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SPEAKERS

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Okay, so on Friday, I received an email inviting me to write an article on about Nirvana. And so it's been a little bit in my mind this weekend, and I thought I would talk a little bit about this very famous topic. No one knows anything about. Nirvana, in, in the Pali is called Nibbana. The way that Pali and Sanskrit kind of closely connected, but it's pronounced somewhat differently. So Nibbana and it's, the word is often used as pointing to the ultimate goal of the Buddhist spiritual life. The goal and the resolution of that life in that practice. And as a way of introducing it, I want to mention a very famous discourse that the Buddha gave called the fire sermon. And I read it as fire sermon as as being a really great piece of rhetorical sermon sermonizing sermon. And, and the Buddha says, There's great emphasis so imagine, he says, everything is on fire. Your eyes are on fire. What you see is on fire. How you the perception of sight in your mind is on fire. Everything that we do with sight is on fire. Your nose is on fire. Smells are on fire. Everything has to do with receiving and receiving smells is on fire. Your tongue is on fire tastes on fire. Everything we do with taste is on fire. Your ears are on fire, auditory, experiences on fire everything we do with hearing in the brain, the mind is on fire. And he goes on kind of on fire, it's on fire, it's on fire. It's on fire, everything's on fire. And then he says it's on fire with greed, hate and delusion on fire with greed, hate and delusion. And it doesn't take a lot of looking around at our world to realize to say, you know, our world is on fire. You know, literally it's not on fire. But the degree to which there is greed, hatred, delusion rampant in our world and causing tremendous suffering and destruction and despair for people just to just, you know, it's just astounding how much is there. So, you might say our world is on fire with the forces of greed, hate and delusion, the results of greed, hate and delusion, that spring from people's minds. And so, everything is on fire, with three taking delusion, Nirvana. As the word Nirvana and Nirvana has many different meanings are different, different different people have different interpretations of the word. In Buddha in India, time of the Buddha there were different that word existed people use it in different ways. The Buddha had a particular way of using the word but one of its colloquial meanings is it means to, to to extinguish a fire to quench a fire to cool a fire. So, back then lamps had flames. So the exterior the exterior extinguishing of the flame of the lamp. In doing that the lamp would be Nirvana iced. You bond iced or

a fire, the fire was put out, you'd been ebonized. And it wasn't you simply it would disappear. The fire, the word Nirvana imply that the fire was cooled and cool in a hot climate is very refreshing. So it was a wonderful state being cooled and being quieted be settled. And so the state of being this experience of this thing of Nibbana was used by in Buddhism as a point to the possibility of quenching or cooling or putting out the fires of greed, hate and delusion in our minds. And so that's what refers to that pause. ability. So, the most common definition and Nirvana is the putting to end putting to stop or extinguishing the forces of greed, hate and delusion. Some people might doubt that it's possible to do this, or that it's desirable to do this. But the Buddhist tradition is predicated on the belief for the understanding that it is possible to do this, and that it is really worthwhile to somehow cool the fires of greed, hate and delusion. Now, in order for a fire to burn, it has to have fuel. And it turns out that in Pali, the language of Buddha spoke There's a wonderful wordplay in a sense, because of the word for fuel or something sustenance that keeps a fire burning is also the same word for clinging padano. So again, this use of the imagery of fire, that the very thing that keeps the fire of creation going is the fuel that is our cleaning, the grasping. And so there's a possibility that if somehow, if you want to cool the fire down, you have to get down to the fuel and somehow put a stop to the cleaning, to relax, let go of the cleaning, like go far enough. So there's no cleaning there that can produce greed, hate and delusion. And the purpose of Nirvana, the function of Nirvana as a goal. Nirvana is, in a sense, an experience that can happen to people. Meditation, the goal of meditation, the end is Nirvana. And so the experience of Nirvana, we can talk about it that way. What it is, is less important than what it does. It has a function. And if it Nirvana itself is kind of sometimes said to be a transcendent reality to turn it around to transcend an experience. But it might be seen that way. What's important is not so much the transcendence of it, the transcendent aspect of it. But what's important is that transformative function it has, it transforms us, it changes us. And so it's an experience that you know, if you go into the water, the water changes. If you put a candle and dip it into the into the water, it's snuffs out the