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SPEAKERS

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Last week, here, I gave a talk on conceit. And as I was leaving, I thought that in my mind that what would make a nice follow up talk on conceit is compassion. And so today's talk somehow is about compassion, but you're gonna have to keep that in mind yourself. They might not be obvious as he goes along here. And because it's raining today, I'm also reminded of parable which sometimes teach about when it rains, the called parable of the plants, which is taught in a famous Mahayana discourse called the Lotus Sutra. And the way it goes is that when the when it rains in the forest, it rains equally and all the planets which trees in the herbs and the grasses, whatever. But each plant according to its need, pulls up different water with different amounts of water. Each plant takes in what it needs. So in the same way, the reign of the Dharma is falling on all all of us equally, that each person takes in just what they need, as a devotee will take in different things, different amounts, different experiences, different things at different times. So that's why also why there's 30 retreats. 30 people on retreats, there are 30 different retreat experiences because each person takes from that experience, what is needed for themselves. So the idea of rain, in the city of rain each person takes takes in what they need, reminds me a little bit of a sponge, the way we absorb things. And as we go through life, it's possible to absorb the Dharma absorb the truth in a way that has some impact on us. And, in thinking about compassion today, I was thinking that it might be important to distinguish between knowledge and understanding. So there's all kinds of things you can know, facts, for example, so you can know facts about compassion. And one of my favorite facts these days about compassion is that it seems that loving compassion, gestures of compassion have been measured in the human body to create oxytocin. And oxytocin is a chemical that courses through the blood system and it comes into play in various key moments in some people's lives. oxytocin is produced when mothers breastfeed and oxytocin is produced at childbirth. oxytocin is produced apparently When some people eat chocolate oxytocin is apparently produced when people are massaged. And one of the functions of oxytocin is the creators around function. One of the results of octopus chemical is a produces a sense of well being in the system. And so when when there's clean compassion when there's compassion without any anxiety, then this chemical called oxytocin is released in our blood system, and it produces a

sense of well being. And I think that's very interesting fact. He points to some very, very interesting ideas. One of the things he points to is the idea that compassion is something biological, something very deeply built into the structure of being human being and that there might be reasons for that because the sense of well being that gets produced as you breastfeed or give, give birth. He chocolatier or New Directions have compassion to each other is self reinforcing, because it brings a sense of well being. So part of the reason people do these things is not because they're altruistic, but because they're, in some sense, maybe I know selfish is the right word, but it does something wonderful to ourselves. And that's been my experience is that compassion was not a concept that existed in my working vocabulary. When I was started Buddhist practice, I had no interest in compassion. And slowly, the compassion kind of crept up on me. And I realized after a while that, that it would not only just crept up on me became very important part of my experience of who I am. But it wasn't something that requires self sacrifice. It wasn't like I was, you know, I'm just gonna patch the person I'm gonna sacrifice myself. I often had to sense that sense of love or compassion or care, kindness that seems to be welling up slowly in my practice, was kind of incense Who, who, who I am. And it wasn't sacrificing myself to be compassionate it was actually a fulfillment of myself. And I found it very strange, that somewhat strange, the degree to which I felt good when I felt compassionate. And maybe I had a little bit of sense that when you're compassionate, you're supposed to feel lousy. And I certainly there are people who have this idea that I've done, some occasionally, that you only show that you really care about someone who's in distress, but being in distress yourself, and you worry and fret, but to be calm and stable, and loving or caring, doesn't have to produce any distress for ourselves, but actually compute can bring about a calm presence in a situation that maybe needs calmness. So you can you can know the facts about oxytocin and know and be perplexed and bigger plexor Beach Challenge, don't be inspired, by the way that's built into our biological system. So it might have, but that's the knowledge I can tell you knowledge about this. And then juxtaposition to knowledge is what I'm calling understanding. And the reason I'm using the word understanding today, to juxtapose against knowledge is because if you turn the two parts of understanding around, you have the expression standing under. And so understand something by standing under it. Or, you know, we have a culture where people sometimes want to be outstanding. And I prefer the term in standing. That's all become in standing and to stand in our experience, or to stand under our experience. So what this means to me is the idea that when we when something happens to us, we can understand it no it knowledge about it as something external. Or we can somehow allow ourselves to be like a sponge that absorbs that experience that really takes it in. But it takes it in well and carefully no matter what it might be, and that there's value in taking in our experience standing under experience, step standing long enough for something to happen, or the experience to penetrate in some deeper kind of way. You probably most of you have the experience of judging someone negatively. And then we never give up never really talked to you, you see them a distance, and then they sit down next to you or you have some occasion to hang out with them. And you start hearing something about their life. And you find out you know, their troubles or their background and somehow your judgments dissolve. Because you had text took the time to really take in this person. We've taken them in you've stood under them in a sense to understand what's going on with who they really are. You can have knowledge about the person, but to somehow absorb the experience of that person, take it in and allow it to work on our

