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SPEAKERS

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So today I'd like to explore a topic with you, which is very central to being human being a core aspect of human nature. In fact, if you want to live a wise life, you need to really understand well, this particular theme. And that's the theme of desire. Desire is so central, so inherent to human life, that it's basically almost inconceivable to imagine human life without any desire at all. And so much so that I've been saying likely that the term human beings is probably not the best designation for Homo sapiens, but rather should be human desire. It's so rare that people just be. If we find ourselves just being, often we find that what we experience is the momentum, the impact of our desiring. Probably some of you sat down here to meditate today, and found that the momentum and the power of desire was still driving your mind and your body, you're still feeling the consequences of it. And it's such a central aspect of human life that encompasses such a huge range of what human beings do. They it encompasses some of the worst things that people do. absolutely horrific things that people do are an expression of a forms of desire. And also, it's an expression of some of the most beautiful aspects of human life, that some of the most noblest and wonderful thing that people do, are also expressions of desire. So as to be very careful then, not to look at the word desire in a pejorative term, as if desire is a problem. And sometimes I encounter people trying to blame Buddhist teachings, the Buddhist teachings. And they problem to problematize desire, like, desires bad, shouldn't have any desire. And the character of Buddhism sometimes will come from the teaching that there's suffering and desire is a cause of suffering. And so you have to put an end to desire. The Buddha never said that. However, it's sometimes a kind of simplistic character of what the Buddha had to say. And then people start scratching their heads and they, you know, then no desire then once but to give up on desire, and some people are confused, perplexed and they just leave and then other people are not confused and believe it. And then they kind of just give up all their desires and, and chances are from at least a good majority of the people who give up all their desires, they're depressed. It's certainly a symptom of depression not having any desire. So, sometimes it's so it's very important to look into this topic of desire. And offering the word desire to today is kind of a neutral term that covers a full range of human motivation. However, it might be a little bit in English, I don't know if you agree with me or not, but I

have a suspicion that in English, if anything on the spectrum, good to bad, healthy to unhealthy, the word desires is used their vocabulary kind of leans in that direction of being kind of bad, independent of Buddhism. So I don't know if you would kind of agree with that. And, and there's a whole bunch of words like there's this desire and then there's no vision and greed and clinging, as you get into that, you know, range into the more unhealthy modes. And then in the healthy modes, you have words like reason, aspiration, inspiration, certainly motivation intention, sometimes to have more positive connotations for people. And so I looked up the word desire in my dictionary, and it said the root of the word D, the D part in Latin is from and that is desire part apparently comes from the Latin word for star. So, you know, wishing on a star, you know it's going to come to you, your desire is going to come from the stars. So, maybe there's a kind of, you know, etymological reasons why it's a little bit funny the word desire, kind of wishful thinking, that is kind of connected to the word. But anyway, I'm using the word today as a neutral term. And so the task before anybody wants to live a wise life, is to begin exploring deeply the nature of their own desire. So I'll talk about desire a little bit here today. And I could say a variety of things that sense can remain very abstract. Unless you turn this talk around and use it to explore your own heart, your own motivation. what goes on in you. Doesn't mean that I'm right. But you can still sometimes when someone's wrong, they can still help you clarify something about yourself, right? Because he's, well, that doesn't work for me. So I guess I have a different works differently from me. So I'll offer you various teachings today about desire. But the important thing is you turn around and understand your own. That they said they say the Dharma is to be discovered in your own hearts not in books. So one of the interesting qualities of desire for some people is there are aspects of desire is desires can come really easily. Some people desires are a dime a dozen. And I could have, I could just sit here just generate maybe I have more desire kind of mind, some people are more aversive minds. And, versus thoughts are dime a dozen. But for me, it's like desire, just, you know, they can come real easily. And so one things I've learned, is just to let them pass through. That's interesting, you know, so desires can arise and pass the income quite easily. And then what's interesting is, what do we do with the desire that's arisen? And do we just allow past speech? Oh, that's interesting. That's nice or not now. Thank you. Or maybe all, you know, world orders that are arising you the interest to explore the desire, what