candle, the flame is transformed by that is put out by that water. So what's important about Nirvana is not necessarily what it is, but how it affects us. And that's important to realize because when people try to describe what it is or what it is, you can get Go down endless nuances of philosophical subtlety partly because this experience of Nirvana is maybe ineffable maybe cannot be described. So he tried to describe it, all kinds of problems. So the function of Nirvana is how it transforms us and how it transforms us is that in some way or other begins to uproot? Or take out the fuel for greed, hate and delusion, so that it's not there anymore. And it's said that the experience of Nirvana is something that can uproot these things, once and for all. It isn't just something that you can just kind of, you know, just go through through through through a certain level of equanimity or spaciousness or openness and meditation. You can see these things and not be caught by them. That's really, you know, not you know, these, these things are not going to rise again. They're not going to happen again. So, now but in order to understand Nirvana a little bit newer the or the tremendous potential that the teachings of Nirvana point to, you have to appreciate the tremendous subtlety by which the mind operates with great subtlety, which forces of greed, hate and delusion that you know, operate in the mind and clinging operate in the mind. The, the mind, the word mind, in, in Buddhism is not a thing, it's not like a fixed thing, like a block a block by block of granite, you know, like a like, but rather than a mind is like the software of the computer, it's quite malleable. You know, you can change yourself, we can rewrite

it in all kinds of ways. The mind is a series of processes, and so we can talk about An ecology of mind. And all these different systems and processes that make up the mind are operating together in various ways. But generally the mind is operating in such a way that it's about something, the mind is the conscious mind the conscious is our thinking. And that kind of mind that we're kind of engaged with involved with is, is often being driven by intentionality, or planning, or these latent tendencies of greed, hate and delusion, that the activity of the mind is always awful, and also talks about something. So if you're sitting in meditation, and you're planning what you're gonna do for the rest of today, then the mind is about planning. And it's being driven since by the planning involves, it's constructing thoughts, ideas about the future and what you want. If you're remembering a conversation you had yesterday, and you're angry about it in some way, then again, Your mind spends about a conversation and about your anger. And you're engaged in this aboutness in the mind. The mind often is about something, or consciousness is flavored or colored by its concerns. And so it's concerned with all kinds of things. So that is often intentional. Planning or intention wanting something is a big part of what the mind is about. Like wants something. And so use track and watch a little bit your thinking, for example, just your thoughts, you'll see that your thoughts often have some kind of desire or intentionality behind them. So what is it that keeps you interested in the kind of thoughts have you have are they just kind of idle thoughts that are floating through sometimes they can be, but sometimes a little because there's a drivenness or drive or engagement with a thinking process. And it's quite humbling, I think sometimes to watch our thinking. To realize how little control we have over our thinking mind, how you can you know that the mind has a mind of its own sticking by itself it striven it's on these tracks and gets involved in these tracks. And you might be able to let go for a moment. But then you get involved again, you say, you know what, it's like Velcro. It's like this kind of like this pump, you know, pumping out these thoughts in a certain direction. Sometimes we talk about the mind being directional, it's interesting, some direction some thing about something. In a sense, the degree to which we are thinking, or visualizing some people visualize more than they think in words. As thinking has to do with words, has to do with sentences and sentences have subject objects and verbs, right? So most of them so they're about something. They're there's about a verb and intentionality and wanting to know this. So generally, our mind is almost always about something and the technical a way that's talked about in Buddhism is the mind. Most of the time is involved in constructing things. It's a constructive apparatus, constructive, constructing meaning constructing experiences. And it's not just it's very subtle that constructing apparatus. So, if you you know are walking in the mountain trail, forest trail and you come across a branch on the trail, but you see it suddenly for a moment you see it as a snake, the mind is constructed a snake out of the branch, because the mind but does it kind of takes in sensory input interprets in some way constructed in a certain way. But so the mind is constantly involved in constructing much of the way we experience and see the world around us. So you come in here to meditation hall in the morning, and your constructive activity is is very much into play. I imagined. You kind of you construct floor cushions and chairs and you look at people, men and women, some people with shawls and some people not and some people this way and that way, and we find ourselves and discover who we are, what the situation is. And we're kind of constructing some kind of a environment here. That's more than just what the environment is, before we came. Our history of meditation halls or lack of it, or history of voice, like, together with groups in the past, our

