And so it's kind of impactful for me to hear that this man, George, who I know is disappeared this way. And it adds to two other I guess phone calls I received today about one person who's dying and also part of our community or maybe close to dying or something like that. And maybe should be in hospice. Maybe he needs help, but maybe not. And somebody else who also apparently I don't remember that didn't recognize the name but someone else who apparently comes to hear, called from a hospital asking for support and help. And so in terms of the topic for the talk tonight, Maybe it's kind of a nice, a nice it may not word word but appropriate introduction. Because there are times to take time to time when something occurs where we feel the preciousness of people and the preciousness of life. And we somehow identify more strongly with people's circumstances. And, and it's usually does something to our hearts to us. Sometimes it makes us feel alarmed and afraid or angry or something. And sometimes it opens us to compassion and caring for each other. And it's one of you know, and held the right way or they're held a certain way is one of the things that helps us feel that our common humanity and our common caring for each other. And as I understand the way that Buddhist practice unfolds through my practice, As unfold folded, is that it's really inseparable from my connection to the people around me. And the practice I've done is helped me appreciate more and more the depth of preciousness and that connection, the pressures of people, the value of life. And, and something about the nature of how it is that for me at times where I lose that connection, and don't feel it, and how I could feel disconnected from others and more importantly, disconnected from the caring for others and compassion and feeling the pressure, this new love for people. And I think that one of the opportunities and possibilities of a practice like this is not just you know, to get calm or to feel some more peaceful and resolve about our own issues, but rather to help live a life that we're Living a life. For the welfare of all beings, we feel connected to all beings, we feel the importance of all beings. And so the topic for the talk was to talk about right action. And because on Monday nights, I'm giving a series of talks now on the Eightfold Path. And now the Today's topic is called right action, which seems a little bit maybe a little abstract, you know, right action could include almost anything, but what it specifically refers to is the right action is that action, right here means appropriate or helpful, or why's that action, which in our relationships to other people, which is compassionate, and supports the welfare and well being of all beings and all being including ourselves. And so that's kind of, you know, that's kind of how it's understood the basic element of right action, but it's part The eightfold path. An eightfold path is more of the path of practice that leads to liberation leads to profound peace. And so what I think very significant is the way that these two are, are closely connected, that are caring for others, our compassionate connection to others are concerned for the welfare of all is inseparable from our own walking the path and becoming free. That it's not one or the other. It's not that you can put aside your care for other people and then expect to become free yourself. In fact, if we are selfishly involved in the practice, it's all about for me, that that goes to diametrically opposed to the very movement of the heart, that liberation and freedom is about and that so right action, as part of the path is usually described as three kinds of action are
actually sexually defined in the negative mostly, and that is avoiding killing or harming other living beings, avoiding taking what's not given and avoiding misusing sexuality. So those three things are they're kind of the key things.

These are kind of like the big three, for our social relationships. These kind of these three things cause a tremendous amount of harm in the world. You just have to read the newspapers to get a sense of that. And, and I might, you know, three phone calls did in three things today of people in distress. And it's, you know, I've met so many people as a teacher and heard their stories and what goes on with them that I'm pretty confident the right word, but I kind of confidently assume that a big percentage of you here today have had horrible things happen to you really great difficulties that happen to you. And probably they happen because someone was not doing one of those was doing Want to you know, was doing one of those things were involved in actively harming? I guess you haven't been killed yet. But But you know, you've been probably we've been harmed or hurt physical ways has been people have taken from you what's not given in some way. And people have probably been involved with some sexual misconduct. Or maybe you have been involved in such a way that someone was deeply, deeply hurt by this. The level of number of people in our society who've been raped are quite dramatic. And it's not just women. I have a good friend who, when he was 18, he was raped. And he said that when it happened, he knew at that moment, his life had been changed forever. And so many people like that. And so to remember that this is part of our life. This is these kinds of things. I don't think that would have spirituality. is meant to just put a pretty face on life and just assume that everything is beautiful and wonderful and if we can just kind of meditate and live from the cloud of loving kindness and peace and you know, just everything should be you know, just just a delight I think that we would be a poor people because of that, if that's all it was about, I think that the depth of who we are wouldn't be accessed accessed or give expression. And so the fullness of who we are. And so one of the words is connected to ethics, or just right action is integrity. And I think I think integrity is such a beautiful word. I don't know if other people feel that way. It's more much more beautiful word than ethics, which should be a beautiful word. But you know, I don't get you know, automatically excited by ethics. And when I was younger, I you know, A teenager and such. You know, I had no interest in being ethical. You know, it wasn't that I was unethical at all, I was a pretty ethical person. But so it wasn't like I was problems with ethics exactly in the conventional understanding of it, of, you know, being ethical. But when people talked about being ethical, I would shut down or think that was kind of silly, or kind of, puritanical or something. It just wasn't, it wasn't kind of a concept that, you know, that was attractive to a hippie, like me. And so, the word integrity I think, is beautiful, maybe because, you know, it comes from the word in one, you know, to be one to be whole to be interval. And so this beautiful capacity we have to become whole, to heal the ways in which we're divided heal the ways we're fragmented. Many people are free. divided against themselves, you know that there are people who are at war with different parts of themselves, they have parts that they don't like, they feel are wrong they feel ashamed of. And so they attack it, they push it away, they argue with it, they try to recoil from it. It's quite something the inner war, inner war that some people feel.

