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SPEAKERS

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Good morning. And it's nice to come and sit with you all. It's the custom that in January beginning of every year, I'll give a talk on the Four Noble Truths kind of start the year. The four noble truths are considered the heart of the realization that the Buddha had, that thing that made him awake. So when he was awakened, was to have this deep insight into what he then articulated as the Four Noble Truths. And it's been said that all of Buddhism is in somehow or other comes out of that understanding or is a is an expansion or rewording of these four insights that the Buddha had for interlocking insights. And so the They're called truths, which for some people, puts them off right away because it could seem like a creed you have to believe in. But these are meant to be pragmatic truths that we experience for ourselves truths that are true in their application. So, it's true. I think, generally, that if you clean a wound, the wound heal heals quicker. That's not a, you know, sort of big, philosophical, religious truth. It's just, you know, part of generally what it takes to clean to help a wound heal. So it's that kind of pragmatic aspect that these truths and likely to a wound is. I did because the first noble truth has to do with the wounds the wounds of being a human being. Not the physical wounds, but the kind of deep psychological Spiritual or existential wounds that people encounter. So the first one, the first truth is a truth of suffering. And, and you don't have to look very far in this human world of ours to encounter some form of suffering. There is suffering on the small scale, and they're suffering on large existential scale. So then a couple of weeks was going to be a workshop here on exploring death and dying, you know, that's a place where there can be a lot of suffering. And then there's a truth of what causes that suffering. What causes the wound that people experience they carry with them, and then there's the possibility of the cure possibility of healing that wound in some way. And then there's the cure. The cleaning, cleaning the wound, keeping it covered, putting antibiotics on, sewing it up. Whenever it takes, and this is what the Buddha called the Eightfold Path. So, the first of these the first truth of suffering, explicitly does not say implicitly does not say that life is suffering, but rather say it says that there is suffering in this life of ours. And Buddhists will use the word suffering a lot. And the question is, what does it mean? It's sometimes use so often that we kind of glaze over when we hear the word and one of the meanings and I like it, I like to see that it kind of that in the in the Buddha described what is suffering what is the fourth noble no four first noble truth, he divided into two general categories of suffering. One is the large sufferings he taught a Buddha said that birth is suffering. Aging is suffering, sickness is suffering and dying is suffering and So, if you happen to go through one of those, you'll often many people experience a lot of disruption and disintegration of the structure of their life as they are deeply sick, strong disintegration of their life and the structures of what holds their life together with gives their life meaning and worth falls apart, when some people get sick when they get old, as they're dying. And that, and that disintegration of the different elements that create a hole for what our life is about our community, our sense of connection to others, since a connection to ourselves understanding of who we are in this world, is a very powerful form of suffering for people.

And so that's one whole category of the other category can be seen as both big suffering but also smaller suffering, the Buddha defined as one of the things he said was not getting what you want is suffering for some of us, and, and then there's being separated from what you love from your loved ones or different things, and then being connected or in contact with things you dislike. So, even small children, you know, suffer because they don't get what they want. You know, but you know, some of the adults kind of sometimes will even, you know, not take them so seriously for some of their suffering because it's just, you know, what do you mean, you're upset because you can't get the third candy. But, but this idea of not getting what we want, operates, you know, even some of you coming here today, maybe you didn't get the parking space you're hoping for, or that or this seat in the hall that you're hoping for. And so there's some disruption, some agitation, some frustrations, some annoyance, some sense of loss something goes on there. And then reviewing your life go shoot apparently somebody will do here in a couple of weeks on Saturday the workshop and of your life. Maybe, you know you didn't get to do in your life what you most wanted. Some people followed a course of life that was set in motion by their parents and their society and got registered in schools went to discipline careers, and come to them to life and realize I didn't do what I really wanted. And that's a huge realization to realize that you know, the end of one's life. So to look at this first noble truth is one of the important tasks of Buddhist practice. And it's one of the reasons why some people are delighted by Buddhism, and why some people recoil from it. And the people who are delighted, kind of sometimes you have experienced people, people kind of here The Four Noble Truths for the first time and they say wow someone's finally saying it like it is fraud someone's finally talking about this which I've been to it or felt is going on in our society and my family and me, but everyone else has been denying it everyone else is kind of printing it up and you're trying to say it's gonna be okay or have solutions to it all rather than looking at it directly. The people who recoil or sometimes the people who feel like it's you know, it's kind of depressing to talk about suffering and should at all costs you should avoid looking at it. And you should pretend that it's not there you should have a religious or spiritual or whatever philosophy, which creates a beautiful inspiring vision of what life is it's all pastoral and nice and rainbows everywhere. And, and meditation centers should have pastel colors. And, and we should all kind of play probably play music Sunday morning here. So We could all kind of be distracted from, you know, our suffering. So that's you know, so both both both options go on but the, you know, you know, a very important aspect of Buddhist practice is willingness to stop and look and understand and investigate the nature of our suffering. One of the things I do is I'm involved in a training program for Buddhist chaplains and chaplains are people who visit others. At times when their life is ruptured in dramatic ways. Their life is as they know, it has disintegrator life as they know it has kind of come apart. So the study of the normal structures of their life, the normal age, which they get meaning and connection to themselves and the world around them, no longer works. And it's quite challenging for some people. So, for example, being hospitalized so for some people is quite a challenge, especially if it's a real serious illness and you're there for a long time. And you can't you know, your role as a, as a breadwinner or a family, your role as a certain career, your role as a parent your role, you know, your role in society. No longer is there, you're just there to kind of, you know, sleeping gown that's open in the back. And the you're kind of dignity and worth you know, is I visited a man who's dying on Thursday at the Zen hospice, 95 year old man, and one of the things that he was a little bit upset about was the indignity of having to put on diapers and having the nurses come in and, and, you know, move his private parts around, clean them up.

