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SPEAKERS

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So, you all know that today is Earth Day. And last week I talked about human nature and hope to provoke some thinking on your part about the nature of human nature of humans. So today we're talking about Earth, nature, nature nature. And maybe this will also be provoke some thinking or some reflections in your part. One of the very significant images, Buddhist images, comes down through the ages, is the image of the Buddha touching the earth. And it's the image that comes from the time that he was sitting under the Bodhi tree, setting himself up to practice and become enlightened and it said that there you some doubts about or the way the way that the mythological way in which was talked about it said that Mara came to the Buddha and channel and cinema look like for you you okay we can raise okay with it the tomorrow Mara came to the Buddha and challenged him for his right to become enlightened to become liberated. Who are you? You know us through some kind of schmuck you know workbook right have you to do anything and being liberated is within the liberated Indian context was to attain a fairly high status, spiritual status and a sense for Who are you to kind of step into this high status. Some of us have a lot of doubts ourselves about Is it okay to like go deeply? Is it or is it safe? Where does that leave me Maybe I won't be anybody. Maybe I won't fulfill my responsibilities. And maybe I'm not worthy of that. Maybe I'm such a lousy person myself that that I can't possibly hope for a full liberation, full awakening that's only for great spiritual adepts not for someone who's stumbling along like me. So there's all kinds of doubt. So tomorrow, we're going to voice these doubts to the Buddha. And I think it's quite significant that among many of the challenges the Buddha faced, and his path to enlightenment, he faced them with tremendous resolve tremendous personal strength and ability to face and be present. And this is the one time when these doubts arose. So one time when the stories tell us he didn't rely on his own abilities, but rather what he did was he, he reached out and he touched the earth, and he called upon the earth to be his witness to his right to be awakened. You probably some of you see statues that depict this. And you see, he's sitting like this one here and meditation posture, and then his right hand, he, he reaches forward and puts over his knee and lets it fall down to the fingers reach down, just very likely touching the ground. Now in the ancient mythology, it isn't that he touches the ground, but he touches the ground, but what he calls upon is the goddess of the earth. The earth Goddess has been around for a very long time and has witnessed everything and says, you know, and he says, you know, I've been around, you've been a witness to my practice and who I am in my lifetimes of practice. And please bear witness, please speak up now. And say that I'm, it's okay for me to be liberated. And so the earth goddess responds with an earthquake and That gets Mars attention. Earthquakes are quite significant in Buddhism, certain North North earthquakes are the incident. And so then Mara gets realizes that gets frightened and runs away. And so it's mythology in the question is, you know, how do we understand mythology. And as with all images, there are these kinds of images. They're evocative. And as societies and culture changes, I think images and mythology are interpreted, understood in new ways. And so it is the image of the Buddha touching the earth, calling from the earth as a witness calling from the earth to help him at a time when he couldn't

help himself. I think speaks very interestingly for many of us, maybe there's a time in our practice, when we can't rely on our own efforts anymore.