And you know, I think anytime that we're unethical, we're divided from ourselves because we can't be there's not integrity that we're not a hole. Anytime that we are selfish, oddly enough, you think someone who's selfish all about myself, you know that maybe you're humble, it's all about you. But there's this odd paradox that the more selfish you are, the less hole you are less complete you can be. And so to become complete, is to have a capacity, part of one's was to feel and have empathy for the wider world and to recognize what's all happening there, what's going on in the world and to meet it and be willing to meet it to hear it And I think it's a beautiful thing. So, someone told me a story of being on retreat. And he was maybe he came into the retreat, a little retreat all meditation hall maybe a little bit before everybody else or some other people and I guess he was looking and watching what people are doing
or something but you notice this woman near him came to take her seat, and there was a pile in a little
pile, little pile of meditation cushions, kind of, you know, window box kind of place that you know
seemed pretty clear to him. They were not claimed it was part of the retreat center. They had extra
 cushions and stuff and but they were in a place wasn't they weren't usually after she went over there
and took a cushion. To watch her go take a cushion, bring it back to her seat and sit down. And then he
watched her get up and return the cushion and then go out to the place with this retreat center. Had
cushions, you know, like big pile of cushions in their shelves that you know, you can, you can, you
know, everybody was clearly offered to everyone everyone could take. And then she took one of those
and came back with that. And he was so impressed by that integrity, the fact it wasn't obvious to her
that the ones in the window sill were freely given where, you know, there they might have been
someone else. And so she had so I guess she had some doubts. And so he went and returned it.
And, and so that's beautiful. I think it's beautiful to have that kind of care and sensitivity. But it was also
beautiful, was the man who saw it was was moved by that. That that was really meaningful to me, wow,
someone who have that kind of care with their integrity with their ethics and not to cause harm or not to
take what's not given. And so I don't know if it's similar, but this story was very meaningful for me. The
first time I did have a passionate retreat, one of these kinds of retreats that we do was a very long
retreat comparatively, it was, you know, 10 weeks long. And that's long enough to get your ethics in
order. Somewhat. It's very hard to do this kind of practice here without getting your ethics in order. So
you should be warned about that. So if you have no but no interest whatsoever in being ethical, and
you're kind of opposed to the very idea of becoming an ethical person, this probably this practice is
probably not for you. Because it probably is, you know, going to undermine your, your wish to be
unethical. And but it but especially if you go on a long retreat, I mean, that'll really do it in your wish to
be unethical, because the longer you sit on retreat, the more you face yourself, the more you become
integral where you become whole, the more you know, you just can't it's not possible. You know, in
retreat when you say it's not possible to keep the divisions, the fragmentation to hold things at bay, it's
not possible to stay selfish. And so, you know, kind of opens up and opens up. And so I was sitting this
long retreat, and I don't know I wasn't, I don't know how long I'd been sitting there six weeks or
something. And, and I remembered that this woman who just before the retreat that I had lust for, and,
and so I was thinking about her, and I just couldn't generate any lust. And what I felt and said instead
was this kind of beautiful clarity and maybe I don't know, impurity also is, you know, hippies sometimes
didn't like pure, you know, like me didn't care for it too much the word but kind of purity of heart, a purity
of the mind, cleanliness, a clarity. And I certainly I valued this woman, I thought she was wonderful, and
I appreciate her, you know, just as much as I had before. But there was something about the lust that I
had for her. That just didn't seem right anymore. Just like, you know, just why would I pick that up? I
want to get involved in that. When there was this beautiful state of mind in a heart there that felt much
more open and had a much greater sense of integrity there. And you know, it just was obvious in that
state. No, of course, I wouldn't act on that, of course, I wouldn't even want to have those feelings,
because of the contrast between how good I felt.

