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SPEAKERS

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So good morning, everyone. And I would like to continue the series of three talks that I started a few weeks ago on the three characteristics. And I've given a talk on the first two, which is the characteristic of impermanence, and suffering. And the third characteristic is the characteristic of not self. And they're called characteristics because it's one way or the other. They characterize any human experience that we can have. There's some quality that these things that are there. And without understanding this aspect of our experience of life, we're certainly going to run into frustration, disappointment, into a variety of challenges. And it's possible to live it much more harmoniously with our life. If we have some insights into how things are impermanent, suffering and not self. In this wonderful way in which Westerners can reframe Buddhist teachings, these three have been reframed or connect locally as things change, it hurts, but don't take it personally.

And these three characteristics can be difficult to understand they're kind of some ways probably inappropriate to really be introduced kind of cold to them. And that's particularly true for the one we're going to talk about today, which is the insight into not self. It can be confusing, it can kind of be not so logical for the way most people think about themselves, to be told that You don't exist. And just doesn't compute so well. And it also lends itself to a lot of philosophy and philosophical thinking and quandaries about what is the self and the true self and all that. And it's not meant to be a philosophy. And it's not really meant to undermine a healthy sense of self. It's suppose it's meant to be liberating. It's meant to be free us in certain way to have this insight. And so each of these are meant to be insights, insight into impermanence, the insight into suffering and the insight into not self for their insights. So they're not philosophies, they're not beliefs, they're not creeds, you don't have to believe them. You have to believe that things are impermanent. You know, it's that they're meant to be something we see as an insight means to really have a kind of a first hand experience of and relationship to And it's probably also helpful to appreciate that the overall context for these, developing these insights and understanding them is compassion and love, that somehow there's compassionate care about our welfare or well being that's built into this whole endeavor of the Buddha Dharma, Buddhist practice. And in that endeavor of caring, compassion, there's something about developing the ability to see these particular things, which is very supportive for our well being and for the well being of others as Oh as well. The and also, when people when you were taught these three characteristics kind of up front. We don't appreciate the wider context the other context in which they exist. And the wider context I like to refer to as the preparation for the insight, the insight itself The liberation that comes with the insight, and then the gift that comes with liberation. So the preparation, the insight, the liberation and the gift, and that I think it's helpful to understand all those together. So with the preparation for not a for each of these three characteristics, we understand that we want to prepare ourselves by cultivating the opposite. So for self for a impermanence, the opposite of impermanence is I like to call stability, certain kind of constancy. And we want to cultivate that in the practice, psychological stability of mind, stability of heart,

without having the mind stable and calm. It's not really easy to have these kinds of insights and if we have the insights they can be disconcerting to have so we want to kind of stabilize ourselves, stabilize the mind calm settle it. This suffered the insight into into suffering. We want to actually we don't, we don't want to cultivate more suffering, thank you. But we want to cultivate his well being, and happiness. And so the cultivation of happiness in practice is important. And that cultivation pervades, provide provides the context for the insight into suffering. So it's very different to experience suffering if there's a field of well being, than it is if there's a field of suffering already in use, go deeper into the suffering, it's kind of a drag. And then the third, which is topic for today of, of having insight into not self, we want to cultivate the opposite. And the opposite of not self like to just kind of represent by the term self confidence. And so we want to cultivate a strong sense of self confidence that allows us to see that aspect of reality we can call them not self and so what we cultivate and practice is we're cultivating these qualities of stability, well being and confidence as those become strong. Then we begin having insights, these insights come in the wake of that and so without cultivating these strengths, these these capacities, it's hard to have effective effectiveness in this insight into the three characteristics. It's hard for them to do their work these insights into liberate us.

