

2007-01-23 The Dharma of IMC

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, welcome to our evening here. We're going to talk about IMC and

I've been looking forward to giving this talk since it first came up as an idea to give a talk or presentation like this. And the reason I've been looking forward to it is maybe twofold. One is that

IMC is something that

I take a lot of delight in it brings me a lot of happiness. And I've been quite surprised that IMC exists regularly quite surprised I show up here and what's this place doing here? And

and when I think about it, I'm just you know, I just it's delighting delightful, it's just, it's one of the bright lights of my life, that center like this community like this could come together. Something guys kind of see and kind of grow up from very little you know, we

to be a small sitting group in Palo Alto. And I think the group starts to get started before me. And like maybe 20 or 21 years ago, I think it's about the date, like maybe six? I think so. So I thought it'd be really just looking forward to kind of just the happiness of kind of talking about something which makes me happy. And then the second thing that made me happier about doing this was I was looking forward to finding out what I would say. And so now we'll find out all of the so what I'll do is I'll talk a little bit, and then, you know, you can ask questions, and probably some of you have, what kinds of questions about IMC and what goes on here and the philosophy that goes on here that maybe you've never had a chance to ask, and this is a chance to ask about it. I want to particularly welcome some of you who might be quite new here. Some of you I could see I've been here for a long time. But some of you might be quite new and this is kind of your introduction to IMC. It has occurred to me that if this is a nice thing to do tonight, it is maybe something we should do once a year. So that people who are new coming into our community can get kind of orientation to what we're about we're doing that really hasn't been available in the past. So I want to welcome those of you might be new and curious to find out what we're about. The little bit historical, so some of this many of you know, because you've been around for a long time, but some of you don't know this. And so you're going to give a little bit of history that in the very early 80s James Perez and Jack Kornfield were both kind of in the Bay Area by that time, and together with a few other people decided to pursue the possibility of having a residential Retreat Center, which eventually became Spirit Rock. And they looked on a lot of different sites to buy a lot of camps, places, and all of them didn't seem quite right. And then Jack Kornfield was about to, they're about to give up. Or they gave up. And as soon as they gave up, they got a phone call from the Nature Conservancy, saying yes, but we have this property happens to be down the street from your house.

And Jack said, we're not interested. We're kind of given up, though, but you have to go look at this. It's a sacred Indian, sacred Native American sight. So that was the hook. And so Jacqueline, basically down the street from his house and to introduce the spirit rock. So there was this effort to kind of start spirit rock. And by the mid 80s, it was kind of going along and hadn't found the land yet. And one of the people who was very active in that effort, very involved with Jeff and everything was a man by the name of Howard Nudelman, our Ingrid Nudelman. And they were the instigators for starting a city group in Menlo Park, I think around 1986 or so '87. At the Met at the Valparaiso, the Catholic retreat center there, anybody here there? There's, they're slow is there. So we have some people have been around for a long time longer than me. And, and how and how we call and nearly a year or two was one of the main teachers have come down to teach. And then at some point, I don't know why the group had to move to move to Palo Alto. And so when I came to study at Stanford in 1990, I was studying Stanford results. I was also in teacher training with Jack Kornfield. And one of the homework assignments from Jack Kornfield was to be trained as a part of training for teacher is to lead a sitting group and just so happen that unfortunately, that Howard Nudelman

discovered he had cancer. And he could no longer lead the sitting group. And he called me up and asked me if I would take it over. And so, I came in September of 1990 or so and started leading the group. And that point it was about as my memory was, like 15 people or so who came somewhat regular basis. And we met what was kind of like a nice little living room of a church on Cowper in Palo Alto. And, and then the first was very simple in the beginning, and I would show up and teach. And I, as kind of continuing kind of the training that I've gotten in Buddhism, certainly training I got the Zen center for San Francisco and also the training I've gotten a little bit in Asia. A person shouldn't want to teach so much and doesn't take the initiative to teach, but rather a person who waits until the requested people ask you ask you to teach. And so I would have been asked to come and teach to this group. And so I kind of treated myself as a kind of like a guest, you know, kind of like I'm there on the request. So I would come and teach. And no, it was very, it was pretty nice. I was a new teacher, and pretty new to it all trying to make sense of it, you know, make sense of teaching. And,

and,

and then there's a little basket for taking in some money to help pay for the little incidental expenses they had. I think there was a little bit of rent they have to pay and a few other things. And so I talked and after I talked about nine months, they had a little bit of surplus in that basket, and then it occurred to them to give me \$100. And because it hadn't occurred to me or anybody that I should be see if any, anything for teaching I just talked that didn't occur to me at all. So I was looking at that that's surprising. And, and I didn't do anything, I just idea I'm not gonna do anything here. Unless it seems like there's a request from the group, you know that I'm here and I'm here kind of like a servant of the group kind of thing, more or less. And we organized a one day city that James Burrows came down and taught vipassana teacher in Berkeley. And it was a great event, there was some 80 people who came don't think of big events, you know, 1991, I think spring of '91 and then occurred to the group for me that too, maybe will be good if I also let it one day sitting. So then I started leading one day sittings periodically. And after a couple of years, we started with our growing and growing and that little room and we've got to be about 40 people. We were pretty packed and just really packed in this tiny little room. And this man came up to me and said Gil, I'm a member of the Friends Meeting House. Quakers in Palo Alto wanted to come and take a look at that place and see if you'd like to move the group there. So I went to look at it, it seemed great. So we decided to make a move. As soon as we kind of announced we're making the move, the Minister of the Presbyterian Church women said, Wait a minute, you can leave one of the one of the ministers, you can't go take it lightly. They liked it. They warned us there. You know, Citigroup, he went to the Minister, system minister, he wanted to come sit with us. He tried to

convince us we'll give you the bigger chapel. And, and but we moved. And what was remarkable was, as soon as we moved, seems like we went from 40 to 60. People very quickly, somehow the news of the move kind of grow. And I continue to teach in there, and at some point, it's self health like kind of a fantasy or fiction. The idea that I was just a servant of the group. We just kind of just did things where things were requested in the sense that the group is growing big enough and active enough. That in a sense, without it being said to me explicitly, the request was for me to take some leadership of the group to meet the kind of kind of kind of take some leadership of the situation as a teacher, and that I shouldn't just be waiting until someone asked me to, you know, teacher one day sitting or something, that actually the group didn't, it was kind of a headache for people, right? Even always come to me and ask him, and I should kind of take some, some initiative and kind of plan and organize. And I felt that that was in some ways appropriate because one of one of the roles of the teacher is to have a sense of the potential that people can grow into both individuals and also a community. And I had been around Buddhist communities for a long time and practice longer than most people in the group. And so I had a sense of potential there and I felt it was my responsibility. As a teacher, I'm invited in To try to open the doors, open the pathways of the gates to those fulfilling those potentials so people can grow and develop in their spiritual life. And so, like I said, you know, it's a little bit more involved than I had been.