Now, you know, if I had not gone to retreat, and instead they have distressed out life and running
around doing a lot of things being stressed out. Lust might have felt like a relief. And, you know, why
should I give up? My last isn't better things, always pleasure, and I'm having a hard time and it seems
good and, you know, whatever. You know, it's difficult in moments of stress or preoccupation. And we
we don't have this integrity. It's sometimes easy not, you know, to to operate on intentions. then other
times when we feel more settled and integral that we wouldn't act on. So this is not a you know,
puritanical thing. It's not a rule based thing. It's not saying you know, don't have don't act don't we don't
have less. That's if lust is a bad thing. And no one was telling me that it was an internal shift. feeling a
sense of how I felt how I experienced myself, I experienced this life that shifted for me. And that's what
told me, this is I don't want to do this kind of activity doesn't feel right anymore. So this Enter. And so
that really surprised me at the time. And I was so surprised by in this, it wasn't just with the lust, it was just ethical behavior in general, that I just felt coming out of this long retreat, this tremendous sense of ethical purity or clear intention that I had during that retreat. I wish I could tell you that it just continued beautifully after the retreat. And, you know, just that was set for free No. But you know it you know, that the effects of retreat kind of wear off and, or to say it differently, maybe a nicer way, the sense of intimacy and connectedness and subtleness that supports ethical life is kind of faded away after the retreat. And so it took While to breath to build again, for me the so right action or right to ethical behavior is an important part of this practice the Eightfold Path. And it's, as I said, it's defined by not killing, not stealing, and not engaging in sexual misconduct. And some people protest, you know, this is just negative, you know, this is negative spirituality, negative rules, just what you shouldn't do. And they want something inspiring. And so I've known people who've tried to reward these kinds of teachings to be positive. And they said, Well, I don't want to I don't want to live but I don't want to be negative. So I'm not going to live by this idea of not killing, I'm going to be going to living compassionately, or I don't care this thing about not taking was not given I'm going to live generously. That's what I'm going to live and but it's not so clear. What it means to be compassionate? It's good that you know, you know, it's exactly I mean, the behavior of compassion is not so clear that behavior generosity is not so clear what it should be. But it's pretty clear the behavior of not killing, you know, you kind of generally, you know, if you, you know, whether your cause you know, you're intending harm or not, don't intend harm. You know, if you're taking something it's not giving, you know, if you're stealing Generally, if you don't know you're stealing, you're technically wouldn't be stealing in the Buddhist because you have to know and have intention to steal. And so it's kind of clear, clear guidelines for what it is. And so, so, you know, it's a clarity of it. And we live in a phenomenally better world. If those three things were live by not killing, not stealing, and no sexual misconduct. I mean, we would the world would just be a totally different place of that. It's a pretty because of the tremendous impact that would have on this world. They're really profound. Things that we shouldn't overlook the value of it. And all what they have all three have in common with Buddhist ethics, I think is the fundamental principle for Buddhist ethics is don't cause harm. And so as you as we don't cause harm is not meant to be a rule. You know, like, you know, Thou shalt not cause harm, but it's really meant as in Buddhism, I think, as a mirror as a pointer to a capacity inside ourselves to be integral to be whole, to be settled, to be in touch with you know, inner purity or Buddha nature or empathy or wholeness or connectedness or intimacy or, you know, pure inner cleanliness, you know, something that's beautiful inside inner beauty, to be connected to our inner beauty.

