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SPEAKERS

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What's been on my mind lately is the topic of ethics, Buddhist ethics. And traditionally, ethics is considered a very important part of Buddhist practice. So much so it's called the foundation for it. though perhaps in Buddhism and classically in India, you wouldn't use the word ethics of course, the English word with a lot of associations here in the West that some of them good, some of them not so good. But ethics has to do with how we behave what we do. And there are perhaps two very large questions that religion sometimes address. One of them is, who are we and the other is What do we do? What are the important things to do in this life of ours?

And

you have trouble hearing or working to Ruby people here, okay. You can't hear as well, Abraham.

So

so the question of what we do, how we live our lives, is the has a lot to do with ethics, or ethics has a lot to do with how we live our lives. And what's the source of ethics, which is a source of guidance for how we live our lives. How do we decide between all the different things As we could make, and then it gets more complicated the issue of ethics, when we it isn't just a matter of what we do as an individual, but how does our actions interface with that of others? How does our actions interface with that of our society? And so once you get into that it gets more complicated. And then quickly it gets political. How do we live in such a way that we live? You know, ethically. And part of what the why I was smoking in my mind is I read this weekend, quote from I think it was a TV interview with President Obama. That was he I guess he was asked about the Occupy Wall Street movement, about three weeks after started and he expressed some understanding and maybe some sympathy for that movement. And he said that,

that,

you know, it's kind understandable that in the biggest public financial crisis since the Great Depression. That said he called it a huge collateral damage that people would like to see some repercussions as repercussions for the people who were responsible for that crisis. And see there's understandable that should be. And then he was asked, Well, why aren't some of these hedge fund managers, why aren't the Lehman Brothers executives, why aren't they taken to court? Where are they prosecuted? And then this is what he said I thought was really interesting. He said, Well, it turned out they didn't do anything illegal. What the but what they did was immoral, immoral and reckless. So that's what the President

said. Now, you know, he's a politician. And so what is how do we I held that, by that that's quite a statement to make that, you know, there's some huge sector, certain individuals in a sector of our society, that clearly being immoral. And so it caused me to look up in the dictionary what morality means, because I don't know. You guys know it means and because, you know, Buddhists, but English, but English speaking Buddhists that I know, very seldomly use the word moral and immoral, it's kind of part of Buddhist English. And so I thought I should look up in the dictionary what is what is this moral morality in morality immoral mean? And the dictionary definition that I read was that morality has to do with right and wrong. And so has to do with behavior and deciding what kind of behavior that based on what's right and wrong. And you know, it's pretty abstract the ideas of right and wrong. But generally what I've seen in Buddhism, Buddhism doesn't evaluate things from right and wrong, we might say things are right and wrong, in a sense, but that's not really the reference point in Buddhism is a reference point. Buddhism isn't for behavior, something else. So the idea of behavior and ethics I think, is close to the heart of everybody has close to I think it has, you know, central issue to what it means to be human being is to have some basis upon which to look at our actions and what we do and how we relate to society. And then we had the report that was in the news. Today, and that, not so new, but it was today that it certainly impacted me reading it, where it said that 16% of people in United States live in poverty. That's 49 billion people said, and there was some quibbling about whether it's 16% or 15.3%, or something. But that's pretty impressive. And they define poverty as a family of four that lives with less than \$24,000 a year. That's phenomenal 16% of the country. And so, you know, how do we live hot so how do we as individuals live in as members of society where that's, you know, what's going on in this society? Are we not Are we just simply not responsible? You know, it's not my problem. You know, I have a job and I have, you know, a house and you know, they should get a job or so the government should think about it. The hedge fund managers to think about you so much to think about, if not, you know, that my problem or is it our problem? So apart also the only threads that went into my mind for this thing, my thoughts today and one of them was marna, who's sitting here, I hope it's okay to point out her. So marna probably those of you see her here, you know, she doesn't strike you as being you know, particularly young, older than me, I think. She doesn't look like this wild, hairy person who lives in tents, on claws as an Oakland and you know, running around with and, you know, she's a very dignified probably a grandmother, aren't you? dignified grandmother. And I happened to walk by one of the Occupy demonstrations a few weeks ago, and there was marna with a sign that said something like, what did it say your sign say?