And so then,

and we kept growing, the numbers kept growing. And at some point in order to take the pressure off the Monday nights, we started a second group on Thursday evenings. And I twistedly, one of the Thursday evening group, to be more for people who are newer to practice wasn't exactly a beginners group. But what I've often said was, here's where we're going to teach. Kind of the basics of practice. Monday night, it could be anything in the Buddhist universe so I could talk about, but on Thursday night, it's gonna be real practical and kind of down to earth and so and also, because was already a lot to teach more than one evening a week. I also said, I will prepare for Thursday, I can show up. And you will be and

so

so I started teaching Thursday and, and I was Thursday, I was just really content and happy teaching for very basic, and that people somehow would help them manage in this life just a little bit better. It wasn't a, you know, some great idea of liberation or something. I'd be more interested from Monday night. And I was just happy that people could use the mindfulness practice in various parts of their life. It was very nice for you to have these two different formats. You'd be nice to the community. There's some people who gravitated more to Thursday that's worked well for them. That kind of ambience, the feeling the tone of it, and some people work really well the Monday and then and then at some point so I was surprised by this all this happening, because when Jack Kornfield asked me to be part of the teacher training To have a sitting group, I kind of went along with a homework, there's a homework assignment. And I was asked, and, and but, you know, what I thought I was doing was being trained to become a retreat teacher. That's really the real practices, the heart of the practice, the really real, really real thing is, you know, it's going long retreats, and that's what I was going to teach. And it was nice to support a certain group, you know, in urban life and all that. But, you know, I was being trained to be retreat teacher. But what happened was that as you know, the scripts kept continuing and I kept being involved with it. I was very much impressed and inspired by the level of commitment that many people showed, to the practice and the seriousness in which they took it, and the degree to which they were practicing so well and their daily life, and also had a sense, from a variety of different practices, backgrounds that I had, that there was much there's much more To Buddhist practice, they what happens on retreat, there's about this practicing daily life is practicing in relationship in work and

livelihood, in, you know, in all the different aspects of our life in a lot of these aspects don't get evoke when we're on retreat. So to kind of create a well rounded practitioner, it's really important to have a sense that you're practicing and your your yarn retreats life as well. And so with all that, I began to feel that I wanted to or that I had a commitment to this group. And initially, that commitment took the form of what at this point, I can't just leave the group. I think we need to grow this group enough so I can invite another teacher in so I could leave. And, but I felt a real commitment to the group. But as the group grew and grew, I felt that commitment was greater and at some point some of us had a meeting. at someone's house to talk about the future of our group, and it was decided in that meeting, to some point aim towards having our own center on urban center not renting anymore. And that was about 1995 perhaps that were 9695 9695. And so there was a year and a half I think of committee meetings, putting together bylaws and everything to decide the governance and how we should be organized ourselves. A lot of thought went into it. And, and then 97 we finally got Incorporated. So 97 or January 98, we got incorporated and, and part of the incorporation idea was to put together the infrastructure that will allow us eventually to be able to have her own place. Now remember, when we started this process may be nice 76 I said to someone, it will take us five to 20 years to have a place of our own. And that was more thinking to 20 years, you know, and, you know. And then we kept growing and just you know, the pressure at Monday nights was kind of big. So then we started another sitting group on Sunday mornings in Portola Valley. And that slowly grew as well. So we had two sittings a week at the Friends Meeting House. We had one sitting a week in Portola Valley. Once a month, we had one day sittings at the St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Palo Alto. And back then maybe a couple times a year we went to Jikoji retreat center up in skyline to put on reserves of short residential retreats.

And so we were renting facilities in you know, three or four different places in the course of the year. And then at some point around that time also someone very generously. The friend of the sunken member offered me a small office or air was a bedroom in her home and its own entrance. It became my office in Menlo Park. Before that, I would have interviews with people people want to talk with me about their practice. And I would meet them when it was warm enough, I'd meet them in parks, we sit in the park bench or in the grass. And when it was cold, we would meet in places like like cafe Verona, in Palo Alto or different coffee shops and sometimes people would be having to come in there crying, you know, you know, and just the waiters are looking Can I help you. And so the, you know, the head not having an office was a little bit awkward. And so it was very nice to get this perceived this house office. And so we had all these places kind of spread around homes, things we were doing. And then we got incorporated in roughly around 98 or so. Then we started our fundraising. And in the fundraising went relatively well. And eventually, we had this wonderful situation where these ministers who own this church here, wanted to sell it to us. And they made a wonderful, wonderful connection with them. And they made it relatively easy for us to buy this place. That's a little bit historical background. And it's, I felt it's part of been part of my job ever since, or in all along to be a little bit of a visionary or visionary enough right word. Exactly. But to be someone who has some sense, not just what's happening here now, but some has some sense of what's what's possible. And then, not to be the, the, the I don't like being the leader for the quote, moving into that. But I like being the person who kind of points to that possibility. You know that people take the initiative step into it. There was a period of time where I felt I took the leadership for getting our own center short period of time. It was very gratifying. At some point, I was able to step back and there are other people who took leadership of it. And I was part of the team effort to do it. But there was wonderful people who stepped forward and really took a lot of leadership and initiative to kind of grow develop IMC but still a part of part of the teachers role is to have a sense of vision and possibility as the community has grown in maturity then there's other people now also who are beginning to have some sense of potential and also sharing in that kind of planning and developing of the center A few years ago, a couple years ago, after we moved in here and things had gotten to a certain level of growth and stuff. I said I think to the board I said basically some some like, that's

enough. Let's just stop and kind of rest for a while. Just everything will be doing just fine. We're not to go anymore now. And You just kept growing. There's there's this kind of now, I think, almost a natural momentum of growth. Because it's a spiritual practice and religious practice, people are growing and developing themselves. And that's what's supposed to be happening. And so as individuals grow and develop, it makes sense to have new opportunities for them new ways of expressing the growth and maturity, and new programs and things. And so it makes sense, a certain kind of natural momentum to grow and develop. And in the last years, I don't know if someone how much we've grown in numbers in terms how many people come here, but I feel really delighted how much I think we've grown in maturity, because I see a lot of our community and get more and more involved and more developed and grown and grown in their, in their way. So when I when I was kind of beginning to take some responsibility for this group in the early 90s, there were several decisions or choices I made. That I think had a big influence on kind of the culture of the Dharma here that we have. One of the things was that very early on, in the very beginning, I was involved. I felt it was very important to give people who practice in a practice place that were the practice community, the opportunity to take responsibility for the stewardship of where they practice. And I wanted to very carefully warn people have the opportunity to take stewardship, opportunity to take responsibility to offer back and support and help create the community to practicing in. But I didn't want to make it an obligation for people. I didn't want to have a sense of this, they, you know, they're gonna have to do this. So there was this kind of his arc between making an opportunity

without making it feel like some obligation or burden. And so, whenever there wasn't something to do, even if it was very simple, hi. would ask if anybody would like to do it. So there was some simple things like we had, you know, three or four different flyers we would put out every week, not for ourselves. But like for spirit rock, we carry spirit rock templates and stuff, brochures, flyers. And so I would ask, you know, is it easy for me to carry, I can just fit them inside my notebook, there were so many. And I would ask anybody to be the caretakers of these and carry them back and forth every Monday night and put them out. Someone would offer. And Would anybody like to be the person who opens and closes the door, you know, I could carry the key, it was pretty easy for me to do it. But I just thought it was nice to give people the opportunity to feel like they're sharing, taking care of the place of practicing in and that sense of giving people the opportunity to help share and take care was part of a very important part of, of what we're doing here. The other thing that was important and similar to this was the idea of dāna, of generosity, or and what this how I interpreted it. So how I understood it is to offer primarily to offer the teachings and the practice opportunities freely. That's that's what comes to mind first, when I think about dāna is if you're offering it ourselves freely, we open the doors we teach freely, without really an expectation in return. And so it's an act of generosity. And one of the reasons for that is that I think the Dharma, Dharma practice unfolds healthiest when it's in the field of goodwill and generosity, it's very relationships are much or somehow more conducive, I think, to Dharma growth, when there isn't that kind of obligatory exchange that can happen when you pay a fee, for example, or has an expectation of some kind of exchange. It's just kind of freely given. And and, in fact, that's kind of pretty much our commitment ever since is to do that. We have been very low key about this whole fact about this, especially in terms of letting people know that they could make a donation in return. Those of you who come regularly, when's the last time you can remember that I gave a little Sonic pitch about how you can make a donation here. Who can remember the last time I've done it? There was no one remembers last time I do. Yeah, there was a Saturday. There was a Saturday A few months ago.

