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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdaal

So it's my delight to welcome you all here. And just lots of delights for me. It's a delight to have Guy here, and is the first time he's been here and, and I I treasure Guy and treasure teaching with him and his teachings and our friendship and so to have him here together, it's a wonderful thing. And it's wonderful for me to celebrate spirit rock, which is what we're doing here today. Part. This was first thought off as a part of the celebration cycle that's happening this year, for the 20th year spirit rocks existence, since they bought the land I guess 20 years ago. And I've been involved 19 of those 20 years that spirit rock and Guy has been involved just about the same, maybe before after everything, all above 20 And the and I'm very happy that spirit rock is exists and happy with very happy with the practice they're the teachers there the whole thing something I'm proud to be part of as one of the Spirit rock teachers. So to celebrate spirit rock I thought was a nice thing. And to celebrate it with a theme of emptiness and compassion seemed like a wonderful way of marking it 20 years of emptiness and compassion. And I thought that and also the idea of today is that it's a benefit for spirit rock Scholarship Fund. And spirit rock offers a lot of scholarships to a lot of people so that they could come to spirit rock and practice there. And I think it's a wonderful thing to support and augment and grow that fund. So that as many people as possible have the opportunity to practice in this very, very powerful practice center practice place at spirit rock. So all these things make me happy, and hopefully make you happy. And they say that it's a lot easier to meditate if you're happy. So, having shared a little bit of mine, let's start with short sitting

So, I'm going to say a few more words here this morning about the topic and spirit rock. And then Guy will give a talk on the topic of emptiness and have his chance to say hello. One of the teachings of, you know, in some ways emptiness is can be considered a very profound teaching. Oh, for those of you who are new here, and, and maybe your heart of hearing, we have a box full of hearing system devices in the corner of the stage there where Robert is sitting, so you can get those and plug them in your ear and that can be helpful. Can everyone hear okay? Sound working? Always a strange question because the people who can't hear and not gonna ask

So, emptiness can be considered a very lofty or very profound teaching. But one one teaching around emptiness is that it's found in the details. And so I'd like to go over some, a little bit of the details of the history of spirit rock and how we get to today in here to our benefits. So it all began with the Buddha. And then a lot of things happen. And then we get to the 1960s. And a group of Americans and English people primarily but other places as well started going to practice in India and Thailand. and India was fortuitous, because just as they were arriving there, two very important Indian teachers, because the teachers just come back from Burma and started teaching there. So they kind of arrived more or less at the same time going in when Indra and, and also some of the people like jack went to Thailand. Some of these people went into Peace Corps and then discovered Buddhism and they were there. And, and

they had the good fortune of studying with some really wonderful, great teachers. And they were all pretty young. Sharon Salzberg was still a teenager. So right. Yeah, so teenager, and Guy, Joseph and Jack were there just out of college and pretty young. And they had a wonderful contact, introduction and practicing on retreats and all in Asia. Then they came back to America. And the way that circumstances worked out they were invited to teach. One of the places was at Naropa in 1974. And six, I think and, and people were interested in the retreats they had to offer. And so they started offering retreats, Jack and Joseph and Sharon. And in retrospect, things developed very quickly. And by 1976, they had bought building in Massachusetts became Insight Meditation Society. And I don't think that Joseph, Sharon and Jack were out of their 20s yet, and here they were in important and significant teachers have a whole tradition of Buddhism here in the West. And unusual situation to be in. And one of the one of the great values of this kind of this young energy was that it gave them a lot of years to learn, and was all still learning, but also, it it allowed for some kind of fresh perspectives fresh a fresh approach for how to bring Buddhism to a whole new culture and society. And I believe that every generation has to find its own expression, its own translations on a deputation, its own relevance for Buddhist practice and Buddhist teachings. And so it became a very what happened with these young people is they went to Asia, got a little bit of Buddhism, or a lot of Buddhism got, say Buddhism. And then they came back and introduced it, as opposed to a lot of the other Buddhist traditions where it was a Asian monk or teacher who came to America. And so both are valuable ways of bringing it. But when an Asian monk comes, they tend to come with a lot of the tradition. When these young people Americans came back, they were both liberated and freed of a lot of the tradition. And so they had to kind of rediscover or discover a very fresh come from the ground up, how to introduce this Buddhism Theravada Buddhism Vipassana Buddhism to the west, and it was a very creative time. And out of that creativity came IMS. And then the early 80s. James bread started early 80s started teaching in Berkeley. And jack moved jack kornfield moved to the Bay Area. And they started to form a nucleus of people who really wanted to retreat center like ins here in the West Coast. And they start having meetings. And I think guy went to those meetings, and was part of all that. And, and then amazingly, they were just about to give up. It's about buying property things too hard. They were looking at places and nothing was right. And then they got a phone call from the Nature Conservancy, saying that you should look at this property out there in San Geronimo Valley and Jack the first idea was no no, we're finished with this. No, you have to see this it is a sacred Native American sight and is also just down the street from where Jack happened to live