So we have enough resources for everything when you have enough resources for everyone if we shared it. And this has been a common theme that I've been hearing for decades, it's some people will speak up and say we have enough resources to share everybody share if we all shared and so, rather than Occupy Wall Street, it should be apple pie for everyone that everyone should be should be shared. And so that was kind of struck me and I here was, you know, one of our members of IMC and here we have this big thing going on with the occupy movement. Also a big thing going on with the tea party. Both of them are really new phenomena. One is like, what, two years old and occupy is less than two months old. So already making a big impression. And then it points to this, you know, to talk about the Tea Party and the and the Occupy Wall Street movement, you talk about a huge divide in our country. And so what do we do with this huge divide? And, you know, is it possible to explain rationally? what is right and wrong, explain, you know, what should happen, what shouldn't happen. There was a study I read recently, they did a survey of the central core values of liberals and conservatives. And they both, you know, have beautiful values that they kind of organize themselves around, but it just happened to be different values. So, in survey, they tend to find that Liberty The values are at the highest score highest and their list of valuable, valuable, valuable values is fairness and caring. Whereas for conservatives apparently the highest one has highest value, the values of loyalty, respect and purity. So, in the researchers who found this out, but kind of in theorizing, why this might be the difference,

and the theory was that has to do with location, the communities in which they lived, and that somehow the nature of different communities tends to produce different kinds of ethics different kinds of values that people want to live by. And the theory was that is that these kind of values of loyalty, respect and purity tend to arise in communities that are close knit, and heterogeneous. And that communities that are much more that mean close knit than homogenous and homogenous, whereas the value values of caring and fairness tend to arise and communities and wider genius, more mixed and diverse. And so they pointed out that's a little bit like, you know, the East Coast, West Coast, especially the big port cities tend to be where they tend to be quite much more liberal places with a lot of immigrants who came tend to be a more liberal, whereas places were much more homogeneously. Here's name, obviously white, tend to have other values. And you see that across the world that the cultures that have very close knit community values, have certain kinds of sets of values come with that. Some of them and some of us can't, can't understand here from the west. So how do we speak you know, how do we do we use these values as the reference point for how we act in the world. And then we go out into acting the world angrily demanding or angry, upset, you know that should be different? Or how do we how do we create change for society highway? Should we be agents of change? Or should we be agents of

you know, are not the agents of change? Should we just sit quietly and meditate in the privacy of our homes in IMC and you know, not worry about anything else? Or should we be out there on the streets in one way or the other? Throwing tea overboard, raising tense, what should it be? And, and then questioning over here where the Buddha center so what's the role of Buddhism what what is Buddhism has to teach us what values what direction is Buddhism good, and I think that has to be a little bit topic of my talk. Otherwise, I don't think I have any business talking about any of this And also what does Buddhism have to offer? My first Buddhist teacher has said something that made a big impression on me. He said, Gandhi. Now Buddha, Buddha taught the value of sitting. Gandhi thought that was important to choose where you sat. Because if you sit in the privacy of your own home, that's very different than if you sit on the Plaza in Oakland. And I was kind of delighted to see last week there photograph in the newspaper of Buddhists protests at the Occupy, you know, Oakland protests, and they were sitting meditating, very different than the image of the protesters who were breaking doors, spraying graffiti and things. And I like that I like you know, that's a that's an Nice way of speaking up, speaking up by sitting down publicly. And then I was thinking about, you know, Gandhi's a big reference point for me. And when I saw when I when I read also that there are these merchants in Oakland and New York City who are around the plazas where the Occupy movements are, who are now struggling financially because there's no business. I thought about Gandhi and I think Gandhi would never have done that. Gandhi would have been very careful not to cause any harm to anybody. And I'm very happy to say that I'm pretty confident that marnus demonstration did not cause any harm to any of the local merchants at all. And but the fact that Gandhi would think Gandhi would, you know, has had this big thing that he was trying to do, but his concern was always how how to do it in a way that wasn't gonna cause any harm? How do we do it so that our anger or upset, doesn't harm anybody? Or doesn't get the upper hand? How do we how do we consider what doesn't harm? And this I think is what we get back to Buddhism, with Buddhist ethics is based on Buddhist ethics is not based on, you know, abstract principles and right and wrong, but rather, it tends to be based on what causes harm and what brings through alleviation of harm, what brings harm and what brings benefit to people? What brings suffering, we're still deviation of suffering, what brings happiness. So, maybe those are also a little bit abstract. But suffering is not too obstructive, you're suffering. Happiness name is a little bit harder to define benefits a little bit hard to define. But it's a little bit you know, I think it's less less abstract than right and wrong. And so the Buddhists Analysis tends to be, you know, where's the benefit? Where's the Where's what's beneficial, what's helpful. And so Buddhist ethics is based on these notions of helpfulness, what's helpful and what's not helpful, what's beneficial and what's not beneficial. And, and that tends to

