep at night when they have to go outside again, and sit in front of the gate and bow their kneel down. And when I went, it wasn't that long. So after standing the gate for a few hours, then a senior monk came out. And he asked me questions. Because just me, right before I was really worthy of coming into the monastery so that there are some questions in this case, the you know, the monk has to find the question. So anybody else? What else? Yes. Oh, so instead, it wasn't just not I keep asking questions that could be a symptom of restless mind. But great, beautiful. Okay. But he still he's waiting for a question. And so the young man comes back and he sat in meditation for a whole week is really still and quiet. He sits in front of the meditation monastery gate. And he just shows a stillness in fact the most come out and revile him and spit on him and and He's unmoved, unfazed, and David comes out and sees what's going on and he says, out. So, yes. Who asks the question. So he comes back and he says, My question is, who's asking the question? It's a great question. Who's asking the question? Who am I? It's kind of like, Who knows? Who's the one who knows? It's a great question. Who knows? that knows anything. And these are all great questions. But the average is keep sending the monkey. The monkey a monkey sent the guy away. Anybody else want to try? Boy Yes. Boss. Oh, nice. That's very good. What kind of work do you have? That's very nice. What kind of work do you have for me in the monastery? So very practical, very immediate. Just how can you be of

service rather than what's in it for me? I want to get something you know, what can I do for you? Okay, how can I serve? You know, put me to work. Let me train you the details of life's great great love it but still out. Yes. The question is I want to learn from you and your masters and all your your masters masters and what's really true what you know. Oh, yeah. What's wrong with me? These There's another question but similar to that. That's a very good question to ask and I recommend all of you to ask this question, because I suspect many of you are really good at that question. What's wrong with you? But why don't you ask the question? What's right with me? What kind of answer Did you get that then? And how do you how do you feel in response? But anyway, out to the gate? Yes. You're trying again. It's not a question, who's looking for a question? Yes, to come back with a question. So. So I've done this kind of thing. Exactly. This but I've been to these, some Zen masters where you keep showing up trying to offer an answer, and usually ring a bell to go to go you know, I'm wasting my youth. You know, I could you know, I'm sitting here, sitting here thinking, pondering and I really, you know, I go in, I'm not really, you know, he doesn't understand he just sent me and he missed my call, you know, he's, you know, you know you have all these reactions responses the guy's crazy and you have perfectly good answer and being being in your day after day after day. So that what am I doing here? That's a great question. What am I doing here? And that's what the that's what the Abbott's asking What are you doing here? out? Yes, let's ask another voice. Yeah. Why do you ask for a question? That's good. That's being to show some some initiative. They're kind of questioning back and challenging. I like it. I like it. So good, but out. Some Yes. How can I end this dissatisfaction? Great. That's like it Maybe he's studying Buddhism because in the teachings of the Buddha, that is like the core question, that's supposed to be the appropriate question, whereas what is the suffering? And where's the end of that suffering? The Buddha said, there are many questions you can ask that are the wrong questions to ask. And you should actually know what questions you should ask. And that's one of the questions than what you just said. So that's very good. Buddha would have been very happy with you. But the abbot says, yes. There are no fixed questions. It's not a question. So I'm sorry. Yes, please. My question currently is how can I best live my life? And if the answer is no, then all right, where can I? Where else can I go? Because that's what's important in See, so you show up at the gate and you say, well, you're not accepting any of my questions. So where can I work on this question? Where can I work on what's important? And you have to just go. Don't Yeah. If you want to, you know, it's fine with the Euro to be here in the monastery, we don't need you here. We don't physically want you. But if you went if you want to come back here, you got to ask you come back with a real question. Yes, please. Do I already have all the answers? Do you think the debit said? So it's very important to know how to ask a question in a spiritual question. And so you know, so that they But they're the young man and sort of trying to figure out what, maybe it's how I asked it, maybe it's the way I am. So one of the ways is to ask and silence and it's one of the great things to do is to sit in meditation or go someplace with a silence go for a walk in the woods or something. And, and somehow get the mind still, like someone said still mind is, and also get in touch with your body kind of feel like you're in your body or with your body or sensing your body in a very deep way. And then and then find out what is the important question or, or to ask a question, if you have one, and see what bubbles up as an answer. What you really are to ask that stillness are asking that in the face of either because you can imagine sitting next to it or it's real, like asking something in the face of death. If