2000 to

2002. So 2012 we'll get around to it again. And actually do it somewhat regularly in that I do it the first day of the introduction. reclass people that are considered new time see that he was like a know what's

going on. So at least two or three times a year that can have that form. Now, this idea of data is a very important one for our tradition. Because then a little bit repeating myself, the idea is that the spiritual life that we're living, practicing, unfolds best or kind of already, it's nourished really wonderfully, when it occurs in a field, an atmosphere of goodwill, generosity, and gratitude and goodwill, generosity and gratitude cannot be bought. And it cannot be an exchange. Exactly. And, and, you know, Dharma practice is a voluntary thing. You know, that you will, you know, you No one can really demand that your practice, follow that breath you know, and our feet kind you know, right now in It doesn't, you know, no, no, you know, people can teach you the basic ideas, but no one can really, you know, make you do it. It's a voluntary thing. Even if you have, even if you paid for it, it's to do for the teachings, it still is a voluntary thing whether you do it. So, I think there's something very nourishing, when the whole field is a whole whole field, the whole organization, the whole community. It really feels like the whole thing is voluntary. And really points to this role of generosity and goodwill and gratitude. My maybe naive image your hope, is as someone who's coming to you to IMC would come in and not notice the donor box. And no one would ask them for any money or for anything really. And I mean, some people come to me and say how wonderful it is to come to our community and be able to sit quietly in the back from months or years are a time. And it's the only place in public and public kind of sphere where they can be with people and practice with people. And nothing seems to be asked to them. And for some people, it's really valuable for them either on an empty that, that kind of being left alone. I know for other people's will do the opposite. They want community. And sometimes we're sitting here silently together, and then where's the community? Sometimes it could be slow to kind of develop the community. But so my naive vision idea is that someone comes here for a few months, there's no ask, there's no request for money given at all. And they don't even it doesn't even occur to them that money is an issue. And, and then after being here for maybe I don't know how long some months, some stick finally dawns on them, what's going on here. And then they kind of notice or ask someone or someone says, Oh, it's all offered freely. And if you want, you could make a donation back but it's generously freely given. And somehow that awakened some spark in them, of appreciation of a different direction. economic model, then what's common in our society, one that's founded on goodwill and generosity, and perhaps it touches some part of the heart. But there's a lesson of teaching there about, about, you know, the role of this, these kinds of values in our lives. A very important part of this kind of all volunteer generosity system is one of the volunteerism here at IMC and I feel it's an art the delicate art, the whole thing of volunteering at IMC. I still feel as I did the first years, that it's very important to provide people the opportunity to be able to take responsibility, stewardship of the community they practice in the opportunity to offer back in some way Through their efforts to the community practicing but I don't want that to be an obligation. So for some people there for their life circumstances that's the right thing to do. For people for their life circumstances. That's not right to do. And, and for people whose life circumstance such that spending any time and just getting here to sit for 45 minutes or come for an evening, Monday evening is a huge stretch in their life. They have kids that work, they have all kinds of demands to take care of someone sick at home or whatever. And we don't want to give the impression to those people that in order to be a kind of good member of IMC, you're supposed to volunteer anything. But it's for those people who like you know, who works with the opportunities there. And one of the big surprises in my life is how well that has worked.

I mean, there are how amazingly many people have stepped forward to take initiative and volunteered. And I was amazed a few years ago when I was told there were 75 volunteers. And lately Inez, who counts these things up to only 150 people, and that's the full range of people who do As much as he knows, on one end of the spectrum, and then two people who maybe you know, do something much more simple, you know, or something that takes a lot less time, but the whole range 150 people, I can't believe it. I don't believe it. Show me that list. He's right there. And it certainly warms and inspires me

that there's so many people who will come forward in that way in their own initiative and want to kind of offer something to this community support it to make it happen.

So this idea of this community of practice here and the teachings being made available freely without obstacles for people, translates in other other ways as well. One is an attempt not to have Buddhism, stand in the way of people's involvement with The practice we offer. As many of you know, some of the practices that we teach here can stand quite well, independent of Buddhism doesn't need Buddhism. Mindfulness doesn't need Buddhism. Buddhism needs mindfulness. But mindfulness does nothing in Buddhism. So, there's a lot of people who for whatever reason, are committed to another religion are not interested in so called religion or Buddhism, but are very interested in some of the practices, some of the cultivation that goes on here, and some of the teachings and it would be, maybe a turnoff for them. If it was all this was couched in very powerful Buddhist terms. So for example, we could have had a much more grand Buddhist statue here, you know, the gold you know, big altar, towering above us, you know, 10 foot tall and, and, and every time we all came in, and we have to get down on the floor and bow to the Buddha statue and offer it incense, and we could have done that it's not, that's the kind of Buddhist thing to do many places and Buddhist centers, you do that. But that's a rather Buddhist thing to do. And, and so someone who wants to come and learn about mindfulness practice might find that to be a turnoff. And so, you know, the idea was to make this these teachings and, and, and this practice opportunities available to people. So there's very little obstacles to come and get it and receive it and be part of it participated.

And

the second part of that is that I believe it's a Buddhist value, that any reduction in suffering is worthwhile. And so the fact that someone is stressed at work, and learns of meditation reduces our stress. I'm really happy or that someone is in difficult relationship and they learn some basic principles of Right Speech and that helps the relationship. I'm really happy with that. I'm happy with small little helps people get and greet you know, regardless of their care if they're Buddhist, you know, become a Buddhist is not becoming a Buddhist is no, it's very important for what we do here at IMC. Sometimes I joke that we're kind of like the Unitarians of the Buddhist world.

And so, however, Buddhism and being a Buddhist for some people is very important. It's important for me, and it's very important for me, and I believe, you know, for IMC, to those people who are interested in the full depth of seclusion has to offer all the way to liberation. That also those teachings and opportunities get provided through us as well. So the art of IMC is, for better or worse is to be something for everybody is to somehow be able to be a place with people urban urban Retreat Center, where people living the stresses of urban life can feel like they can come in a relaxed way, comfortable away Come, and it helps them manage their life a little better. And that people who want to dedicate their life perhaps really be engaged in some full time, way or complete way or this is a central thing of their life as a Buddhist practice, that somehow we can support that as well here. And I've been pretty gratified that there's we've had the full range of people here practicing at IMC and we've had people certainly who've just come here because it's just a great help for their lives. Some people, you know, simple things simply coming coming. Some people just find it a refuge to come and be in a community like ours, and maybe they're not even interested in the practice that much. It's just nice to sit in a room with people like us to tell people and not have to Visit the refuge with them. And we've had people who have gone off to Asia to become monks, you know, and sweated it out there. Amongst the nuns we've had and people who have gone off to Asia, for example, long retreats, people who've gone off to IMS or spirit rock and sat long retreats, people who really made the practice kind of their central issue of their life. And, you know, put everything else aside some of them have given up their regular kind of

employment, simplify their life so they can really make this their thing kind of like pseudo pseudo monastics in their level of commitment. And it's been really inspiring to me to have such people around IMC involved with us and supporting us and think those people kind of nourish all of us through their practice in there, but they do. So that's part of the art of IMC is how to kind of cover this wide range. And to go to the kind of Buddhist light but also for those people who want to go Buddhist heavy. There's a place for them to. And the