be situational. You can look at each situation and see. And then, more interestingly, I think, is that when the Buddha talked about ethics, or let's say, when he talked about wisdom, he defined wisdom, as or a wise person, as someone who considered the benefit of oneself, the benefit of others, and the benefit of both self and others. A wise person avoids harming self, harming others and harming both self and others. And this is a very interesting definition of wisdom. It's not so abstract. Sometimes people want to have wisdom as being something You know, only if you have a PhD in Stanford, maybe you're you're wise, but you know, knowing what's beneficial, what's not beneficial, you know what's harmful or not harmful. That doesn't take you often take, you know, a PhD in philosophy, it just, you know, hopefully there's some inkling evaluate ourselves. And then you come to meditation.

What's in Asia, in Buddhist Asia, in Southeast Asia. It's very common there for the Buddhist teachers there to insist that the entryway the first step into Buddhism Buddhist practice is through ethics, through living an ethical life living by the precepts. Practicing loving kindness, practicing generosity, being ethical. And that's the kind of required beginning. And I remember many years ago, there was a woman from Taiwan, a Buddhist practitioner who came to him America. And she she left her law career that she had here and went to study Buddhism. And, and she took a class I was teaching and she was completely committed to going to make her life about Buddhism, studying Buddhism. And so I asked her if she had a Buddhist teacher and she's, oh yeah, the Buddhist teacher. And I said, Do you meditate? And she said, No, not yet. I'm preparing myself for that. And I was so inspired by that, that, you know, most people I know here in the West, these convert Buddhist, you know, they want to go through the meditation first. But she had so much respect for meditation and what it takes to meditate she was preparing the ground for that with her behavior, ethics or studies or whatever, I thought that was quite nice. So in Asia, that tendency has been that you know, ethics you start with ethics in here in the west for the last 50 As Westerners have gotten involved in Buddhism, most Westerners have gotten involved in meditation first. And so people say they have it upside down to be ethics first and then meditation. But I think the door for a lot of Westerners is meditation. It's partly because we want to see benefits right away. And partly because the idea of ethics is a little bit complicated to say the least. And sometimes a little bit hesitant. You know, if I did a, right I do, you know, I do a popular six week introduction to meditation class here at IMC. And, you know, we last year as we've been getting 100 people come each time, but I'm pretty confident if I offered a five week class on ethics. You know, there might be three or four people wouldn't be as popular, I guess. And so meditation is kind of the door it's it's practical. It's personal, it's immediate, the results more or less. But then then then the thing that usually happens is if a person meditates for quite a while enough, it's enough changes their heart, it changes their sensibilities, it changes their sensitivity, their awareness. And that change also changes their ethics. And so what tends to happen is that people become interested in ethics, and Buddhist ethics, after meditating for a while. So it comes in the wake of meditation, rather than meditation coming at the after wake of ethics. And so then the interesting question is, how is it that meditation affects our ethics or ethical behavior? How are we changed by it? And as you know, those of you who haven't been changed yet you want to be changed this way. And how does it change us for the better so that we are inspired to live more ethically, both in No locally is for the one on one encounters. We have other people, but also and it can have wider scale in our society. What is it about meditation that might make a person more ethical? What is it about meditation that might inspire a person to begin? Not because they've been told to? Rather than being being told that should be ethical? What is it about meditation that encourages a person to be ethical? Rather than being told you should? You should think about others and think about what's beneficial for them and avoiding harm and harming them. What is it about meditation that prompts or encourages person to begin seeing that way or considering things that way on their own? So what is it? So that's my question for you. So I'd like to hear what you think. So if he gives you the mic,

