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SPEAKERS

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Okay, so here's a story. Motion was one of the more radiant monks in the monastery. The peace and joy that seems to be out of him inspired everyone who met him. He never seemed to want anything. But he did have a knack of being in the right place at the right time when others needed help. No one had ever seen him bothered by anything. However, this didn't seem to diminish his thoroughness, and doing his job as janitor of the monastery. Since he always seems to be at ease with his life as a monk, one day, I asked him, if monastic life had ever been difficult for him. This is what he said. My life before coming to the monastery was very difficult. In fact, I've considered taking my own life, because the suffering was so great. For me the monastery was the end of the road. I saw it as my last chance. When I first arrived at the monastery, I had a long interview with the abbot. He asked me lots of questions. And I told him things about my life that I've never told anyone before. At the end of the interview, he welcomed me to the monastery. As I took my leave, I asked him what sort of spiritual practice should I undertake? He faced me, he faced me and looked with such a look of compassion and confidence that my first thought was that he was preparing to tell me something very important. But I was confused when all he said was always walk completely through the doors for the rest of a day. I wondered if I had heard the abbot accurately? How could walking through the doors be pertinent advice to someone in my despair? Perhaps the abbot was becoming senile in his old age. But then, to my surprise, the next day the monastery doors started talking to me. Every time I went through a door, there was a faint whisper. At first I thought I was imagining it, and didn't give it much attention. But the whispering kept occurring, so I strained to hear what was being said. It seemed that each door said the same thing. But the afternoon I was able to make out the whisper what each door said was, it is all empty. It is all empty. I asked the other monks if they ever heard the voices but none did. Then I asked them if they knew what it is all empty meant. They just smiled and shrugged their shoulders. Because if they didn't have a clue pretty quickly, I decided that the voices were reminding me of the life I had left behind in joining the monastery. All the possessions I had had the many pursuits I had run after the recognition I had sought the womanizing I'd done. All that was indeed empty. The doorway voices were reassuring me that I had made the right decision and coming to the monastery. They were reminding me that there was nothing anymore outside the monastery for me to go after. So at first the voices made me happy. Reminded that the world was shallow, I threw myself enthusiastically into the monastic life. What a delight to have found a meaningful life but the voices continue to say that it was all empty. And after a while, I began to have doubt about them about my monastic life as well. Was this life also hollow, meaningless. To add to my concerns, the voices started to speak louder. Soon I felt as much despair about the monastic life as I had in my previous life, trying to grasp onto something that would give me meaning. I decided I needed to devote more time to meditation, and thereby develop my inner life. Certainly the pursuit of some real spiritual attainment was meaningful. The meditation practice seemed to lighten my despair. And when my meditation was deep, I was filled with confidence. I began to feel quite happy, even

happy go lucky. I found the key to happiness, and was convinced that I was that I was surpassing all the other monks and holiness.

But every time I left the meditation hall, the doors again said, It is all empty. After a while this graded me and I became increasingly angry. I was angry because the voices seemed to imply that my newfound identity as a deep spiritual person was empty. When my anger was too much for me to bear, I finally had to admit that I had been caught in pride, and that my vanity was empty. After the anger passed, I still practice my meditation practice. After all, nothing else seemed to make sense. But then the voices started commenting on the meditation itself. I heard all is empty, as saying that meditation itself was meaningless. With this, my despair returned more strongly than ever. I tried hiding in my room, so I wouldn't have to Go through any more doors. I took, I took to climbing through windows whenever possible. When I had to pass through a door, I ran trying to distance myself from the voices. But by now the voices had gotten quite loud. As I ran down the hall the phrase, it is all empty, echoed after me. After a while every thought I had every wish I hoped for, and every effort I made, was attacked by it is all empty, resonating throughout the monastery. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I ran toward the front gate of the monastery. I was going to find a tall mountain cliff and throw myself off. It did not make sense to keep living if living was going to be so bad. But as I came to the front gate. The gate doors loomed large in front of me. I became too frightened to go through them. It was as if I could not survive one more voice, telling me that it was all empty. After I stood frozen for a long time, I remembered the practice the abbot had given me on my first day in the monastery, always walk completely through the doors. The instruction had seemed so empty and meaningless when I first heard it. Now, it seemed too monumental. I could not manage to get myself to pass through the front gate. Inside my head, a voice kept repeating. It's all empty. It's all empty. My mind couldn't find anything to rest on, because when it did, I was reminded that this too, was empty. My mind became increasingly contracted in on itself was pulling away from everything until finally, all that was left was my frightened mind itself. Then, again, voice boomed out, it is all empty. And with that, I let go of my mind. I turned around and re enter the monastery. Since that day the voices stopped, and I never again worried about the meaning of anything. Either, neither despair nor hope are relevant for me. It is emptiness itself, with which lives through me. So, emptiness can seem like a wonderfully meaningful, profound insight, which it is, and emptiness can be for some people is another way of saying it's all hollow, shallow. It can be source of despair for people. So, I want to describe to you something that can happen occasionally and meditation in my meditation is kind of deep kind of work very still the mind is quite still. So the mind is quite still calm, peaceful, settled on itself safe in itself. Not searching outside of itself for happiness or security or anything settled on itself. Very quiet still. And then there can arise in the mind, a thought. And you can see the thought arise, because the mind is so still, there can be a sense. It's not so interesting to go and get involved in that thought, in fact, to get involved in that thought,

