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SPEAKERS

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So as I said, last, as I said a few moments ago, on Friday, I'll start the year long demo practice program on the mindfulness of breathing. And I wanted to talk a little bit about mindfulness of breathing and its role in Buddhism practice. The Buddha emphasized mouthfuls of breathing, breathing a number of different places. One of the more for me significant places, where it kind of gets emphasized is once after the Buddha was enlightened, he went into the forest to do a three month kind of self retreat to the forest. And he said, if anybody asks what I'm doing, people are curious, what are you doing in there? He tell them I'm doing mindfulness of breathing. trouble hearing. Probably hearing today, pick up early Speak up. We're supposed to be kind of informal here. So that better now, the better you can hear now. Okay. So this is a, this is a practice of the Buddhist practice mindfulness of breathing. And the big impression for me when I was practicing in Japan, when the Zen teacher that was with told me that all of Buddhism, the whole path of Buddhist practice, right up to liberation, can be attained through meditation on the breath, mindfulness of breathing, is that effective, that significant? And the Buddha did give instructions for how to use breath meditation, as a vehicle for liberation, right from being a beginner, right up to being, you know, fully liberated. And the most concise place to do that, or the primary place to do that, is in a discourse that he gave called the discourse of breathing, in and out, breathing. And then he goes through 16 different stages in breathing mindfully. And those 16 stages lead you from additional context. With the documentation, right up to liberation, so the course of the year, we're going to go over those 16 steps and stages. And certainly with a hope that by the end of the years, nine months, and we get to this point 1616 states who all be fully liberated and enlightened, you know, we always wish we always have that aspiration. So, or at least get a sense of how it all works. The there's a story that's told around about, of, probably a fable of a young person who young person living a monastic life, very dedicated to meditation practice and all that and just couldn't get concentrated, couldn't get concentrated. personally went to the abbot and said, am I getting concentrated, not working. I've been here for years. And, and this breath thing, I can't remember. Stand with the breath. It's so boring. You know, you keep telling you focus on the breath and the you know, it's like, you know, the most boring thing in the world, my mind provides much more entertainment than the breathing. And you help. So the abbot took the practitioner and they were outside your Oh, well, I guess we're apart and shoved the person's head into the water, kept the person with their submarines had been under the water for a while, you know, and you can leave it to your imagination, how long exactly, but until probably the first was somewhat desperate to breathe. And then pull the person up and the first one and then breathing instead and now said something like, that's how interesting the breath is. Now you know that now you're focused on the breath.

And so, you know, it doesn't take a lot of reflection, I think about the nature of our breathing, to realize the importance of preciousness of breathing. When I was I've been to a few births, but there are terms of relationship that breath is the one that made the most impact on the big thing that impacted me was

the birth of a cow calf. And we were there helping give birth it was a little bit little bit difficult for the cow. And, and then the calf came out. Kind of like like sports PR still kind of in a envelop, some kind of sack that seems like kind of sometimes come out in and the SEC was kind of really transparent, kind of like plastic transparent. And so the head came out, the legs and the hips came out. The head, you know, just eyes closed and I couldn't tell. calf was alive. And then suddenly before the whole cow would come out just the head and that whatever the sack was, whatever the clear fluid was, wherever it was, a burst was really thin. And, and as soon as a burst, the cow opened her eyes and took a breath. And that's it. That's the beginning, I guess like and began earlier than that, but somehow that ability to have independent life to be a self contained independent, being, that sense begins with a capacity to breathe for a first breath. And with my kids, I didn't see their first breath that for them in their first capacity to be independent was crying. So and then there's the left breast blast breath. Zen teacher I know a friend of mine said it made a big impression on her. When someone told her that with your last breath, it'll be your last thought. So you don't have glass friends, we've sometimes we watch people as they die. And often we watch the breathing. And, you know, there's a signal sign that this is the last breath. Watching without the breath doesn't start again. Personally breathe out or Breathe in. Nothing follow just stopped. And the so that you know, and then we have this whole life that's bracketed by that first breath, the last breath. And, and it's possible to spend years and years and years, intellectually knowing your breath, but not really tuning into the breath without really becoming familiar with our breathing and not really discovering the great capacity, three potential that's inherent in the way we breathe and our breathing. And that potential is so great. I really wish that perhaps in high school, that there was a class. There's like there's p class, there was a PE class, breath education class. Because the breathing is a really prominent element in the human ecosystem psychophysical ecosystem. It's a very important element in the variety of inner cycles, inner cycles of stress response, the relaxation response, the hormones and chemicals that get released as they're stressed. So there's this relaxation. The breath is a prominent player in our emotional life, and the feedback between our body and our emotions. The breathing how we breathe, is a prominent care player in our attitude towards life, our relationship to the world around us. So if we want to have a handle, get a very effective handle, into our stress into our relaxation, into our wellness into our illness, into our emotional life into our cognitive life and attitudes towards life. The breath provides a very, very wonderful one. Because it's a feedback system, it goes on, because the breath is malleable, can be changed. And as the breath changes, so does the inner life change. Because the whole the whole ecosystem is interconnected. You take one element of it, and change it and the other things change as well. And if you don't breathe consciously, or with mindfulness, you're still going to breathe. And then the breath becomes the passive player in this great inner ecosystem of