As some of you know, there's this writing on the wall up there that I asked Stephen Browning to paint. And it was meant to be fainter than it is. So and actually a little bit higher than his video was that none of you would ever see it. And I would never pointed out you know, and, and what it says is just kind of for the time was my kind of had some kind of heartfelt connection to this particular synonym for the support and liberation or Nirvana, or Nirvana. I'm not a doctor and The idea is that whoever sits in this seat here would always be most see that and always be reminded that no matter how Buddhist life we are in our teaching, no matter what, you know, they will always remember that the teachings we do here inclined to very important word inclined towards liberation. liberation is always there kind of in our mind. So we don't, I don't, I'm not going to forget it. But it's always that's kind of always the potential in the possibility that this practice is where it's going, which can go and that a very important role of anybody who sits in the seat up here is to keep that in mind and kind of necessarily talk about it every time or, you know, make a big deal of it. But at least kind of have something that points in that direction or leans in that direction or, or keeps that through that possibility open so that people really feel that's a possibility for their life. liberation is a possibility. And, and sometimes it's hard to believe that sometimes You know, so. So the idea of liberation, you know, it's really important to me, if I wasn't, didn't think that I was supporting people, encouraging people towards the Buddhist teachings of liberation, the Buddhist experience of liberation, then I wouldn't be satisfying to do this kind of work that I'm doing. But if I only taught those people who wanted to know, liberation or bust, that wouldn't be satisfying for me either. Importantly, that that is because I didn't want to bifurcate life between what's acceptable or not acceptable, what's right or wrong or what's, you know, I wouldn't have a priority or hierarchy of what's you know, of practices and what's better practice and worst practice. Part of my understanding of the Dharma is not to do that, but rather to meet each moment. Each person where they're at, in their fullness, the completion of that person. And what that person needs is a bandaid for the splinter. That's the full and complete Dharma for that moment. And that's what to do. If what someone needs is a little nudge into Nirvana, then you know, that's the Dharma of the moment and, and the Dharma the moment we meet the moment. So you notice the steady expression that says the old kind of kind of little bit Miss paraphrasing, these, you know, the essential teachings of Zen or Buddhism is, can be summarized in the idea of an appropriate response. So if you need each thing, each person, each situation with respect with dignity, that each person each event each thing is is the dark, the Dharma is found right there. And then part of that notion also goes into play with a certain view of mindfulness. That I hope that we can, I would like to develop here IMC and that is that there's two sides to mindfulness practice. There is a side that mindfulness practice involves

connecting to this moment right now, being present for this moment right now and decided mindfulness, that doing that is also a stepping stone on a path that leads someplace into the future. There are some people emphasize a lot devalue the deep value of just this moment here, waking up to this moment being fully present this moment without looking into the future, for some magic moments in the future whenever things would be okay. Because if you have too much desire for the future for something, you'll miss this moment. with other people who are teachers who emphasize the importance of you really need to have a strong sense of humor. And possibility unless you have that you wouldn't have the motivation to really in the in the skill and make the choices that really help you grow into the full potential what Buddhism has to offer. And so what I like so and then there's sometimes there's conflict

between the two schools, the present moment people and the future moment people, you know, people who use mindfulness now and the people who are about using mindfulness for some great goal, the future of the Big Bang Theory of enlightenment. And, and I don't think that that tension or conflict between them is necessary. I think they're both very profound teaching, and they're not, and they're not in conflict with each other. They're both true. And both can be developed. And I think it's very important to develop a sense of both, because if you do, then you'll be happy with every moment of mindfulness, your practice. Regardless of where athletes and you have a sense of how this, how you're part of a path of growth and development, that can lead to radical transformation, both can go together. I've known people who've gone after the radical transformation path, you know this thing in the future. And they haven't been transformed very much, but didn't work very well for them. And they ended up being bitter. angry at you know, all that time they spent being mindful. It's very sad. Because they had they hadn't learned the great value at one moment in my process. It's wonderful in itself when it comes to the completion in that moment. So you'll never feel frustrated or feel Dunker that was, that was a waste of time. Because it was it was right to that moment. So there's a kind of a sense here at IMC of hope of kind of encompassing or harmony noticing a range of approaches in Buddhism rather than holding them in opposition with each other.

few more things to say. One of the values that I hold in try to, I tried various ways to pass this on here and probably haven't succeeded for a while. And that is to have IMC to be a Dharma centered center, as opposed to a Teacher, teacher centered center. And those of you who were around in those days, the old days, remember how much I protested or tried to resist getting up on this platform, having this platform built. I did not want this platform here. We were back in the friends back then we took with us and we're basically I used to throw From the floor, you know, and everybody else stuck in the floor. And I did not want to sit in this high place. You know, because it's bad enough in our tradition, where we sit in kind of a half circle, you know, and all this energy to focus is on the teacher, but he's not even foot folks. It's not the Buddha even right. It's you know, here and that's bad enough. And then to the openness platform, you know, and the projection and everything will go on. So I wasn't happy with anyway, they twisted my arm and that basic argument was that people couldn't see me know see the floor and they want to see me so. But the idea is to be Dharma centered rather than teacher centered because that's something we all share in common. My either relationship to the Dharma, I'm a Dharma practitioner, your Dharma practitioners. The Dharma is the teacher for us. And the Dharma was discovered through our practice and we practice together. And I tried, for example, And the first few years when we did the Wednesday morning sittings, I tried so hard violently, to whenever we met Wednesday morning, for that group to always sit in a circle, we made it we got together to symbolize the fact that you know what teacher wasn't the center, but you know, the Dharma was and you know, after a while, every Wednesday saying, Okay, everyone get up and move, you know, when we learned, you know, I know, you know, so hard and then that numbers got bigger and bigger just got to awkward. Basically, there's something a whole very important idea we have the Dharma in common the Dharma Dharma is at the center. And that's not teacher centered. And little bit along that line is that I don't believe that anyone teacher, you know, has a monopoly on the Dharma. Or even better, I don't think anyone teacher really understands the Dharma fully in its fullness, and that so it's very important actually, for people when they cry This, they might have a primary teacher they have. But it's very important to hear a lot of different expressions of the teachings, and a lot of different sense of how people practice and how they've been changed and who they are. I think of, you know, I'm part of the Spirit rock teacher collective. And that's very important for me, because I have this this cadre of colleagues, who are my peers, and, you know, I'm accountable to them. And, you know, they'll call me on things. You know, so I've had some of my teachers say, Gil, you know this and they know about your teaching this are you doing this? Pay more attention or you shouldn't be doing that. And very few of you tell me that except except, you know, get off the floor. And so have a seat noticed. This is collective, a

teacher, quite large collective of teachers and friends and people, that peers that's kind of behind me kind of invisible support for IMC. But also like I think like a spiritual teachers collected, which is something like 19 features. Now, I don't think that any one of them has the Dharma. But it's a package. If you want the Dharma, you have to get the whole package. And some of them are really good in some areas. Some are really good and others are some teachers are really good at the domain of relationships, and other people, that's not their strength at all. And other people who really strength is you know, Samadhi practice for the people whose strength is loving kindness, practice. So like it's a package and together we make a package make a hole. So part of IMC is very, very important is to be able to have a lot of people coming through MC to teach. So the people of IMC can hear a lot of different voices, and encounter a lot of different embodiments of Dharma and the different ways that it manifests. The last thing that should happen is that you know that you should all look at me who's the primary teacher at IMC and assume that if you're going to become good practice He goes to end up like me. You know, you don't want that. When I was a new Dharma practitioner at Zen center,