and The deal was that Spirit Rock would buy it, the Nature Conservancy would use that money to buy rain forest in Central America, I think or someplace saving rain forest there. And so it's kind of a wonderful confluence of things coming together. So in 1988, then spirit rock bought this beautiful property up there in Marin County. And then it took about 10 years before they finished building, beautiful retreat center. And it has space for about 85, 90 people on retreats, staff, and it has large, very large, beautiful meditation hall with a walking walking hall for meditation, walking meditation. And been more remarkable. It has a very wonderful rich community of people who are the supporters and practitioners connected to this. And there's hundreds, thousands, thousands of people who've been supporting and working and volunteering to make this thing hope all this to happen and To be it's just remarkable to me to see so much goodwill, so much energy so much, you know, spirit of support to make this thing a flower and now it's kind of bubbling over out of spirit rock that has for many years now and spreading out into many different directions. And one of those directions is to spread out to is down here to the peninsula. Because we have the center now Inight Meditation Center in Redwood City, and its genesis was spirit rock without spirit rock. I seriously I can't imagine this would be here and if at all, and it was the president of the Spirit rock board in about 1986 this board I guess, I guess it for they had a spirit rock but they had this board and committees and all and Howard and Ingrid Needleman nudelman and they started a sitting group in Menlo Park and Sitting group was taught by for many

years for a number of years by Howard, Howard Cohen one of the spirit rock teachers and kept it going. At some point in 1990. Howard nudelman could no longer teach it because of health issues. And I just coincidentally had arrived to study at Stanford. And I was asked to be the teacher of that group. And then slowly that group grew and grew and developed into this. And while we were growing, spirit rock was always there in the background supporting us. And it's always felt in the first few years, it felt very much we were an extension of spirit rock, and we would have work parties. And if those of us would, you know, in our group we would have go up as a group up to spirit rock, and we would have work parties up there on the land clearing debris, gutters, trenches, whatever. And we planted trees if you go into spirit rock, and you drive in, and just to your left yesterday. right as you drive in your right side as you'd make the first curve into spirit rock, just before you come to those little, the corral with horses, sir. There's three oak trees planted in triangle and those are planted by IMC and they're a little bit too close together. Because we didn't know, we didn't know what we're doing, but but they were actually planted in the memory of Howard nudelman because he died around 1992 I think. So it was anything we could pick out these trees and a lot of other other trees in that entry area. They were planted by people from our group going up there. And over the year, spirit rock has continuously been supportive of IMC, in many, many ways, in its publications, listing our activities here in offering us when we were going to buy this building here. We asked them for their mailing lists for the peninsula. They provided it so we could do fundraising and they provided insurance liability ability and property insurance for many, many years before we had this building. So there was a lot of support I felt and goodwill and generosity coming spirit rock that allowed us as a community to grow. And it feels wonderful to me that finally, probably much too late that we can have this day here, both to celebrate and express our appreciation to spirit rock and gratitude, and also to offer back you know, a benefit for what goes on there. Otherwise, the spirit rock is bubbled over is that so many different ways. There's no spirit rock has a training programs, training, both teachers and community leaders be possible. And there's been hundreds of people going through this, and there's all over the country and now actually internationally to people who come and get trained and they go out into their communities and have sit in groups and teach and

there's been, you know, I can go through a whole list of things which has bubbled over out of that place into the wider society. Huge, huge influence. It's one of the primary places to go and sit on retreat. It's a wonderful place the month long, the two month long retreats That guy is very much involved in is one of the I think one of the most profound offerings of practice in my opinion in this in this country, to be able to go sit there and a long time it's really kind of really protected up there. It's really deep for the teachings are wonderful. And, and I'm so glad it's such a relief and happiness for me that there is such a place to go and practice and engage in and all. Spiritual rock has a wonderful, you know, this kind of just creative attempt to try to discover how to how to do is Theravada Buddhism in the West. There's been a lot of new choices here that are very different than choices made in places like Thailand and Burma. And some of it has to do with not compartmentalizing, not having teachers teaching kind of separate from each other and having their own tracks and And kind of isolated in a sense. But here we have terrace bare rock has this wonderful teacher collective. And the teacher collective itself is connected to a larger community of teachers, spirit of IMS and other places. And we're all in touch with each other often teaching together and rubbing up against each other. And, and so it's provides a tremendous support for all the teachers to have that contact with each other, to provide feedback. We learn together we studied together we practice together and, and it also provides wonderful opportunities of creative tension, which I think is really important to have that as we grow and develop. And I find it valuable that spiritual teacher collective has different points of view. And, and I think that the bigger package of the of all these different points of view, allows for this creative tension exploration keeps us on our toes a little bit and keeps us kind of you know, you know, questioning, you know, what is what is I'm teaching, you know, how does this work with other people's teachings? And I think probably probably I can speak for a fair number of the Spirit rock teachers over the last 20 years. Their