chemicals and hormones, tension, muscles, emotions and feelings and beliefs and all that and so you can see that in how we breathe, doesn't take a lot to track how the breathing changes over different circumstances. I mean, certainly, you can certainly run you read a lot more than if you're sitting quietly, you see how that your breathing changes. But you can see that when you get afraid, you can feel the breath gets tight and constricted, and sometimes there's more of the breathing goes up into the chest area towards the neck, upper chest slot where the muscles have to work a lot harder up here. And then if you're relaxed, you can see feel how the breath sometimes can drop down. If you relax enough to hold yourself chronically, chronically tense, the breathing drops down, you have warm abdominal breathing. And so you're so if you're not, if you're not conscious in mindfulness of your breathing, then the your breathing, how you breathe is the passive is passively or is a passive participant in this great, big kind of cycles or flow or ecology of the human body, mind. But if you're conscious Have you breathing, then a variety of things are possible. Once possible as you can adjust your breathing, your breathing doesn't have to be passive player in at all. And so people you know, it's very common for people, I think in certain situations to adjust their breathing for their benefit. If you're angry, when you encounter 10, you know, breathe deeply. Or if you're afraid of something, if you're going to make a

presentation in front of some people, then go and breathe deeply for a while. And next. So firstly, if you breathe deeply, then have the exhale lasts longer than inhale. Breathing when you do it, then you're breathing. Deep breath, and then ever long, slow, exhale. Do it again, deep in breath. And then as you exhale, long, slow, relaxed, exhale. And as you do that, relax There's your breath. So chances are that's shifted something T, that's maybe just a tidbit for you. Certainly by doing that you're more connected to yourself now, rather than hang on to every word I'm saying, you know, but rather you're, you know you're in touch with your body or where what's going on in your body. But also, if you took a deep breath, some of you might be aware of tension in your body and deep breath. Sometimes you realize to place the resistance of holding, sometimes there's just tension holding in the muscles around the ribcage, sometimes in the belly, in the stomach, sometimes the shoulders, sometimes in the back variety of places, mid back sometimes and rally places. And so you take a deep breath, you can feel where that holding is, and that holding. So as you begin tuning into the breathing, it allows us to adjust it in different circumstances. We might adjust it in different ways for our benefit or It gives us information. We start noticing how our breathing and what that says about ourselves. Sometimes the first indication I've had of emotionally how I'm feeling has been I noticed my breathing has shifted. And so it's a great book. It's a great kind of teacher for us, because it shows us a teacher's of what's going on. And there's a lot a lot of different ways the breath changes, and it's just been depending what's going on. I've been when I started being a teacher, that's when I became aware and talking to people in a meditation practice. I became aware of how much people's attitudes very deep attitudes and held attitudes are expressed in the breathing because I would talk to people about the breathing experience of breathing and meditation. And they'd be certain problems people had or guide people in kind of breath meditation, and it become clear in the guidance that certain kind of up against certain kind of walls or difficulties so some some some little examples would be there was a woman who was having trouble she was yawning a lot and having trouble with her medication because of the yawning and you know she's getting a little bit focused and you start yawning and so I did a little guided meditation was there to kind of see what's going on with her breathing when she's meditating. And at some point, just getting settled into the meditation, I I was encouraging her to relax a little bit I told her to relax her stomach muscles. And,