The Nino is kind of you know, he was kind of upsetting for him to have that happen, the end of his life. This is where it comes to so there's a chaplains look at people in hospitals, you know, sick, seriously sick. Also sometimes in hospice, like I was this last week, people who are dying, which is a big disruption for many people. And some people there's one woman in our training program is doing hospice work for homeless people, goes around with other chaplains, and does protocol kind of chaplaincy spiritual programs for people who are homeless. And that's another dramatic disruption for

many people, many of them. And so it's interesting to look at what chaplains look for when they come in to see a patient or see a homeless person where they're tuning into because they're tuning chaplains are tuning into suffering. And so what what how are they trying to understand suffering or looking at it and there are three some chaplains will look at three primary care in which they will try to understand their suffering, understand suffering. One is from the point of view of a person's value and worth, how a person experiences their own value and sense of worth as a person. The second is how they experience a meaning for their life and what they do. And the third has to do with what issues of reconciliation of forgiveness, what relationships need to be healed, in order to become can become hold again. And so the idea of worth of value is sometimes referred to in chaplaincy world as dignity, that everyone has a sense of dignity or feels that they're worthwhile or worthy, or have value as a human being. And, you know, maybe Some of you feel that automatically easily. But there are plenty of people who don't feel this in our society. Society actually will tell them that you're not really worthwhile. You're not you don't really count in some way you're put aside. And I was struck reading the paper this morning that nine years before I was born, I was born 1954 it was only nine years before I was born that America ended it's it's it was was it called the immigration law for the Chinese Chinese Exclusion law was it held where what the Chinese experience of nine nine Chinese Exclusion Act nine years before I was born, that's pretty recent. Right? And, you know, where people are Chinese origin coming to America, we're not allowed to become citizens. And a little bit touching for me, typically, because I'm an immigrant myself. I wasn't born here I was I came here as an immigrant. And so other people came here and were excluded. And so you know, you don't count you can't really count and be worthy like us, is what that was one of the messages of that. And now we have, you know, all kinds of attempts to in California and around the country to care for, you know, to cut the budgets. And so some of the places are being cut, there are people who are the most underserved people in our society. And for some of those people, I'm sure part of the message they get this Medicare medical gets cut out from them anytime a little bit, is you don't really count you're not really worthwhile, you know. And so their sense of their sense of dignity, your worth, or not really, you know, it's hard to maintain it. And that's because it's just situations. The idea of meaning of value and worth is often connected to being part of a community. So being a community of MB, friends, family, your local neighborhood, your religious group, your church, perhaps there's all kinds of ways people get community. And so is that community so chaplains will go into the hospital say, is that person connected to a community? Or is that that relationship and rep in ruptured because sometimes it gets ruptured in dramatic ways in times of big illness. So if someone's been ill for a long time, after a while, the community starts falling off, falling off and people stopped seeing them. Or maybe they don't have community some people's relationships to community has been ruptured for much much of their life. And that involves a certain degree of pain and suffering. Can people have a sense of part of the sense of worth and value is having a possibility an opportunity to be of service to serve others, to love other people, and is as a person have that opportunity.