understanding and, and realization in, in Buddhism has grown and developed in this wonderful creative mix that's going on here in the world. And I have a lot of confidence in this because I have confidence in the in the commitment motivation to practice the motivation for the truth searching for it. I have a lot less confidence in those who find it. And we find it of course, but then we find it and then what else what other ways can we understand this? How can we question is what are the edges of it? keep keep looking. I think having a large community of people practicing this way together is part of that way. So one last thing I want to say this is this is Benefits today for the spirit rock Scholarship Fund. And it's the days offered freely like everything is done at IMC and those of you'd like to make a donation, free, freely made donation, you're welcome to make that in the box by the door. And all that money will go to the scholarship fund. So it makes it possible for a variety of people to go and retreat at spirit rock people who don't have much means people who have various kind of health problems have a special Scholarship Fund. And in that regard, I want to mention that that one of the sore points about some people's relationship to spirit rock is the amount of money spirit rock charges for retreats. And I just want to say it because people have all you know what's scholarship and all this money they charge and it's like what's going on? And I want to say that my relationship to this has changed over the years. I was also a little disgruntled at times. And I would compare it to San Francisco Zen Center where I practice and see well they don't charge as much there. And then I checked it out and see that they do charge

Oh, that's interesting. And then I, and then now IMC puts on retreats we put on our own retreats. And it turns out, it's really expensive to put on a retreat. And so IMC doesn't have any staff to pay. We're all volunteers. And so, but it costs us \$50 a day per person to put on a retreat. And spirit rock is, you know, a little bit more than that, but not a lot more. And they have a wonderful community of people working there who are doing, you know, we're really working hard in creating this beautiful place. For a lot of people come in practice. And spear rock also has intentionally keeps the cost of retreats below what it costs them to put it on. And they have other places where they get support from donations, people make the things where they come in argument and subsidize those retweets. So it might seem like a lot in many ways. In many ways. It is a lot of money. And it's unfortunate in our society that, you know, the cost of things is what is what it is. So in one hand, it's expensive another hand, I think it's a really good deal. But it's really important for us to be able to make it possible for other people who don't have the means to be able to come and practice. So it's available as possible. The spirit is we want to make as available as possible to everyone. And one of the ways we do at spirit rock is through a scholarship fund. And those of you who have the inspiration and the means to support that, it's a beautiful thing to do. The idea of letting other people practice that your efforts can make it possible for other people to practice. It's one of the best things going on the planet. So, thank you for coming and listening and I'm very happy that we get to hear guy instead of his ear.

I haven't been wired like this before. Is it working? Good. Gil, thank you for the lovely introduction. And thank you all for coming today. And being part of this benefit, I am really happy to be here. See a number of familiar faces. And I'm embarrassed that it's taken me this long to come here, because I've been hearing about IMC for years, and it needed a little push from behind to get me here. But I have a tremendous appreciation for what Gil has contributed here and what you all have set up. In the Buddhist lineage, it seems there are periods of time in history when the whole tradition gets revitalized, because as it said, the students surpasses the teacher in terms of realization. In some ways, I feel like IMC has surpassed spirit rock in terms of the way it works. And I have to confess a little bit of center envy when I

When I hear what you all are doing here, and I try to convert it into center mudita sympathetic joy, but I'm often left with pangs of center envy. Because when I started practicing in this country, I was not one

who got his start in Asia, I started in this country. In 1976, the going rate for retreats was \$7 a day. And that made it possible for me on very limited income to basically settle into insight meditation society, in Massachusetts for a six month retreat. And when I think of what a six month retreat would cost a young person today, there are very few who have who have that ability to contribute. So spirit rock stated intention is to have an operating model like yours, in the sense that all the offerings will be on a dāna basis. We're not there, yet. I read recently in some news item that Harvard University has, I think, a \$35 billion endowment now. Someday I hope major Buddhist centers will come close to that because honestly, I think the value that Buddhism can contribute to our culture is at least as great as that contributed by Harvard. So hopefully at some point in the future, when we have an endowment, even if 35,000,001 1,000th of Harvard's, we could offer retreats on a dāna basis to everyone who would like to come. So that's our vision for the future. In the meantime, the scholarship fund is a really, really important way that we try to make retreats as widely available as we can last year I think spirit rock gave out almost \$210,000 in scholarship money. It's available to anyone who who asks for it. There's not a you know, means test or anything like That. So if any of you are ever interested in coming to sit at spear rock and finances or consideration, please don't hesitate to look at the scholarship offering, we really want to give it away as as much as possible. So I also thank you for your, whatever contributions come from the day today to making that possible, and I thank you and IMC, for allowing this to take place. So our topics today are emptiness and compassion. I can't remember who suggested it. I think Gil might have suggested. Yeah, those topics. And I felt a little bit like, oh, we're at the dawn of the Mahayana. Because when it made the transition from the early schools of Buddhism into the Mahayana, the main shift was an emphasis on emptiness, compassion and compassion leading to the bodhisatta ideal. So we're kind of let's think of today as being held somewhere in between The Theravada and Mahayana one of the things I've always resonated with Gil on is our really deep love for the, for the Pali teachings the Pali Canon and something we can get together and hobnob about it's fear right teacher meetings when other people are off talking about Ridwan or other other courses, and also our shared affection for the Mahayana. And because of his many years of Zen center, he has a strong influence in that direction. I have a lot of years of involvement with Tibetan teachers that have given me an appreciation for that stream also. So I like to think of this day is as ecumenical as we can be, because we have a little bit of Theravada, a little bit of Zen and a little bit of Tibetan teachings. Here. emptiness is not an easy thing to talk about, or to or to realize as Gil said, it can get Quite, quite lofty. There was a Tibetan teacher on his first visit to the US name injure mpj. This was a few years ago, many of you may have seen his new book, The joy of living, where he combines Buddhist principles with scientific findings. And it's been very, very well received in the wider kind of Dharma community. He's a young Tibetan Rinpoche a, who did his first three year retreat at age 13. And then immediately followed that with another three year retreat. So by the time he was 19, he'd spent six years in retreat, and then became the retreat master for the next three year retreat at his monastery, so he is very well practiced and very empty when you meet him. It's hardly anyone there.