And one of the ways that I've been taught I was taught when I was a new Buddhist students, about the precepts things like these things. Do not take them as rule based, but take them as guidelines that become really interesting when you're about to violate them. And so they're kind of like mindfulness bells, mindfulness bells, a bell that rings and when your rings you stop being mindful and see what's going on. So when you're about to kill someone, or about to harm someone intentionally that's a really good time to stop and pay attention. If you're about to steal that's really good time or be deceitful or fraudulent you know, all kinds of considered considered taking was not given that's a really good time to stop and be mindful. And if you're about to engage in what's in any kind of basis is considered sexual misconduct, no matter whose rules whose puritanical rules they are, if you know if anybody's in your neighborhoods rule idea of what is sexual misconduct. Don't start off by protesting their fundamentalist whatever they Use it as a mindfulness bell. You know, I'm about to break my neighbor's precept, you know, they they're uptight, whatever. And, and let's use that as a mindfulness bell. I know places where they pay a lot of money to have someone bring a mindfulness bill. And so I'll just use that as a, as a free one. So that we can look and stop at our sexual behavior and understand it, look at it more deeply. And no matter how uptight and puritanical someone's sexual mores are, I think everyone can spend more time looking, be mindful of their sexuality. How many people you know, are really, really wise
about sexuality really worked it out really well studied it deeply and understand it really well. All the ins and outs of sexual sexual behavior and you know, a lot of people like that. We have a society we have like national heroes, you know, that are like the sexually wise beings. You You know, gone through the wringer and we all hold them up. It's great esteem. Me we should have people like that, right? Because, I mean, what can be what is more central to being human being most human beings to have some relationship to sexuality, even asexual people have relationship to sexuality that's important for them. And, you know, and it's an amazing amount of time and behavior that people spend around thinking about and acting on and doing things having to do with sexuality. And, you know, people spend more time I suspect that people spend more time focusing on what they're addressing, you know, based on you know, some kind of sexual interest or attraction or something, then probably almost any other reason for how we address except maybe comfort. I don't know. Anyway, it's a big thing, I think, right? So Shouldn't we have national heroes shouldn't have people in society recognize people who have kind of gone through the wringer and really understood really well and We can go go sit at their feet and say, you know, how can you tell us about, you know how this works and how to be wise and, but rather we have pop stars and we have Lady Gaga and we have, you know, sports stars and people like that to our cultural heroes. And so I don't know. So the idea that of using any kind of reminder to stop and look and question what our sexuality, extract sexual behavior, interests, desires are and look at it more deeply. It's my assumption that sexual activity and sexual attraction between people sexual behavior is probably the most complex form of social communication and interaction and relationship that exists for human beings. It probably has more layers of more more elements, more aspects of our psychology come into play, then probably Any other thing? It's probably, I think any pretty much any sexual relationship is multi multi multi dimensional, what's going on in that relationship and that sexual behavior, it's not like just go for the pleasure. Or it's not just go for gratification. It's not just for, let's express my love.

You know, it's a lot, a lot of things. And so I think it's a really rich area to stop and be mindful for. So this idea that these precepts and the usual definition of the right action is the first three precepts is not again, not to take them as hard and fast rules. Though sometimes it's very useful to do that. But rather than take them as mindfulness bells to stop and look, what am I about, what am I about to do? And is it possible that in my intention to violate one of these precepts? Is it possible that I'm hurting someone? Is it possible that I've lost touch with some place inside of me That I want to live from Do we know someplace inside of me that's, that's that valuable that you really want to live from that place, not values like the value of not killing as a value, but the clarity and the purity of heart. That is a kind of feeling place, that you live from that feeling place. Of course, you wouldn't want to harm someone. Of course, you wouldn't want to harm someone because it's, you know, just that's not possible in that place. In the teachings of the Buddha, it's said that someone who attains to the first level of spiritual maturity in Buddhism, called stream entry, that after that they're incapable of breaking the precepts. They're incapable of intentionally killing someone stealing, lying, engaging in sexual misconduct and intoxicating themselves. And that's a pretty powerful statement. When we know that so many people In our society struggle with these issues and other, it's something people really wrestle, struggle, sometimes they struggle, they kind of succumb to these powerful, powerful temptations that cause them to violate, you know, break these precepts. And to come to a place of kind of transformative place where you can no longer cross that line. Again, not because of a rule because of some inner feeling inner place integrity that just can't be crossed, is a quite a remarkable capacity to human beings have to get to that place. So to when I was thinking of coming down here thinking about giving this talk, I wanted to say something, make the talk really simple. Because this was I thought, this is a really profound topic. And so it's so profound that only it really deserves a simple something simple. If it's not simple, then it's not profound enough and I got got a stray with the announcement and They became kind of a for me it became kind of a extemporaneous reflection. It wasn't what I intended. But so the

