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SPEAKERS

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So one of the ways of understanding Buddhist practice is that it's nothing really extraordinary. It's taking ordinary activities of our life and seeing how they can be transformed into a path to liberation to freedom to come deep compassion. And now one of these very ordinary activities that will have tremendous potential for Trent, this kind of transformation is the use of trouble he can't hear. So one of these common activities that I'd like to talk about today because of its transformative potential is the act of listening. And talk about mindful listening. Somewhere someone did a study and concluded that people listened about 45% of the day though, waking day. So it's a big part of our life, ordinary part of our life. And what is listening like and then what's the potential there. Imagine yourself up against a large wall, and there's a nice door in the middle of the wall. And so you open the door and you open the door and you step through and you close the door behind you and you look out where you've come. And you find out that you've come at it at this beautiful kind of spacious panorama, like habas Vista mountains rolling off in the distance and skies and space and it's just vast and you get a sense of the vastness and specialness of the natural world in front of you and your realize there's whole universe as a whole, you know, big big world out there to be explored and to be discovered. So then you turn around, and you look at that door again, that the wall from that side. And so you open door again, and you step through and close the door behind you. And then you look and see. And they're also it's a huge, expensive this stuff. And it goes on mountains and mountains, different mountains with different mountains and rivers and valleys that go on and on for a long time. Both sides of the door. It's a lot of vast worlds to be discovered. So listening is the door to these two different worlds and realms. The door this thing's kind of like the it's called echo tone, the space between two different biological zones and so on one hand, we have the world of There are beyond our eyes and ears, the world that we can listen to. And so universe, it's fast that it's, you know, it's been explored for forever. And then equally vast, is the world inside of us, that we can listen to and be aware. I think most people don't understand or have no sense of how vast the universe is, inside your skull inside your heart, how big it is. But my sense is that it's as vast and spacious as whatever is out there. And listening is that door. And the idea is to keep that door open, not to step through the door, close the door and just look one direction. But rather keep the door open, so that we can see both vistas we can see both directions and be aware of what happens when we're listening. So that means my mindful listening means not only to be mindful and present for what you're listening to, but also to be mindful and present for yourself as you're listening. And there can be a lot going on within you as a listener. One of the things that goes on as a listener is we forget what we hear. The also read some studies that concluded that by time someone's speaking, finished speaking, we tend to only remember half of what they said. So I should test you now. How much advice and then within a few hours, it's 20%. You know, so, within a year, you know, I don't know, maybe all you remember from this talk is that's the image of the door and the vistas. What was he talking about doors.

So, you know, it's normal to, you know, to forget normal enough but But to really listen so we can really register and take in what's being said, but also really take in and register who we are as a listener, what is it that we're What's our subjective aspect that goes on, when we listen, not to tune out ourselves because we're so engrossed in what we're listening to, but also not be so tuned into ourselves that we don't really notice what other people are doing. One of the things about listening, is that something significant is to distinguish it with from hearing. Listening, the way the word word is used in English is that it's an active, deliberate activity. We have to want the listener to engage in the act of listening. Hearing just occurs. You know, you don't have to do anything to here. Except just be awake, I suppose. and have a look. No noise noise is loud enough. You'll hear it the You know, if we could we could have an image, you know, a postural image of someone who's listening. And it's pretty easy to come up with various kind of gestures of what what someone's doing when they're listening. You know, you can take your hand behind your ears and kind of leaned with your head to one direction tilt your head, and that would be a sign someone's listening. But what would you use for hearing? What would be the postural gesture for hearing? As soon as you put your ear, tip your head up and put your hand behind your ear? You're listening, not hearing, you're hearing as well. But hearing doesn't have a gesture. I think in my What do you think that you agree with that? Or someone want to try a gesture? Just show us how you hear? No one, okay. So I guess, idea stands. The so the idea. So hearing just occurs, but listening is a deliberate, intentional act. And as an intentional act, it's connected to all kinds of aspects of our inner life, our values, what we want to do our preferences, our emotions, our feelings, our responses to the world. Anything that intentional is a part of this big universe behind us. And so as we listen, we can start becoming more aware of what is going on behind us. And same thing for the person who will listen to. There's things going on in them beyond the words. What's what do we can we listen in some ways beyond the words behind the words? What, why are they speaking? What is their motivation? What are they trying to accomplish? We can listen with our eyes because it can be body communication as well, their posture, their gesture might be very important to understand what they're trying to say. And so we can look and watch as well and listen with our eyes. What's going on VR besides the words as a listener, because It is intentional. We could listen in a hurry, hurry listening or hurried hearing, I, you know, finish speaking so I can say what I want to say. You know, like, get Oh, you know, and as soon as someone is finished speaking, we rush in with our words, you know, because, you know, you know, don't you know we don't want to waste a lot of time here and you know, listening it's so important things to be said. So why Listen, so that we can kind of listen in a hurry. Like we're not really taking it in, to listen, mindfully is to listen, with with time to listen mindfully is to listen in a relaxed way. And one of the ways to listen in a relaxed way is don't stop listening, when someone has stopped speaking, but continue to listen after they finished In other words, that there be a pause, where we can take in make space for what just happened when we should add. And that has a number of advantages. One is that if you pause after someone speaks, they might have more to say, that's interesting that provides more information. That if you rush in with your opinion, your idea, then you don't let the person kind of finish what they're doing or carry on further. Also, with that pause, you get a chance to listen to yourself and find out what your responses what your reaction is with the first things you want to say are before you say it. It's really great to avoid saying things that you later regret.