So on his first visit, we wanted to show him a little bit of the Bay Area, my wife and I took him out for a drive. And I'm trying to make a little bit of conversation just to get to know each other and I said, Do you find people in Tibet happier than people in the West? He said, Yes. And have conversation. And so I waited a few minutes. And then I tried again. How do you find the West? He said square and clean. Coming from where he came from in India, I sort of understand that take on things square and clean end of conversation. So I waited until we were out of the car, and we were walking around the loop walk on Mount Tam. And I said to him there, I know they're these actually there are three kind of famous views in Tibetan Buddhism, the view of Nagarjuna, or the middle way, the view of so champion the view of Maha Mudra, which are two later schools, and I said, What's in between the view of the middle way and the view of zog Chen, and his eyes suddenly lit up. I found a topic that he was interested in. And although we were walking around a path that could only hold two people, he How to sit down right on

the path. And so we made a little circle of my wife and me and the translator and Renfa che. And he proceeded to give about a 10 minute discourse on the difference between the two views. The first thing he said is, in order to understand, you have to realize there are 18 different kinds of emptiness.

And then he took off from there.

So, not only is it a subtle teaching, it's also a very broad teaching. When I think about how to begin to talk to people about emptiness, My mind goes in about 15 different directions at once because it, it's so far reaching. It's so fundamental to the nature of things that it changes everything when we come to see it. But one of the important things I think, to realize about emptiness in the beginning is to some extent it's about a shift in understanding conceptual shift and understanding and then a felt or experiential shift in understanding which come under the category of right view, in the Eightfold Path, the first path factor. But as it comes to be a part of our understanding and our practice, what we really want to take from it is a way to live differently. A way to feel ourselves in the moment affected by the understanding of emptiness, and essentially, to come out of a sense of fixedness about the world are fixedness about ourselves and come into the experience of reality of the changing and fluid and dynamic nature of the way things are. One way this sometimes is summed up is by expressing it as our understanding that reality is not a noun. Reality is a verb. And we touch this often in our meditation practice, we come into the sense of how quickly things are arising and passing, how nothing is fixed in our whole field of experience. And that lack of fixedness is we open up to it is the felt sense of emptiness. So all the teachings that probably we'll both be talking about this one, certainly that I'll be talking about, are not so much meant to be lodged in the head, but to come down into your, into your being, so that they start to shift one's relationship to life and our relationship to experience. So with that as a background and 18 different kinds of emptiness ahead of us before lunch.

Let me let me get started.

I think there are actually

three ways that we most directly, can understand emptiness Remember that the Buddha said that the heart, the root, the very root of our suffering comes from this factor of not understanding or ignorance, the first link in the chain of dependent origination that we don't see things the way they really are. And that leads to repercussions that lead to clinging or holding on, and when there's clinging there will inevitably be suffering. So he summed this up in a fairly pithy statement that I like to remember from time to time. He said, in whatever way you can see, the truth is ever other than that.

That's kind of shocking.

Another teacher of mine put it a little more succinctly, he said, everything you think is wrong. So I think it's important as we start to look into the question of emptiness to remind ourselves of that in order to just loosen our conceptual grip a little bit. We normally like to think we know the way things are. But if we loosen our adherence to that a little bit, it can open us up to seeing things a little differently. The main teaching device that the Buddha used to point to emptiness, in my opinion, was the five aggregates. But because our time is limited this morning, we're only going to do three aggregates. So this will be the teaching on the three aggregates and it'll be sufficient.

I think.