And we have to kind of reach out to something and, and one of the things we can reach out to is nature the earth The nature around us. If we have it close by, I guess you could order a few and maybe it works if you reach out and touch the asphalt. I don't know they have asphalt, I don't know, maybe. But, you know, my ideas, you know, you don't touch the earth usually do. We touching the ground, the earth, the soil. And, and this idea that there's some part of nature into nature, that we're so deeply connected to nature, that somehow it's our connection to nature, that some somehow will allow some final release. And one of the ways to see that is that it's very well known in Buddhism, that the, some of the most profound experiences of liberation freedom is not something that you can will or you can do with it yourself as myself, you know, I'm the one in charge here. I can do all these things and I'm capable and I'm going to show you know, be the first one in my block to be enlightened. That that doesn't bring yourself and your ego you egotism you self censor. In your even your self centered will to try I'm going to force my way, way into enlightening doesn't work requires a deep letting go. And allowing, in a sense some other process. Some other something else besides our self centered will to, to function. And for some people, some people discover this very early in the practice, because that's what's needed early on. Some people discover this very late in their practice, because that's what's needed then different people have discovered different times isn't like one's right or wrong. Some people find that personal effort works really well for years, carries them quite far on that path. And then they come to a point where they realize they have to let go of that. And other people personal effort, it just ties them in knots to begin with, right away. And so they have to kind of learn to let go and trust something wider and deeper. And here this represented perhaps by nature. So that's one way maybe of understanding this ancient myth or the image of them. The Buddha touching the earth, touching the earth is a very intimate thing to do, you're in touch. And however, you're not the same. There's kind of it's kind of not quite the same as the earth, but you're also not separate either. And there's interesting balance between being very closely connected, and also the same time separate enough to know that you're connecting, know that you're separate that connection. So another image that exists down through the ages in Buddhism is that of the full moon represents the enlightened mind, the mind is completely luminous. The mind which mine which are the cloud, the clouds of the mind, the defilements of the mind, the hindrances of the mind, it clings in the mind of all kind of drifted away. And so there's the full luminosity of the mind shines forth. So Full Moon represents that and in Japanese Buddhism, they take this one step further and they talk about the moon in the dewdrop the moon in the dewdrop. So, the idea is to find this luminous mind to find this luminous awakening. And you can look at you can go out for more night and look up and see it, which is you know, like, you know, some Full Moon days this cloudy you always see it, but, they do this you know, this is great big thing, but here the Japanese you see it something as ephemeral as dewdrop you come up in the morning and, and do drop simply disappear very quickly, as soon as the sun comes up, they evaporate, something very ephemeral, very temporary. And so the Geoffrey's are pointing to the temporary and permanent nature of the constantly changing nature of human life and existence. And the kind of speaking to that and you say, even in there, or maybe in that, because of that, in that define the moon, the full moon, the moon in the dewdrop person so the moon is not something surely something so far away from the sky. But it's found even as something as the right word, but something is significant as a drop in the small little things of life. So again, so the attempt here is not to make the moon something distant and far from us. But something has actually integrated and found in this world of ours in the small little parts of nature. So something as small as a dewdrop. So to do draw, money to drop that, I think is a beautiful image. Then we come to the 20th century. And one of the great images of the 20th century is that the earth photograph of the Earth from Space photograph the earth from the moon. And it's a you know, it's a powerful image. It's been used a lot and

some people have the Messer flags, some people I've known, who have preferred to put that out in the driveway instead of the American flag.

And, and, you know, this, this image is, again also represents or speaks to people in many different ways. But for some people it speaks about the earth being our home, a home that's very easy to clean off and notice how precious it is or how unique it is, and how it is a home, it's possible to think, you know, my neighborhood, My home is my home, my neighbors, my home, my city, my state, my country, but to actually get a step back and get a sense of the earth, and maybe how small it is, or how integrated us a hole is, and how we all share it, that's our home. You look further out into space, and it's gonna be a while before you find anything comfortable. And no one's found one yet. But, you know, not in our galaxy. You know, where where is it? You know, so it's, it's, it's quite, it's quite a phenomenal planet that we live on. And all the different, perfect things coming into just the right balance, so that there can be life and us Hear and it's a quite a phenomenal event that all these different who knows exactly why life is. But Buddhism basically is content and happy enough with scientific understandings of it. And in here we sit, you know, some of you are meditating or which all of you were doing but some of you were meditating here who A while ago. And, and, and some of you maybe weren't always and maybe you were thinking about what you're going to have for dinner tonight, instead of meditating. It's an awesome thing that you were thinking about even having dinner. Because, you know, it's, it's kind of like 5 million years of evolution has come to that mean it's not an easy thing to think about theater. You know, these for all the different factors, you know, Come together like that. It's pretty awesome. It's amazing, amazing, sophisticated and complex event that took many, many millions of you billions of years to be able to come to that pinnacle of existence in this moment, thinking about theater. So the surface of the Earth is our home. Some people love the image of the Earth from space, because it seems that the kind of ways in which we divide up our life, the boundaries that us versus them, doesn't seem to exist there on that map with that picture, the boundaries between countries, you know, kind of like, what does it mean? It kind of like the home for all of us. It was kind of a wholeness, a unity. We're all in it together, as opposed to us versus them. This is we all share this place and we're all the same. We're all kind of products or results, children the same or same universe and Some people love the image of the earth in space because because it seems somewhat small or big vastness of space, there can be a greater sense of fragility. And so seeing how fragile it is how unique it is, and special it is. There's an arousal for some people that desire of certainly reverence or respect, and perhaps a sense of wanting to care for that and love it many ways.