inner life to work on your heart is a very different experience than having knowledge. So part of the function of meditation practice is to become an understanding person in standing versus somebody who stand under our experience. And when you see meditation in this way, then meditation is not about having some pristine, wonderful, perfect meditative experience with chasing after the perfect experience, some, you know, abstract idea of some mystical state or meditative state. There are wonderful states and meditation that can be attained. But but sometimes When people are focused on attaining a rarefied meditative state, and they're trying to find the technique for that, that state and the past to it might have nothing to do with our life. And in fact, sometimes the pursuit of rarefied meditative states is not very helpful for people. Sometimes it actually leads to greater conceit. And sometimes it lends himself to kind of hold whole part of themselves at bay. Another way of thinking about meditation is that meditation is not about a technique to get someplace. But rather, it's a way to let things get to us that our experiences get to us so so no matter what's going on in our life, we sit down to meditate. And we discover when we sit down to meditate, what is really the currents of our psyche or psychology or emotions or feelings or thoughts or concerns that are really need to be digested need to be looked at need to somehow that are powerful working in us, we discover what's working in us. And then as we discover what's working in us, it might be different than what we thought was working in us. And then the art of meditation is learning how to stand under those things. absorb it, take it in, in a way that is helpful for us that useful. So you might say what this also implies then is that this kind of meditation isn't very pretty. Sometimes it is, but it's about your life as it is. As opposed to some you know, beautiful pristine meditation, meditate. have experiences. So, sometimes your life is beautiful. As you take that in, as you meditate, you feel the joy and the happiness of it. The peace, and sometimes your life is distressed, distressed, or a lot of sorrow or sadness or fear. And so, rather than sitting down and thinking, Oh, I'm not supposed to be afraid, that's not real meditation. Meditation is to give a time for yourself for your heart to take in. What's really going on for you. So Oh, that's what's happening. It's not what I was hoping meditation was gonna be like today, but it turns out that fear is what's happening. Okay, what is it like to take this in, take in the fear or the sadness, or the happiness, whatever it might be? Let's take it in. And some people might protest and say well, taking it in just gonna make me feel lousy or something, especially if it's something like fear or sadness. Maybe I don't want to feel bad. When I may temporarily think myself feel good. But the art of this meditation is both to learn to take something in. And the same time not to take it personally, and not to identify with it. So often, the way that we get caught by our experiences is we measure the experiences or emotional states or thoughts or beliefs, by in reference to what it does to me what it means for me, as a person, as an individual, as a self. There's a lot of selfing that goes on a lot of this conceit that we talked about last week. So your person you might come to meditate and feel fear. And they might think, Oh, no, I'm not supposed to be afraid of meditating. Or you feel angry. Oh, no. With all these good Buddhists, I'm not supposed to be angry because Buddhists Don't get angry, right. And so that's kind of stopping interrupting the taking in Have the anger or the fear, by some judgment idea that this shouldn't be here. Or that could be the idea or this, I'll be overwhelmed by this. This is too much for me. That's also an idea of self. This is too much for me. So what is the art with the way we learn this art slowly over time of how to sit still, for what our experiences so this is taking in of our experience has a lot to do with being still and seeing how still connect be and still taking what's going on. So I