I read recently and wonder I thought was a wonderful quote. Only God will ever know the anger you didn't express I mean, you know, right, but, but no one else maybe knows because you don't know us. But only God knows. And I guess we're Buddhist, they would say, only your karma knows. You know, it's consequential, sometimes not to speak. So you want to kind of know what you're what you're saying what you're doing. So to pause to let some little bit be there, and listen, what's going on, in deeper way. There was once upon a time a boy who came home from school late and maybe late for dinner. And his mother was annoyed, because it's happened too many times maybe, or something. So she said, Well, you know, why are you late? And he said, because on the way home, I stopped to help my friend whose bicycle broke down. And the mother said, You don't know anything about fixing bikes. And this unsaid?

No I don't. But I decided to stay there and even company while he was crying. That's something. So the mother was in a hurry. She had her opinion she was listening through the filter of her ideas or memory of past experiences with the sun perhaps. And so she was rushing to judgment. And I bet after hearing the sun say, I stood there to keep company with a friend who was crying. I bet she her shoulder sank or I bet she's like, oh, okay, she changed her mode quite quickly. So to listen, to take time to listen to time to find out what is there is a really important part of mindfulness practice. And one of the skills one of the things we want to develop and mindfulness practice in Buddhist practice is the ability to do nothing. The ability to feel comfortable with silence, the ability to be comfortable with solitude, the ability to be comfortable with not getting, needing anything to come from relationships or in just to be just to be present, to make spot space and time to listen to hear to let something deeper go on. There's a story that's often told in our tradition that comes from the Indian texts called Obama Yana. And Rama is walking in the forest with his attendance of her friends. And he starts hearing a very faint whisper in the woods. And he asks his attendance to spread and soon do you hear that you hear anything? No, we don't hear anything. So he kind of goes in the direction of that sound, and very faintly, starts hearing his name. being spoken around Rama. So he goes, he said, asks his friends again. Do you hear it? No, you don't hear anything. So he goes and follows it and finally comes to this big boulder. And he listens, it seems like the the, the words of sound is coming out of the boulder rum, rum. So he takes his two hands and he places them on the Boulder. And then the boulder dissolves, breaks open or something transforms and there's some woman or being or person that is has been somehow frozen inside the boulder through some magic and with him touching carefully his hands on the boulder breaks open and breaks the spell. So I like the story a lot because it's because especially because it's his name that's being called. And it's something very faint that only he can hear. And it's something in this story where that's frozen. blocked locked up. And sometimes we have to listen really carefully to the faint whispers inside of us to hear what's really calling us to find out what's really going on. If we are in a hurry with our minds, if we're thinking a lot of planning a lot, preferring a lot when you do a lot, mind is spinning around and stories and ideas and planning that we do. It's very hard to listen to ourselves. And so part of practice is to learn how to be quiet enough to learn the skill and the ability and the direction and the and the tools and the value of becoming quiet enough that we can hear what's going on below the surface chatter of our mind, the surface kind of discursive thinking that goes on.