relationship to people or dispositions we have towards people all come into play, and it plays out here. So people come in here, and their first tendency is, who's a nice person to sit next to, but where's the most comfortable place to sit? Or where's the safest place to sit? Other people come in here and they think that if they focus on Who is it, I don't want to sit next to where's the place that I don't want to be? You know, kind of know we're operating under version, but we're kind of constructing in order to make our plans intentions. The most constructive activity and what's possible. So generally that's what minds do all the time. And that constructive activity activity of mind, especially when it's driven by greed, hate and delusion, is one of the definitions of samsara. samsara is often considered the opposite of Nirvana. So the world is not samsara. We don't want to call the world samsara. samsara is that constructive activity of wanting intentionality of the mind. So, since we have an illusion operates so incredibly subtly in our minds, it takes a very well trained mind to see it to see how subtle it can be. So one of the functions of meditation practice in Buddhism is to quiet the mind enough, she starts seeing the subtlety by which the mind operates the subtle This way, the mind is driven subtly about greed, illusion, operating, intentionality is operating, wanting something is operating, planning as operating. And, and as you see the subtlety of it, that is possible with time to begin letting go of it, relax it or soften it. And then as the mind becomes quieter, it becomes you get a different kind of perspective on the normal activity of the mind than you would have if you always live in the norm with the normal mind. So if you if you always live in, excuse me, if you always live in fear and you spent your whole life living in fear, it never occurred to you that you don't have to live in fear. And then suddenly you come to some places Where there's you realize you don't be afraid. It's a whole new thing. And from that place of lack of fear, you look back at your, you know, decades of living with fear and say, Oh, that was kind of painful. I didn't realize how painful it was. And I just took it as being kind of normal. But it wasn't so normal. It was kind of a coarser thing. It was kind of more agitated state to be. Once a spirit rock meditation center where I was teaching, a woman came and said to me, this is the first time in my life where I felt safe someplace. And I don't know where she'd grown up or where she lived. But this is the first time she felt safe. And this is a place where we don't lock the doors. You know, you've had you're given a room to sleep in, but there's no lock on the door, and no door locks the outside and he felt it was the safest place to serve again. So as the mind can get calmer, some of the things we take for granted and considered normal. We start seeing maybe not so no, I don't have To live that way, I don't have to live with that level of stress, that level of agitation. Even though I thought I know that it was unusual, I thought it was normal with normal state of mind to do. So. So as So, part of the function of meditation practice in Buddhism is to begin shifting the focus of the mind. So, the mind is not always about something is not engaged in wanting something, or directed in some direction, correct into the future or the past or fantasy, or wanting something where the mind is not so much involved in constructing things anymore. Making things off make, one of the things we make up is our sense of self. So, in that's often operating very persistently and people some idea of who I am and I say defend it or build it up or created or measure it or judge it or all the selfing goes And unless the mind is really calm and peaceful, you might or might not have a clue how much your mind is constantly evolving the selfing game. So part of the function getting calm is you see something that you can't really see so well unless you're calm. It's like having a a, you have a wonderful microscope, wonderful to have a wonderful expensive microscope. And you can really see deeply into the nature of reality this