and as soon as I asked her to relax your stomach muscles, her eyes popped open. And, and she realized what it was going on. She was trained as a young woman who was a girl to always hold her stomach in. And, and so she was and she does become a chronic Lee held position for her and it was affecting how she breathed. And so as she was kind of doing her, focusing on the breath, meditation somehow that holding on the stomach affected how much oxygen how well she could breathe. And from that, well, since you saw that, learn that and she was she was quite lucky, she was able to relax her breathing and get to relax. But always so easy to stop chronic patterns in her breathing. I've seen people as you kind of get into the kind of more subtlety of meditation began realizing that there's some dynamic that goes on in the exhale, that you know, is usually so subtle, you don't see it in every day. But the but subtle doesn't mean that it's insignificant. It might carry some very deep held attitude that plays itself out in life in other ways. So I've seen that people who didn't really want to breathe out all the way. Didn't want to exhale all the way. Because to let go with the exhale, like extra can be filled with like a letting go. And to let go all the way the exhale isn't letting go of control and certain people don't want to like Control, they want to be in control, or didn't necessarily want to be in control. But giving up control is really frightening. And that kind of that kind of space. So kind of letting go completely with exhale leads to kind of, you know, kind of place a fear that people don't want to go out to the uninitiated that might seem ridiculous, you know, with a simple, innocent thing, like breathing out. But what I'm trying to tell you is that how we breathe is deeply connected to our psychology. And it's the things play itself out in the breathing, that, that you'd be surprised, you know, such a close intimate relationship between our psychology and our breathing. And I've also I've also known people for whom they were

fine with breathing out all the way. But once they got subtle enough in quiet of meditation, they saw that they had an attitude they didn't really want to breathe in. Because that, you know, they don't want to let the world come into them. They don't want to be oppressed. They want to they want to be free. The world of things and doing an activity and just be like, leave me alone. And so it was kind of very deep attitude of leaving me alone the world's and oppressive place that somehow was playing itself out in the way that they were breathing. And the first indication that this attitude for some people is, can be sometimes in the face discovery of course on the breathing. People who meditate and get settled, they might not discover the connection between the two. But as you settle and get more and more, at some point, you reach that layer, where various attitudes emotions, connect your breathing, come to the foreground. And so you have to work through it and work through it. And then if you work through it, sometimes you will find that their breathing shifts and changes as a result of that.

The and then I've known interested in if people have attitudes, they can have attitudes to every point and whole cycle of breathing. I've known People who were happily read, you know, breathing in, but then on top of the breath didn't really want to let go. They got it, they want to hold on to what they have. So So, because of this connection the breathing has to our inner life. As we tune into the breath, there's a number of benefits. One benefit is that we can adjust the breathing to make it healthier. Even as I'm talking to you here, I'm tracking and watching my breathing and making subtle adjustments. So I can give you just a second as an example of what you can do. I noticed that sometimes when I give talks up here, like a little bit caught up in what I'm saying, or I get a little bit concerned, am I getting something across to these good people here and, and so I can feel that, that kind of little concern, manifests in the in the breathing kind of goes up into my chest. little tight, lift up and all that. And but if I pay attention to that, that's a really good, I could pay attention to it mentally that concern as well, which I do pay attention as much as I can. But it's very effective to pay attention to the breath, because I notice it here, the type now, then I can relax back into my Belly, belly, breathing more from relax belly again. And when I do that, then whatever concern I have, or anxiety I have kind of goes away very quickly. If I look at the mind and saw a little bit anxiety, and try to relax the mind, sometimes I can do that. But sometimes, you know, it gets a little more complicated and start analyzing it. Why am I doing this and, and what's the history of this and all that and it's all very fascinating, interesting. But you'd have to we all have to pause for a long time. I was gonna do it up here and do it. And, you know, for the purposes of the talk, it's a lot easier for all of us concerned if I just kind of it just relaxed to the belly along with it. So I do this all the time. It's a huge part of my life to tune into my breathing. And it's become kind of almost second nature. So, you know, I've been doing it while I'm talking, you know, stuff like, you know, I lose touch with myself as I talk back and watch and feel what's going on here. So we can make the adjustments. The other thing I've said is that mindfulness of breathing can give us lots of information of ourselves and teach us a lot about this as breath shifts and changes, then you can learn about yourself, then you can ask yourself a very interesting question. As you notice that your breathing shifts you can answer your question, the question, is it worth it? Is it appropriate Do you really want to take the go in that direction? So I've noticed for example, driving sometimes that how I drive affects how I breathe. So if I kind of am into kind of, you know, getting someplace but getting some places that Beale and all I have to get there quicker. Something you know, then my breathing gets more tight, more constricted, more shallow. And now if I notice that, then do I want to live that way? Do I live with that kind of constricted tight breath? Or do I want to, you know, is that work is worth sacrificing the inner well being for getting someplace two minutes early. Now in relationship to this, you know, what the modern medicine is discovering more and more, is the tremendous cost effect that stress has on our body. And even even small stress, chronically held pretty constant, the constant kind of bombardment of small stress that we hold on to will affect our body, you know, a variety of ways. It's kind of like the body has weak links. And, and so the variety of the stress that we hold in their body, at some point, we'll kind of find weakest link or where out the weakest link and for some people it's the heart some people it's