I'm going to lose touch with a sense of safety of well being contentedness happiness spaciousness that's here in my awareness to settle here. To get in to get involved in that thought train, I start getting agitated, pulled off, distracted, pulled into worlds, where I'm distracted from this deep sense of peace. And so it can seem very natural then to just let go, not get involved just like pass, the Thought Bubble comes up. He's like, go have it or just floats away. That's very different than how the mind normally operates. For many people were thinking is almost this, you know, it's like the air we breathe, and we don't see it. It's just part and parcel of what goes on all the time. And the seeing the arising of a thought that's not you know, that's not, you know, we just always end them, you know, find ourselves for where they were thinking we're often aware that the middle of the train of thought and their concerns and one thought leads to another and chain chain of associated thinking. But when the Mind is really quiet and settled on itself. It's possible to watch the arising of a thought. And not only see that it's not interesting to go there, but to see that in some way that thought is insubstantial. I think it's easier to see that a

thought is insubstantial than a wall. But it's, you know, what's the weight of a thought? What's the shape? What's the color, you know, it's, you know, it's, it's not even substantial, insubstantial enough to be transparent. It's like give me it's like not even transparent, right? Just what is it, which is like, the most probably the most insubstantial thing in the world thought. And thoughts can be all kinds of flavors and colors and themes and ideas. And from that very subtle place. It doesn't really matter if the thought is the holiest thought humans ever had. Or if a thought is the most demonic. Just Oh, I don't want to touch that. I'm not interested in There's a good place. I'm in here, right here. And some of the thoughts come up and they have these little fingers say, come here. I'm really important. This is really essential you take care of, Hey, you, you're not going to be safe unless you join up with me. So all these kind of come, come, come, but because you know, this really good place where you feel safe and settled, not now, not now. You see how insubstantial it is. What's interesting, as you watch this phenomena of thinking arising, if you can hit a space of watching it, you start seeing that pretty much everything that we cling to, is clung to through the filter of the thought, through thinking through a concept, and in fact, I would venture to say that it's kind of hard to find that we claim to something which is Not a concept. This is a little bit kind of building on what I've talked earlier about, it's you know, where we're focusing on in Buddhism is not so much what the world is, but what our experience of the world is. Those are two different things. And our experience of the world is so much mediated not only by the electrons that go up the optic nerve and things like that, but also by the highway reconstruct this world, how the concepts we form, the thoughts that we make it happen. And it's really a phenomenal thing in quiet meditation, to watch that constructive activity occur. And you can watch the construction of self of me myself in mind, and you say, well, who am I? Who are you really, and then we can have an endless debate about who the true self is true, not self is and, and, and, you know, we might come to blows. This guy said, are these very, you know, things that people are passionate about self and not self and all that But if you if you should relax, everybody take a deep breath and relax. Forget about this teachings of self and not self. Get really calm really still. And watch the arising of a self thought, the rising of a thought, This is who I really am. Oh, just one of the more of those thoughts. I think I'll stay in that quiet place. I don't need that thought. Thank you. Well, who are you? are you killing yourself? who you are? Who are you when you don't tell yourself a story? A thought about who you are? What's the end? If there's no thought that tells you that you need to answer that question. But then.