And what is calling you what's what's inside of you for break open if you listen to it really, really carefully well But even more are more important, but also it's what is, what is it that is deep and the other person you're listening to? What do you listen to when you listen to a person? Do you really listen to the other person to really know the person? Or do you listen to the person just enough so you can get in edgewise and tell them what you know, what you think is important to tell them to really listen, to really get to know someone that requires listening. And the term that I, I've heard in recent years that I like is active listening. And active listening is the act of intentionally making a point of listening to someone actively, but actively not just because you're quiet, you're listening, because you also you're using your words and your body language, to show that you're listening to engage and support the listening so humans feels heard. So to do that, I think it really helps to be relaxed to listen well to someone else. There are lessons about listening to yourself, you have to be relaxed at ease, which is not an easy thing to come to, especially socially. But here is a really important point about I think active listening to really, you because if someone really, if you become a really good listener, you're really listening to someone well enough that they feel really listened to. It helps put them at ease. Just the act of listening, you know, you're listening well to someone, when it helps them become more at ease. It might not be dramatic, it might be they're really anxious and just get a little bit less anxious. But two people really feel they feel listened to something inside off and kind of get sued or settled or relaxes and the other people as well. Especially in conversations where people are doing hurried listening, hurry listening hurried speaking this not conducive to relaxation. And more important is not conducive to everyone in

the party, everyone talking, to listen deeply to the rum, listen deeply to that which is deep inside that maybe is often overlooked or ignored or blocked or frozen. So to listen with enough space and time and generosity of spirit and presence, caring, that the other person has a chance to reflect deeply, to feel deeply to talk deeply. To hear something else come out is a big part of this. Active listening involves having having having that other person really feel like they've been heard. And so, you do that with your body language. You're really there and present. And you also do it by acknowledging what you hear and say, you know, Rick ruber repeat back what you've heard. So really, they know that you've heard. But also, so you can get corrected if you didn't hear, right. Even if you don't get it, right, the fact that you try to repeat it back sometimes means you're really trying to listen. And they people appreciate that. Then you say, well, it was a little bit different. And this is how it was different. And then active listening often involves empathy, where we feel something about what's going on for the person emotionally, not just what they're saying, but what's the tone of their voice? What's the emotional qualities that go with it? And so that requires sometimes for some people, a choice to tune into that pay attention to that. What is that person actually feeling as they speak it? That's one of the problems you know, with email is probably all of you know is that sometimes As emails don't contain any of the emotionality, any of the context of the body language, anything that tone of voice that lets you know how the communication is being intended. And, you know, I've had communication where it just seemed like it was really rude, called mean spirited, rude. And but, you know, I knew that person I knew and you kind of knew I kind of like I mean, whatever it may try to put myself into how they speak, you know, and their, their their way of speaking say, Oh, you know, I don't think that's how it is actually they had this little or this kind of a tone that they tonality and I could I could hear the same sentence they wrote, being spoken in a way that doesn't feel rude, it doesn't feel just, it just kind of like you know, their way they speak that can be quite caring. And I sometimes been put off by some of the emails I get like I'll reply.

Show them you know in a completely miss you know then soon soon you know cleanness with they're coming from and then they get this rude be mailed back and before we know you have war and I wonder how many times a wars can be traced some acceptable is that

so to listen is a choice. It's something we do intentionally we can listen or pay careful attention not only to words but also what's behind the words. We can listen to why someone speaks and also we can listen to why we listen. What do we do When we're listening, what's our attitude about listening? What are we trying to do when we listen? What's happening while we're listening inside of us? Are we formulating our response, and re tuning out and have the hindrances come up? So we're caught up in desires and aversions. Are we clear and present? Are we relaxed? How are we, as we listen? So we can listen to the to make deeper? What's the tone of the voice of the person speaking? What's their body language convey? What are they you know, what's what's behind their words? What can we how can we listen deeply some of you might have not heard the story of a couple of went for a couple of counseling to the therapist. And the therapist some point to recognize there was an issue here and communication so turn to one of the spouses and said you really need to listen to your spouse. Well, the next Listen. And so the next week they came back to their couples counseling and they said, it didn't help. And so then the therapist said, Oh, don't just listen to what your spouse is saying. Listen to what they're not saying. What's not being said but is in the room in the communication. To do that, deduce intentional active listening, mindful listening, does require a willingness, temporarily at least to put aside our agendas or our preferences or our judgments or our preconceived ideas of what's going on. It does require letting go of something. And it lets you let go of many of the same things. They will learn to let go of we meditate in meditation, as a Well, we get caught up in our thoughts, we get caught up in our judgments, we can cut up in our stories, our preconceived ideas, our expectations, our reactivity to what's going on. And meditation is a great place to discover that to see that and learn to let go of and learn not to be limited by it, to learn to listen to ourselves in deeper and deeper way. I think