The powerful image I think, the Earth from space, we should have it you know, flying all the time that flag there's a many years ago, I found this on the wall of a convent. I was teaching retreat at a Catholic convent. And in the war, they had this issue if the earth were only a few feet in diameter, Floating a few feet above the field somewhere, people would come from everywhere to marvel at it. People would walk up, walk around it marveling at its big pools of water, its little pools and the water flowing between the pools. People would marvel at the bumps on it, and the holes in it. And they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it, and the water suspended in the gas. The people would marvel at all the creatures walking around the surface of the ball, and that the creatures of the water, the people would declare it as sacred, because it was the only one and they would protect it so that it would not be hurt. The ball would be the greatest wonder known. And people would come to pray to it, to be healed, to gain knowledge, to know beauty and to wonder how it could be. People would love it and defend it with their lives, because they would somehow know that their lives, their roundness could be nothing without it. If the earth were only a few feet in diameter, the inner reflectiveness image of the earth through space, you know, to me, it's a very moving image, but also not far from that is a reflection of what it took to get that image. You know, it took a lot of certainly a lot of scientific knowledge, but it also took a lot of technology. And it took a lot of fuel and, you know, took many things which are now causing

tremendous damage in this planet, or, you know, have that kind of kind of in the background of, of the kind of technological development that goes into having that ability to see the planet from space. So there's kind of a kind of a mixed thing here, where the variability to see the preciousness and sacredness of most of this planet from space was in some degree dependent on the very forces that have been causing some of the damage to this very sacred place of ours.

Now, the image of also the image of the earth, you know, the image of the moon in the sky, for more in the sky can be seen as quite distant and the Japanese Buddhist and called it do in the dewdrop to bring it back home to this planet. In the idea of the earth also is a ball two feet diameter of a field makes it something other to have the image of the Earth from space, you know, it's it's also kind of, you know, it's far away from that picture at least standing on the moon, you see far away studying on the moon, you know, finally we got to the moon. And turns out, like there's not there. You know, once you get close, that's not what it's set up, set up to be. So as long as we hold the earth or distance just like we hold the moon in the distance it's possible to over idealize the world and I think that a lot of people over idealize the world and one of the ways to override it idealize it is to say it's all good you know like if any which is beautiful theory also posits kind of kind of people interpreted as being just benign wonderful perfect kind of system of harmony and balance that we have to be careful not to destroy or disrupt because otherwise you know be destroyed but it's you know, nature by itself you know knows what to do just leave it in harmony until the next Meteor strikes. Right and then the whole thing has to find its own you know, Meteor strikes and then the balance is destroyed and takes a few billion years to discover new balance. I don't know if the I don't know if we need to kind of over idealize or idolize it all the nature of the world shouldn't be to appreciate the homeostasis appreciate Gaia principles a beautiful principle, but it lends itself to over idealization. Now if we go back to the mythologies that different religions have about this human life on Earth, I think there's some interesting contrasts that can be made. Hopefully it's okay to make these contrasts in Christianity and Buddhism. The and if I may, the scholars who've studied religions, there were some scholars in this 30 6070s, maybe early 80s, who were quite critical of Christianity, as having a teaching that talks about being kind of the Earth is subservient to me life beings are kind of can do whatever they want. And, and there were times other scholars pointed out, but that's not the full picture that Christianity isn't just wasn't just a environmental hazard. But it actually is also Christian teachers, Christian teachings that actually emphasize also the sacredness of the earth and being stewards and caretakers of this earth as well. Both are fine that are there. And then people have pointed out that actually to try to go back to the ancient times where there's ancient Christianity, or Judaism or Buddhism, and try to pull out environment, environmental ethic from those ancient religions. Maybe it's not quite possible or interesting. You can squeeze anything out of anything. You know, so it's possible to take Buddhism and kind of squeeze environmental ethic out of its early teachings and teachings of the Buddha. And it's worth doing that. But I think it's really hard to really kind of get a really well developed from a minor ethic from Buddhism. And it isn't that because the Buddha wasn't was you know, was a careless environmentalist, you know. But rather, in the ancient world, it wasn't the same issue. The issues weren't the same, they didn't have the picture of the earth in space, we have a sense of the whole interconnectedness that we have nowadays. And so there's a whole different way in which we have to understand what it means to be human, what it means to be alive and the impact we have in the world. That was not the case over 2000 years ago, but if you go back to these myths, you know, you know the myths of Eden, Adam, Adam and Eve ate the Apple, Apple of knowledge, and then were banished by God out of the garden of Eden, paradise. And the banishing is God's doing. And then, you know, later on, he had this flood, talking about environmental problems.