I think of it little bit like a snake who is quite miserable because it's skin it's just not quite right. It's a little bit too much wrinkle has a spot to the wrong place. And anyway, the color slightly different than its friends, you know, and I don't know it's you know the skin just quite isn't right and some of the snake's friends have tattoos but this one doesn't and would like to have a tattoo but it's afraid of the pain and you know so that's hard and so what to do and the skin is not quite right and so the poor snake is miserable and in the misery kind of just wants to stay by itself and its own little apartment and doesn't want to go out anymore and because you know, people get to see it skin and so the so then so because he doesn't go out he doesn't get food and is anyways too miserable to want to eat anyway and then so it kind of like starts to shrink and that skin gets more shriveled and ugly. It's not a very pretty pretty sight until finally a wise person comes along and Whitesnake comes along and says, you know you gotta eat eat a lot. should eat, eat lots of stuff, just eat and everything will be okay. And so the snake for some reason trust the wise snake starts to eat anything, whatever snakes eat. And it starts to grow and grow and get bigger and bigger and kind of fatter and stronger and, and then at some point lo and behold, it sheds its skin, that all that skin, it wrinkled or whatever, and it has this new shiny skin. So as long as it was trying to hide away or get tattoos or get makeup or, you know, or whatever it was trying to do, there was no solution really. But it had to grow, for the old skin to fall away and the new one to come. So this is kind of the background for these three characteristics, certain kind of growth, maturity, development of, of these qualities help us to have very different relationship to many of the things that ails us the challenges we have the difficulties we have if we stay within The domain of the difficulty itself, you try to solve it there. Sometimes we're like the snake, you know, trying to deal with its skin by not eating or something. But if sometimes you want to develop these strengths, and then we have a very different relationship to what's happening for us.

So one of those strengths we want to develop is mindfulness. As mindfulness gets stronger, the strength of mindfulness helps us to grow, but it also creates a different reference point for who we are for kind of what the center of gravity for who we are, rather than center of gravity being you know, what, who knows, whatever our neurosis is, we start to having some rep we start to identifying with the strength of attention, strength of awareness, or we start identifying with the strength of stability, we feel quite stable and calm in difficult situations, or we feel happy sense of well being that's portable in the carry with us. And that sense of happiness becomes bigger than the particular individual detailed difficulties we might feel. And some of those difficulties begin to dissolve, because they don't need to be solved, because we have this kind of other thing that grows up like the snake. So we want to cultivate these things. So with not self, we cultivate self confidence, or what is in modern psychology, sometimes

called a strong sense of self. Buddhism is very hesitant to use the language of self to talk about human beings. Because when we start using the language of self, it's a magnet for all kinds of ideas of who you're supposed to be if you're a self. All kinds of things we learned from media, learn from our family went from our experience. And so the whole idea of self and Buddhism is an unnecessary concept in our spiritual growth. So isn't that Buddhism is against it, but you find Buddhists kind of shy about using it. So the idea that strong sense of self is not a Buddhist thing to do. But if you scratch under the surface of what a psychologist says about a strong sense of self, they mean you cultivate strong sense of self monitoring, understand yourself, well, sense of ethics, sense of strong motivation, self confidence, maybe self worth, and probably a list of, you know, a lot of other things that you're kind of cultivating and developing good sense of patience, ability to not be reactive, you can have all kinds of things because you've monitor and you develop these inner capacities, qualities. That's what you do in psychology, when you're developing a strong sense of self i think is good enough for those of you who are psychologists and not so not to ask. And so in Buddhism, developing all those qualities are very important part of the practice. We do Don't put it in a nice neat package called strong sense of self. So you can if you wish, but some of those qualities are developed. So, confidence is a very important part of practice. So when you sit down to meditate, we develop things like the stability and well being. But also we develop confidence, ability to sit upright and strong and capable and feel like we have the mental capacity or a heartfelt capacity to stay present for experience, whatever it might be, to have the confidence that we don't give in to our clinging our cravings or fears, or judgments or kind of belief system that might not be so helpful for us. We don't give in we don't get lost in our thoughts. And we learn to have a confidence to stay upright and present for experience. We learn to monitor ourselves, we know what's going on. We develop a strong sense of motivation in boot Practice, having a strength of motivation is very important. Just as important as letting go of craving. So there's different kinds of motivations. There's motivation of greed, which is not helpful. And there's the motivation to develop ourselves to develop freedom, to develop compassion and love. So, just so we develop a strong sense, yes, I'm going to do this. This is important for me. So we're there and present and engaged. These are all qualities are developing is what I call the self confidence or the opposite of, of this experience of not self. As that develops, there's all these. We cultivate ourselves with stability and well being and confidence in these qualities. Then, sitting in meditating or sitting and just being a person in the world, but a reference point is meditating, then sitting and meditating, things begin to shift and some of the things that begin to show gift is that the strong tendency to identify with certain things as being me, myself and mine begins to be seen as not necessary unnecessary.