that what we learn in meditation translates very well to listening. Because we listen, we can listen to the same thing, pay attention to the same thing inside of ourselves, or their preconceived ideas and judgments, or their fears and anxieties they get in the way, what's going on inside of us, and can we let go? Not like Oh, so that we are, you know, can't take care of ourselves in that conversation. But let go so we can listen more deeply. And I think we can take care of ourselves better if you listen deeply to the inside and outside. Sometimes it's good to pay attention to the great VISTA that's outside of you. And sometimes it's good to pay attention to the greatness inside of you. It's a great world, inside and out. Ideally, the door would be open, always open, so that you flow back and forth and you need to take both into place. I for me, I feel that my listening, or my speaking, both listening and speaking and conversation works the best when I have 50% of my attention on the person who's speaking, and 50% or my attention on what's going on inside of me as I speak. And if I can do that really well. Then there's something happens in that communication or in me, where there's an aspect of me that disappears, the self consciousness of me disappears, or the or some kind of boundary between me and the other person disappears. And it isn't that I become one where the other person and then kind of do for bullish things.

But rather much rather that I'm kind of part of me is my subconscious and not there. But it's, but I'm very aware of the feelings I have the thoughts I have the beliefs I have, I'm tracking myself up to our tracking what's going on inside of me during that time. And the best of my ability, I'm tracking the other person, what they're saying what's going on. And that full attention to both realms. This beautiful thing happens that I kind of like self consciousness disappears. And it's just there in a very clear and open way that feels very, very akin to your deep meditation practice where there's a lot of freedom and openness and clarity, of just being here. So mindful listening is takes an ordinary activity of listening and transforms it into something that has tremendous value and potential for us, where we can grow and develop on the path of freedom, liberation. As an act of compassion can also be of tremendous value to the people who we listen to. Who we get to listen deeply to, they get they get listened to. So I've talked enough. Now it's my turn to listen to you. So any thoughts you'd like to say or any comments about this? responses? There is a mic over there. Liz.

While this is helpful to me, I am.

I was in I was with a group of women last Sunday. And we were each sharing something. And there was one person who I guess I would describe it as sort of going on on a tangent.

And it lasted pretty long, was like five minutes, which, for me, it was a long time to listen without interacting and because of the nature of the what this person was saying, and I just noticed how in my body how uncomfortable I was. And it's like, you know, when I listen, sometimes there's the sensitivity there. That's strong, and so I could feel the other people's listening. What was going on with them? I mean, I could sense it. It was tense, and people were getting impatient. And so I just wondered if you have any thoughts about that, like, sometimes the listening is uncomfortable, and you feel like you want to say something? Or even ask a question or something. And you've, you know, for me, it's like, what, what do you do in that situation? Because I don't want to be rude, but I So I'm suffering, struggling. Anyway,

that's my question. Well, thank you. That's a great question. And again, you open the door to a big panoramic Vista, we can go different directions with that, your statement here. And the one place I like to go is that back to meditation. If you can't underestimate how valuable is to have your meditations be uncomfortable. Don't just because you're a comfortable meditation, don't think that it's a bad meditation. It might be some of the best meditations ever, in terms of terms of what you learn and how you learn to