So, the three the three most common ways that emptiness is used in our tradition. Again, there's an opinion and Gil may have a little different take and be interested to hear from any of you as well. The first level of the meaning of emptiness is emptiness itself. That within this mind body process, which constitutes our human life, there's nothing fixed at the center. There's nothing unchanging over time, that becomes the center from which everything is experienced, or that stays unchanged as we journey through a life. This is kind of a hard thing to accept, because we normally have the sense that we were the same person in second grade, as we are today, that something has continued unchanged over all those years. But if we look at our actual experience, the body is very different now than it was in second grade. Our opinions and views and probably most of our emotions are very different than they were in second grade. Every cell in the body has changed mostly many times. So what could we possibly say was the same and yet, we haven't The sense that there's something inward that is, is stable and continuing and permanent, at least for the length of this lifetime. So, the first level of emptiness is seeing through that belief itself. The second way of seeing emptiness then is seeing through what looks like the substantial or solid existence of the physical world. As we become familiar with that level of seeing emptiness we also realize it applies to the inner world of thoughts and emotions. But perhaps first we get a sense of the insubstantiality of the physical world. And generally this is called seeing the emptiness of phenomena. transparency, openness, spaciousness. insubstantiality are synonyms for it. And the third way that it's talked about, often in The truth in the whole Buddhist tradition is the emptiness of the nature of mind itself. That the mind itself is naturally empty and aware. At the same time. This forms the basis of the meditation practices of schools like zong, Chen and mahamudra. And I think in Zan, it's kind of understood as implicit. But I'm not so familiar with zen, so I don't really want to talk about talking about that. So this morning, I want to talk particularly about the first two. And we probably will not get into the third, but emptiness of self, which is equivalent to the not self teaching that you've probably heard many times and Vipassana talks and emptiness of phenomena or the insubstantiality of things. So let's start and look a little bit about emptiness of self. And we'll use this model of the three aggregates to to approach it. So I want to ask you when you look at your experience as a meditator What do you find there? When you sit on the cushion and you close your eyes, and you get in touch with the inner world, what's their

awareness? First of all

second, yes.

A flow of energy, where do you feel that

okay.

So the comment is that the flow of energy is very apparent. It starts with the physical sense sensations in contact with the seat and as time goes on expands. So, could we start with saying that physical sensations are a part of what come into this awareness? Okay.

What else?

Yeah feelings and emotions a central piece of what we encounter and an important area of coming to learn about we sort of open up a new terrain. What is happening in the emotional life at any given moment? What else? Yes, in the back. Thoughts? Yeah. Frequent sometimes all too frequent visitors, thoughts and emotions, physical sensations, awareness, what else is in your experience? previous feelings of closeness. So memories memories of previous meditations. Thank

you. Sounds

very common as we close our eyes often given the instruction to open up to hear sounds. So, if we include memories in the kind of area of thoughts if we say a memory can be a thought, then we basically have physical sensations, sounds, thoughts, any emotions when you're sitting, anything else?

images, good. So

the with eyes closed the images that come into meditation. Good. Let's just for the sake of this discussion, let's call those a form of sight. A kind of seeing.

Quiet, Uh huh. The silence

So sometimes that is it that when you say a silence, is it in the area of sound that that's experienced or is it in the level of mind? Is it a peace of mind or is it okay? Okay. But the silence is an important element. Vast silence, which could be in the area of the absence of sound, or could be taken as a state of mind, in a way of silence of activity, interactivity. So, this introduces one other little different element, which is, in addition to emotions and feelings. They're also these more refined meditative states of mind, like there is mindfulness, an aspect of your experience in meditating? You ever noticed the presence of mind fullness, concentration.

Okay, because she experiences things. There's something watching the experience. Could it be awareness? which was the first comment? Can we say that there's a quality anyway of awareness? awareness, witnessing, knowing, watching, observing. Good, yeah.

Could I define mindfulness?

I think of it as the quality of mind that knows what our experience is in the present moment. So if we're breathing in, we sort of know that's a breath. If we hear a sound we recognize that's a sound. If there's a feeling of happiness, we know there's happiness. Okay, so Want to suggest that in addition to emotions as part of what makes up the mind, there are these more refined meditative states. Mindfulness concentration, inner peace, equanimity interest, we wouldn't exactly call these emotions would be, but there's so in the broader category of, let's say states of mind. Okay? So when you're sitting eyes closed in meditation, their body sensations, their sounds, their sights, which are images with our eyes closed, there are moods, emotions and states of mind and then there's awareness.

Anything else fundamental in there.

So the comment is that there can be a contraction that includes a physical and a mental component. In the Buddhist teaching, the word grasping or clinging, is often used for that. And although it's not an emotion per se, we could call it one of those movements of mind. That could also be put, I think, in that category of states of mind, so clinging or grasping. Yeah, thank you. Yes. breathing. Okay. breathing. How do you know how do you know a breath is happening?

You can feel it. Okay. Okay.

Yes.

Yes, it is true. It's, it's.

It said that in deep states of meditation, the best Sometimes ceases, I think that's true. So I want to suggest that the way you reported knowing your breath is the way I know mine too. It's through feeling it in the body and hearing the sound of it. So again, we're kind of back to sensations and sound. Thank you. Relief and gratitude. Yeah. Can we put these in the emotion? mind state kind of category? Okay, so I'm looking for any Is there anything outside the categories we've named so far?

Okay, comment was the sense of the transitory nature of these. This sounds to me like an insight, insight and insight meditation. Yeah, there should be insights and that sounds like a wonderful insight. I would put that in the in the area of somewhere of mind. You're right. It's kind of an in between category.

There's some wisdom associated with it.