So, you know something maybe something be a little bit ridiculous if I drove down here today and my old Subaru impreza and, and parked in front, and you all saw me driving around this old car that rusty wheels and you know, it's not hasn't been clean for a long time, it's actually cobwebs right now on its sides in the mirror. And I came in sat down here, and I all of you saw the car that I drove. And I started thinking, oh my god, what are these people think of me? They must think I'm a terrible Dharma teacher. My whole kind of, you know, persona is a dharma. Teachers now is at stake and I better you know, this is the Silicon Valley and, you know, I really used to be up to muster on here I should have a Tesla. So here I'm all concerned and worried about all these things. And so I sit here Sit down to meditate and, and I start feeling stable and since a well being being here and, and sensing certain kind of confidence and just being alive and present, and those car thoughts, my identity would be who I am, you are what you drive, right. You know, comes comes in, and I can see those thoughts go by and I'm not interested in, you know, I see, it's ridiculous. I don't have to waste. So what a waste of time to be involved in those thoughts, I better things to do meditating than to, you know, be concerned about the car that I'm driving and how that relates to how people see me and my identity. And so that just kind of that's part of the skin that just gets shed. So as we, as we kind of develop this practice, we start seeing a lot of different things that begin to shed are not needed. We don't have to pick them up, we don't get involved in those

thoughts, those feelings and all that. And the Buddhist tradition refers to three areas of self, where the shedding begins to happen. And that has to do with the area of possessiveness, what we take to be mine, the area of conceit, what we take to be who I am, and the area of Buddhism calls it views, beliefs, about what the what the self is. So this is mine. This I am, this is myself is how it's worded in Buddhism. And so we started seeing that we're, we, we take things as mine, this is mine. So one of the great things to experience happens occasionally on on Unlike meditation retreats or even coming here maybe is your you know, your, you've gotten yourself, you came here to sit and you chose a chair cushion from the shelves and you sat down, and you've maybe sat for a while there and it's your place, it's your chair. But you have to get up and go to the bathroom. And you come back and someone's sitting in my chair, someone's sitting at my cushion. And it's you get all hot. Mine, you've taken that as being mine. But you didn't realize how much you took it as mine until you went away and came back and so was taken. If, if no one had taken and you sat down with it, then you put the you know, the cushion back at the end and the shelves are walked away from the chair. In a week from now you only remember which year was yours. You know, it's like who cares, you know, but you know, you've taken it as you've been mine. And that's a very powerful thing that people do. Human beings do is they take things this is mine. I want it for me. And whether it's and then there's the I am you fill in the blank. I am my car, you know so I am you know, by profession, I am kind I am unworthy I am, you know, unlovable. I am so lovable. People better get on with it.

You know, you fill in the blanks and there's so many blanks to fill in right there is infinite number. Some of those blanks are filled in by our society for us. And that can create a tremendous pain, suffering due to discrimination, the prejudice in which people say you are and then sometimes that's internalized or we have to deal with unfortunately, other people's projections and ideas. And sometimes we do for ourselves, we could fill in I am. Sometimes it's based on experience. And many of us sometimes our self concept is behind the times, we're a little bit slow to change, right? And it's not uncommon for people to still think of themselves, I don't know 10 years younger than they actually are, you know, the kind of I can't quite get it, you know, I'm 70 years old and people are at the bus are getting up to help me sit down, you know, you sit down here, you know, but what, I'm not that old. And so I am you know, so that's and then there's the that's it. There's a lot of suffering around I am, because I am a lot of the suffering has to do with comparative thinking. We compare ourselves to who I am supposed to be, who other people are, and we don't measure up. We compare ourselves to what we were and look we are now we compare ourselves to what we expect to be you know, all the stuff we compare ourselves. Better, worse, whatever we know. And there's a lot in the mind gets caught up in that then it gets contracted fear builds up. A lot of the reason why people create a sense of self, this feeling I am, is to feel secure in life, because life can be secure, it can be frightening until you want to have some kind of orientation stability that gives us a sense of who we are, that we're protected from the difficulties of life. And it's a normal thing to develop a sense of who we are, we're supposed to develop a sense of who we are. But when we get latched on to it, then we can't let you know we can grow and shed the skin. So you know, certain things certain I am something are appropriate, but we have to know how to drop it. So for example, at this very moment, I think it's relatively reasonable to say that I'm the Dharma teacher here. And you know, I'm sitting Dharma seat. I'm giving a Dharma talk. If someone came in and said, Who's the Dharma teacher? You know, oh, you know, I don't have any identity. I don't assume anything, you know. And it's just a waste of time, right? I mean, there's asking who's giving a talk. And so I raise my hand. If I go home after this talk to my family and my two boys and say, your Dharma teacher is home.