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simple thing that I wanted to try to say is that, I guess would be two things. One is that you cannot become free yourself. If you are involved in intentional harm for others, if your behavior in some way or others causing harm for others, you can't become free yourself. That's the one simple thing. So to the degree to which becoming free liberated is a motivation used to keep that in mind. The other is that if you do things selfishly, you can also not become free. And the connection is that I believe One of the primary motivations or one of the primary elements involved in breaking the precepts, cause doing things that cause harm to others is selfishness. Just thinking about yourself and your own needs, your own desires, your own, you know, thing. And, and so it's not to say it's not possible to become free or selfish. And so the ways in which Buddhist practice focuses on ourselves a lot. It's focusing on ourselves in such a way that it's meant to free us from selfishness free us from that contraction holding that that entails.

Okay, so that's what I have to say. And we have 10 minutes. So this is, again, I think this is a very important topic. And it's always makes me I always, very much appreciate When people grapple with these issues in their lives, they don't have simple answer sometimes to how people grapple how important this is for people. But it means a lot to me that people are really interested in this. Sometimes people come to me and say, you know, I have termites in my house, what do I do? And I don't want to tell them what to do. Because, you know, the question for Buddhists would be like, should I kill them the right? And I don't want to say what they should do. But I really appreciate that people are asking those questions. That to me is meaningful that they have that sensitivity that prompts them to, to question rather than, you know, automatically killing termites. So if anyone have any, any topics, yes, please see if you can, Barbara, can you bring that over there? There's Mike. there and then nirali like he likes to raise your head.

Thank you so much. For the talk.

So you said that there are two things to be considerate about is not to overtly be harmful to others. And the second is to not be selfish.

If you want to be free,

yeah, if you're assuming you want to be free.

So I grapple with the second one quite a bit.

And since a few years, this is just

like the precept thing, so I love to hear that someone's grappling with that, that makes me happy.

And since a few years can be honest, it

can be painful. It can be difficult, I know. But I'm very happy to hear because it's soap epidemic selfishness. And so the hero is someone who has the interest and motivation to grapple with it is really great.

Yes.
So the question is, like, one aspect of it that I also think about is self compassion. Like, just as I don't want to be selfish, I also don't want to be selfless to an extent where I'm violent to myself.

Yeah, of course, that's not that's not good either. So to find that discernment between not being selfish and yet being kind to oneself has often and in in several like situation, real situations of my life. That has been a question that has come up. And I'm not sure if I've been able to behave in a mature mindful way. So I don't know. I hope there's like some technique or some who your answer around this or All right.

Yeah, the answer. The answer, I wish I had an answer. I think that you know, my understanding so far, my limited understanding of people and myself is that you It's really great to be on the path. It's really wonderful to have that interest to practice and try to work with these things. And the sometimes there are no easy answers and, or there are any, there is an easy answer, but we don't know what it is in this circumstance, and so we do our best we can and then we try to learn from that. And so I think what's the refuges and knowing your basic intention, what are the values the intention, what are you trying to do? And when you don't know what the right approach is, then fall back and ask what is your intention? What are you what's most important that you want to come from what's values or what's what's the guy guideline that you have? We're trying to find an answer. And in terms of the right action, one of the guidelines the Buddha gave is to be concerned for the welfare of all of all and you know, in more modern English I think some people say, the greater good and the welfare of all includes yourself. You don't leave ourselves out. So what is good for the for everyone, what's the greater good for the whole thing? If you kind of come back, that's really what I'm looking for. I don't know how to do it, I have other motivations going on, but take refuge in that. And then then we try to find our way and you know, it's not easy in some circumstances to find that way. The but both was selfishness and unhealthy selflessness. If you're if you're doing mindfulness practice, we return and really are mindful inside internally for your what's going on in your body, your mind and your heart. really pay attention carefully, deeply. Kind of get by the get behind the concepts you have, you're trying to live by, do what it actually feels like to be selfish, what it actually feels like to be self effacing this kind of way or, you know, you both deserve segments, you probably find feel that something is off. So if you're being selfless in an inappropriate way, then if you're being had an inner sensitivity, it comes from mindfulness, you'll feel that it's off, something's wrong here. And that becomes a guideline or if it feels right you'll feel that it's right sometimes being selfless is right and it feels that way. And so I found over and over again that the tuning into my inner life tuning into my body, my my emotions, my mind my thoughts is a great guideline. It teaches me the felt sense of it all teaches me when something is off and when something isn't. It makes some sense.