Ed Brown was the main teacher, first teacher I encountered. And my assumption was that I was supposed to end up like Ed brown if I practiced. And I spent an hour went away for a couple of years, practicing my own little bit of brown and brown, you know, how he was carried himself and was. And then I came back to Zen center after a while, a couple years. And I saw some of the other priests there. remember seeing Philip Whaley? famous beat poet, present priests there, and he was having breakfast, eating a cereal reading a newspaper. And what? That's not zen, you know, that's not, you know, Ed brown would never do that. I'd rather just eat a cereal. You know? And then I realized, you know, the point is not to be like Ed Brown. Ed Brown is one of my heroes, I love him. I think he's great. But the point is not to be like Ed Brown, there's something very profound about being yourself, not becoming someone else. So sometimes having a lot of different models for practice can actually help you become yourself. We only have one model. It's not, you know, sometimes it's not as easy. So you hear a lot of different teachings is also very important part of what we are here doing here. Part of it also is I think it's very important for people as they develop in their practice, to have the opportunity to share their practice to effect to others and to inform the teaching. And so in the last few years, we've had a fairly large group of seniors, practitioners, veteran, many, and I haven't been able to give all of them opportunities, but I've certainly started to give some of them opportunities to start giving talks. I'm very glad that Don Johnson started halfmoon Bay, sitting group and sitting group that we started in May years ago in San Jose, and some of our senior students are able to go around and start giving talks more. And it's a very important part of growth. It's a, it's a wonderful way of growing in the Dharma doing Dharma practice, to be in a position of supporting other people to practice and to be teaching and all that. And then slowly, we're also developing people who are kind of kind of also becoming teachers in their own right. We have Andrea Fella, who's a wonderful teacher. And, and one of the wonderful qualities that I knew that Andrea was kind of ready to kind of be a good teacher was was she wanted to do something here at IMC that I did not think was a good idea. And I gave her all the reasons why she shouldn't teach that. Why she can do that. And she went ahead and did it anyway. That was a great that was you know, that was Really good, I thought. So I knew we were safe with her. And

so.

So

it's really remarkable what's growing up here. It's really remarkable that we have such a large community of people who are interested in practicing. I find it quite remarkable how many people who are really serious about their practice. It's really very, very central in their life. And I feel very committed to supporting that. IMC is very committed to supporting that. I think there's a lot of room for us to

continue developing in terms of offering programs and opportunities for people to grow in their practice. slowly over time, I hope we can find ways to do that. The IV as I said earlier, I've been amazed at how many volunteers we have part of There's a whole way in which being volunteers is a practice in its own right, kind of volunteering at IMC, I'm hearing a practice Center offers an opportunity for practice it offers an opportunity to be in relationship with other practitioners in the community. And being a relationship both for the good and the bad for the difficulty in the joys of it is very important. Some of the difficulties of being in relationship are very important part of of doing this practice. If you're a Buddhist practice community was only harmonious, you wouldn't have a chance to grow. So there's something also about being willing to be in a situation that sometimes it has conflict in it to work it out and try to work it out. And I hope that I MC, I don't expect IMC at a place that has no conflict or no difficulty. But I do expect you hope that IMC is a place that we're committed to hang in there with each other to work through the conflict. We're places people are willing or feel safe to talk about difficulties. They're having If they're not able to do it directly, like if you have difficulty with me or someone, we do have this never really publicized committee called the IR Council, the ethics and reconciliation Council. That's a people group, a couple of three people who are highly respected in our community, our community, we're available to help with some of the conflict and difficulties that might arise. And so, Jim Podolski is one over there. You have conflict with anybody with him. And Cheryl Hilton, and who's the third person? Yes, and Nick Bennett. Thank you. And, but, you know, one of the ways of practicing is to practice every opportunity to practice together with people. And there's a lot of learning that happens in the conversations and the practicing being together. And there's a lot of, I think, inner joy that can come from Knowing that you're part of a support team that's making practice opportunities available to people, nothing at IMC happens, unless there's volunteers who are willing to help put it on. And there's all kinds of managers who come and do things that manage people to put out the newsletter. And there's a slew all these different volunteers who do these things so that the teachings and the practices can be available. There's amazing phenomena we had with audio Dharma wouldn't be possible unless there were people who sat over there and recorded and edited and still don't get all the web serve reports and websites and everything. And it's a phenomenal offering that we offer the wider world. How many countries now? At that we have people downloading our talks from 80 countries in the world. There's something like I can't believe it. You know, it's mostly I don't believe what's going on. Even here at IMC but there's there's supposed to be a half a million downloads a year. of our Talks, half a million people. So there's more people who are part of our community in the cyber world, than there are people who actually come here in person. So that's phenomenal. So as we continue to grow and develop, and you know the potential and make more opportunities for people, it's not going to happen unless people step forward to volunteer. And there are times when people have done made times people don't completely on their own initiative. I'm delighted, especially when we first moved in here to show up here, open the door, walk in and find someone had somebody had done something that I didn't even know needed to be done. And no one asked me, no one asked anybody, they just, they just went and did it. And I guess it can be a problem sometimes if you do the wrong things, but but, but the idea that there's a self initiating people who took the initiative

and so my hope is that the people who come here regularly and for those people who come regularly and who want to that, that they can feel like this is their, their home their spiritual home. In doing that they can feel welcome and encouraged to take responsibility for their home. If something needs to be done, step in and do it. There's no then there. There's no and then but I am seeing us and sometimes that there's no there there is a problem because sometimes things don't get done. There's there's certain things that maybe I won't mention it right now, but there are certain things which remains unfinished or done. Not done. And I'm just waiting. No one's doing anything. Just there for quite every day. Still there, the whole there. I wonder why I wonder anybody whether I do it, I think well, I'm thinking of doing it. I have a sabbatical coming up. And that's all I have time. I'll do it then. I'll take care of it. And

but mostly it works pretty well. Part of the spirit of volunteerism that I tried to develop here at IMC is it is also a delicate balance