microscope, but you've never taken the lens cap off or you never cleaned the lens, you know, so you kind of see but you can see all Merkle. So part of meditative meditation can do as you begin relaxing and calming enough and developing enough concentration that the lens cap gets taken off or the grunge on the lens is cleaned off so you can see much more clearly. So as they're constructing activities in the mind, quiet down there's less momentum and there's less centric, centrifugal force in the mind, the mind is less scattered going out towards less agitated, less driven. And at some point, at some point, it's possible for the mind to stop all its constructing activities. All the constructing activities can just come to a stop. So making a sense of self having a sense of self planning, letting go wanting, having a version. And it turns out, as I keep saying, The constructing activity is so subtle, that even our sense of having a body, the sense of it, the feeling of it, the experience of it is also part of the constructing activity of the mind. So even the sense of the by being constructed drops away. So it's actually it can be no sense of the body. And then and since the mind, in normal mind is primarily constructing activity, that's what it is. sense of the mind drops away, because of normal mind is not there, the constructing mind is not there. So Nirvana is dimension of the mind to aspect of the mind. Or consciousness perhaps if you want to say when the mind has no constructing activities as part of it. So, all the construction activities are put to put the rest of the stuff and it's really cool. It's one of the meanings of Nibbana is really it's, it's cool. It's really cool. And not cool in the American colloquial sense. But cool, in a sense of being really kind of a great refreshment that's considered to be the greatest peace, the most ultimate peace that's possible is that, that peace, when the constructing activities of the mind have come to a stop. When the construction activities have come to a stop, it's very hard to describe what that is like. Because it's constructing activities which are used to describe and how to describe something which are not constructed. So it's very hard to describe what it is sometimes, the word, the analogy of space is used for it. And, and in a sense, maybe the unconstructed mind that consciousness was unconstructed is kind of like, mental space, though. That's so it seems so vacuous. It seems like what's good is that the it's like space, you know, to understand the shape of space. Like this room has a space in this room has a shape, right? And that that shape is defined by the walls in a sense to it, so it has a shape. Or if you know, if you're in a house with many rooms, then maybe this this space of the bathroom is defined by the shape of the bathroom. The shape is defined by the walls. But if you take out the walls of the bathroom, then you have a bigger room with the living room, whatever. And then you have a bigger space. But if you if you take away all the walls, then at some point, space doesn't have any shape. Does the universe of shape out there in the outer edges of the universe? I don't know. But imagine that universe doesn't have an edge, I guess supposed to have an edge, right? I don't know what happens out there. But you know, at some point space has no you can't you can't. There's no walls. If there's no boundaries, then the shape of space cannot be defined. In fact that hyperspace doesn't make any sense to talk about shape when there's no walls, right? So the same thing with the mind which is not constructed mind, which is not about something cannot be, it doesn't make sense to talk about it. One of the things because there's no constructing activities in that mind, it doesn't make any sense to talk about location, that mine has no location. Because the mind has no constructing activities with it. It has no inside or outside, inside outside is constructing an activity. Because there's no constructing activity going on. There is no time in that mind. So sometimes it's called timeless because constructing

activities arise and pass, they're impermanent, they're in constant. When there is no constructing activities, that sense of impermanence is stopped. And so it said that the mind which is not being constructed, is as permanent, or is timeless, has an internal quality to it. Sometimes it says that this mind there is luminous, completely luminous, even though there's no light there. So that's kind of odd thing to say, contradictory. So a timeless mind it's also called the deathless sometimes because because it hasn't, it doesn't have the nature of dying, that something is going to die. Constructing a thing is constructed, anything that's conditioned, will pass away at some point. It's a fundamental truth of Buddhism at least. It's all constructed things all conditioned things are impermanent. But since the end Constructed mind is not constructed, it's not gonna die. So it's called deathless. So the expression up there in the wall is on my doctor is a deathless dimension. And that is pointing to this experience to this place of Nirvana. So you know, it's a very unique kind of experience. exactly what it is, is a little bit hard to define then. And again, the point of this is not to have the experience and experience sake, it's not like the thing is important. It's how it's going to change us and transform us the way that it just kind of does this uprooting and it's a phenomenal thing. To have to be able to know that there's an alter that there are different alternative places for the mind to be or have different minds to have. You know, if you only know that's okay to be afraid, don't know any other