think many of you had the experience of making I'm sure you've all had experiences of somehow or other taking things in that had been, you know, come back, banging on your door really loud. Sometimes you get sick, you know, some major stuff. Some of you might have been even dying, or you know, someone who's dying, or some of you might, you know, had a death in your family, or some of you might suddenly have some kind of financial crisis, or some of you might have an earthquake. You know, we're all talking about or thinking about earthquakes these days, right? Some of us reading especially through the Chronicle. I know, I don't read the Mercury News. So maybe they ignore it down there. But in two days, we had this anniversary of the 1906 earthquake. And, and in times like that we take in what is to be a human being in a very different way than we go about life, blissfully ignorant of the fragility of our lives. So we take it in and then people sometimes will change their life based on what taken in what they really experienced. I remember once I did a guided meditation on dying for some people. And at the end of the why should the woman didn't tell me right away, but she told me I think some weeks later she said that, at the end of that guided meditation on dying, she decided to quit her job. What did I What did I do? Now it's been, I think, 11 years since that time, and she's really happy she did that. Really the right thing for her to do and the kind of corporate job she had was just full of stress, and she didn't have her heart in it anymore. And somehow taking in the fragility of life and death and somehow changed her. She stood underneath her depth, in a sense, took that in and that'll add or change I'd like to read this poem by Wendell Berry. That in my mind speaks to all this. I go among trees and sit still. All my steering, steering becomes quiet around me like circles on water. My Tasks lie in the places where I left them asleep like cattle. Then what is afraid of me comes and lives while in my sight. What it fears in me, leaves me and the fear of me, leaves it. It sings and I bear it song. Then what I am afraid of comes I live for a while. In its sight, what I fear in it leaves it. And the fear of it leaves me. It sings. And I hear its song. So we sit still. And then as we sit there, things will come visiting us in this this poem, it's his fear, what if it was or things that are afraid of him? And you sit there and you watch it, you look at it, you'd be willing to take it in and allow it to somehow find that way taking something in, heals us, taking something in, transforms us. taking something in informs us into a better life for ourselves. So we have to cut so we come to compassion or kindness or so it's my understanding or my belief, my experience that as we get Still and we allow ourselves to take things in, it passes through the outer layers of our psychology. So, if we're restless or busy or agitated, we're kind of like on the surface of our lives. We're always being egotistical always about me, me, me, becoming the surface of our heart to the outside of our mind. And as we learn to kind of quiet the mind or the heart, the surface stuff, so their experiences can penetrate more deeply that it touches something that is very tender or very loving or very Beautiful, that I like to call something that's very shy in the most beautiful parts of our psychology, or inner life, I think of as being quite shy, because if you are overly busy, overly anxious, overly ambitious, overly entertained, that shy thing is not going to show itself. But that shy thing is, I think, the most precious thing that we have. And it's the wellspring of compassion and kindness. So to learn the art of taking things in and being still being still enough so we can take it in into the center of who we are. Then it somehow vibrates in there, that place that is love or compassion. So this is a beautiful poem by now me. She have nine it's titled kindness. Before you know what kindness really is, you must lose things. Feel the future dissolve in a moment, like salt in a weakened broth. What you held in your hand, what you counted and carefully saved? All of us all

this must go. So you know how desolate landscape can be between the regions of kindness. How you ride and ride thinking the bus will never stop. The passengers eating maize and chicken will stare out the window forever. Before you learn the tender gravity of kindness, you must travel with the Indian and a white Poncho lies dead by the side of the road. You must see how this could be you how he was someone who journeyed through the night with plans and a simple breath kept him alive. Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside, you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing. You must wake up with sorrow. You must speak to it till your voice catches a thread of all sorrows, and you see the size of the cloth. Then it is only kindness that makes sense anymore. Only kindness that ties your shoes and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread. Only kindness that rises its head, from the crowd of the world to say is I you've been looking for and then goes with you everywhere, like a shadow or a friend. It's kindness that says it is it that you've been looking for. So, this poem put together In this value on our sorrow, or in seeing the suffering of the world, experiencing the world who actually is, because in seeing that or taking that in standing under it, that then we can begin transforming the heart transforming us in some way. It allows that little spark with a little place, fire in a shy place where kindness shows itself. kindness and compassion. I don't think there's something I discovered in the abstract. You can read all the books you want about compassion, or get all the lift, I can give you like a list of 10 reasons why it's really good for human beings to compete, be compassionate. And you might agree with list. But that's not where compassion arises. Think for compassion to arise, genuinely. It has to be in contact with the suffering of the world, both with our own suffering in ourselves and the suffering the world has. So what is it to take But in, in such a way that it's productive is useful for you and for the world. So to sit still and take it in, feel it, and let it somehow change you, if we try to fix things too quickly, or solve things to quickly try to have understanding and the usual way of trying to have knowledge about something, or to judge it or put it in its place. We might not might not have liked it, kind of settle into our hearts kind of taking it in. And taking it in is sometimes a slow process. Taking taking an experience into our heart. There's no map that says how long it should be there or how you're supposed to experience it or what's supposed to happen. It's all kind of mystery, unknown little bit what happens. And my understanding of this process, the value of taking in is not something that I was taught, but something I realized in retrospect, after many, many years of sitting in meditation you know, I was set up in monasteries and Sydney meditation centers. And it was just what we did. We sat, we sat, we sat, get up every morning and just sit two periods of meditation. Evening you'd sit during the day, you'd sit, sitting. And so sitting meditation was you couldn't run away. I couldn't run away from myself. All the stuff was they're just there and they're there. And so I would sit for this stuff, and sit with it and sit with it. And my early years of sitting, I was quite lucky, I feel, because I didn't have any idea that it should be any different than the idea that I know it's supposed to be you know, I just, you know, I was just, I was too naive. There's, you know, so I would just sit there, and my thoughts and my feelings and just sit there and sit there with the practice I had was practice of accepting what's happening in the present moment. So just sit there with what is and that and then slowly sitting there with what is you know, what is allows what is to be taken in, to sit there and be still and try to be still with it, and then take it in. I discovered that slowly I was transformed and changed. So much so, that I stroke Now, sometimes of my early practice, early years of practice, I was incensed pursuing enlightenment. And what happened to me