So against their windows, major disruptions in people's lives and to be of service it can't really fall through Do that. So, life is suffering, the Buddha said, I mean, he said life is suffering there is suffering in life. And so some of that can come with our sense of lack of sense of that were valuable were important. And how do you restore that for a person? How do you help a person understand that they are a valuable person? How do you how do you impart the person's sense of deep acceptance and love for them. And so a chaplain is one person in the hospital, who's kind of job description is to try to do that. The, you know, the, the surgeon isn't trying to do that necessarily, or the nurses aren't, you know, trying to do that, but, but the chaplain is one of the person who tries to meet a person and, and, and show with their presence, their caring, their kindness, that they are really important. The second area of the chapter looks at is the idea of meaning does it there's a there's a person whose life have meaning there's a stories and what they experience the story illness, does it have stuff does it fit and sits on purpose of some larger scheme or some understanding schema understanding, so that it's not

just seen as being valueless or unimportant or not leading to something that opens up some possibility. And so some people, it's the life of theirs their story of their life, which is very valuable to have someone listened to it's meaningful for some people as they're dying or very sick, to have someone who listens to some of the important stories of their life. Maybe the story is it incomplete or the stories which are still have open wound in them, and actually, to having someone witness a story? There's something about that it's meaningful to someone else to hear and listen. Helps to heal some some wound for some people. And so chaplains do that. They listen to stories, and they listen with attention and care and interest. But also, you know, does it have meaning? Does it have meaning? That you're sick does have meaning that someone you knew died, does it have meaning that you're dying does it have meaning that you lost your job does have meaning that, you know, you, you know had some kind of rupture in your life. And, and you find a lot of people are looking for meaning this means that God, you know, the will of God that puts meaning in it. This means is my past karma is something settles when people have some sense that it fits a pattern or they have an understanding for it.

So the third and then the third thing has to do with reconciliation or forgiveness or how to heal relationships. And it's quite I think, interesting that when people some some people as they're dying, or some people in times of crisis, that it's hard to die unless they've kind of can can can resolve Or bring to a conclusion or finish or say something to some someone else they're in relationship with, they might might have managed for decades to let the kind of be in the back burner and even think it's not so important. But it's interesting what comes up to the forefront of a person's life as they're dying. What's unresolved what needs to be finished? And, and sometimes it's asking forgiveness from someone else saying I'm sorry for something I did. Sometimes it's offering forgiveness and say, you know, I know I forgive you, or, or sometimes just saying that I love you in a way that maybe it's never been said before. Or sometimes it's forgiving oneself because that's the you know, we're the relationship that's ruptured relationship to oneself and one's own sense of value or worth, in some because of what one has done. So how do you forgive oneself? So all these things have to do with places where people's lives are somehow broken or disintegrated or ruptured. And And so how do we understand our suffering? And then how do we address it? Certainly, you could. You know, there are things you can do in the world that you might be if you're successful, people will praise you. And you could get more sense of value and importance. You can get elected as governor of California. And I'm sure that makes you feel like you're important and valuable. But that's probably not gonna happen to most of us. But there's other things you can do, you can you know, things you can do, or a sense of meaning you could take philosophy class, you could read some great spiritual books and kind of pull in their sense of meaning, and adopt it and say, yes, now I have a real sense of meaning. And there are people who really latch on very strongly, to given meaning to kind of borrowed meaning from from religions from other people. I remember when I was at the San Francisco Zen Center in the 70s, there was a teacher there, who was brilliant, and giving us the sense that Zen Buddhism and desempenho Zen center was at the cutting edge of whatever good was going to happen in the world. And, and he would know all these great political figures and the governor of California and he would tell these Dharma talks where you felt like, you know, it, you know, the big change in society was going to happen right here, right there. And we were kind of sharing the meaning in it and felt I felt like very meaningful to be connected. It was so meaningful that I remember when I told my mother that the governor of California would come visit the abbot. She's always okay that you're studying Zen then.