I think for me it was

to see the whole, like, meaning I could, I was able to see the effect of my action, like, on everything in everyone, or time. And I was able to see kind of what yielded something positive for me and what yielded something negative. So I was able to see the ripples. And so something about meditation helped you to see over time, the whole picture and the consequences of how you lived. And before you meditated, you didn't see that. I think before I meditated, yeah, a lot of stuff. A lot of things were happening very automatic. And I think I was losing sight of it. So I wasn't just aware of these implications,

the beautiful and any any sense of what was about what what happened in meditation that gave you this more holistic vision.

I think any impurity with I had against anyone in any form like it reflected in my body, like I could feel. My breath changed my body change in very subtle and subtle ways. It was very, when I said it was the volume was turned on a lot whenever this impurity happened, because I think we tend to recall those memories of impurities as they arise, because I don't think like if want to express anger or lust, like it stays in the body for for a

long, long time. So part of what meditation did for you there was a heightened sensitivity to your body and the consequences there. And as you saw the consequences in yourself, you became then also more aware of the consequences outside of you and others.

Yes, yes. And mean completely. be selfish it was for me. You know, it was best for me not to do that, because my body was undergoing a lot of stress.

So so if you were going to be really selfish, really well, then you don't want to be selfish. So yes, thank you.

I think for me, it was an opening of the heart in a way that cause me to feel more compassion for others and myself. And

I think you couldn't not care more when you're in that space more of the time, you know, at least an

opening of the heart to heightened sensitivity in your heart. And so how could you not have more compassion or care that that sensitivity is there? Right? Okay. Thank you.

That's it. An interesting question. Um, it seems to me intuitively that it could be twofold on the one hand, the respect and the self care and the love that I was offering to myself by engaging in the practice helped me to transfer that love and respect, I think to others. On the other hand, when I was in deep pain and suffering, and I could find some way of dealing with that suffering, I develop compassion for myself and then if I see other beings that are suffering, then I can't help but want to offer them the same compassion.

Beautiful, it only makes sense so your heightened sensitivity to your own suffering, helped you feel compassion for others and bringing bringing and developing sight and sensitive bringing attention to yourself in a loving, respectful way caring for yourself this way, then also translated to wanting to do the same for others. Beautiful, thank you.

For me

doing

meditation changes my behavior by having

stuff not matter.

I don't know that I become more compassionate or anything I think maybe that's true but

or maybe that's there, but it's almost like

It becomes obvious that everything that seems to have weight or importance just really isn't.

And so it's more of a letting go.

So that's great. And many people have some experience like that, but as long as you keep it, so as that happens, do you find that new things become more important than they than they had been before? Everything lessens in importance.

No, not.

Other stuff comes in. I mean, it's it. I don't stay in that meditative space. But it reminds me Like you were saying last week or maybe some other time, that it's an openness. And so it's more just open.

And then from that openness, when you walk out into the world with that openness, how does that affect your ethical evaluation, new ethical choices? Are you more ethical or you're less ethical or indifferent?

It isn't so much indifferent. It's more just accepting.

And how is that beneficial ethically?

I don't know.

That's just what happens. Yeah,

it's beautiful. Thank you. For here, Martin. I know.

I guess I was thinking that when you meditate when I meditate I commit to just stop. And the stopping means stopping thinking and activity or whatever that is more mundane. I commit to sit and stuff and pay attention. And as other people have said, what I'm paying attention to is what the what's in the heart, which is what I'm normally overlooking, because I'm too busy with all this stuff. And so you sit and you suddenly pay attention to what your heart is feeling and that hurt is something that seems to have an ability on its own to just know the ethics because if you're doing if you're not acting in accord with what your heart is perceiving but you're not paying attention to, you don't feel good in there. And so it's not that you really need to think you just least for me, it seems like I just need to feel that something

doesn't feel in alignment. And the point of sitting is to realize that you don't feel right about how you've been living or you've been doing something and then I think the ethics comes from that recognition that you need to get in alignment with what would be I suppose what you what is good with for other people in yourself.

Beautiful. So the again, the heart becomes the reference point for this.