between it's

very, very, very much appreciate and value, the volunteer efforts. It's really a marvelous thing that people offer what goes on here and makes it possible for people to run the practice and learn here. And this is the difficult part to say it or how to say it, right? once said, right, then we can go to their counsel. But the and most of the things that get done, we don't need them to have them done. We don't need to have them done. So there's a great appreciation for it. There's no need because we can collapse. We're collapsible organization. can become a lot simpler than we are. And, and, at least in my mind, I would like to think that kind of that we're fluid we are trying to hold on tight to institutional forms the way it has to be. If we don't have a newsletter, newsletter comes out three months late. It's not gonna be the end of the world. You know, I think I'd rather be relaxed. There are people you know a lot of people in his in Atlanta who do fantastic work for us and help a lot of people through the newsletter they do. It's really wonderful. But, but I don't think we need to get all tied up, wrapped up in a, you know, uptight around the newsletter. If somehow something happens. And just, you know, that easy to happen one month, it comes out maybe a month later. So the idea is to kind of have this great appreciation and value of what people do, but also to hold it really lightly. So that we can collaborate to not do it. And so it's more fluid and more relaxed and hope People don't take their volunteer work at IMC as a burden. Because if it's a burden, then it's one of two possibilities. If you feel as a burden, then that seems a burden is a great opportunity for you to practice. Or it's a sign that you stopped doing it. You know, don't you know, because we don't want that to continue for too long. Now, this sense of this holding things likely has gotten a little bit harder. As we've gotten so big, so many volunteers. So we're going to try to, to caretake the whole volunteer scene better than we have in the past. And one of the ways to do this is that I'm going to offer a year long program called Dharma volunteering, that will start in April, we meet once a month. Anybody who is volunteering or is interested in volunteering at IMC can come if you like, and we'll have some practice together and often discussions and teachings are explorations have determined the different issues that come up around the practice of volunteering. And it kind of gets, you know, to, to offer support and offer some depth. And really kind of pass on the idea that the kind of volunteer where people do is also a practice in its own right. It's a form of Buddhist practice to do that. And so let's discover how that is and how to make it richer, Enriching it for people. As we've grown and gotten bigger, it's gotten actually much more complicated to hold the volunteers structure in place. And it's important to care for it well have a good structure because even though we want to hold things lightly, we also want to respect people's work and effort. And so respecting entails that there's a timely way of responding to people and supervising people or supporting people interpret things they do. And we've had in history, sometimes people falling between the cracks or something not being supported properly. So a few people have put a lot of work thought into kind of creating a nice structure for how everything can flow together. And we hope it's kind of a fluid structure doesn't have to be locked in. But a structure that would help kind of support with we are. And you'll see, there's handouts like this from the table. And also this big poster in the window there for the front door, that lays out our current organizational structure. And it's organized with the board kind of being the main custodians of the place. And then the board has basically five groups kind of under it. And each of those groups has what we're calling a program director or director of the group. And those five directors and myself are kind of like a team together with a board that helps take care of ifcs and communication with each other and kind of exploring the Dharma at this level. And then under that there's a whole slew of other committees. To take care of so many different things that each in their own way, is helpful for people's helping people and helping our community.

So some of you might be interested in volunteering. Some of you might be interested in exploring what's possible to develop how to develop and use volunteering at IMC as a way of developing and growing. One of the surprises to me is that some of the people who take in leadership positions at IMC have been surprised to see how much they've grown as practitioners as people as leaders in that role. And I've realized kind of after after seeing that, that's one of the things we offer to people is a chance to have that kind of inner development that allows them to grow and as a leader as a person, in that taking responsibility and involvement in the community like ours. So I want to make that available to people who are interested and And then make it clear that that's a route that people can take if they'd like. They'd like to be more involved and, and grow in that capacity. And

so maybe I should introduce to our board. Those of you who don't know, there's Erlanger, who is the president of the board, which is stand up for people really see a wonderful president. And thank you. And then there's there is let's see, Claudine who is our wonderful treasure. We really lucked out with Claudine being our treasure, because she's professional accountant. And, and I found out from her that it was much more involved. I couldn't imagine that we needed to take care of the accounting then we had been taken care of. So now we have really responsible You know, accountants accounting scene. And that's one of the few things we can't collapse. And then we have Jim Bronson up here, involved with us for many, many years is now doing teachings for us. Thank you.

And

where are we going around there's Nick Bennett also been part of the board for a long time and helping a lot with the chaplaincy work here at IMC and pastoral care kind of things.

And

Chris Clifford here has been part for a long, long time. And the Vice President and she very fond of many years in which she managed the Thursday evening in Palo Alto. She was there kind of opening and taking care of it and returning it was such a lovely thing for her to do and love the way for me to have contact With her. And then Jim Podolski? Well, for a long time also gives talks here sometimes. And our newest member is Carol Collins. And Carol is leading up our efforts to find the retreat center for ourselves as part of our vision of seeing the potential in the growth of our community and to really ensure that our community has places to grow and develop in our practice and deepen it in all the different ways is to have a retreat center, where that's a whole new step in holding a whole new dimension of how people can grow and develop, community grow and develop, just to have that parallels. As of today, I guess. Susan as a co Oh, yes. And Bruce Friedman, has been thank you on the board. And he never thought he'd be a secretary. And now he's the secretary. The board. And thank you. And many wonderful people here, this may, former board members here who who did have been involved since the very beginning. There are people who are involved in different committees. There's one of the program directors of these different five programs we have is here as Betsy Mian, who's going to is offered to take leadership or coordinate the efforts that will be called sun care for Sunday care group that goes like Sangha neighbors and our ability to offer chaplaincy service, as our community has grown. One of the things I'd warn you just talk for an hour now. News check in. I'm sorry. I didn't think so much to say. The risk of continuing. One of the things that became clear to me is that our community grew that this is this is a private very spiritual community for many people. And so there's spiritual needs with within maybe in the western terms called pastoral needs, is something that needs to be met through our community. So there are people who want to get married, and this is their community. So you can't tell them all, you know, we don't do that, you know, just the back just down the street through it. You know, the, and people die in our community, and so it's appropriate when it's

appropriate to offer ourselves as a place that people do memorial services for our community. I've done dv blessings, I've done a rite of passage for 13 year old girl pouring into that. He called it a bird mitzvah. And we did another rite of passage into elderhood for Hilda recently, and so they're kind of these are more of kind of pastoral needs, and also the people who get sick and start dying. And all kinds of things happen to them. And one of the things that became clear was I didn't have not have the ability to be present for all those people in the way that they really should be received support. So now at IMC, we've created a chaplaincy Council. And these are people who I very much respect and value their maturity and ability, who are available now to do you know, to offer the kind of care and support that I think people in our community are warranted as appropriate. So already you know, you know, some of our committee has been involved there was a suicide that suddenly connected to our community had recently in the family and so one of our chaplaincy council people went in support of the family for a while and you know, variety of things that you know, brought people who situations we get emails from people because of audio Dharma people in some level. distress. It's a little bit complicated how to respond properly to that. But we've had some success of some of the chaplaincy, council Council, people, you know, supporting them, getting them on the right track. So we have this No, this committee, there's about 12 people who are available to help take some of that respond to some that need sort of reset represents part of our growth and development as a community. There's a lot more potential that we have.

As our community grows, I think that I hope that we continue growing and filling that potential. And the only way that's going to happen is because people here step forward to kind of offer and support to make the whole thing go and offer make possible to to take care of the next steps developers we need to have. Nothing needs to happen. We don't need to grow. But there's a great opportunity in the growth In a great potential for joy, I hope that those people who come to IMC that one of the many kinds of things that they encounter here, I hope they encounter joy. I hope they did bring some joy and delight to bright light to come here and get a sense of what this community is about and the phenomenal goodwill that's here. And we don't have membership, that's a choice we made. So, but we do have membership, and the membership is made up of anybody who would like to be in your member. If you want to come all the time and not be a member, that's fine. And if you've ever been here before, and you feel like you want to be a member you are, you know, it's you know, it's it's very, very relaxed that way, and I hope it's something that you find meaningful. I've talked a long time I apologize. We can take a few minutes, perhaps if some wants to ask some questions with things that I've left out. things you've always wanted to know. Yeah.

I'm wondering if there are any satellite sitting groups, particularly in the Palo Alto area.

With the empower to the closest thing we have is there's a woman who was connected to us named Julie Forbes, who has a sitting group that's like Wednesday at noon or something at all, over needless to call a retirement community in Palo Alto, and then Sharla Catherine who has connected to us, she has her own sitting room for on center kind of sitting group in Mountain View, called the incitement Something I believe, and then that's the closest that I know. Thank you. This

you talked about how you consciously like to combine or mill the Buddhist life with the Buddhist heavy.

I have one question, are we from time to time, they might have some monks that come by and give talks on that. That's wonderful. But they tend to be Western. And I, you know, and I know that there are a lot of Asian monks and nuns in this area, and that are very wise and wonderful. I personally feel that we might benefit a lot from seeing it from the other perspective to have those teacher teachers come from time to time. Is that a possibility? Or is that a conscious decision? To not

sort of have it too heavy.