And, and remember how you know that kind of a certain kind of euphoria or mild euphoria, field I feeling kind of this sense of meaning and purpose that you know, these stories He Deva told us about so borrowed meaning. So, then we come to the second noble truth, which from the Buddhist analysis of what's the cause of suffering, where they sat there, and he This is very interesting, because it gives a certain spin or angle from which perspective in which to look at all these other issues or earlier issues I

talked about. And so, for the in short 10, the Buddha said suffering is caused by craving. So, then we look at where is there craving involved in any of these disruption, disruptions, any of these things? So, for example, meaning to take one example, it could seem that meaning is a good thing to have, and people will ask, Well, you know, I'd like to have, you know, what's the meaning of life I'm looking for the meaning of life. I'm looking for the meaning of my life. I'm looking for the meaning in you know what happens to Me, mine employed and I want to you know, it's it's important to me to find meaning in that and value in that. And so what's the meaning of being unemployed? Maybe I need to learn something new, maybe I need to whatever. So in asking us to look at craving Buddhism is incense is asking us to do something, which is to turn around 180 degrees and turn the attention towards what motivates us to want meaning, which is what is the motivation for it, rather than assuming that the search for meaning is worthwhile. And so we look out we look because we're searching we're looking out towards meaning, trying to understand it, we look around and see what motivates that search. What are the emotions that are motivating and what's the anxiety? What's the desires connected to it? What are the beliefs connected to the search for meaning? And so from the point of the second noble truth is there crazy anything connected to that search of meaning? Is there some kind of compulsion? Is there some kind of drive in the search for meaning, which comes from motivations which are best settled for themselves, but better resolved on their own before we search for meaning. So for example, the search for meaning is driven by fear. It's probably better to turn around and resolve the fear than it is to find the meaning. Because if you find meaning, then chances are that the anxiety that prompted you to find it to begin with stays unresolved. The fact that you now know what your life is all about, doesn't necessarily settle the deeper wound the deeper anxiety or emptiness that prompted it to begin with. So the city of turning hundred 8080 degrees around and looking at what is the compulsion, the drive the motivation is part of this looking for craving itself. So, also the sense of dignity and worth is there some kind of compulsion or craving, connected to the search for dignity or sense of value or self worth? There often can be, because as soon as you talk about worth and dignity and self value, it connects to the tremendous complex field of self self definition self identity, ideas we have about who I am in relation to other people. And many times these ideas of identity are unexamined. And so, to simply say, Oh, you should have you should develop a sense of a strong sense of self worth. Is this too simplistic to say without, if you think of self worth as being like, like a coat you put on, maybe you need to understand what coat rack you're putting it on, or what body you're putting it on what belief systems you're putting it on.

So there might be, you might not have grown up in a family, where your parents told you, you know, basically, I think you got the message that only if you succeed in particular areas of life, will you be a worthwhile person. And so, rather than finding your worth through that pursuit, it might be more interesting to turn around 180 degrees and look deeply at what is driving you for that pursuit of success in certain fields. And it might you might go back back back into your psyche to see that at the heart of it, there might be some feeling of, of emptiness anxiety, of, of that stems from maybe an anxiety that your parents had about what six what it means to be successful and not successful, some part of you that's unresolved and empty and rather than then filling it filling that empty with a particular form of external success, what happens if you turn around and heavier handed And your mindfulness book right deeply at the heart of the wound right deeply at the heart of that emptiness or the heart of that anxiety that might be there that prevents you from feeling some kind of sense of worth worth or value in and of yourself. And, and it's so powerful the practice of mindfulness, to sit still and quiet, and to turn around and really sit with what's deep inside and not try to fix it. Not try to fill it, not try to explain it, not try to defend it, but sit down really feeling a deep way and see what happens. And more often than not, if you can do it in a deep mindful way, something shifts and changes by itself inside. And in some kind of peace arises some kind of sense of well being can happen some sense of being whole and complete. Where in many ways you could say the life becomes worthwhile, that valuable break, if you see our value and our worth, independent of having to do something. Because the need the need to find the fight to have had the need to find value is a neediness to find value, a compulsion to find value in

