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SPEAKERS

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Lately I've been talking with people, some people about their fear. And so I thought I would talk today about fear. Fear is area of practice mindfulness that I think everyone's going to have to encounter sooner or later. I'd like to think that any spiritual tradition that's worth its salt is, will have you encountering fear sooner or later. It's not what people think because you're supposed to just kind of enter into meditation and go off and float in the cloud. And be happy, happy ever after. But it doesn't work that way. I think that what this Buddhist mindfulness practice is about is really meeting yourself and a deep, integrated way, in such a way to set yourself free and come deep abiding peace and so That process involves confronting and meeting fear, which is, I think almost a universal factor for human beings. So I'd like to start by reading a fairy tale. It's a European fairy tale. It goes like this. There was a beautiful princess, who was engaged to a hideous serpent monster. Terrified, she sought the counsel of a wise old witch. The witch told the princess that she should go ahead with a marriage and that she should, she should wear 10 white gowns on her wedding night. When it was time to go to bed with a serpent. She was told she should take off each of her gowns one at a time and ask the serpent to take off one of his skins for each of hers or get her dresses. After she took off for 10 gowns, she was to embrace the serpent The princess didn't like it. But she took the advice of the witch. As she took off the last of her gowns, she saw that the slimy repulsive serpent was still there. And although she was repulsed, she nevertheless nevertheless had the wisdom to follow what the witch had said. And she embraced the serpent. When she did the serpent was transformed into her handsome princely lover. It's it's a fairy tale, right?

So but the fairy tale the reluctantly the bridegroom accepts her the monster as her as her bridegroom, and embraces him goes towards him. And but in going towards it, then is willing to strip off her 10 gowns, asking him to do the same And this willingness to take off the layers of armor, the layer of defensiveness, the layers of identification that we carry with us, is not an easy process to do. And people feel quite exposed and quite vulnerable. But if we're going to really embrace our monsters, you know, not the external ones, but the internal ones, and have them transformed. There has to be a willingness to meet them to almost like embrace them to really be there. If we pull away, run away, if we stay defended, then there can't be that transformation that the fairy tale talks about. And there can be a transformation for us. We don't have to live perpetually in fear. I meet people who, whose fear was set in motion set in place when they were children. And then they become 60, 70, 80 years old, and the fear is still there. Sometimes it comes to the forefront. Sometimes it recedes. But it's still you know, quite solid. Because I've never turned towards never dealt with it, it's continues to be guiding them, influencing them and a lot their life and fear, you know is a, as I said, a common phenomena. Different people have different things that they're afraid of more than others but there are common fears. In Buddhism, they list five common fears. I don't think they're necessarily the universally common ones but it's interesting list. Fear of livelihood, loss of livelihood, fear of loss of reputation, fear of unusual

states of mind. Fear of death and then fear of public speaking. And I've seen so that's the ancient India. You know, so I've seen lists of fear in you know, for Modern Americans and public speaking and death are up there in the top 10. And appear very fear of loss of reputation could be connected to the whole fear of insecurity and security around how we relate to others and many people that I know cluding myself when I was younger, the whole fear of being rejected was really big. And so, you know, I get all kinds of social gymnastics in order to kind of deal with my fear of being rejected by people. The there's seems like a very high level. High on that list of top fears is fear of heights, fear of flying, fear of snakes, fear of spiders. Some people have fear of going into public, being in public spaces. There's fear, you know, fear of loss of security, issues around safety, and gone on with the list and probably you have your own list of things that you're afraid of. And then there's a it helps to have a little bit of differentiation the different kinds of fear to know how to address it. There is phobias, which are these recurrent kind of deep seated habits there are those that keep reappearing. There's fears that are connected to trauma, which are different than phobia, which are often very, eat a different way of approaching than maybe ordinary generic fear. When we look at the teachings of the Buddha, there's an interesting practice that he offers that I've become increasingly aware that because as I read more and more of the teachings of the Buddha, this stood out as something he says repeatedly that none of my teachers ever mentioned and none of the books I've read a lot of books on Buddhism, right, never mentioned like we have a selective ability to most religious people's choose their taking choose through their scriptures selectively, right so Buddhists do that too. But there's a you know, and then we leave things out. So there's one thing we've left out as far as I could see, places I've encountered Buddhism. And that is the Buddha had this threefold kind of understanding that people should have about all kinds of issues in their life. And this is, he says repeatedly about many different things. And one should know the enjoyment or the benefits of the thing. One should know the danger of the thing, and one should know the escape from the thing.