You know, the, you know, so God does all these things, and we have to behave a certain way and paves the way then God response is different ways of understanding God and maybe something very

profound that both Buddhism and religion and Christianity are saying the same thing, or the Old Testament says the same thing here. But if you look at them with the same kind of myth of creation that exists in Buddhism, which Buddhists almost never referred to, there's a Buddhist myth of creation. And I can give you the reference. But it's not, you know, doesn't have such a such important role in Buddhism. But the myth is one also of human humans, but exactly, but let's have beings eating something, not the apple, but they eat, and it's the eating which becomes the problem. And it isn't the apple of knowledge, knowledge is really important in Buddhism. It's part of the function of practices to get knowledge, but the eating is way is that there was a time before there was this earth, before there was matter in the really modern universe kind of the all the living beings of the universe existed is kind of self luminous, kind of spirits of presence are something formless self luminous beings. And one day, one of them kind of looked down and saw that there was a kind of a sea of some kind of liquid down there, and got curious and put the finger in there and licked it. And it tasted good, delicious. And with that sense of deliciousness, came greed and they wanted more and, and as greed developed these luminous, formless beings start to get the more solid and Miss Kind of liquids started to get more solid as well. And so it got to be chunky and he started eating it. And then because of that he started getting coarser and coarser these bodies. And then as luminous, kind of formless bodies became thick to form, he started taking different kinds of form different shapes and stuff. And, and that gave gave birth to them despising each other, because they're different, the version arose. And as a version arose in human beings, then are these beings then they got even coarser that took more form more shape, and this kind of stuff, you know, there was first this like liquid became thicker and thicker became hard ground and then you couldn't even eat it anymore. But then they're sprung up these funguses that were delicious. And so they're eating this thing. They've got to go around, pick them as mushrooms, but then they only gave birth toward three And so then the beings got more took more form. And then they took a form of male and female, which ended up to other kinds of issues. And, and then with as these other problems of greed and aversion and lust and all kinds of things start happening, there's wonderful mushrooms disappeared. And then that time you had people and the people have to go out and start farming. And you're collecting seeds and working. And then after a while, someone got tired of going out and collecting seeds all the time. So they said, Well, I don't want to go off or collect or whatever, I'm just going to make a fence around my place, or I'm going to collect the just keep it up, keep a whole bunch of hoard. I'm going to go out and do all at once. hoard a lot of this stuff, and then hoarding a rose and then things got you know, got worse. And so what it is with this mythology is, this myth is crying. Point two is that there's an intimate relationship in this myth between the nature of our universe our world And human ethics, the quality of our mind in our activities. And that as we, as beings as human beings, act with greed, act with a version and hate that that has an effect on the environment. The environment responds in the mythology, it's kind of like a some kind of mystical and magical kind of connection between the two. But there's an intimate connection between the two. And what I like about this, this myth is that the relationship between humans in the world is not so separate. It isn't that the world is out there and worlds are two feet ball up in the sky, you know, up in the sky that we can relate to out there and we're here. But rather, there's this kind of kind of inseparable, interdependent inter intellect influential relationship between the world The quality of the human mind. And now that we have someone just 6 billion people in the world, it was just Adam and Eve, just a couple of people in the world. A couple of mines of quality, the mines not gonna have such a big effect, perhaps. But now with 6 billion people in the world, it's huge. The impact that human behavior has on this world we have. And so this or this myth, you know, kind of kind of resonates, I think pretty well, with how we see human life and the earth these days, that the quality of our minds has a big impact on what happens on the quality of the earth that we live in. And a lot of the ways that Earth is being destroyed a lot of the environmental problems has its genesis in the human mind, and human mind that once the human version. You look out across the bay area on smoggy day, and where's the smoke come from? You could say, well, there's no greed there. You know, I've just, you know, stick together. My kids to school, it's reasonable. But is it you know what it would. And then and then you get into a car that gets nine miles per gallon.