alternatives. You lose very narrow life. If you're only involved in a mind that's about things, some people's lives are all about relationships. about being in a relationship, having a relationship, who's thinking about who and how it should be in relation to other people. It's all about relationships or being social. And they never, they never spent it, you know, anytime solitude in nature, for example. And then after many, many years of being always in solitude, always always social. They go into solitude in the nature and they just delight it, they love it. And then for some woman who's living at the monastery Tassajara there were two people who came to the monastery to be students there at the same time. And one was a woman who had raised two children. And she said, I grew up in a family of many kids. And I left my home when I grew up in to get married and have children right away. And so I was always around people and children. In all this, you know, social life. And then when my kids got old enough, I came to this monastery, deep in new progress national wilderness. And she said, I've never had so much solitude and freedom in my life. This is phenomenal. The fellow that came at the same time, I'd spent the last something like 25 years, living alone in a house in the sunset district of San Francisco. And he came to this exactly same monitor exactly same time. And he said, it's so claustrophobic here. I can't believe all these people here and as always be. So you know that we often get into certain mindsets. And we think that's the mindset we should be in. And so it's possible to kind of have a different experience. Because Oh, that mindset is, you know, one way of living but it's possible to have another mindset. And sometimes going to different cultures is a great gift. Great such a debate teacher Trump I said once if you can't meditate, travel. So you get a whole different men in a mindset realize there's other mindsets to have. So the more mindsets you know possible, the more flexibility you have and more fluidity perhaps you can have within between them as is appropriate. So, to understand the mindset that is not a set at all, the unconstructed mind, the mind of Nirvana gives a very different perspective on what your life can be about what life is about. So if you realize that there's some there's a there's a very wonderful place, luminous, peaceful, very happy place. Something that when the mind is not involved in constructive activities, then you realize that there's an alternative to constructing activities. And most people are

trying to find their happiness, but always constructing, constructing, constructing stuff A life in a particular way to get it all to work out just one way, some way. So it's a cornucopia and revolution in the mind to realize that there's a whole other dimension of the mind a way of being in the mind mindset to have that so radically different from the normal way in which we always operating. So this is called this this, this alternative mindset is then called Nirvana, or Nirvana. So it's a form of consciousness. And that's very hard to define. And there's a wonderful analogy. For this, it's a little bit different than the space analogy is that when light travels through space, vacuous space, so I'm not a physicist. I don't know how this works. But there isn't this is the analogy the Buddha used. Not a modern one was travelling students. space. Apparently you don't see it. You only see light when it hits something. So the Buddha said, when the light hits a wall, then you see the light. And if you understand the light is there, but if it doesn't hit anything, then it's not there. You know, is it there? It's there. But you know, it's like, how do you define it? How do you understand it? How do you measure it, you have to measure light because it hits some hits your retina, or hits some instrument or something. But consciousness, the kind of consciousness which is Nirvana is the kind of consciousness sort of light of light it hasn't hit anything. It's not it has it just exists. It's there. But it hasn't picked anything up. It's not constructed anything about anything. It's not, hasn't touched, a thought hasn't touched, a sensation hasn't touched. A feeling or an emotion. So it's very hard to talk about now, you could easily say no, what good is it? Aside from the fact that's very refreshing. It's kind of like a peak experience of recording. It also is transformative, and exactly how it's transformative. You know what the mechanism of transformation is? I can't tell you, but all of it, but the idea here is that as you begin seeing, or experiencing this unconstructed mind, it dislodges some of the foundational s constructive building blocks or, or constructive techniques that the mind is using, and the foundational construction that the mind is built on. often much of it has to do with greed, hate and delusion. So that building division gets dislodged. First, it only gets dislodged the build bit and it gets loosened up. It's like you kind of starting to break it up. It's like you have this heavy duty concrete. And you can't get rid of the concrete right away. But first you can just take this big sledgehammer to it and you kind of break it up a little bit cracks. So, first