So because it translates the gratification, the danger and the benefit, someone else translates the second one danger is the downside or the downfall or something. So these three things it's kind of interesting. So this will be begin here with looking at fear and evermore Cognitive way kind of understanding way. And what do we how do we understand fear? And so rather than having a simplistic idea that fear is bad, and we have to get rid of it, we begin the analysis by asking what are the benefits of fear? What's the gratification that comes with fear. And in this regard, Buddhism lists two fears, which it considers to be the guardians of the world. So the protectors of the world and this is has to do with a fear of wrongdoing, fear of harming others. And so, certain kind of fear when you feel like you're about to do something that you're going to cause harm to others or cause harm to yourself. And, and you're kind of pulling back a fear. So both fear of what we're going to do and fear of doing it into the future, fear of the consequences and this is considered a healthy fear. If you feel if you know if you feel afraid to go and rob your neighbor And you're gonna practice Buddhism and overcome my fear. So, you know, so I can be a better robber. This is not what Buddhist practice is about. In fact, that certain kind of fear gets stronger. I think the more a person becomes relaxed and settled and sensitive to their inner workings. And the fear of wrongdoing, the fear of causing harm, is I think becomes increases with time, not in a debilitating way, but hopefully in a supportive way for our lives. It's called, it protects the world to do this. And then we have fears that you know, clearly protect us in situations which are quite dangerous. And in terms of children, there are children who grew up in horrendous situations. And last night, we had a memorial service here and People talked about the person who died is having grown up in some of the worst possible circumstances they can sit it was worse than concentration camps. But the person who was one of the most joyous and happy and generous and kindness people that the people at the memorial had ever met that heard. But so terrible things happen. And one of the ways that children protect themselves is by being afraid, because being afraid, it's helpful to be afraid in dangerous situations, you have your keep your guard up, you're looking out and making sure that when

the alcoholic parent comes home, and it's going to be angry, that you hear the footsteps and you know how to be really quiet, you know, received disappear to your room, because of that fear. And so growing up as a child, sometimes certain kinds of fears are, have the benefit of protecting the child. But in the process, that fear gets kind of reinforced and strengthened. And so by the time a person becomes adult and they know longer living in that household and that situation, the habit of fear is still quite strong and still operating. And it becomes something how they orient themselves to the world and they carry that fear with them in the world, even though the danger is long past. But to appreciate the benefit that comes from fear, when it does, in fact, protect us, I think is a way of is really beneficial. I know one practice where people practice thinking their fear, when it's an ancient fear that benefited themselves long ago, when they come into the future into the present when they still comes up. And fear is not necessary anymore, rather than feeling ashamed or feeling bad about it being there, offering gratitude to the fear for the service it provided long ago. So there are benefits that can come and so it's useful to look at that and see, one of the interesting questions around the benefits of fear is it Even when it is beneficial, other other approaches that are more beneficial even though the fear might get you out of danger, there are other wiser ways of getting out of danger. If you're afraid of having a conversation with someone because you're in conflict, the fear might prevent you from having the conversation and therefore you stay safe. And I've known people who've stayed safe in their marriage for decades, rather than having a conversation that you probably should have.