is the nature of this desire? What's happening? What's your relationship to desire? And one of these one of the reasons why this is very interesting, is it even the most healthy desires, the most appropriate desires, a person can have, can be held in such a way to cause suffering, to cause pain, for oneself and for others. So even the desire to say you're hungry, and so it's reasonable to want to have food. So you have desire food, that desire for food, can take the form of gluttony, you know, kind of a kind of clinging craving, desperation, for food or for particular kinds of food or you notice you know, so, all kinds of desires, even healthy ones, like desire for liberation in Buddhism, is considered very important desire for British to have or could have, can be held very tightly, neurotically with greatness. expectation with great striving and pushing with great demand or sometimes it can be held. So clinging wise or sometimes it can be held some desire can be held very hesitantly. Kind of, Oh, you know, I don't really dare have that desire, maybe, you know, I have this desire, but maybe I'm not worthy of it. Or maybe it's not okay to have a desire electron and Buddhist. Buddhists are supposed to have desires not supposed to let people know they have desire in some Buddhist countries, and when I was there in Asia, I was told I don't know if it's true. But I

noticed that when people ate, especially in an Asian Buddhist temples, like late people, they would eat very leisurely, very slowly put down, but very nice. I thought, very nice way to eat rather than the way I usually eat. I'm kind of a speed eater. So what I was told, and I don't know that part of the reason for this, is that in a Buddhist culture, you're not supposed to show that you're, you have a lot of desire. You know, you're greedy. Are you supposed to kind of just eat kind of like, you know, like easy commies are gonna have to eat, you know? So I don't know. So there are all kinds of reasons why we hesitate to kind of express our desires to act on it. And so there's typically ones in Buddhist circles. I'm not okay to have desires, some people think. And so that could be give me give me the hesitate. Everyone desires that we can have aversion towards desire, we've been burned before, we've had certain healthy desires, it didn't work out. And therefore I'm never going to fall in love again, I'm never going to do this again, because I don't want to be burned. So it can be aversive to desires, even though it might be healthy desire. So how we hold the desire has a lot to do with the impact it has on us how much we suffer. Also, there can be desires that in and of themselves, cause suffering. They're not healthy to have in the first place. And when the Buddha talked about the cause of suffering, he didn't call it design. He used as far as I could tell a non technical term kind of tactic on Buddhism. He used the word, thirst. And Polly's conda. And thirst is the very kind of graphic and physical kind of, you feel this kind of, I don't know, this kind of desperation, this compulsion, when you're really thirsty, I need to have. And so there's kind of the kind of desire that causes suffering is desire that has compulsion. As part of it. There's pressure or drivenness as part of it. And so there's a whole series of words in Buddhism to represent unhealthy desire and thirst is one of them. Another one is craving and the other one is clinging. And, and these the movement of, so craving and clinging can be unhealthy in and of themselves, and craving and clinging. can be latched on to healthy desires. understand what I'm saying. And then it becomes unhealthy in essence, even even the best desires become unhealthy if we hold it the wrong way. So in the graphic language of the Buddha, he said, clinging, when there's clinging, it's like holding a hot coal in your hand. And part of the reason so hot cold is an interesting image because the image of the word for one of the words for clinging upādāna also means fuel. So cool, right? So both the clinging the client clinging is both the fuel that burns and clinging. So I think it's interesting to look at our lives and look at what the cost of craving and clinging is head in our lives. What's the cost of having compulsive desires? And I know I've seen certainly huge costs in my life. There are times when I've been amazingly amazingly embarrassed that I've acted on compulsion or craving, that later I said, What was I doing? Where'd that come from? What was going on? How did I get to kind of so caught up in that particular desire? And then at times I've been quite ashamed, not just embarrassed but ashamed. And by results of things I've acted on. There's been huge combat caused pain for people acting on desires that and then sometimes acted on unhealthy desires and then I've made made worse, this is a long time ago and you know, trying to cover it up And then, so they certainly have tremendous costs on our social relationships act on the wrong desire and a friendship that took years to build up can be destroyed and instant. desires can be held the wrong way clinging craving kind desires can take a huge toll on our body. And you can see the small in small ways. If you watch your mind when it's involved in a really juicy kind of desire, wanting something in the planning mode sets emotion in the mind, just planning and thinking and wanting and how am I gonna get this and it can be quite, quite exhausting for the mind to be caught up in this kind of activity.