Yes, I think for me, it's about slowing down. It's about removing myself from The pace of the world and the inconsequential mood and, and pace of of, it's almost like a madness of the world that that continues to drive forward where when I meditate I can slow down and become more in the moment and feel the consequences of or feel feel that feel how I am acting at the moment and feel that the consequences of my behavior can be more I can be more at ease with it and more felt rather than being caught up in the whole pace of, of the world. I think what you were saying about President Obama where he compared the ethics With the morality and, and there was a sort of a disconnect there. When I meditate I want to be disconnected

from the rash

consequences of our sense of the of the world and just be in tune with my own personal feelings of how I should act.

And then if you and then there's a different kind of connection to the world then

Exactly. And I view the world through my own filter rather than the news or at the just just the, the outside world more through my own filter.

So meditation helps you slow down so you no longer living through the filters, the ideas, the concepts, their societies kind of pouring down on You politicians and everyone. And then and then you become your own kind of teacher your own guidance from something inside that you trust that's meaningful for you, I think sensitivity and

yes, I think that that's one thing eautiful Thank you.

Looking at my craving and aversion during meditation going out into the real world, I see looking at those effects my ethics outside.

Hmm. So begin by looking at your cravings and meditation. What is what do you learn there that affects what you do outside of meditation.

I say, according to I guess how it affects ethics. When I'm wanting something, I am more in tune with how it affects myself and other people in the same time.

Great. Thank you. Give it to her. She can see what she says.

I'm

I guess I would resonate with a lot that's already been said. The slowing down allows me to see what's actually happening. actually seeing what's happening, and meeting the suffering allows the compassion to arise and allowing the compassion to arise

as care and

I guess it affects my behaviors and actions.

Great. Thank you. And then wonder about the bobby Do you want to say something Bobby? She listening? No. Oh, well, Bobby, do you want to say something? Yeah. Wait for your various for the mic.

One of the one of the few elders in the group, huh?

No, it's it's been a long I've been I've been around for a long time and through a lot of trouble Warren through you know, when I think today what you young people sure under 30 you're young, or you're no if you're under 50 you're young. But I think you even in many ways need more of this understanding. Because I think what Derek and I've come through, and the kind of wars and, and disasters we've faced and the losses of people close to us, and young people too. That's an awfully harsh way to have to look at life and say, What is it all about? So it did early, get us to look at what is it? What is it that's really a value?

Beautiful and what and how is the time? How does meditation help? You

just connected to prayer or what I learned a prayer early on. And it is in, in some set religions that you can use or use as meditation that silence is a part of the of the religious gets mixed up a lot with music and singing and activity but basically the churches I've found that have been responsive to the need of the people to have that security in at least one place and the one place where people are gathering willfully.

Beautiful. Thank you. So they also points out to this idea that I wonder to what degree for, you know, for Buddhist meditators, who once agreed, meditating together as a group also affects your ethics. And whether your ethics are different, whether you meditate alone, or whether you feel connected to a community. And so for many people, it's just you know, a spiritual community is very important. And how does that affects ethics and then how we behave out in the world. So someone else can have maybe Abraham, remember he moved that? This one over there. There it goes. Thank you.

So far, a lot of this resonates with me but I guess a couple things came up one in which that when I'm meditating and trying to be just with my breath, and in my own moment, I noticed a lot about where my mind was. wants to go, which is I cling a lot to things and the cleaning.

I guess noticing that, and knowing

I guess what I want to talk about is like intention, like if I'm clinging to something itself involved, and it's usually intended to, for me to have a desire or something that I want and if I in meditation notice it and can do something about it and reach into my heart and really know what I should be doing. to lessen my suffering, and also others because I don't treat people all that well all the time. If you notice that you're actually your intentions wrong, then you're going to actually be more ethical and in the future, act differently as a meditation helps you do that.