be comfortable with discomfort. So what you if you're uncomfortable meditations like a little laboratory, you get to study what it's like to be uncomfortable. You get to let go of some of the impulses that come up when you're uncomfortable, the judgments you have about it, and you'd like to kind of learn to be in a relaxed way about being uncomfortable. And so if you come into a social situation like that, then yes, sir. Definitely social situations where you feel uncomfortable, but you can know how to breathe with it, you know, to kind of settle back, okay, this is uncomfortable, and I'll just be with it, as opposed to some people's attitude towards discomfort is they have to do something, something has to happen to fix this. And I think meditation can teach you that nothing needs to be fixed. Just relax, breathe. So that can be very helpful, it will step and then on the other end of the spectrum, it sometimes is appropriate to interrupt someone and, and say something, but how to do it caringly and compassionately as part of the issue or the point. And some people actually do talk a lot, sometimes expect to be interrupted and stopped. And occasionally they appreciate it. You know, they're like, you know, lost and going off. But how do you do it in a caring way? And sometimes you can do it by active listening where you kind of cry Find some place where you can insert some, some something, something that responds to it or speaks something they just said or repeated back or say that must have been hard, but it was really hard. And or say, you know, wow, this is a lot. You just said a lot that has a big impact. I really took this in. I think, you know, I think it's better let's let's take a moment and wait. You know, I think we need to kind of process it now or something like that. But you know, it depends how skillful you are. It depends how capable they are of, you know, hearing it. Good luck.

Yeah, that was one of the nice things about maybe maybe terrible things about listening is that active listening does involve a loss of control. Some people don't want to lose control, but in order to listen well Have to lose control of the conversation of this controller with you to allow people to speak and go where they're going. You know, within limit, of course, but there is a lack of control. But at the same time, there's a lot of self control, or self monitoring or itself that goes on at the same time in order to stay in that mode and a useful way. We can, Okay, thank you. So

yeah, yes, thank you for your talk. And it reminded me of learning several years ago learning something about the cult culture of deaf people who use primarily American Sign Language. And what I was taught was when you communicate with American Sign Language, the expectation for both communicators will be that you remember what the person told you about themselves, and that they will remember what you told them. I just thought, really?

I said yes, that's the expert. It's not always Matt.

But that is the expectation.

That's very nice. Yeah, imagine I was thinking about that about you know, someone who's deaf you know, I guess they listen through their eyes and they pick up a lot more. You know, if they're listening to someone who doesn't that speak sign language. They have to listen to you know body language and gestures and all kinds of things and it's probably the work with the visual world is much richer they pick up much more just like someone who's blind uses sometimes their hearing and they hear things that is available to everyone to listen to, but we're not tuned in are a sensitive to hear the subtleties that they do to the rich world to pay attention to. This

within the Eightfold Path for a wise speech, how does guidelines from the Buddha to wise speech can also they, I see kind of a link to the wise listening and, and just how can we apply is there's a link besides what you said about care, you know listening and responding with care and compassion.

I think we're the closest with you stay within the framework of right speech. Right Speech involves knowing that your speech is honest knowing that your speech is supportive and friendly knowing that it's timely knowing that it's useful. So you have to pay attention to the situation well enough into yourself to know that those things are the case takes some reviewing some consideration some deeper reflection which is part of the listening. You have to listen first before you can know what's right speech. But the other thing about the Eightfold Path is, I kind of think of listening as a variation of mindfulness. So that you know, the seven steps in a full path is right mindfulness, wise mindfulness. And so, you know, it's mindfulness with our ears.

I was glad to hear this story about uncomfortable listening. It reminded me of a time. That was a huge lesson for me many years ago. My son who's now 20, he was, I think, a third grader. And his teacher was just in her second or third year of teaching, and she had a large class over 30 Kids and she was giving instructions. And my son just was very aloof and said, yeah, yeah, yeah. And she was clearly upset with this. And I got a note that day. And I could tell by the handwriting that she written it

really

quick. And he had detention or something like that. And I didn't quite understand the whole incident. And so I went to first thing in the morning to go speak with her before school started. And as soon as I walked in the room, I there was this bristling, icy feeling and her eyes and, and then she spoke to me very firmly. And this energy came at me and I felt like I was shaking. And I said, maybe we need to talk with the principal about this. Because it was not going to have a good understanding just the two of us. So she said, Yeah, And I went by the principal's office set up an appointment for just a couple hours later went home and called my mother.

And she basically told me to pray.