Sometimes that kind of activity of the kind of planning and desiring and wanting is so engaged in an object, something that we want out there, that there isn't any kind of self reflection or personal mindfulness to notice the cost that has on us. And we don't realize the exhaustion to get to the end of the day and say, why am I exhausted? Because you spend the day craving. That's why the most graphic example I can give in my own life of this was when I was younger, I would go into bookstores and leave the bookstores exhausted. didn't have any money, but I had plenty of desires, I love books, titles. And so there can be a tension, physical impact on having desire, craving and clinging. We hold it the wrong way. And, you know, there's a kind of tightening up and lifting up for me to sometimes identify a listing in my belly, up into my diaphragm when I'm caught by desire or craving, and sometimes it's the energy of my energetic Just in my body kind of rushes up into my head, focus for me, when there's a lot of kind of driven desire, it comes along with a lot of planning and thinking. And so it was blood energy goes up into wherever I think. And desire held the wrong way can lead to craving to frustration, because it's not fulfilled, we have expectation or demands we have wants. And so it's not the world doesn't provide it, that doesn't unfold the way we want it. Tremendous frustration can arise, that frustration can lead to anger, anger can lead to violence. There can be grief, one of the interesting qualities of too much driven desire. person is caught up in the whole world a desire, maybe the point of addiction. There's a kind of desire has a quality of alienating ourselves from ourselves, even from other people. Sometimes has to do. Driven desire craving planning for it has to do with fantasy. It's an imagination, what we want. And so that living in the world of imagination, we lose touch with ourselves. And some of you may have been on retreat, where if you have a whole day meditation of just meditating all the time, there's a lot of time for the mind to kind of show us how it actually works left alone. And it's not always so solitary to see what the mind does when left alone. And one of the things it can do is get caught up in desire. And you can sit on retreat for a few hours, kind of just completely mesmerized by some fantasy image that the mind has created desire image, and it's often quite seductive because it's so pleasurable and enjoyable. And then at some point, to wake up from the fact you're doing this wake up from the mesmerizing seduction, and to realize that it was exhausting. Even that was so pleasant In some way, it was also very tiring for the mind to be engaged in that activity. Too much craving desire driven desire, caught up in that world of desire can also lead us to live on the surface of life, kind of skimming the surface and that really pumped to the depths of life and plumbing to set the expression English plumbing, limiting, plumbing, plumbing, the depth, the So, dropping down into the depths. So, you know, one of the really important things in Buddhist practice is finding some way to drop down into the depths of who we are depths of our being to live not in a surface dimension of our life. But you know, two dimensionally but to live three dimensionally to draw really deep down and really have a sense to sense experience of who we are in the deepest, fullest meanings of being a human being. So it's very important to find some way to kind of drop out of the surface and go deeper. And one of the one of the important aspects of our depths of human beings, one of the most beautiful things of human life is aspiration. And I love the word aspiration in English, because the word aspiration has the word breath in it, black, the word for breath, like respiration has the word breath in it. So aspiration, and awe, not means to out on to breathe out or to breathe on something. So the air that comes out of our breath comes with our breath, and I associate the breath with some part of the depth. The breath meditation is one of the ways to plump to the

depths of Earth. To really settle, let go of the surface kind of concerns and chatters. And be able to find out and be in touch with something that's deep within us deep sense of knowing deep sense of motivation, deep sense of sense of purpose for our lives. So, aspiration is my word for this very beautiful quality of desire, desire his very best. And if you read the teachings of the Buddha, he expected his practitioners to have strong desire. He really wanted that he had a variety of words that he encouraged this kind of healthy desire. In one expression, he used the word tepee, tapas, which is in his language, his argument, we translate his ardent ardency you don't have ardency unless you have desire right. And, and he encouraged his practitioners in his time to rob arouse your desire arises your desire you know, he's not gonna say that if he thinks desires bad rizer to develop your desire, have desire, have