So these thoughts me myself in mind can be seen as insubstantial as a creation of the mind. And it's possible to see the stickiness the glue that's connected to it, all the fingers saying Come here, all the ways in which we you know, it seems like Important, it's possible to watch that and the impulse to get involved, it's possible to seal that. But it's also possible to stay settled. To say, Sorry, senada, bye bye, I'm not going to pick you up, I see who you are thought, I see you as a thought, you're just a thought. And I don't have to leave my quiet place, my peaceful place in order to engage you. You can do what you do. And then you start realizing how much how completely how much of our experience of ourselves the world is mediated through these concepts and ideas. And then a very, I think a very important thing can happen when you start questioning what these thoughts are, and what our involvement with them is. And more importantly, is there an alternative? Is there a different way of being than clinging attaching to thoughts is a different way of being of clinging to concepts, or pushing the concepts around, you know, if you push a lot of concepts around in your mind, it's a good thing to do. So I like to do it, I do it regularly as well. But you have to also always remember that if you're pushing around rearranging concepts in your mind, a little bit like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. You know, it's, it's, you know, it's nice that it's nicely arranged when it goes down. So seeing the emptiness of thoughts, the insubstantiality of thoughts, leads to seeing the MTS is of such insubstantiality of so much of what makes up human life. It's not to dismiss all those things. In fact, it's possible to be very friendly and warmly engaged in them and creatively engaged and all that. But the idea in Buddhism is not to be tricked by it, and think that's where life is and I have to arrange life that way. And also be more

importantly, is to know there's an alternative. And, and so, thoughts concepts are empty. But the other kind of emptiness that sometimes just talked about, is the mind or awareness, which is empty of clinging, empty of the activity of selfing me myself in mind, empty of delusion, empty of hate, empty of all these things. And it can, it can be very challenging to be up against that possibility of a mind which is freed from this stuff. I know that in my practice, my early years of practice, I came to a place in my practice where I could see the elusive quality of my self clinging and self identity, I could see how I was creating a self identity for myself and how I was trying to play the self game present myself to people certain ways so they would see me a certain way back and this whole self thing, and I could see it was empty in some sense. I was you know, to see, and I knew that I had to let go of it. And I was afraid to I couldn't, was up there against that fear. It took me a while to take that next step, because of the fear there was there. So this emptiness thing can be very frightening for people as well. But it's also offered as the supreme medicine. It's offered as a great medicine, that the understanding See that's understanding but seeing emptiness, you know, understanding the thoughts are insubstantial, that I don't know how useful that might be. But to actually sit be still enough to watch a thought is see it being in substantial arise and pass. That's a whole different thing. So to see the emptiness in our moments, moment experience, to see how substantial it is, and then perhaps be on that edge where it's, Oh, I didn't sign up for this. This is frightening, because, you know, where am I gonna stand now? And so emptiness is a profound practice that takes us to the edge. And

let's see.

So then there's time for another story. And I have to remember memory now so I didn't bring it down.

I'll just make it up to you. So there was a fellow at the monastery. He was really a diligent practitioner, very sincere, really applied himself hard to the meditation to monastic life to the study everything and he made no progress whatsoever. Nothing, nothing, nothing. You didn't let go of any was clinging. He didn't see anything about how he didn't see anything any any insight of self thing. All these great teachings of Buddhism he understood intellectually just didn't make any sense. Then they sit down to meditate and his mind was always distracted and the more he tried to tie yourself in knots, system wasn't working was not a good, pretty picture. The Avatar was a brilliant Abbot tried everything. Every technique reteaching everything to try to help them find his way in this practice. Nothing worked. So finally the Abbott said we only have one option left for you. We take you down to the basement to the red door. Now the red door in the basement was petrified. And the monks, all the monks the monastery when they went by that door, they always walked as far as are away from it Is it good? No one want to get close to it sometimes actually try to avoid going down to the basement at all because that red door and most of the no one really knew what the red door was. Because no one had been in a generation no one had been through the red door. But their habits either knew it from his youth, or the knowledge had been passed on to him and the key to him to test on him. And, and he had instruction this this is the last, you know, for some certain people, certain kinds of person. This is the only hope. So, took him down to the door and he stood outside said to the young monk. There's a simple instruction. You're going to go through this door into this room there and all you have to do is walk to the other side of the room and out the door there. That's the exit. It's only kind of do seems easy enough. The young mongstad what's what why is everyone afraid of this? This room? Why what's the issue so the habit suddenly open the door and push the monkey through and close the door and locked it. And the monk found himself standing on a ledge. There was one foot wide and look down in the room was a huge abyss. And every once in a while these flames would shoot up from the bottom. And these great kind of grinding sounds would come up from the bottom and couldn't even see the bottom, you know. And he stood at this edge, you know, the door was behind him and it was just up against the door and this ledge and this and you remember the instructions. You had to walk to the side and you could see the