It expresses itself generally as a thought. But first before the thought comes, there is some kind of aha moment. So let's put insight into that category of things that happen in the area of mental states and then thoughts.

fundamentally different categories.

smell and taste good. So in addition to the physical senses of hearing and seeing, sometimes with eyes closed, we get smell, and taste and body sensation is touch. So basically, we have the five physical senses alive, don't we? sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and the body are all present. Any other different categories? Yeah. Okay, presence in the moment, could could that be a form of mindfulness, that sense of presence in the moment? So, sort of within the mental factors or mental states and the distractedness is that usually through thinking? So then we have the presence of thoughts and the loss of of mindfulness moment.

moments have a sense of universality and a spiritual sense that things are fleeting. Could we also put that in the insight

insight category?

Okay, I'm gonna stop here. Because I think we could, we could probably explore this all morning that all the responses have been great and really on the money What I get from the conversation so far, and maybe you'll permit me to not go into all the other possible alternatives, we have the range of the body and the physical senses sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, let's say that's on one hand, we have the range of what goes on in the mind, which include emotions and feelings, thoughts, insights, refined meditative states, which I'd like to kind of all lumped together as and call them states of mind or factors of mind. That, okay, everybody understand the kind of that range. And then the first thing that was mentioned the quality of awareness, there's some faculty in us that is able to look on and know all these things. So I want to suggest that what you've reported is basically three big categories of human experience. Discover through your meditation, but applicable everywhere. The first is the world of the physical. It's the body and the five physical senses. The second is the changing inner landscape of thoughts, feelings, emotions, meditative states insights. Are these things fixed or changing? Changing I think, and the third of this looking on quality of awareness, or I'd like to call it consciousness. Because this is the usual translation of the word that the Buddha used called vinyasa. In the five aggregates, the term uses vinyasa or consciousness. So if you'll permit me that substitution,

I want to suggest that these are the three aggregates,

body and all the events of the world. Because the outer world comes in through the physical senses, doesn't it? When we have a sight of the room and of the people, that's the way we receive the world through that sense store. So we have the whole physical level through the senses and our body. We have all the states of mind going through and we have this Faculty of consciousness that knows, observes all the rest.

Okay, so

to grant me This is our our model for human experience. So we're in all that is the eye. Sense. What about physical sense experiences? Those are changing aren't they?

Could the Ibiza body

though sorry. Okay.

I capital I

where's the self in all This

is it in the Is it the body? Okay, it's not the physical senses, right? Because that's all coming and going. Is it the body?

Yeah. It's who we say is I don't we? when somebody asks you how old you are, do you have to hesitate before asking? I don't because it's very much in my mind right now I turned 60 this year. And it was a bit of a shock. But I immediately say I'm sorry if somebody asked me I say I am 60 Well, what it really means is the body is 60, right? But I kind of identify with it. So I say I am 60 my thoughts aren't 60 my sense experiences aren't 60 my emotions aren't 60 but the body is 60. So I just say I am 60 but it's changed so many times. It's not stable, is it?

But that identification is

probably the central one that the sense of I gets founded on.

And because of that, because the body is separate from the rest of the world, we end up thinking that I am separate from the rest of the world.

And this is, this is the problem.

The

it was an Indian teacher nisargadatta Maharaj, who taught in the Vedanta tradition, but his teachings are very, very close to Buddha Dharma, who said that all the spiritual practices are for the purpose of solving this problem, what he's which he called the calamity of separate existence. So once we identify and take the body as being me, we're caught in this separation, which leads to loneliness. isolation, fear of death, and then many many attendant neuroses based on that. So once people have looked at this question for a while and practiced with it for a while, they tend to know cognitively, that we can't

really say the body is me because it's too changeable. The cells rejuvenate so frequently it changes over time. So this is not really me. What about the Looker?

consciousness?

is it changing?

say more.

Consciousness awareness.

You make perfect sense is there's a feeling the feeling of a consciousness or an awareness that's not obviously connected to any body. And yet in some way it is you know, we wouldn't have this consciousness if we didn't have a body and have the senses to to meet the outside world.

does it last?

Is it does it seem to be ongoing?

What about sleep?

It seems to go away doesn't it when we when we sleep?

often comes in dreaming the consciousness returns in dreaming. To some extent, I think there's a thread of consciousness hanging out in sleep. Because if you're a mother and you're sleeping, what happens when your child cries faintly from the next room.

Something's happening.

Maybe a thread of consciousness that's hanging out, or when we faint. Maybe there's a thread there. So I don't want to get into too much of a philosophical debate about this because whole schools of Buddhism have virtually come to blows over this question. And we don't want to recreate this here. But I'll just say that in the in the Buddha's own teachings, the sense of vinyasa, which we're going to translate as consciousness is that it sort of arises to meet a phenomenon that's arising at that moment. Yeah, the sense is that vinyasa arises to meet the phenomenon that's arising in that moment. So when a sound occurs, there's a moment of hearing consciousness that arises with it. And last while that sound is happening, and when the sound has died, the hearing consciousness becomes, you could say dormant again or non-existent. So the way that the Buddha explained it is the consciousness arises for each object and then drops out again. Yeah.