And because they're afraid of what disruption is going to have, but other other ways of having a conversation, that is not going to disrupt the relationship where there are ways of entering into what needs to be addressed, that are that rather than pulling away and not doing it because of the fear. And so what do we how do we learn the skills? How do we learn the ability to turn towards our fear? How do we turn analyze the situation, turn towards what we're afraid of and try to understand Are there other approaches that we can protect ourselves and feel, get the same benefit that we're trying to do through acting on our fear, I think is part of a wise life. So when we look at fear, and I think part of mindfulness practice is to look at it, stop, take a look. get interested in it. And it's really wonderful. I think the opportunities that meditation provides in our life. One of the opportunities of meditation is that ideally, you do your meditation practice in a situation where you feel safe. So the privacy of your bedroom perhaps or hopefully you come to meditation center like IMC and you feel safe enough. And you do it someplace where the time and the place where you feel safe and where you're going to be safe. And then you sit down and in that environment, because the situation is safe, perhaps It becomes a safe enough place to begin turning towards the things that normally we're not, don't feel comfortable turning towards and looking at. So to sit there, and the fear arises, not to run away from it, but to turn towards it, and maybe turn towards it first kind of tenderly, carefully, maybe from a distance even, you know, you don't have to kind of, you know, dive right into the depth depth of your greatest fear. But to begin kind of skirting the edges of it, getting to know it, what's going on here. And perhaps because you recognize you're in a safe place, that maybe you're willing to open up to it in a way that you wouldn't, it doesn't make sense to do so. If you're out in the world where it's still maybe situation is dangerous. And so, the mindfulness practice is a great place to turn towards things that might close meditation, and begin finding our way through it. And then finding our way through it. It's might be nice to use the categories of the mind, the body In the heart as a way to kind of enter into it. And part of the advantage of this kind of breaking it into these three parts is that fear is usually a composite. Fear is not a unitary single event, but is usually made up of many different factors coming together. And as they come through and get come together, the fear arises and becomes quite intense, can be intense can become intense. So we start breaking it up a little bit and seeing what's going on here. Makes it easier sometimes to address. So, the mind for the purposes of the talk, I like to say the mind has a lot to do with our beliefs and ideas of around fear. And so there's, it's generally the people who are struggling with fear in their lives, in the people I encounter here are not living in situations of war, not living situations of ongoing danger

moment by moment in their lives. And so a lot of their fear a lot of things It is imaginary belongs to the world of ideas. And they imagine what's going to happen in the future thing. Anxiety is usually defined as fear, or the some things that's going to happen in the future, it's imaginary, might have some truth to it. But we have to use our imagination to project into the future. So what is the what is the role of your imagination? What's the role of ideas you have in becoming afraid? What do you think is going to happen when you walk in the dark? What are the beliefs that are going on? If you're afraid of social encounters, what are the ideas and beliefs that are coming into play and that social encounter? So for example, I had fear about being rejected. And so I had a lot of ideas about what it meant to be in relationship to other people how people saw me how I wanted people to see me. I had ideas about how people respond and react to what I said and what I did. And I had the you know, the brilliant idea that people would reject me if they got to know me. So, you know, that's a dangerous idea to have. So, you know, the best thing to do is not let people know you're right. And, and then people will like you. But what if they like you? What are they liking? Is it you? It's kind of like you can't win, right? Because Because if you don't show people who you are, and they like you, they don't really like you. They like something else.

And so they don't really know you. And so then you're in a morass. So, so, look, you know, what, what do we believe in what are the ideas, one of the strong forms of fear for some people is, has to do with identification, what we identify with as to how we like to represent ourselves and fear of losing that indication fear that being threatened in some way. So, some, so the, some of the identity issues that can be threatened is We might have a value and idea that we're supposed to be seen as competent. And if other people don't see us as competent, then the situation becomes frightening or I'm afraid of myself if I don't hold myself up as a competent person, or need to be smart or need to be beautiful. I've known people who, as they get older, they're the beauty that they were so strongly identified with begins to change. I like to say that it changes into a different kind of beauty. But some people are slow on the uptake and so you know, they don't, they somehow don't recognize the new forms of beauty that are coming as they get wrinkled and sag and all kinds of you know, natural processes begin happening. And so there's fear of that loss of beauty because not because the beauty itself because the impact is going to happen or sudden their social The world if we're not seen as if we're not, don't have that identity of being a beautiful person, then certainly people reject us because people accept us and like us because of our beauty, the smoothness of our skin or something. The I met one so many years, some years ago, I met I hope this is okay to say there was a woman who came to came to IMC for a while. And she didn't like coming here so much. Because because of a high percentage of the women who came here, didn't wear much makeup and let their hair grow gray. And, and this was quite kind of upsetting for her because, I mean, how are you going to get a man if you if you let yourself go that way. So you know, we're kind of like a little sub cult of our society. And then and then when I was at Zen center, and then it was a nice other reverse, remember was San Francisco Zen Center many years ago, the 80s. And they're also you weren't supposed to wear makeup and stuff. And were you being you know, supposed to be dressed up like a, you know, very feminine ways. And then there was this wonderful Zen teacher from Boston named Marina Stewart, who came to visit and she wore her Zen robes, like his beautiful, elegant dress, and she wore makeup. And it was liberating for the Zen women back then. You can you can do that. They've been afraid in that kind of setting. So it goes in both directions, right. So what are the beliefs that you have? What are you afraid of? And it's a useful exercise to go home and actually write out what you're afraid of. Because there's a lot of honor in articulated fears that people carry. They haven't really people And haven't really named them from the sales, they kind of they're in the background operating, but it's admit makes a big difference to write it down and actually see what they are. And then once you see what they are to ask around them what, you know, what are the beliefs you have that support those fears, or the beliefs that are around those fears? Where did you learn that kind of fear is an interesting question, because where you learned it