experience for most people, the experience of Nibbana unconstructed mind is like you're taking like a sledgehammer to this constructive world of greed, hate and delusion. But then, with repeated experience with deepening that experience, and entering into that world of the unconstructive more and more, it begins to more and more kind of dissolve or soften and let go of these sources of greed, hate and delusion. Until finally, there's nothing solid in the mind anymore. No concrete left. No greed, hatred, delusion left and And, and it said that, well, there's still greed, hate and delusion left. Someone who has seen seen or experienced Nibbana is kind of like someone who sees a wonderful pool of water. Someone who's managed to do the work of really breaking up or dissolving all the great forces of greed and delusion in their mind is someone who's plunged into the water. So, the instructions that are given is, please, plunge into Nirvana. plunge into it. plunge into the unconstructed mind or let go. Stand there on the diving board and just like go into the water into the refreshment So, was that sensible? So, again, I talked about it. So, constructed it, I constructed an image and idea. Something unconstructed. Sorry about that. Are there any questions you'd like to ask about this? clarifications. What is generally the mind that most of us are generally usually experiencing is, is a constructing activities is a processes mental processes that work together. The mind is a

system, the process of mentality What's behind the question? aspect? So mind is basically Yes. So the mind that you normally have is, is a series of processes, mental processes, they work together, to make us aware to make us think and intentionality to have, you know, to sense to feel, all these things, all these things working together as a big process. And in most of that process is, is constructing activities. So, that the normal mind that we have drops away in the experience of the Boehner. Some people would say there's no mind there. But, you know, it, you know, generally only only don't have a mind when you die. So, the idea is you still have it, you still have a mind you still have consciousness, but it's a radically different kind of mind very radical, different Kind of consciousness, Windows constructing activities, enough presence and someone who, who is very closely in touch with the unconstructed mind, you know, somehow it's really kind of influenced by who they are. Or they have a sense that it's ever present or something, then it's possible that they're, that the activity of their mind operates very differently. Because it's, it's hard to talk about this. It's like, normally the activity of the mind arises out of intentionality planning, wanting to know that. And it said that someone who's deeply embedded in this unconstructed mind that the, what they say what they do, what they, you know, what comes out of them, is not planned does not will, in the same way that it would be for someone who's so it's not constructed in the same way. Just kind of You know, it's a very dangerous to kind of try to describe what it is. But one of the one of the functions one of the aspects of that is that that which arises sense out of this unconstructed mind doesn't create any karma or that which has influenced the mind that the mind that's been influenced by the unconstructed, well enough to be transformed just no greed, hate and delusion is will no longer be influenced by karma. Am I create karma nor create karma. So that doesn't just help with your understanding of defining the mind. And, okay, Oh, one more. Um, you've been meditating for some time. thing like 30 years. And I want to ask this without asking anything personal, but do you have a chance is there that? How many people have you seen who actually got close to this? That's a fair question. People I've known personally. No, it doesn't mean not. Not historical people, but people I know personally believe that. Yeah. people I've met, how many people I've met, who have had a taste of Nirvana. I know for sure. Well, I didn't think about it for a while, but I could probably pretty quickly rattle off a list of maybe a couple of dozen people. What is it? Well, I don't know anybody who's plunged all the way like you know because that that plunged all the ways in our heart sometimes called the enlightened and the reputed such people in Thailand people around and so it's possible I met them or something but but but I mean they're there it's pretty there's people who are reputed to be in Thailand Malibu for example it's a variety of people in Thailand because yachts and I never met them I can say so until I got that got this request to write an article about Nirvana. I was going to talk about fear today because Park they had a blast Last week's conversation. Many years ago, I gave a talk someplace in San Jose and I showed up and said, I'm going to talk about enlightenment today. But before I do, so, anybody have any questions? And we spent the whole evening talking about anger. There was more relevance, right for people, I guess. So, hopefully this was, you know, useful in some way for you and if not then Soviet. If it wasn't useful, they don't construct anything. Just let it be.