against my plans, was compassionate. And I'm very grateful it was very important for me. And that experience of being compassionate by the practice was something that happened very slowly by allowing my heart to be Hoping to take in the experience of being human being. George Washington Carver wrote half or said how far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weekend strong. Because someday in life, you will have been all of these. So many people call, you know, call upon us to be compassionate because what I'd like to suggest here today is that being compassionate and kind, it shouldn't be something that we impose on ourselves. Or now I should be this way I should go out and find someone to be compassionate with, but rather compassionate and kindness is something that can sprout can blossom. within, within us, if we allow ourselves to stand under our experience, to take it in, to be in standing with or extend in our experience is then anyway that kind of quality way that allows the experience to affect us. So that takes time. So sitting meditation is one thing because this time sitting and having a cup of cup of tea, looking out a window is giving your your this shy part of your heart, very important time to take things in experience what's going on. Quiet Time, silent time of solitude, taking a long walk in the woods, for example, in other way. So finding the ways of contemplative life, they said is to find ways to allow the heart the shy part of the heart to take things in. Experience what's going on. Then, if we do that, and let this thing blossom inside of us, then perhaps, we can come to say what Gandhi said. To come to the heart of truth, one must be able to love the meanest creature as oneself. And those who think that religion has nothing to do with politics, to not know what religion really means. It must be able to love the meanest creature as oneself. So it takes sitting still, we can take in the other person, not reading statistics in the newspaper about people, but to take it in. Take it in. Today in the Chronicle. There was the usual kind of headlines someplace in the Chronicle about kind of thing where three people were killed in a bar late Friday. Tonight, I think I just glanced the headlines and said want to sell you know, I, it's so easy to read these things. I just gotta let it go and read it. But I turned the page and I guess somehow this article continued later on the Chronicle, like, third or fourth page, and then it says something about Redwood City. I said, oh, they're killing each other Redwood City. So then I went back and read the newspaper. And, and then I read it, read that read that article and allowed myself to take it in. And it was very touching for me. meaningful to me, in a sense, to take that in and realize, you know, almost down the street, at the other end of town. People are killing each other. So what does that mean to take that in right here in our community? Then Then Gandhi says, I'll end with this, he said, And those who think that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion really means. I think if we have begin having some taste some experience of the shy, place of compassion, some experience of compassion. Compassion is not something we do exactly but something we are, then to be true to what we are, would be to begin acting on that compassion. expressing it. Compassion becomes an expression of who we are, rather than a duty. And then we are life then spills over into the lives of others, caring for others, a life without caring for others or say it this way. A Buddhist practice that doesn't care for others, sooner or later becomes a dead end. So sooner or later I think caring for others because comes in natural part of the outcome of this shy thing. It hopefully eventually stops being shy. So those are my thoughts. And I hope that it's been helpful and you're willing to maybe try taking things in. Give

yourself the time. And if this didn't make any sense then stand under some other tree. Thank you very much.