energy, energetic desire. aspiration is a whole series of words in Pali that can represent this healthy form of desire. So aspiration is one of them translating translate into English, so to aspire. And so one of the interesting questions, important questions is how do we get in touch with a healthy sense of desire for our lives, intentions for our lives, that maybe we want our whole life to be oriented around to be what would our life is about. Some people have a whole series of different things they want their life to be about. But some of the people sometimes we really admire people who really settle on one thing, this is what's really going to make this the center kind of orientation to my life. And I'm really going to pursue this and really dedicate my life to it. In a sense, that's what the Buddha did. The Buddha had a phenomenal aspiration for liberation. And he made huge life choices to become renunciate and to engage in a very arduous exploration in the kind of religious practices of his time in India, in order to kind of discover or find the path to liberation to walk that path all the way. The I don't know why comes to mind right now. I apologize if it's kind of a non sequitur, but the I was actually quite impressed by this. It was it was an eight year old, who swam from Alcatraz recently. Back to San Francisco. You know, eight year old you know, As the coach, the coach said, you know, just an ordinary kid, except that he has persistence. And so he trained, his mom said, Okay, if you train, you can do it. So she trained and trained every day, and eight year old kids for me, you know, across the bay. So it's amazing things you can accomplish with a strong sense of purpose. The question is, can a strong sense of purpose be tied to what's healthy? And how do we discover what's healthy? As we know, it can be tremendous a strong sense of purpose and persistence with very unhealthy things in life a huge huge You know what, that catastrophes happen in our in our world? Because some people are stuck on very unhealthy desires. So the question of healthy aspiration that has a lot to do with certainly something like mindfulness practice and awareness practice that helps us get in touch with ourselves to really know ourselves well, to be able to find deep inside. They accuse the reference point for understanding the nature of our desire, the nature of our aspiration. One of the very simple suggestions that Buddhism has around this whole question of healthy aspiration. Healthy guidelines for finding it is to have the sensitivity to recognize that is there any suffering or tension or pressure inherent in that particular aspiration. If there is, then it's probably not going to be healthy or, or if it is, then do more work to kind of separate out the draws from the draws from the gold, so we call it separate out the draws from the gold. Be very, very careful to be sensitive to where the tension and pressure and clinging still might remain. If there is none, then you're much better positioned to know whether it's going to be a healthiest place. And another thing about finding aspiration is I think it's really important to value ourselves. I think if we don't have deep value for ourselves for who we are

and what our capacities our work capabilities are, it's really hard to give ourselves the time to discover and give respect to our hearts, deepest aspirations. So we have to value ourselves and give ourselves that time and be able to listen to ourselves, well, I meet a lot of people who dismiss the respiration, so I can't do that. I can't do that. Or I'm not good enough for that, or I don't have what it takes to do that. What does it take to have an aspiration, a healthy aspiration for your life? And then to follow through on it? It's a very interesting question. What did it take to follow through Does it do certain things have to be renounced? Let go of not because they're bad. Because if you're going to do one thing, you can't do everything. So it just took a narrowing of a narrowing of focus of your life to really follow through. And that of course, the answer is often Yes, right? Many people in life make that choice all the time. Through all the all the different choices we have in human life, people narrow the focus in order to do certain things, go to college and study x or, you know, pursue different things. One of the ways to live on the surface of life is to want everything they want to, you know, try to get everything. And I think often in our society, there's all these forces that are encouraging us to want everything. And so we have to start stop listening to the external forces, and listen to ourselves, and then listening to ourselves, be able to choose between the different desires and wishes we might have And follow through on what can really make a difference in the long term. So I think of aspiration as something coming from our depth. And coming from the depths, I think of it having as I'm having a non discursive source, desire, or craving, clinging, I think is very much