Because I was worried that I was not prepared. I did not know how to handle this situation with this angry teacher. And so I did and what I learned was in this most uncomfortable moment, then in meeting with her and the principal and the vice principal

about my son thing Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Is that this teacher was acting out of fear. And in this office, she broke down and cried. And I learned so much that we are all broken. We all act out of fear. And that when I came to that meeting, I was praying that all of us would listen and speak truth about being prepared and how to guide these children, and not be surprised by their actions or their words, but be prepared to teach them instead of just discipline them. And so because I had a heart of wanting to listen to wanting to be helpful, I felt like I could see better more clearly this broken person, and how fearful she was of losing control of the class and knowing how to handle this situation. So so

there was something inside of her was the Rama was what we know something inside of her to be listened to and come out. It wasn't done. The surface wasn't there with her anger. And so maybe the fear and to find a broke up broke open. Yes, it was great that you offered that you could

do that. I hope it made a difference. Yes. Well, I still have to practice the state. But I thought I would

share throw one more in the back.

Thanks, Gil, you were talking about letting go and taking care of yourself. At the same time. Could you speak a little bit more of the balance and how to approach that balance? I

appreciate the question. But can I ask you a counter question is why is this an important question for you?

Because in taking the practice in everyday life, specifically at work, it is people around me are not in the practice.

They have, they have a very different practice.

So there's, there's, there's a time that needs to, I need to push forward and push hard, sometimes hard. So it's keep keeping that 5050 is is difficult in that sense.

Yeah. So I think different social environments have different roles, different work cultures of how things interact and how things work. And so, you know, a friend of yours has just had a loss, someone's died then it moves around common rule but then you would you would sit, maybe go recipe the person their living room and just go for a walk with them, just let them speak and hear them out and really know you're listening. Some other time and nothing's dramatic is like that's going on the life and you're going out to, you know, a coffee shop and you're having tea or coffee and, and you're having a great time. Just a lovely time. You know, both of you're really enjoying yourselves arguing about politics. You know, like duking it out and being fast and one top to the other. It's just, it's just part of the fun And, you know, to say, oh, let's slow down and listen to each other deeply and, you know, it's not fun anymore. And so you have to know you know, different settings, different ways of conversing. So I can imagine in some work environments and professional environments, the currency of what works of what is expected. And how you get things done is a particular way you're having conversations someone recently I was at an academic kind of conference recently or a kind of seminar I was part of, and there was someone in the in the seminar who was rapid fire responses, I said some things like rapid fire, like, like, you know, and then it was like, in long list of you know, defense, you know, kind of proof This is why it is and, and there was no space like, you know, it's gonna surprise and later I guess the person thought that maybe he was little bit too much and he said a number of things. Explaining explaining itself one thing he said was that he's a professor, a German University and he said in the German academic environment This is what's expected. And so that's how we talk there. So I came here then was just doing the same thing again. And within America we don't do that. That's that much in academic academic environments. So maybe to work there it's expected there. So anyway so little bit you have to understand what's expected and what's required and maybe have to participate in a certain way or is there space to change the flow there is is there a space for you to take care of yourself space for you not to participate that way make more space after a while they realize you will odd but it's but actually but actually like they like they like coming into your office and talking to you even though you're odd. Then why are you odd because you just sit quietly and this meaningful response are pretty sure it's not adequate but is enough

It's a it's food food for thought.

And one, one more follow up. Yes. When you say take care of yourself, What do you mean?

Take care of yourself so you don't get hurt. That's the bottom one. And then if you can do better, then you only don't do get hurt but you benefit from hosting. Yeah.

Sometimes the speech you're listening to is intended to hurt. Do you have any guidance to what to do with that?

Well, again, you have to every if so many different situations where it's, you know, what to do depends on the context. Sometimes use leave, you know, leave and leave the state You know, sometimes that's the wisest thing to do is just get out of there is enough of this. I mean, that's an extreme situation. That's one end, right extreme. Sometimes what I like to do is to, if I can, if it seems appropriate in that conversation, is to tell people that tell the person, you know, that really hurt, that hurts. I know, I feel a lot of pain hearing that. That's difficult to hear from me. Or when you speak that way, you know, I feel afraid. And generally, I find that most people if I, if I let them know, the impact of the words are on me, it changes the conversation dramatically. Because once it's been said, very few people want to admit that loud, they're trying to hurt you with their words. You know, that might be the intention, but once you put it out in the open, like, you know, oh, well, you know, and, and so then usually shifts the conversation too quickly.