you're going to die or someone you love just died, you know about that's really close by what are the important questions what's important issues in life in the context of something as big as death? You know, what's that? Does that clarify Why things very quickly? And then to ask questions which are not too abstract, you know, part of the reason that I, I titled My book the issue at hand is it's it's one translation of Zen expression called Genjo Koan. And Genjo Koan is sometimes translated also as, of course, are interpreted as meaning, understanding what the question is right here. Now. What is it the question right here now. So the issue also like the issue at hand because the member says my book at hand, it's so tangible, something that's immediately present and felt so abstract. I've been on retreats sometimes where the fifth day of the retreat someone will come to me and say, you know, interview. Can you recommend a good book for me to read on Buddhism? And it's completely weird. On the fifth day, there's you to ask that kind of question. Because it's so abstract, so distant from the intensity and power of being right here with oneself. And the whole after five days of him teachings about being here and being present and discovering the practice in yourself here in this moment. He gave me a book. And, you know, it's a good question in other contexts, but it's kind of we're finding weird content. And some people have tremendous capacity to avoid themselves, avoid the presence and ask abstract questions. Yes, please. How can I have a love? That's a great question. How can I learn how to love How can I learn how to compassion? I can learn how to be kind. How can I be helpful? How could it be a service? Great, great questions. And so the young man comes sees The habits and says that the habit looks deeply in his eyes and he didn't happen to me still for a while looking at him. Maybe a single teardrop goes. goes down the Abbess cheek and then the arm goes up. Because I'm brave, yeah, yes. May I come in? Very, very simple direct, very simple. May I come in? I like it's no, don't question. Whom does the Dharma service is a question then put the man's asking request you asking me separate from that. So what is a repost of appropriate response? That's a great question. In fact, it's a famous call and maybe you know if there's a famous story of someone think went to went to famous master and old master, he was been Zen practitioner for maybe 60 years. And the young guy asked the master, after all these years of Zen practice and teaching, you know, what's, what's the, you know, what's a third lifetime lifetime of Zen? What's the essential teaching you have? What's the essential thing you've realized? And the teacher said, an appropriate response? And the idea being that there's no right answer in the abstract. The right answer has to do with the particulars of the city. In and knowing what's the appropriate response here? What is this response? what's what's required now? Yes. What is this? That's beautiful question the in. It's kind of like one of the i think i think that also is one of the kind of prime Buddhist questions and certainly for vipassana students, and also in Zen students asked him what what is this? What is this never settling for an answer. So that's a very important thing of not settling for an answer, but always to ask the question then being ready to ask again. Further. What is this? What is this really easy to get an answer? What does it really look? Look? Let's look more closely. What is it? What is it and search In insight meditation, that's kind of spirit of it. What is this? What is this? What is this? That's a great answer. I love it. I love a lot. I love these answers. It's really great. So the fact that the arm goes up and sends you out sends you away, is not meant to, you know, denigrate the value of your questions? Yes, please. How are you? That's great. Great. Let's find out what's going on here first before? Yes. How are you? Great. I'm great. Thank you. Come back another day. That's not your question. That it

gets this question. It gets you into the monastery. Yes. What are the teachings of the Buddha now if you ask a Zen master that now the arms are gonna go up towards him gonna be slammed in your face. The Buddha and his teachings, that old fart. What does he know? The kind of things entities and masters would say? Yes. Oh, why does the sun rise so high in the sky? is a very interesting question. Can you unpack a little bit more? Why would you ask that here Great. That's a great question. I like I like your question. And it's very interesting, some of the questions we can ask about nature. Because your question is, why does the sun rise so high in the sky? And in fact, the sun never rises at all. Right? It's, we're in this planet is spinning backwards. And so it gives the impression of the sun going up and down, but it's not going up and down at all. So the question sometimes some of the basic experiences that we look one way, we find out find out when we start questioning, there are different Norfleet what they see and that's part of the value of questioning is questioning the status quo questioning the given, questioning the usual ways of interpreting our life in ourselves and going beyond that. And That's great. There's not many of you left anymore. Yes. Should I ask? What questions should I ask? Okay. Habits would say, that's what you need to find out. Yes, that's the whole point. So the young man goes around the world. And he starts asking other people for help, and asked people and got all kinds of wonderful questions like you guys gave this evening. And as he gets all these wonderful answers, he's really impressed by them. It's really kind of changes him and really inspires him. And just hearing the questions is so great. Just hearing the questions, kind of opens him opens into some new possibilities, something new, just keeps opening and each one open, open. And that's part of the value of questioning is not the answer. But and that's kind of difficult to implement. So interested in the answer, maybe the point is not the answer. Maybe the point is to wait and should opens us to the possibility. So he goes around and you know, every once in a while he comes back to the monastery and asks what he thinks is the right question since away slowly over time, the distance the length of time between visits to the abbot from longer and longer and longer, becomes a month in between six months in between a year in between, and just wanders around, finally stops coming back at off to the monastery. And he just wanders around goes around, ask people, what's the question? What's the question? And, and then many, many years later, somehow or other the app is up and about and he runs into this man. And the abbot says to him, Hey, you never came back. And then what happened to you? And oh, clean back. Oh, you forgot about you. Like it became irrelevant for me going back to the monastery, the monastery being at the monastery. The it's just been so meaningful and powerful and enlightening for me to just always be asking, what is the question? which was the first one, right? You said, What is the question? What is the question? So they added, bowed, and said, that's great. Now you can enter the monastery. And the man said, Thank you, but now I don't need to. So until they bowed, and that was it. So what is the question? is a great question. No, and what in this in this very moment in this situation? What's being asked of me? What's being asked? What's the question? What needs to be addressed? rather than coming with some preconceived idea that you know what the answer is to life into your spiritual life, you enter without knowing, but rather you enter with this, what's required here? What's asked of me here? What's the question here? What's the issue attend here? What's been called upon here? What is you know? So the question, what is this costly factor that What is this, but not only what is this? But what's the question implies a little bit? In my mind at least, you know what, what is the appropriate response? What is my, you know, what's