No, no. I'm also delighted to invite Asian monks who I respect. I know. And it seems like probably the average probably once a year or something, we have someone Asian monk come, we had maybe not that often, but we just happen periodically, if we haven't come in, but you know, I don't go out shopping for monks, you know, you know, I, you know, and I don't go out looking and recruiting a little bit further. I don't have the time. The people I don't know. And so, and I feel sometimes not all monks are the same. So, some, there are people who asked to come and teach here. And I don't really feel like I do a disservice to our community to have them come. So the whole question of if you don't want to be very careful. So one of the policies So, I have about who I invite to speak here is, is only if I know them. And so you know, there is a possibility we are we are trying to get a Burmese teacher here in June you Tanzania, and it's a matter of whether it's a wonderful teacher, very popular this moment. And, and he is it's well, depending on where he gets a visa to be Burma, or come to this country, and we try to get to see Jeeva, another wonderful Indonesian monk to come and teach a retreat for us. But it wasn't, he wasn't able to with the schedule to come and so certainly that's an interest for us is to have Asian monks as part of it. Roxanne knows

how to pick her know what all the volunteer jobs are in how we can hook ourselves into them.

It's, I don't know. So well that answer who wants to ask that question? See what answer that question.

And since we're in the process of really reorganizing, we're actually going to make it a lot more obvious. Until now, it's really been when there's been a need, we've kind of like asked around sometimes to put on the email lists. Sometimes just tell people we know, you know, what, what's needed at the time. And often people just come up to me and say, you know, I'd like to, you know, I'm the managing director here at this point in time. And people just have come up to me and said, I can do this, you know, and we also have volunteer forms that people fill out and they, they, they were, they write down their skills, and there's some by the door by the way, and you know, So we'll look through those when we have in need. And but there's always something that can be done. You know, I mean, there's there's always things to do here. So, you could talk to me to talk to Audrey over here. And Jim Podolski and, you know, and then if the board members actually so that it'll be a lot more obvious subrecipient we're going to set something up that will kind of chart it out, and it will show what, what things are needed. So thank you.

I've sat in sin.

I've spent time in the various thermal zones. And I'm always wondering why, if there's a etiquette here for coming into the meditation hall, I mean, I know that, you know, people don't want to have a lot of formalism and you know, I can come in and bow, you know when I want to and things like that. But, you know, after the bells rung, it really surprises me that people continue to come in. And you know, if there could, that there's Is there any notion of etiquette within a meditation session?

It's a good question. And I have don't have any fixed views on this. That's why I haven't actually said too much about it. I have some views, but it's still kind of something I consider after you know, where 30 minutes into a 45 minutes sit and four people walk across the creaky floor. I wonder if we should say something about that. And you say, you know, when you've come back late, maybe should sit out there and the other Hall and wondered about that. Choice so far has basically been an etiquette free place. So that, again has to do with the accessibility, that that the place is quite accessible to anybody. People are new and be kind of a turnoff for some people to have a formalized. There's some difficulties with

forms and benefits and forms. And given the pros and cons of everything, the choices made to kind of make it keep it quite relaxed and, and let people come and take whatever form works for them. I think that you know, this is an urban meditation center. And given the kind of urban lives that people live. It's a real challenge for some people be able to come and come on time, for example, and the fact that this is a place people come at all You know, I'm so happy that you didn't come. So I didn't want to say what sit by the, you know, don't go come in or don't come late, you know, lock you out or something. I just want people to, you know, nice people come on time. But if people assume that anybody who's late is like, for good reason. That's my assumption. And so then, you know, like them comes in urban center, we were a different kind of center. Human might have different kind of etiquette and rules. And also a you know, it's also the kind of part of the advantage of mindfulness practice. In mindfulness practice, there's no such thing as a distraction. Right, so we're, we're we have a lot of room in our practice to incorporate everything as part of the practice. Yes. Robert, in the back.

Would you talk a little bit about the vision that the IMC holds for the residential, urban residential Retreat Center.

little footnote before that, perhaps it comes I think I kind of suspect that it comes with a kind of role that I've had for our community as our community grows, as our community has grown, I've been surprised to seek to to discover that I have more and more vision for community. And I hope that that's the safe and appropriate thing to do. It seems like maybe it's part of the role. But you know, 20 years ago, I never thought of myself as having visions for anything, you know, but it comes with you know, this kind of caretaking this role has. So, my vision one of the visions is I have a lot of visions now. visionary visionaries are dangerous people. So you've been warned. But one of one of the visions is having a retreat center. And I think that a retreat center is a place you know, in some ways, meditation retreats is one of the one of the kind of the heart for the real depth of practice in our tradition. Not everyone does a lot of depth outside of Retreat Center. It's like great value outside of retreat, center, retreat practice. But I think that the nourishment to support the health long term, sustained sustainability of our tradition really comes out of people's ability to do long term retreats, long term deep retreats. And it's a it's a wish, desire that I have to teach people on retreats. It's something that's I feel it's very important to be able to kind of work with people that level and support people that level and train people level deep retreats. And I think it's something very maturing and very supportive for our community. Here I am in Redwood City, to have a residential retreat center associated with us. So we kind of in our orbit there or kind of sphere in our kind of understanding what we're about. Not that everyone or anybody has to go and retreat. But somehow I think having that in the atmosphere and associated with us actually will deepen everyone's practice including those people who don't go on retreat or don't go on retreat. And then having retreat center as a possibility for unknowingly silence long retreats. Practice is an opportunity for other kinds of practice programs as well, that we can do here. So for example, we might be able to do special, special kind of Spotify retreats for beginners. If I have a new introductory introduction to retreats, we could do weekend retreats, we can do week long retreats, we do month long retreats, we might be able to study retreats, there might be you know, particular forms of study of practicing it's kind of unique that could only happen in a residential program. study programs for example. Stephen bachelor can come and do it. weeklong study program is very, very rich enriching for us. Having a retreat center might also allow us to support the family program looking more like the family retreats that we do occasionally wonderful family program at spirit rock. It's a place where we can invite a lot of different teachers to come in, I'm not going to be the only teacher by any means retreat center. And there's a lot of wonderful teachers who would be nice to have part of our community. And one way to bring them in and really get the kind of the fullness or the depth of what they have to offer is to have them be able to offer their teaching in retreat context. So to be able to have people come and offer retreats here would be really great, and to offer our community. The other thing about

the vision for Retreat Center is that I think what we're doing in IMC having an all dāna system which everything's freely offered, and freely supported, is a very powerful Dharma teaching. Very powerful. Dharma kind of situation, that a lot of people around the country are actually watching IMC, in a very inspired but what we're doing here, and there are different groups who decided to follow our model because we've been successful in doing it here. So, you know, we've been kind of a kind of a model for the people. And I would prefer my vision is to have this is to be able to offer the same kind of dāna culture, on retreats to be able to have that your retreats also be freely given. You wouldn't be charged for the retreats. I think this is a very powerful thing to do. And the first, you know, senior, you know, very wonderful thing to do. It has its challenges to do that, of course, you know, but, you know, it's been a huge challenge. People people told me eight years ago

for people, you can't do that, Gil, you can't get an urban retreat center in on the peninsula. No way. Usually substitute delusions of grandeur or something. And, but now we do. It's all I'm gonna do the whole thing, right? So I think it's actually to create a to create this vision of is before the vision is to have this, you know, this retreat centers also in the same way. And I think that's a powerful thing to be able to do here in America, the powerful teachings powerful example. It's a powerful opportunity to practice within a couple of more than we could stop. Yes.