other side of the room. It wasn't very big room but you could see the other side there was an exit door to exit. You know the laws now you have to have a you have to have a life on effects I must be mistake so he don't know maybe maybe you know the ledge goes around. He looked around and only went you know, a foot on either side of the door didn't go around, looked up. If a swing across you know, you can jump. No, it's 30 feet, I can't jump 30 feet. There's no running starts. So what they do, so he stood there for a long time and they started banging on the door turn around, see, oh, let me know if this mistake is a mistake. But of course no one heard no one asked the door. So he stood there wondering what was going on. He's there. So the day a couple of days pass could just barely kind of sleep on the edge a little bit, but he thought it's kind of tipping over, he'd wake up and there's no food there. Three, four days. Past instructions was to walk to the side but to the other Exeter but this is a this doesn't make any sense. So after a week of this no one was coming to open the door for me then no one's going to help me the instructions were to walk across the other side so he stood on the edge there, the Abyss and

he put one foot out a little bit tenderly it's crazy you don't step into that this is your fault. So he pulled back to a few more days went by I'll try again to finally say okay there's no other it's hopeless and but you know I'm going to fall over so weak here I'm going to fall over and die anyway, so I might as well follow the instructions I'll take a step towards that exit door. So finally, it took that step into into the abyss. As he did that, the pledge grew out of him and received this word. And then it took him another day before he's willing to take the next step. But as he did that, the ledger grew out and received them. And then he stepped across the ledge, the floor grew up as he did, to the end, he was able to walk out the exits. And what he had learned was he had learned to trust to let go and step into the unknown into that which offers no support. That's where there's no nothing there to hold you up. Nothing there to provide you with the answers nothing there to tell you what's next. And each of us each moment actually, is on that at this moment. Isn't this internet who knows what the next second cause for us Who knows we walk out the store what's going to we're going to find, as we walk out there as we anything. This is our life can be turned upside down the next moment here, we're running a couple miles from San Andreas fault. You know, all kinds of things can happen. Who knows? What's next? So what does it mean to step into the next moment? without holding on to anything? And is that okay to do that safe thing to do? So this experience of emptiness, which is a very profound experience, for founders realization has its frightening aspects as well. Because so much of what we usually support ourselves with and build ourselves up and orient ourselves to the world with it seems since insubstantial, it can feel sometimes as if we're taking that step. And the beautiful thing is that every time you take that step, it's teams that the lead grows to receive you. and nice. But if you believe it's going to do that.

So can you let go? So, we have a few minutes if you'd like to comment or questions about that. Any of those stories or any of this emptiness stuff? Yes. So take the mic, please.

I think

one of the aspects of emptiness teaching is the connection interconnectedness. I sometimes think of it like an ecosystem. Things are always codependent Yes. codependent arising. So an answer to your question. To me, it's not scary if you think of it as just connection, that when you step off the ledge, I'm really into you or to you or to all of us, rather than to some voidness. So that the emptiness isn't a nihilistic or denial of being as an assertion of the connection.

Beautiful. It's a beautiful thing you said. And, and what you said is echoed by many, many spiritual teachers, many Buddhist teachers, so you know, I don't want to, I don't want to pull the rug from under it exactly. But to take off on, take Tesla entry point is a response to take off from the word. codependence which in English nowadays has a little bit of a unfortunate kind of connotations. The, the teachings of

emptiness is often likened or synonymous as dependent co-arising is the person who sees empty and sees dependent co-arising sees how things that rise dependently for whatever sociological reason, here in the modern West, did you have everything interconnected? as seeing as really good thing? And you use the word rather than nail it nail realism, it's an assertion. It's a positive thing. The best reading I could find from the teachings of the Buddha, he understood also how things are dependently arising. For him it wasn't a solution as that was a problem to get liberated from and, and, and a guy talked earlier about the delusion of the separate self, by people not Yeah, see, that's a separate, separate self is elusive, elusive. But the idea of a non separate self as a connected self is also delusion. So is there some alternative to nihilism or a positivist And I think the answer in his teachings as a Buddhist on it is actually a third option or the middle way. And, and it's not it's not to make a positive assertion about interconnectedness. And it's not to make a negative assertion about it. But it's to be free in the midst of it. That makes sense. You want to respond to that or critique that. I was gonna spend the afternoon talking about compassionate connectedness

come to IMC in this.

Yes. Oh, yeah, we could pass this one over.