oneself, that itself arises out of some wound. And so to turn around and look at that, in a deep way, is what they call the second noble truth is to see what that might be. Now, the second noble truth says that it's like craving something by craving or clinging or compulsion drivenness driven is means you can't put it down. You can have driven to do something compulsion means you have no choice, but to act or feel or believe certain things. Maybe all of you are good adults and so you have plenty of impulse control. And so you know, you are you able to not physically do things that you shouldn't be doing, but as much as anything else about feeling and thinking, and so our deeper suffering tends to come from how we feel and think and deeper things. So, in some of you can see in meditation, how strong the compulsion is, because it's so hard to let go of your thoughts. So the second noble truth is to look at this at this. Because this compulsion, these cravings is the cause of suffering. And to look at it and understand it deeply enough, and to find a shift and change, a settling, relaxing, letting go within us, so that we're in it we can free ourselves from those compulsions. free ourselves from those cravings. And if you sit really still in quiet enough and go deep enough in yourself, it's remarkable how you can get down to the root of what drives the need. For that value, the need for meaning to be and shift something, so that maybe the need is still there, but our peace and our well being is not dependent on it or to say it a different way. If craving is the cause of suffering, when craving is let go of, then suffering won't arise. The formulation for the Four Noble Truths has no pronouns in the formulation didn't say you are me, I will I suffer. It's my craving. Or it's your suffering, it's your craving, it just says, just says the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, and the truth of the end of suffering.

And one of the meaning implications of this is that if you're able to If a person is able to end craving and all the different ways in which craving or clinging or grasping or compulsion operate, then that person won't cause any more harm any more any one person won't cause any more suffering to themselves, and also to other people. And I think that's one of the really remarkable things about doing this practice is to become the kind of person that there's nothing in you, which is going to cause suffering in the world. Even if you don't want to cost even if you don't believe it, you need to overcome your own suffering. To be a kind of person who doesn't cross off yourself and not an agent that can cause suffering with others. Because suffering has a Genesis in craving, others might suffer because of their craving, that they're not going to suffer because of your craving. And so one of the descriptions of someone who is matured and realized and these four noble truths is that they offer the gift to the world, the gift of harmlessness. And I think that's such a beautiful thing to the gift of harmlessness. So meaning, value and reconciliation are three important areas that you can kind of look at this thing about the first noble truth. For Buddhists, there's tremendous a meaning and purpose in the path and the practice of overcoming freeing ourselves of healing these wounds, healing ourselves of suffering. And so if we come into situations like we're dying, or serious illness or unemployed are all kinds of ways in which our structures of our life falling apart and difficult for us. There's all for Buddhists, there's always there's always meaning right there. Let's look at this. Let's practice with this. Let's investigate deeply in this. To be a Buddhist practitioner means you stop complaining. You know that there's no reason to complain. Because you're willing to take it on and look at it. You know, what, what is what's what's, what is my craving? What's my clinging? What am I attached to? Where's the freedom here? Where's How do I cultivate love in this situation? How do I cultivate compassion? How do I cultivate peace is always something to do, even right up until the time we die. So that gives tremendous meaning. For some people, it also gives tremendous value, to be to be a person who has freed themselves from the need. For self identity, create creates, paradoxically a kind of identity of someone who has tremendous dignity. So much. So that Buddhist tradition such a person is called a noble person. So it's kind of paradox, right? So, Buddhism, I think, you know, is pointing towards, insists that each person has tremendous value in themselves. And that that value can be actualized, that value can be supported, that value can be fully confirmed. Through a very deep, letting go of the forces of fear the forces of hate the forces of greed, clinging, that somehow keep us agitated and keep us unsettled and ourselves,

keep us looking beyond ourselves keeps us feeling that we're not good enough and not and so Then this the third reconciliation or forgiveness, huge, huge part of Buddhist practice has to do but establishing healthy relationships with everyone around us. And, and without that creation, creation of a healthy community healthy relationship, healthy friendships, they probably very difficult to do much work deep work in Buddhist practice. So, from my point of view, Buddhist practice is one of the beautiful vehicles through which a person can experience great value and worth a great meaning for their life. And, and whatever healing needs to happen in our community in our relationships.

So Buddhism teaches there's suffering that causes suffering is crazy. And the good news is that it's possible to end that craving and thereby end that suffering. And since it's not so easy to do that there's a steady, somewhat methodical, careful approach to engage in that process, which is called walking the Eightfold Path. And that's what many of us will try to do this year. May each of you during this coming year, have your disrupted life healed through turning around 180 degrees and looking deeply into your own heart and finding peace and love there. Thank you