I can't help

but notice that there's no kids here. I come from a you know, kind of a traditional church type setting where you'd see like the Sunday school for kids, so does this not translate to kids or how's that work?

You know, there's a few things there's a lot left a lot to be said about that. But we have tried, we have over the years, but maybe, you know, 10 years now, some kind of family program for kids. We started at the very modestly in Palo Alto, half an hour, once a month. And then it kind of grew. And then and now, most months, we have, we've had a program, the first last Sunday of the month, that's about an hour and a half long, that's somewhat developed and it's kind of parent lead and parent parent taught and everything. And some of the kids have been coming for a long time and, and involved with it. Some of the kids you know, some of the kids that I that I first did the family program are now in college. It's kind of wonderful to see them kind of you know, Growing up. And it was very, you know, I think was somewhat significant. You know that the suicide I mentioned earlier was the father of one of the girls who was in the First Family program started 10 years ago. And she was, like 17, then she was seven. And so I hadn't seen her for a number of years, but many years. But I went to see her after her father committed suicide. And we had this connection because she was part of the family. Significant. The so we've tried. One of the challenges with doing a family program here is a weird it's been a challenge because a lot of fun been told that a lot of parents would love to be able to have a place where they can leave their children so they can come and come to the practice and teachings. But you know, our buildings are big enough for that. And we've tried to find a number of times to try to find facilities in the neighborhood here that maybe we could use for the family program. But we haven't found anything that's been suitable. And if we had a retreat center that might be in the right kind of place and location, that's mighty. One thought was maybe we could do some kind of, you know, spill out and have a family program there. We are in the midst of trying to revamp or change the family program that we have the kids program that we have, and to try to improve on it. So we'll see how that goes. It's just currently changing. And now it's going to be the bulk of it is going to be the first Sunday of the month between 550 in the evening and 715 in the evening. So if people come here normally or normal events, we'll see the kids right. And so we don't know how many families there are, who would come here. Be part of us if we had a much better family kind of childcare kind of system and kind of Sunday school kind of thing. If we had a whole other kind of facility so we could have a family program during the regular Sunday

morning program. There are a lot of young families who would actually find this very benefit. Vishal, we don't know, we don't have surveys to let us know. It's those seem that the demographics of our community is the average age probably people who come to IMC is somewhere between like 5152 years of age, which generally means that, you know, they've gone through that phase of their life of raising kids. And so that's not so relevant anymore. But it could be there's lots of kids, lots of young people who would love to come, but they can't because they're certainly your family circumstance. It's an answer or an answer. So, also, it depends a little bit on again, we're all volunteer, right. And there has been some pressure some some interest from the parents who've been leading and organizing a family retreats family program here. Because you know, this is really hard to do to organize this, you know, where the parents and all that and we're doing, what we really need is we really need to get someone who's a little more trained and, you know, really can focus on like as a teacher for kids who really run it. And then they said, Well, we need to do is we need to hire someone? And I said, Well, that's interesting. We have to, we have to discuss that because we've made a decision very clearly IMC not to not to hire anyone not to have a paid position. Because I think the whole volunteer thing that we are within slowly change, and so no one gets paid here, including me. There's I met on salary. So that's what I wanted to tell them to mention that to people. Some people assume because, you know, this is my job, right? But I have a salary. And that would be the reasonable thing in America. Right. But I don't I do get some benefits from IMC, like the IMC pays for my health insurance, my family's health insurance, and life insurance and a few other things. But my livelihood comes completely from the donations that I receive from people with people given in the dāna box. And so that's kind of interesting way of Living

a little different. So in terms of family program, you know, So we could, you know, I didn't, I didn't rule it out that we could hire someone, but it just seemed like it was a real stretch. And we have to do it very carefully, when we're worried what to do with our kind of culture of volunteerism that we have here. Any more you want to ask or say about that? Because it's important question. How is that handled that spirit raw family program, right? They have they have at least one person, full time paid to take care of it. Full Time is a full time full time paid position to run the family program, spirit runs, and that person in turn, might have a few other people who are paid as well kind of part time. There's a whole army of volunteers is a very complex program, and it doesn't pay for itself. And so, spirit rock versus spirit rocks, the spirit rock retreats, you sit for Apple and Dell just pretty rough. Financial supports the family program. And they've been they put some really fantastic program. I was there on Sunday, helping to teach the family program there. That's very rockin it was an inter Sangha family program. So we have families from our community here, going up there and we had some like, like 5060 kids running around the place. What? over 80 Kids raised over 80 kids. And so, you know, so they have this wonderful spirit rock has a wonderful Family Retreat during the summer. That's five nights and amazing event. Those of you have been to spirit rock and have done retreats there have been to a great, great silence and those of you know, in these camps, you can't believe I still guess as peaceful it is. Come to the family retreats, you know.

And it's you

No, it's it's a whole different universe.

So maybe that's enough. It's a last one.

I think it might be a good closing question because

it's been interesting to hear about the growth of the community. And I'm glad to hear we're being taped tonight because, you know, 50 years down the line, people aren't going to be interested in history of our center, and I hope we're keeping some good, you know, copies to fill all the newsletters and things like

that. Very, very gratifying to me to notice that there are people who are inspired by what we do, and, and, you know, someday so to some degree in a small way, we're kind of pioneering there are many people in America who are pioneer many groups. You're pioneering what it means to be Buddhist, Buddhist group in our country, and in this country, and, and, and so on. And so we're wondering what kind of pioneer and I think that I'm very proud of what we've done. I'm very delighted, and it's been a lot of happiness. And it brings me a lot of delight to hear the people around the country who look towards us and are inspired by what we do and very grateful, very grateful, and all the different people we support and help. I hope that all of you

will, my hope is that you all find it valuable for yourself and your practice and your development to help others in their practice. There isn't just a one way thing, which is your practice your practice, but there's a wonderful mutuality, that as we practice as we support other people in the practice, it helps us deepen our practice as we deepen our practice. It helps us to support other people in their practice. And it's really you know, We all share the Dharma and as we create a wonderful, mutual interactive kind of field, in which we all practice together, we're all members of it, we all help create it. We all are responsible for it. And so as we go along here in next days and weeks and months and years, please feel free to talk to me or talk to some of the board members about concerns you have but IMC questions you have. Please ask if you have any visions of what we can be about and how we can grow and programs you'd like to see happen. Please speak to us and let us know. You're all part of the community and your voices and concerns are welcomed. Those of you who would like to volunteer, we would like to make it as easy as possible for that to happen. You might somebody might want to talk to some of the board members or Andre are people here today. If you look at the if you look at this volunteer Organizational Structure chart that handout. You can little sense it's more complex than is this than it actually is shown on this chart. But it's already pretty complex. There's lots of room to volunteer. And in terms of what IMC needs the most at this point, even though we're not supposed to have any needs is actually some people who are take a lot of responsibility to have the time the ability, the interest to take a fair amount of responsibility. Helping you know, really coordinate and support a lot of other people and be in touch with a lot of other people and to be touched with the board and with me, kind of some of their kind of the sharing the responsibility of all this. So you can look at it and if anybody if you're interested in helping this level, a level and The thing that I value the most, there is not so much the volunteering. But I really value the fact that we can practice together. And it's a profoundly meaningful for me to be in a practice community, and to be able to feel a sense and learn from the practice of all of you. And so it's a great privilege for me to be in this role. And I hope that we'll have a wonderful, you know, practice community together for years to come. Thank you very much.