Yeah, definitely helps

you Thank you.

My question is really similar, but it's opposite in the sunset. Yeah, often I have the problem that I'm too selfless and so you know, maybe sometimes I will want to help someone who actually is hurting me. Or I had this friend who was like always coming to me, you know, when She was set. And then at one time, I was sad. And so she said, How are you? Oh, I'm sad, I said, and she said, Oh, I'm sad too. And then she started talking about how sad she was. And And then, after I had to force myself to not talk to her, because I was really in a bad moment in my life. And I needed all the energy, you know, that I could, that I had. And so, and I felt so guilty, so maybe my compass is a little off. Because when you take care of myself, I feel such a big guilt about, you know, taking care of myself, especially when that hurts
others because, you know, she was, you know, trying to contact me because she was so sad. And it couldn't. I couldn't bring myself to keep listening to her when I was struggling so much, but I felt really guilty about it. So I don't know if everyone answer.

So guilt. So what wisdom do you have about about guilt? You have any wisdom about Yeah.

Well usually I use it as a compass if I feel guilty, I must be doing something wrong.

Oh, so you believe so? So what part of the what you say you believe your guilt? Yeah. Oh, and where did you learn to give your guilt so much authority?

I think it's really where people are more about like, we're all kind of worrying about other people more, but they

never drove in Italy so silly

I was raised. I was raised Catholic.

So I know sometimes something like Catholicism where it lends itself for people that sometimes people from Catholicism get the somehow imbuie this idea to give their guilt, a lot of authority. What do you think of that? All that authority you give it?

That that like, I mean, now I feel better, like my life has become better since I started, you know, avoiding people who hurt me, I guess. But at the same time I still feel guilty about because I don't know, I still have this instinct that if someone said that I know about it, I should help, even though they wouldn't help me in the same situation.

So what I like what I'm trying to do is to is to use maybe you could question the beliefs that are behind that the, the belief that it's wrong, to take care of yourself, and that in doing that, you know, someone someone maybe needs help, but but to help them and they somehow turn it around, so you feel worse afterwards? Is that really for the greater good? And, you know, and so, you know, I think the Buddhist analysis often is to look at the greater good and have that be the standard as opposed to A simplistic idea of self and other and you know who's to benefit the most, because you're important too. And sometimes people who have a lot of guilt sometimes have a certain kind of conceit that they're not important is really was worth it isn't it? Isn't that very interesting to have that in one sentence the conceit that you're not important so you have a lot of interesting things to grapple with, you know? And, and they're, and they're, and they're really good things to grapple with. You have you have really good partners. And you know, where as I said earlier, you know, someday we'll have these, you know, great wise Sage sages of sexuality and we'll look up to them. I think someday we'll have these great white sages of guilt. And you'll be one of those great sages and we'll go to you know, bowtie Wow, you've understood. You know, you really saw the, to the depth of guilt and still I seen it through Through and it won't bother you anymore. And then we'll come and study with you. It's where it's worthwhile, I would do it spend time look deeply. Okay, so thank you. And, and so if any of you I don't know if you want to talk to Michelle about George anyway, especially if any of you are in the south, you know, down south.

Please talk to Michelle afterwards if you'd like somehow to go down there and visit the Parkers. Put yourself on a list of people in case there's something else that we can do. I don't know what we can do, but it'd be nice if our community could help. So anyway, so thank you. you all very much for tonight.