maybe the stomach some people it's their immune system and variety of different things that might kind of get out or get you know be compromised. And so, I think we know about this you know the whole stress response complicated responses that were variety of chemicals which are which are released which are there they're released too often create all kinds of gnarly physical problems and also emotional problems for us. So, the stress response, we know can this Can, can can evoke the production of adrenaline, and sometimes cortisone even in the system, which is good if you're being chased by a lion. But not you know,

something to be chronically have in place. And then relaxation response produces other chemicals for beneficial, more pleasant ones. Pleasure producing ones like endorphins and melatonin. And so the breath is connected to all that. And so if you have a tight, constricted breath, and like you know the word anxiety is, it comes from the Greek word choke. Because this is effect on there being choked, right? And so if you're breathing from your upper chest, for example, with anxiety or stress is participating in stress cycles. If you relax your lower belly, your belly stay soft, then chances are you're participating with the relaxation cycles which come with all the benefits of that.

The Buddha didn't know about endorphins, serotonin, adrenalin, all these things. So he didn't talk about those benefits. And the Buddha wasn't interested in ordinary stress reduction. So we can become better capitalists or better consumers. The Buddha was interested in liberation. And oddly enough, though, can this or you know significantly enough in this conversation today that his definition of liberation was not metaphysical didn't require any metaphysical beliefs or any metaphysical understandings. His definition of liberation was liberation from dukkha Indian where he used Luca and Luca is usually translated English as suffering, liberation from suffering. However, one of the preeminent translators into the Buddhist teachings in English has chosen to translate this word as stress liberation from stress, but not because it's you know this mild stress that we can experience in everyday life which could kill us. But rather the very, very deep kind of suffering or stress that comes from fundamental attitudes, or fetters are clear attachments. Whereas for example, attachment to self attachment to opinions and use attachment to pleasure, attachment to say they say Buddhism There's even an attachment to ignorance to being to be ignoring very, very deep held attachments that play itself out. In keeping us from being unliberated free, keeping the heart constricted, keeping the mind tight, keeping narrow and keeping the breath, fluid and relaxed. So, his his, his goal was an ultimate liberation Ultimate release from the very root causes of stress and suffering, not not relief from stress, but to really release deep, deep release from it. And one of the paths for that deep release deep liberation is through was through mindfulness through mindfulness of breathing. And the first there are 16 stages that's given. And it's not necessary to go through all 16 stages. There's lots of Buddhist meditation practices don't use these 16 stages. And there's another way of practicing mindfulness that doesn't use these 16 stages. This is one we primarily teach here. But whether you use them or not, what happens in these 16 stages happens will happen kind of as a byproduct or as a result of other Buddhist practice meditation practice as well. It just isn't they don't get the prominence, the attention they get. In these shifts and changes, as they get in a particular style of meditation called the 16 stages of breathing 16 stages of anapanasati. So I would like to read to you the very brief synopsis or description of the 16 stages. And as I do this, why don't you breathe, breathe mindfully. Maybe like yourself, you know, taking all the deeper breath, usual and then a little longer exhale, breathing in and breathing out.

First preamble, the promotion. When Buddha said mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated. It is a great fruit in great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. And the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and cultivated. they fulfill the seven factors of awakening. When the seven factors of awakening are

developed and cultivated, they fulfill liberation. And how is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit. Here, a person who has gone to the forest at the root of the tree, or to an empty hut, sits down, sitting folded his or her legs crosswise sits with body erect and with mindfulness established with mindfulness established when mindfully breathes in When mindfully breathe out, then breathing in long. One understands I am breathing in law. I belong in breath. Breathing out long. When understands, I breathe out long. Breathing in short, one understands I breathe in short, breathing out short, one understands I breathe out short. The person trains as follows. I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body. I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body. The person trains as follows as you breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation, as you breathe out, tranquilize calming the bodily formation. The person continues by trading as follows. I feel breathe in experiencing joy. As you breathe out, experiencing joy the person trains as follows. I feel I feel, I shall breathe out experiencing pleasure. I shall breathe in experiencing pleasure. He trains the person trains as follows. I shall breathe in experiencing the mental formations. I shall breathe out experiencing the mental formations. Then the person trains I feel free in calming the mental formation Should I breathe out calming the mental formation? Then the person trains I feel I shall breathe in experiencing the mind. I feel I shall be out experience in the mind. I shall I shall breathe in gladdening the mind I shall breathe out gladdening the mind I see I shall breathe in concentrating the mind. I shall breathe out, concentrating the mind. I shall breathe in liberating the mind. I shall breathe out, liberating the mind. I shall breathe in contemplating impermanence. I shall breathe out contemplating impermanence. I shall do In contemplating fading away, I shall breathe out contemplating fading away. I shall breathe in contemplating cessation I shall breathe out contemplating sensation. I shall I shall breathe in contemplating letting go. I feel breathe out contemplating letting go. And that is how mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated. So it is a great fruit and great benefit. So, 16 stages, some of the language in words here, technical Buddhist language words,