from sometimes has to do with the beliefs that we have. Sometimes it's learned from family from different places.

I still remember. I don't think I'm afraid anymore, but it kind of had a deep imprint on me was when I went to elementary school in the early 1960s. We had these nuclear holocaust, you know, drills, you know, everyone under the desk, you know, and we've all you know, had to kind of go into the debt. And put our hands over our necks and protect ourselves from the nuclear bombs that we can go off in the neighborhood. So that was quite an it made quite an impression on me. In terms of, you know, we know, we know. And when I, you know, still there a little bit because I've gone a few times into my son's elementary school classroom. And that memory of those drills and how they impact me still comes up for me, oh, elementary school classroom, where's the desks? So where do we learn these things? Where do they come from? And then we have help with our fears, right? There's lots of people who spend a lot of time trying to help us be afraid. And so there's politicians that are helping us be afraid. And so you know, and then there's, I don't know if they're, you know, we get a lot of help. I don't watch television, but I know people who watched local news on television? And it seems like there's a strong correlation between some of my relatives who and their fear of the neighborhood their fear of this and that, because these things get sensationalized on the news. And so, it seems to them that these dangers are around every corner. Because of how they know they take us in from their new so where do we learn our fears? Where do they come from the basis for them. So that's the kind of the mind and then the body. There's a great expression from the Buddha called becoming a body with witness and a great term body witness. So what we've tried to do, what we learn to do in mindfulness practice is to be mindful through our body with our body. So to turn towards our physical experience, in relationship to fear, and learn how there's a degree of comfort with our fear. ability to kind of really feel and sense how it's being lived in the body. And there's some advantages of that. One advantages, the bodily expression of fear is not really a story, the story kind of belongs to the mind. And so, if we can turn away from the story, and turn towards the actual way, it's being experienced in the present moment. And learn how to be comfortable with that or learn how to be wise with that or present for that the witness for it, then the physical sensations of fear, stop becoming such a strong catalyst for perpetuating the fear. And I believe there's a way in which the physical sensations of fear are often the fuel for the stories for the ideas or further fear. And if we could stop and be still and feel and sense the fear in the body and learn how to be still and quiet to give space for it and be economists about it. That then the triggering mechanism of The physical sensations of fear don't operate so strongly. In fact, the opposite can begin happening. And that is, the physical sensations can begin to dissipate can relax. So some people feel fear and their stomach commonplace. So the D and mindfulness practice is to drop down and put the attention as close to that area of the stomach as feels comfortable. Some people will put it right in the middle. A great, great thing I like to think of is, is to put your attention right in the middle of your fear. And be still be still nothing has to happen. You have to do anything. Just put yourself right in the middle of it, and be still. And you know, it might be hard at first to sit still, but just sit there with it, be with it. There's something very powerful that happens when we just accompany our fear in the body, where they're witnessing it. Just be with it for it for a while. There's fear in the heart and the shoulders. There's fear in all kinds of places, that people feel it and enter Place to watch for anxiety and fear is in the hands. If you practice mindfulness of your hands as you go through your day, how often do you hand start doing interest fingers doing interesting things and clasping and what does that represent?