tied up in discursive world. planning and thinking, imagination, fantasy. And I think of aspiration as something comes from a non discursive depths of our beings, from stillness from resting in some of the biggest decisions I've made in my life, particularly really, you know, because my life they're going radically different direction. In my life never been the same. You know, after that decision came out of times of stillness and silence, being on retreat, being in a kind of awfully meditative environment and somehow Allowing the exploration of what's really important for me what decisions I was going to make, kind of arise in that tremendous depth and stillness to that retreat environment. And then how to make this almost like a physical knowing, kind of my whole body changed. And I knew that's the direction My life was going to take. And I don't it doesn't always work that way. But the idea of giving oneself time to plumb down to the deeper aspirations we can have is very important. I've known plenty of people who have come on retreat, like a 10 day retreat, because they had to make a big decision in their life. And so they wanted to kind of go off someplace, no distractions, really settle on themselves get really relaxed, and then in that relax, settle mode, kind of find out what they really think what really motivates them. The word aspiration for me has connotations. To the breath being fluid and relaxed, it has the connotation of being very open ended. aspiration has no expectation as part of it. It's kind of you aspire for something, and may it may happen. you aspire for something, and you work for it. And they happen as opposed to demand it will happen, which should happen. And I'm actually quite fond of the theistic slogan. We're saying it's often used, I think in some theistic circles, where they say they say have a wish, or they want something to happen. And they say, and that was saying, God willing. And I guess maybe we'd say Dharma willing, or I don't know what, but life willing, you know, the idea that that that kind of open ended feeling to it. Oh, you know, may it be but might not be so that open ended feeling also is connected to physically because whereas craving is a clutching, or climbing or tightening down, aspiration for me is actually relaxing. When you really know what your aspiration is, before you latch

on to it, just the aspiration by itself, it actually helps me relax. Oh, yeah, that's what it's gonna be kind of it's this is fountains, sometimes you'll have like a fountain kind of coming up from inside coming out, as opposed to something closing down. Yeah, that's what it's about. And there's a tremendous cost for repressed or ignored aspiration or the finish cost of human beings if we never take the time to discover what our aspirations might be our deepest aspirations and so that cost you know, certainly can be in the Being a unfulfilled life, the cost can be and living a a shallow life costs can be and living with frustration, regrets, what kinds of things can come when we don't give a chance for our aspiration to follow through? One of the costs is we lose touch with something I think is really beautiful. I think one of the most beautiful things in human hearts is healthy aspirations, aspirations to be of service, the aspiration for liberation, the aspiration for compassion. There's a whole bunch of series of aspirations that when they're pure, are just the best, you know. And so, to repress or lose touch with our aspiration, just lose touch with what's most beautiful. So I'll say a few words about how To work with aspiration how to. And one of the first things I would like to say is it's important to appreciate it, the importance of it. And never let anyone tell you that the Buddhist path is asking you to let go of your desires. The Buddhist path includes your desires, by including your aspiration, the right aspiration, the right intention, and it's only supposed to include it's supposed to actually come quite hard and strong. So appreciating value and then give it time and space to show itself. I mentioned earlier. If time is phase one of the values of meditation practice is sometimes the settlers selves enough to see what we really think what we believe and what we really want. And also give it time and space for it to grow. aspiration is I think of aspiration is sometimes being very shy for some people. And it needs time and space to grow. And if you fill your life with kind of surface desires, and don't give time for the deeper aspirations, it's not going to grow and develop and become strong. So then nourish it, find ways of nourishing, nourishing by appreciating it, nourished by acting on it, nourish it by being with other people have the same aspiration or shift by having it perhaps appreciated by others or celebrated. Sometimes it's good to celebrate your aspirations and acting on it is really important and aspirations that are never acted on. I suppose the atrophy, you know, aspirations, and never Never never act on is, you