being asked of me in this situation? Often the question you don't want your monitoring might I have a question that is for me, I want an answer for something. Rather than thinking that question is about getting answers for yourself. It's more like, what is the world asking to me? What's the question the world has of me? What response Am I asked to present in this situation? How do I respond? And in the past Now, if we pass now, we put a lot of emphasis on the question, as I said earlier, what is this? Keep looking for the insight into what the nature of reality and nature of ourselves and see what's going on. In zen, that's important. But they put a very important emphasis on something else, which sometimes is under emphasized and be possible. And that is the response side. How do we respond? What do we manifest in the moment, given the situation. And there's a tendency sometimes to be past that to be end up being kind of passive. Because you just kind of noticing, or learning how to be a quantum miniature situation. Be mindful, be mindful, be mindful of what's going on paying attention paying attention. And some Zen masters would just chase vipassana students out the door. Because what's important is not your insight, that insight is easy. They would say, what's in what's important is the manifestation. how you respond and Can you respond To the world with the appropriate response, can you understand the question that the world has for you right now? What's being asked of you in this situation? So it can be as innocent and simple as when it's time to leave here that there's a few people who are in front of you, at the shoe rack before in front of your shoes. What's the question? What's the response? What's, what's being asked of you there? Now, if you're set on your answers and your purpose and your dedication, those people are just the obstacles and just bug people aside and get your shoes and get home. Or you can see what's what's being asked to here. What's the question here? Cuz open open to this is what's this situation here calling for? If you're still quiet, if you open kind of the fullness of your heart to the situation, really take it in, drop your agenda, job, drop your desires, drop your self centered ideas. What's this situation calling for? Maybe simply calling for? I think I'll wait a moment or maybe I'll ask Excuse me, can you step aside? Or maybe it's being called for to say hello to them? Or maybe they need help with something? Can I help you? What's being called from What's this? What's that? What's the question here? So I think what I learned there my Zen practice is a part of the way of questioning and you know, in our life spiritual questioning, questioning is done also, when we can drop ourselves our self concern our expectations, drop our agendas, drop our conceit, dropper are concerned with self image self ideas, and drop all this kind of way in which we can so much of the time to orient ourselves in life around the self or undersell myself. So in drop all that menacing, what's the response? What's the question? And I remember very well for the day in the Zen monastery Tassajara. I've been there for almost three years, maybe two years to the point and realizing that somehow in letting go that the monastic life, the Zen life Zen practice said, done for me, helped me Let go, let go, let go something very precious arose. me very significant, very precious to me, very important. And that was that some new deep appreciation or capacity to respond to what the situation was, to be open to be empty, to some degree. And then in that emptiness, there being a kind of mutual mutual Mutual which reality between the situation I'm in, and the response to bubbles up inside of me so much so much. So it's not even me that's responding. But the response response is happening. And that deep response that arises out of that MTS where it's almost as if I'm not doing it became one of the most very much satisfying things I knew at that time, deeply, deeply meaningful and satisfying. feeling of being very right. So we drop greed, hate and delusion, drop our

attachments and clings our fears. When we drop, the sense of holding onto some secure image of this is who I am. Or this is what I need to do in a situation. But letting, letting it to, you know, letting life respond. And some people talk about that sometimes letting life respond through you an abstract way of saying it, but so you're in a sense at that point in your life, that you're asking a question all the time. But your very life itself is a question in that openness, that emptiness, where you just respond to the situation as if each situation you encounter is a question. Yes. Yes, that's a great question. I love it. You want an answer? It's great question. Now we can let you in. So you will you let into the monastery. See, there's something particular about that young man, that maybe the abbot understood that he was gonna be very hard to teach. And so he needed to have this very strange medicine. Send him away, no matter I had all this question. Other people who would have said welcome for those kinds of questions that some of you asked, but this monkey this man he couldn't. He knew he couldn't. He had to kind of somehow help him break through a certain kind of veil. Or, or some certain kind of crossing crustacean of the heart and mind that he had. And there's constant questioning and appreciating questioning and not settling on anything not being able to not give him permission to settle any place was what he needed to kind of Finally, break the crust. But you don't have so much crust. So please come. So, thank you very much. I thank you very much for your questions. And I hope that you will keep asking questions. I'll see you know, in a month