If you make a habit of mindfulness of the body in daily life, you probably catch the symptoms or signs of anxiety or fear earlier than you would otherwise. That was true for me. That as I became more and more aware of my body and made a habit of tuning into my body through my day, I started to notice a little twinges of fear and tightness and energy and agitation that came along came up that then told me pay attention now, what's going on now, if I didn't pay attention to my body was easy to be preoccupied

and caught up in what's going on and didn't notice that I was anxious. So to become a body witness to learn how to be present and feel that it's not an easy thing to do when the fear is strong. And so sometimes what's useful to do is to be mindful is to notice be with the fear, the fear. And sometimes the secondary fear the fear is is comfortable to be with, oh, I can, I can deal with that fear of fear. And just be with that feel what that's like. And when that dissipates, then maybe so the easier to get closer to the fear that we have. Sometimes fear as we open to it in the body becomes stronger. And so then it becomes maybe useful to make sure that you have support for yourself so you can open to it. Maybe have extra time and do your meditation if that's where you're opening to it. So you can kind of kind of decompress or kind of work off the energy. Or maybe you have a friend that's available that you can talk to, if it gets really difficult to have someone to know to check in with you the so Kind of the body using the body, such an important support for this. The third aspect is that of the heart and what i mean i don't know what i mean by the heart. Exactly, but the heart I associate with kind of the deepest emotional kind of base for fear, the deepest kind of source within us. And, and this is a place maybe in the mind or Meghalaya, or someplace that can heal or settle or resolve or stop its regular kind of patterning of reinforced fear and anxiety. And this is where the heart can come to peace, settle. The heart can be at home and itself feel safe in itself. And a number of things support this. One is. meditation practice can be very helpful when we're able to get concentrated and still independent of look At our fear, there is something called a bypass which can be useful. Sometimes it's useful to avoid certain issues in our life temporarily, consciously and avoid it and get really deeply have a deep sense of well being get concentrated, still do something that makes us feel really good and safe. And then from that deep, safe place, then to open up and turn and look at the fear. If we sometimes if we look at fear in a fearful state, it can just be kind of retriggering and make it more difficult. And so sometimes there's this wise bypassing. Some people will do this with a variety of concentration practices, like just concentrating their breath or doing loving kindness practice. Some people find useful to go on retreats. Some people find it useful to go into nature and get away from their life as usual, in order to kind of somehow get away from the things that keep us in this kind of momentum of fear. But then not to then unconsciously go back into situation with fear kind of pops up. But to go back consciously knowing now I'm going to watch and be present for the fear from this place of feeling good and well being. And then to, to slowly, slowly be able to have the capacity to be really still in the midst of the fear. Because then we can be really still in the midst of the fear of steel means not acting on it, not reacting to it, not needing it to be anything, not interpreting it, not making stories about it, not pushing it down, not celebrating and not acting on it. Just letting the fear be letting the fear be and have the confidence and the trust to just be present for it. And because all our emotions are processes, no emotion is for is no emotion is ever stuck. Unless we hold it in place, hold it stuck. And as we learn to let go and get out of the way, then the emotions that are stuck inside us or habitual begins to unravel begins to dissolve, begins to dissipate.

And to have it repeated experience of strong fear dissipate. It's kind of like it's kind of like getting a massage for the heart and might have to do an over and over again and slowly the heart begins to realize it's okay to stay relaxed as Katie stay relaxed. It doesn't you don't have to be afraid to have to be afraid. And then when the heart really understands the depth of peace, then comes a really a very special moment. And that special moment is when you realize that at your core of who you are, that core cannot be threatened by anything. That there's something inside of you that can Not be threatened by anything, no matter what happens not by death, by war, not by rejection, not by people's anger, not by failure. That's something inside of us to do to touch that core. To know that place of purity or stillness or freedom then changes our relationship to the world to the fear to ourselves, because we know that there's something that is not threatened double. A, we have a lot of confidence, a lot of sense of security as we go through our lives.

So those are my thoughts about fear, and I offer them to you as an encouragement to kindly compassionately spend some time with your fears and see what they are look at them, look at them more carefully, and see if you can see beyond them to the other side of so we have a second Sunday tea today and in order to help you confront your fears mean the last thing you know is talk to people that's frightening it would be nice especially since there's some people are new here I think just to if you don't mind just turn toward someone near you introduce yourself and say hello and if you have been here for a while welcome them you know even if you've been here if you only came last time in the person, here's the first time welcome them. And if you want to say something about the talk to your you're welcome to do that. But nicely welcome and say hello, and then everyone's welcome to stay for the tea please. Thank you.