I'm not responsible. But But I need to have my big car because so this very close connection. So I think that's one of the contributions Buddhism has to make, in the discussion of Earth Day, the caretakers of this wonderful planet of ours. And that is that there is a relationship between caring for the planet and caring for our minds. And that, perhaps if we really want to be able to take care of the planet, we have to also be able to take care of our mind if we don't take care of our mind, our hearts, our ethics, how we behave, then, maybe it's kind of a lost cause. You know, it's only up there with the fix something out there. It's only about fixing what's in here. That's also an ideal, you know, maybe that is not going to help so much, but this wonderful mutual between nature and the world, in our own hearts or minds, I think is what kind of Buddhism is pointing to. And so, we take care of both. In that mutual relationship, we take care of the world by taking care of our mind and we take care of our minds by taking care of the world. The if you go go to the two examples of environmental kind of examples, nature examples in Buddhism, you find a tremendous emphasis in certain strands of Buddhism, on the benefits that nature, being in nature, in the forest and places like that has on our ability to meditate and practice that the natural environment is a wonderful teacher. For anybody interested in this inner transformation that Buddhism is pointing towards, and people spend time in nature changes yourself spectively on your sense of self, changes your perspective on some of your things you think you need, changes your perspective on some of your new relationship to the world and to yourself sometimes in a very transformative way. When the Buddha was ready to teach his son, the Buddha had a son, one son, one child, and when his son became about 20, he was a month by then, and been training with his father and his father for many years to three years. And at some point, his father, the Buddha felt that he was ready to become awakened, become liberated, just needed for mortal teaching or something. And he was going to teach him about the nature of not so very profound teaching of Buddhism, but that teaching of not self them, you have some sense of it. And if you hear the teaching of not self, it can see you know, it kind of is easy to do and kind of dry. Seems kind of intellectual and certainly disconnected to the world and kind of like it can even sometimes seem seems realistic, there is no self people will say, well then what? So the Buddha was going to teach him is very profound and liberating teaching and not self. But in order to do that, the Buddha took his son, deep into the woods, into a grove grow and grow with trees, tree called the salt trees and sell trees of magnificent tree that grows in India. It's kind of like the redwoods of India. And the Buddha once said, if the soil tree was is solid, but

if the solid trees, kind of like you said, the soul trees were people, they'd be non returners. They'd have exactly actually be enlightened. So nificent trees and they had these they have these big illustrates where they call these routes that are above ground that kind of like, like a banyan tree has all that well, there's also you know, where they call this kind of make these walls kind of come out to the side where they're called buttress. Anyway, so you can kind of sit there and kind of one of those buttresses and those kind of above ground roots is being messy trees in the go. So imagine, you know, sitting there in a forest here, maybe imagine sitting in a huge Redwood grove of virgin redwood trees, you know, sitting there, it's quite impressive thing to be sitting in the beautiful Redwood Grove. And in that context, the Buddha taught his son nuts in the context of nature, this magnificent nature, he thought is the most profound teaching you how to teach. Why is that? I don't think it's an accident. And something about nature teaches us about who we are and I think we are believe that it's a lot harder to discover who we are when we lose our connection to nature. And as we discover who we are, in some profound way, and free ourselves and have read, for yourselves have lost yourselves of hate, have a version of despair, of fear of confusion, then I think we started being able to make choices in our life, which was much more natural and easily be responsive to the needs the planet has. I think it's a lot easier to get down downsize, for example, some people don't need to have such big cars. Some people don't need such big homes. Some people don't need to use so much of the resources in this world. And I think that how that not using so much and how using less than trying to improve this planet of ours becomes a natural thing for us to do, comes easily out of spiritual maturity. The suggestion here is that this

wonderful interplay between the Earth and us that we're not so separate. We're so interconnected and just so strong, that it isn't a obligation to take care of the earth. It isn't that, you know that it's a burden to do it. But really, it feels very natural, easy, when there is some degree of freedom from self obsession, so that when we touch the earth, that in some ways we're also touching ourselves, the earth and we are not so separate. So on this Earth Day 2007 hope all of you will get off the asphalt and maybe find a tree after three years and do something that qualifies as touching the earth to call upon the earth, the goddess of the earth, if you will. And as you do that with the kind of remember it's a really tiny planet, or is it tiny? There are much bigger planets out there. We have teeny teeny or the vastness of space. That's all share it together with each other. compassionate, caring way for each other.

So That's all I have to say. So thank you very much. Enjoy your day, every day