I think that's in consciousness. Yes. You know, I think it has this. I mean, it's a very mysterious quality consciousness. It has some some properties that to me transcend what we would rationally expect of it. I'll give you another example. I don't know if you've heard this story. A woman was involved in a car accident. And it was a kind of head on collision and then traffic was piling up because the accident was in the way. The a woman in a car that was backed up who couldn't get through realized that someone had been hurt in the accident because the ambulances were starting to come in. So she started to do loving kindness practice for the woman. It was a woman who was in the accident. And the woman who was in the accident, recovered, she didn't die. And she said that, during the time, that period right after

the accident, she had left her consciousness somehow had left her body and was looking down on the accident scene. And she remembered she remembered feeling this blast of loving energy that she traced back to the car, where the woman was doing loving kindness practice. And she remembered the license plate number of the car and contacted the woman later to thank her for the love that she expressed. So there is something very mysterious About this Faculty of consciousness and I, you know, we don't know the reach and range of it. It has some qualities that I would say suggest something transcendent, but I don't want to make a philosophical stand on that. But it's a mysterious and profound property that we have. So sometimes there's the sense that consciousness is the eye is the real eye. As someone I think mentioned earlier, I'm the Looker. I'm the observer. I'm the watcher. And that seems to have some continuity. When we think about our experience in second grade. It seems like oh, I was watching then. And I'm watching now. Everything has changed but the watching has stayed the same. So I want to suggest why the watching is not self. And that is the watching doesn't have any personality. The awareness is just this clear sense of knowing of what is And I don't think it has particularly a Gill flavor or a guy flavor, or a Robert flavor or any other flavor. And that's why if we take it as self, self always denotes something separate, that's unique. We consider ourselves a person based on our age, our race, our ethnicity, our gender, social status, our intelligence, our beauty, whatever. This doesn't have any of those individual qualities. So I want to suggest it's not a proper basis for self or separation. So this is the kind of the, to me a little bit of a pointing to the absence of self or the emptiness of self within our human experience, through using these three aggregates.

One of the main purposes of this

detailed looking that we do through the public Meditation is to look at all the different elements of our individual experience, and find out that none of them really qualify for being this self. This self that we've built our whole life around.

Because we do that we,

in some ways isn't life always all about me.

It's the reference point we keep coming back to again and again and again. But when we look for it, it's elusive. So, as we can use this model of the three categories or the three aggregates, to examine yourself in the body are the senses, is it in the changing moods, emotions, states of mind, is it in the watching or consciousness and as you investigate that and are not able to find it, that is a key insight. The Dalai Lama said that we we Believe in the self so centrally, but when we look for it, we can't put our finger on it. That's a mark of confusion. And it happens to be a very illuminating mark of confusion. Because when we see the real emptiness, of self, in this whole experience, then there's not so much to protect or preserve or defend. And it opens us up to being

the open space that life moves through.

And we realize what actually constitutes our life are these moments of seeing and hearing and tasting and smelling and touching and thinking and feeling and insight and calm and gratitude

in the knowing of all of it.

So in that way, our our sense of things opens up in this much more spacious and empty way. So that we become open space through which life Not only moves but knows itself. There's a beautiful self knowing quality in this emptiness. And it's a very freeing, feeling in life. Yes. That's life itself has the

quality of being known by this consciousness. Because consciousness is also part of life. I'm speaking very generally now. So conventional level of reality, rather than ultimate. So life gets known by life, you might say. So, as you investigate these three categories of experience, and look into the nature of them, I think you'll see because they're changing nature. They're impermanent nature. None of them are grounds to be called self. And then also, as you look closer, you'll see that they're very, very fleeting. They're so fleeting, that they don't really exist long enough to be called substantial. You can notice this really well with sound, just come and then it's gone. You can notice it with thoughts. They pop up, they persist for a few seconds. And then they put, you can notice it with body sensations. The gentleman commented early on that in the beginning, he starts to notice the flow of energy. If you look closely at the body, in a sitting, see if there's anything fixed. See if there's anything fixed anywhere within the whole frame of body posture, or if actually it's just different sensations. pulsing, changing, coming and going. That leads into a sense of the insubstantiality. Of all created things. This was drawn out by the Buddha in a sutta. That's in the Samyutta Nikaya called a massive foam. And he was with a group of monks of Vic who's on the banks of the Ganges. And he said, monks, do you see that massive foam that's been stirred up on the water of the river? If you inspected that closely, would there be anything substantial in there? And the monk said, No, of course not. Because you know what foam is you go like this, you just clap it and it just is gone, flies away. And the Buddha said, monks, this whole physical world and all the appearances of the five senses, is like that mass of foam. If you inspect it closely, and actually laminate, you will find it to be void, hollow and insubstantial. There's nothing to hold on to just like the mass of foam. So that starts to bring in this second sense of the emptiness of phenomena, the transparency of the phenomenal world. And that would be a fun investigation, but that's a little bit longer investigation. So as we start to explore and find through our own experience, the truth of these of the teachings on emptiness, they start at the conceptual level, but they need to migrate down into direct experience, direct knowing, because the conceptual level doesn't free us. So when they start to migrate down into direct knowing, then there is some freedom. Then we see Oh, there's nothing to hang on to because I see everything's changing or dissolving or passing away. And when we don't hang on, then we're free. So all of this is to encourage us to let go. And the letting go opens our heart. But this is not so easy. Because we have wanted something to hang on to, from the moment we were born, or maybe before. First it was our mother. And then it was our grade school teacher. And then it was the person we were attracted to in high school, and then it was a job or money, or car, whatever.