begins with a very simple familiarizing yourself with your breathing. And here, because earlier it says just know whether you're breathing short or long. You're short, a long breath but I take it to be much Bigger than that. Just becoming intimately familiar with always about your breathing, what goes on the can be aware of where your breathing your body, what parts of your body move, where the constrictions are, you can become aware of the rate of your breathing, you can become aware of the depth, the rubra shell with so many things and then become aware of as much of your body as you can the whole body. So, not just focused on some narrow part of your body, a diaphragm or the nose where the air goes in, but it's kind of developed kind of a broad, holistic, all encompassing awareness of your whole body as you breathe. Very helpful thing to do. Buddhist practices a lot about becoming embodied and connected to your body. And then once you have that full connection to your body, then use your breathing, to calm your body to relax if you let go Having done that, then the interesting thing The next step is to read in and out evoking joy and pleasure because pleasure or ease or happiness it's very interesting, kind of the suggestion that that's the path that's part of the path of practice now is be relaxed, but joy and happiness are important part of it. And then it goes on to their become familiar with as you're breathing, to take care of your breathing, to simultaneously become aware of your mind, the state of your mind, the activities of your mind, and then intentionally as you're freed with the help of your breath, to start calming, settling the activities of the mind, especially for overactive minds, this is very helpful, but the commons and settle the mind, so the mind becomes can become much more lucid, much more clear work in a perception. So the most Their mind or consciousness becomes you know, a real treasure that you know, nourishes us and feeds us sort of calm all the extra activity of the mind. And then once once all this calming and settling and relaxing has happened, then the mind starts getting concentrated. And as the mind gets concentrated at some point, a concentrate is lucid, clear mind is directed to pay attention to impermanence. So noticing how things are rising pass, and maybe have to be initiated or kind of get a better sense of Buddhist meditation to understand the tremendous

opportunity that and the way in which Buddhist meditation opens up to the world of impermanence. But in Buddhism, the world of impermanence opens up to a deeper and deeper capacity or possibility of release of letting go and the last stages of this, of this 16 stages, as to the stages of letting go more more deeply. When you go and then when there's letting go. deep enough, then you've been released liberated from the, from the places of holding places that cause suffering, stress. So mindfulness of breathing, when developed and cultivated is a great fruit and great benefit. And modern in our modern times, medicine, all that I think we have a much greater understanding of the benefits and the fruit of breath. Breathing, well, then the Buddha did. And so we have to modify what he said mindfulness of breathing and cultivating, developed, is of is a great we have to say now, immense benefit and immense fruit. So that's what we'll do over the course of the nine months is kind of systematically go through the 16 stages. And, and it's something I'm very much looking forward to because I really would like to work with people more closely with their breathing and holding And breathing just great. So there's somebody who can't come but I hope that people will come and we'll kind of work the Explore the whole terrain of the breathing and into the nine months, you're kind of hopefully have a quantum leap in your familiarity and appreciation and maybe love of your breathing. Now and with a story from the great Russian spiritual teacher, who he went to, he's kind of a Sufi and he went to from Russia. He went to I think Afghanistan or someplace like that, Pakistan, to study with Sufi masters in the 1920s. And he tells the story of finding a Sufi master in Afghanistan. He takes a long back there, it took a long time to find great secrets, you know. And when he showed up,

the Sufi Master said, Well, why are you here? handkerchief said, I'm here to learn how to breathe. And the Sufi master reported reported They laughed and laughed and laughed and laughed. It was the funniest thing and then spent the next years teaching gritty of how to breathe. I'm sure he knew how but I'm sure you all know how to breathe. But I'm sure there's lots of room to learn something. May your breathe May your breathing become your one of your best friends. Thank you