I just appreciate it. When you said about the that it takes you to the edge. Because I've, in my years of practice, I've had a couple of experiences of what YouTube's been talking about. And I had a psychotic father. So I was fearful that if I let go, I'm that psycho psychosis, psychosis may occur for me if and what happened instead is that despair did arise for me out of one of those experiences and ecstasy out of the other one, and they were both transitory. So, anyway, but I think it's really, I think, at some level, I knew that, but it's I don't know that I've heard somebody state that clearly before. And certainly that's

happened to me. Great. Thank you. And yes, I know plenty of people. I met plenty of people who had similar situation to you where some relative you know, it's had some kind of psychotic break, and so they're afraid meditation to go there because they afraid something that's going to happen to them as well. fears come in enough and, and the experience of emptiness, the deep experience of letting go. It's, you know, sometimes it's better not to have that experience quickly, you know, soon after person started practicing, you know, let's you know some people I want to just, you know, I should be enlightened, you know, quickly, you know, but I think we have to be very respectful of what a powerful thing it is to work with the mind, self identity clinging the concepts we have, and how difficult it is to work with some of these deeper experiences of deeper realizations, unless the soil has been prepared, the ground that is paired for it, and much of Buddhist practice is also preparing the ground for this so that when we, when we finally go in some deeper way, we do it in a in a context that is supports that provides just a lot of well being and rightness for it as opposed to confusion or fear or that disorientation. So things like the precepts are very important. Compassion is very important to cultivating compassion, loving kindness, cultivating mindfulness and self understandings, a whole slew of things that need to be cultivated, rather than rushing. Yes, there's a day today take the mic, please. It's been passed.

Hi, when you describe the feet, stepping out over the Abyss without any support, so I'm just say that this year has been somewhat like that. For me. I'm a special education teacher. And I took a new job.

And

I had a room full of students with issues I had what I perceived as a total lack of support and dealing with it. And it was, it was a very, I saw it, I thought I could, you know, have all these different reactions I

chose to just opened myself. And just to say, Okay, I have this situation, I can either react, you know, like get angry or have all these emotions, or I can just calmly open myself and allow myself to feel compassion for these kids, and to say to myself as myself, What can I do to help these children and by just keeping my focus on that, and believe me, there was some stuff that went down. I could regale you, but I'm going to spare you with all the, you know, stories and so on. But, um,

By simply

keeping that point

I was able to step into the service where I was told I was going to keep control of these kids, which, no way I knew I wasn't going to be able to do that. But even though everybody around me all of my colleagues and superiors and evaluators and all this, are telling me, you know, you're terrible, you're wrong. everything you're doing is completely mistaken and all this kind of thing. Somehow I found the strength in me and I have to give credit to some wonderful friends that I have to James barista whom I mentioned before his awaken joy class. And actually I went to spirit rock meditation. For a day like this with a friend was I was invited

somehow how I was able to find that.

It you know, the letting go this, just relax with it like no matter what people say to you and what, you know, I could feel angry, I could feel sad. I could feel all these things, but that's going to take me off my my point. My point is, what can I do to help these children?

Beautiful, beautiful. So one of the things we've been rely on in emptiness is our intention to be compassionate. And it's beautiful to evoke that. Now as we go through this transition to the afternoon, and I think that we are going to find is that that emptiness leads to compassion comes out of compassion, and becomes support. Compassion comes to support for this place. It's beautiful that you had that experience. And I understand the difficulty of changing jobs. In part as part of the challenge, you're going to submit smoke a small thing to say is that when I was in the Sahara Desert monastery, we'd have a new job almost every three months. And when I was there, I felt that wouldn't at all. Very few people have so many job changes over a lifetime. And what I found was East Job had different challenges for me, and call for different things within me. And so I was challenged in ways in over three years in ways that some people maybe not don't over a lifetime because they always had the same job. So even switching classes or in situations, I think is so valuable just to getting a new environment, new situations, and it seems like you've done really well with it.

After 32 years, I'm retiring in two weeks.

Well, that'll help that'll have its challenges too. new job so so let's take an hour for lunch. The start again, try to start in here at 131 35. And a couple of things. There is out the table or the tables out there, a sign up place to see if you want to be on the spirit rock mailing list. So you can get the kind of spirit rock newsletter, they spew out very nicely newsletter twice a year and their catalogue events and things. So maybe many of you are already on it, but those of you who aren't, it's a nice thing to do. And, and

sorry, I didn't really when you were out of the room. I did those other two things I did. And the other thing is, because, you know, maybe it's lunch break, it's gonna break in at all to tell you how meaningful it is for me personally, to participate in event which is a fundraising for the scholarship fund in spirit

rock. It's profoundly meaningful. And so, maybe at lunchtime, that reflection will also be meaningful for you. So, thank you.