know, it's nice, but I don't know what that is. And then another way of working with aspiration, I think is very important is to stay in touch with your physical body, embodied sense of self. And also with the present moment. Staying with touch with the body helps you to be aware, have a sensitivity to know when there's clutching or clinging, or resistance or aversion that's come into play around the aspiration. If you want to stay open and relaxed around it and let it kind of be a fountain. Rather than somebody close down, the body will teach you that will show you that. And if you can stay in the present moment around desperation, some aspirations might have to do with the future. They have to hold the future thinking very wisely, but really train yourself to be in the present a lot. So that the You get the feedback system that the present moment provides. The present moment will teach you all this stuff. So we help you to hold it in a healthy way. And finally, one of the noble aspirations in Buddhism is the aspiration for liberation. And to throw kind of a curve ball on this whole talk whether it's healthy desire or unhealthy desire, human desire links, human beings are often a lot of desires. Sometimes we want something not to exist and kind of aversion is also kind of desire. And it can be healthy desires and unhealthy desires. And it's just a regular phenomenon the human mind, human heart desires. If you're on, if you get on the freeway today, have a one on one. You could actually stay on

freeways I think, for the rest of your life without ever having to get off, maybe to get gas But otherwise, I mean, they're all connected on freeways in American use driving freeways. It can be an endless, you know, freeway trip and there's beautiful freeways and love driving down them and there's, you know, rush hour traffic freeways with smoke and smog and not nice freeways, but there's all these freeways. You know, go freakin and kind of live in your car and just drive the freeway forever. And most of us I think find that a very appealing prospect of spending the rest of our life in a freeway And we'd like to kind of get off at least to a rest stop. So to always be of the mind engaged in desire, whether it's healthy desire or unhealthy desire, it's kind of like always on a freeway. And one of the things that Buddha teaches is that it's also possible to get off the freeway of desire. You don't have to always be living with desires, being quality, a characteristic of the mind. And that one of the healthiest aspirations, healthy desires, is to create a causes and conditions that can help make it bring you to the end of all desire. At least temporarily. It's one of the great things to not have any of this activity and movement of desire, even aspiration. Then that puts the mind at a phenomenal piece. And so the aspiration for liberation which is very efficient Nice developed and cultivated and appreciated and all that is not meant to kind of stay there forever. But it's meant to bring you to a place where actually you can let the mind come to this phenomenal rest of what you'd call Buddhism liberation or freedom. So it's kind of like, you know, you would like to go visit the Pacific Ocean, you're far from it. And so it takes some motivation to get over the distance. Get all together to go visit the Pacific. And then once you get there, though, you're on the beach, looking at the ocean, that the desire of the Pacific falls away. But you needed the desire in order to get there, but once you're there falls away. So you need to have the desire for liberation. But with liberation, it goes away. And what some people do is hearing that they think I'm supposed to give up my desires right away early on before You know, I've gotten to the Pacific. See, I'd be very careful not to let go of desires too quickly. There's a healthy desire to have, they should be appreciated and strengthened and discovered and acted on. And when they acted on thoroughly, then we can let go. So I hope that this gave you some material today to reflect on I hope, to me, this is so central, so important to the whole Buddhist enterprise, to understand the nature of desire, and to and to really explore it deeply. I hope, I hope, at least for the next week, that you'll you'll try to remember some of these things I've been saying today, and, and explore them in your life and your heart, explain what's going on. Talk to your friends about them. If you have friends here, even you can have setup, time for you know, coffee during the week, lunch or something together and just let's talk about this thing, desire and aspiration and explore it. Do whatever you can I hope you will never ever again or never, I hope you'll never ever have the notion that it's bad to have desire which some Buddhist circles still have that notion sometimes. What you need to do is differentiate between two different kinds of desire. And then in that differentiation, choose to healthy ones. So May your desires, bring you and everyone else lots of help. Thank you