Humans have a deep wish for security.

Once we start to see the emptiness in all those realms, there's nothing to hold on to for security there. And that's why it's sometimes said that this this truth is hard to bear. We have to learn to bear this truth. I was in a group teaching a class of senior students a few years ago. And one of the women in the class took this reflection home and meditated with it for a week. And then she came back and she said, You know, that's, that's kind of spooky. That teaching, because it's one thing to look out and just say the world is insubstantial. But then I apply it to my own body, or the bodies of my friends. And I see they're in substantial. And that brings out for me a lot of compassion. Because I see we're all in the same boat. We all want something to be able to hang on to, we want something to be a base for security. And it's not there in the physical world. It's not there outside of ourselves. So we're all so fragile.

So,

this is how the seeing of emptiness leads naturally into the opening of compassion. As we start to see the truth of emptiness and we don't cling so much, the heart gets lighter. We find, okay, this is the way life is I learned to relate to it without the expectation I had before. And I can move through it more easily. I don't get stuck in as many places because I'm not hanging on. So the heart lightens from that.

Naturally, the light heart, the heart, the slider can move into more concern for the world, and is open to compassion. And then we also see the fragility of our situation, the lack of solidity, the subject to change, how we're all vulnerable in that way, and that also opens to more compassion. So this exploring of emptiness isn't meant to be an intellectual pursuit or to stop there may start on that level needs to migrate down into experience, and then when it does it leads directly into the opening of compassion and the caring, deeper caring for ourselves and the world. But that's the theme of the afternoon. So

we'll leave it there for now.

can take a few minutes for question. One want to just take a few minutes. If there are questions, then we'll have a break because you've been sitting patiently for a long time. Yes, we can use a mic to.

It's helpful for people with hearing assistance.

The insubstantiality of

the insubstantiality of physical

what we see what we experienced the insubstantiality of that, that is puzzling for me. I don't understand really what the word insubstantiality refers If I look at the wall behind you, for example, it's pretty substantial. So what what is it that you really mean by by that phrase?

This is the this is the part that I was just reluctant to go into because of time issues. But since it's come up as a question, let me just take a few minutes on it.

The way we know the physical world is through our senses, our physical senses, so everything is coming through the physical senses of the human being. We grow up assuming that the physical world is substantial. And it may be an affliction of all cultures. It is definitely strongly supported by the scientific worldview of Western culture and particularly the scientific world materialist worldview of the 19th century and earlier so We have a sense I speak for myself growing up, I had a sense that the physical world was the ultimate truth of things, the ultimate reality. So it was the reference point for everything that is so I was born into this world, I abide in it temporarily when I die, I go out and it continues. And that's the basic Reality of Things. There are other schools in Buddhism that take a different view that says that the physical world is not the ultimate reality. This knowing, or consciousness or awareness is the ultimate reality. it persists despite the comings and goings of world systems. And the physical appearances are only a bubble in the Eternally existing consciousness, that is the heart of the universe. Now, but the Buddha didn't go for either of those models. He said that The knowing faculty and physical appearances rely on each other, like two stocks of reeds that are propped up against each other. And if you take one way the other will collapse. So without consciousness, this physical world would no longer appear. And without the body, some physical basis, consciousness could not receive the physical world. So he didn't give either of them the status of ultimacy. So let's just see how this works for us. Let's take site as an example. So here we'll use a little bit of science. The appearance of that wall looks really substantial to me also. But when I start to reflect on how it arises, I realize that it arises because photons from these lamps and the sunlight are striking the wall, bouncing off it and being reflected To my eye, where they fall on the retina, stimulate some impulse that travels up the optic nerve to the brain. And then the brain somehow very mysteriously creates this consciousness of the side of the wall. Now, that image, which we take to be substantial wall, is it permanent?

Or is it being regenerated?

Many times a second

it's being regenerated many times a second, isn't it if the flow of photons stopped, image of the wall goes away. So we know that it's just being recreated that image what looks like a substantial wall is being recreated many, many times a second, by the activity of our physical senses, the stimulation of the brain and the generation of consciousness in whatever way that happens. Therefore, the image is not substantial. What the wall may or may not be, I don't know, because the only way I can get close to the wall is through my physical senses. If I touch it, it feels solid. But when I investigate that impression, oh, that's only the sense of hardness through my fingertips. It's another experience of the physical senses that generated here, traveling up through nerves to the brain and interpreted as solidity. And then we start to see that actually, we don't know what the physical world is. Because we aren't in touch with the actual physical world. All we're in touch with is a representation of that world. This filtered through our senses and generated by human consciousness. That's all we've got. So the bottom line is that everything that appears, is only an appearance in human consciousness. That's all we got. So fundamentally, consciousness is the doorway to seeing the emptiness of things.

So I'll just Leave it there for

this morning. Thank you