Yeah. So it sounds like meditation isn't always pleasant or, you

know, it's interesting to see where my mind goes, you know, but it's worthwhile, it's worthwhile because in the long run it I take it out of meditation and I still see it for what it is and can do something about it instead of just living with it, because that's what doesn't cause

joy all the time. That's wonderful. Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Maybe one or two more before we end the evening. Over here, okay, there should be Where's the other mic now? Or you pass that over to the corner there and the lady there by the window and then

chill. So what I felt it's funny I use I went to this group on Sundays for a while I was kind of down in Santa Cruz a lot and it's just kind of gospel, new age group. It's incredible group and one of the songs I'd sing, just a lot would be, nobody can take my joy away from me. And they'd sing it was just an amazing Just sometimes hundreds of people together and it was a real popular song there. And what I've gotten from meditation, especially, I guess the last few years because I've been a little bit more disciplined about it, is that I have this kind of an inner joy that just kind of this hum and a lightness that's there. And when I get these negative thoughts, which I sense that if I kind of move those too much, or that becomes too powerful, it would probably affect my behavior out there. It's that joy kind of keeps it at bay. It's almost like this power that's just kind of, Oh, those thoughts just less than they don't have the,

the momentum

and those thoughts will probably just ease up what I'm kind of doing and how I'm being in the world.

Beautiful. so wonderful. So you have the you have this capacity of having bad thoughts, negative thoughts? And you have occasionally and No. And, but somehow that meditation the joy that you feel in meditation keeps us from getting the upper hand for you. Yes. And so your behavior is better because of that. Thank you. So last one here.

I recently watched the movie, Good Will Hunting. For those in the audience who haven't seen that movie, it's with Matt Damon and Robin Williams. And Liam Nelson look alike character. I'm not quite sure what his name is. But there's a scene in the movie where Robin Williams and the Liam like character are sitting in a bar and they're discussing the care of their patient who is Matt Damon and Robin Williams sort of plays this scruffy unsung hero type of character the Liam Neeson like character plays the sort of egotistical world famous mathematician. And at one point, Robin Williams assumes that man Nelson it look like is is really out for himself in trying to help the Matt Damon character and Aleem Nelson characters really upset by this and he uses this example of which is this, that there was this, this Indian boy who lived in a very rural village in India. And at some point he had gotten his hands on a very simple mathematics book. And from that text which may or might not have gone beyond arithmetic, he was able to extrapolate Pythagorean theorem and, you know, all sorts of mathematics without necessarily being taught the mathematics directly. And I was really struck by that because I thought, well, how the heck is that possible? And your conversation tonight, reconnected me with that and made me think well, maybe that was all coming from his heart. And so I personally, am not mathematically inclined, and I probably don't have skills beyond arithmetic. But my intention in meditation is to connect with the depths of what is in my heart. And I know that my intention is to connect with other people regardless of who they are, where they come from. And so even though I'm in my own little world, with my this analogy with just my little mathematics textbook, I hope that by studying that, my heart can open to the point where maybe I can understand so much more beyond

what's in front of me and maybe That ultimately allows me to connect with all sorts of people in this gigantic world,

beautiful, wonderful, the, you know, there, there are various geniuses in the world and I tend to believe that if we meditate, we become ethical geniuses. We all have the capacity for that. And so my hope is that Buddhism Buddhist people practice Buddhism, there is no Buddhism but the people who practice Buddhism, that there are certainly a force for the benefit of society in our world, make a difference for the world. I hope that we are in some ways that we are an activist is the right word, but active in trying to improve the lives of all people everywhere, not just our own. At some power, we live for the benefit of others, the world's a better place because we were here And I hope that as we go out and try to be beneficial in the world, that task of Buddhists or Buddhist practitioners, is to try to figure out how to do it without harming anyone at all. And I like to think trying to put it that somehow Buddhists or trite Buddhism, people are Buddhists. Try not to take sides too much, but try to find the Midway or the or the third way, or the way that we're what we all share.

And, and

I would love you know, I'd love it if Buddhism had a role as a mediator and conflicts rather than as people who take sides. But that's my thing. So But anyway, so I hope that some of you, all of you, I think all of you are involved in some meditation you came here meditated today, that you will give some deeper thought and reflection to what they can of meditation is to ethics. What's the connection between meditation and your behavior in the world? And what's the connection between meditation and living living in such a way that your life is for the betterment of yourself and better betterment of the world? And this is a very interesting topic. And you see here today many different responses. So there's not like one right answer when rec response. It's an interesting topic to also talk to other friends with if you know other people who meditate or do something comparable to explore the excuse to explore it with them as well and discuss it with them. So thank you very much, and be well