Close the door. Yes. You know, sit down, I don't need to say the Dharma teacher is here. So when I get when I get home, that would be hopefully before that. The Dharma teacher disappears. You know, I shed that and that maybe pick it up next Sunday morning. You know, but that you know, so I don't hold

on to a tight This is who I am. But people we hold on to these I am very tight. And interestingly enough in Buddhism either The even the intuitive sense of emptiness I am, is itself can a form of it can be a form of attachment. Do you don't have to even fill in the blank? I am so you know, it just even a sense of I am ness is too much. So these things begin to shed and we start seeing with insight into this is not who I really am. I'm not really my car. I'm not really my profession. I'm not really someone who has, you know, I have thoughts that I'm unworthy of thoughts that I'm really worthy. But those are just thoughts. It's not really who I am. And slowly, especially this is why meditation is such a useful place for it or maybe some people find it like spending a long time in nature. Similar thing happens that we begin having a sense of shedding all these identities, all these ideas of me and myself in mind that aren't really needed. And we have an experience of being alive without them and sense of aliveness is meaningful. Feels good, feels wonderful. But it doesn't you don't need to attribute or add on top of it. Any idea of me myself in mind, you don't have to put a top have an idea of self. You can have a self but you don't have to be involved in thinking that. And so, as that gets stronger, that's the insight into not self. That Yes, my car is not myself. Your face is not yourself. Your hair is not yourself. your opinions are not yourself. Your bank account is not yourself. Your you know, your emotional qualities are not yourself. And here's a really fascinating one. If you can get this you'll be so much happier. Your neurosis is not yourself. Isn't that nice? And that good news. Maybe not if you really If you really love your neurosis some people like it so much and they're so you know familiar with it and you know and then who would they be without it? But anyway, so neurosis is not your so to see all these things is the insight into not self. And if you can, and it can be sometimes as you go really deep into it in especially in like on retreat, we begin seeing that anything that we're aware of actually doesn't have to be taken up itself. Any thought any sensation, any experience at all. And for some people there's a period of being kind of disoriented, sometimes fright, frightened, because, you know, if there's no self to kind of orient yourself to be, you know, you're not safe and so people like what's what Now where do I stand what happens? And so it can be kind of confusing, but that's why Having this background of stability, well being and confidence is so important that carries momentum going, it's okay, just to be without any attribution any building up any assigning of self to anything at all. So we that's not self that's not self. The third kind of area of not self or self in Buddhism is idea of views, doctrine. doctrine of self, this is the self. And some of these people some religions have great philosophies of what the self is in yet but a capital S when you talk about it, very closely akin to the idea of soul in the western discussion, that there is an essence there's a true self, there's a core little sesame seed self somehow inside, there's a big self that we identify with a Cosmos or there's all these kinds of ideas of self and Some people, that's where their strongest attachment is around ideas of this is the self. What Buddhism suggests, I think, is that, but Buddhism never comes along and offers a theory of this is the self doesn't have a philosophy, this is the self.

This is the whatever though. It just says that if you want to be free, if you want to discover the peace and well being that Buddhist path practice involved in, you can discover that without having any philosophy of self without attaching self to any thing at all. So it kind of is metaphysically or philosophically simpler, because you don't have to kind of figure out or understand this idea of what a true self might be. So this insight becomes stronger and stronger and what happens when you see clearly see that is we begin to let go of things we're holding on to itself. I see how much myself is tied to my car. And I go out and buy another car. That's one solution, right? Or, but that leads me even if I show up with a Tesla. And now people always think I'm great, or he's like a Primo Dharma teacher, that's what it takes, you know? So I actually speckled the opposite around here, but anyway, you go along with a little thought experiment. So, but then I started worrying, but is it clean enough to auto scratch now, and you know, you know, or after a while, it gets old, you know, and so, then myself is gets, you know, difficult to at all medigo new car. And the, the other other possibility is to just let go of that clinging to let go of that tendency to see myself as is reflected in the car that I drive. So we let go. And hopefully that's a simple enough ridiculous enough example, that you can appreciate that yes, it

makes sense to let go of that attachment. To the car as myself, and so that we start letting go. And that's where liberation is found in the letting go of the clinging to ideas, things as me myself in mind. So we let go, and we let go. And that's letting go can be deeper and fuller and bigger, more thorough. The more thorough we see things, there's not self, we see the thoroughness of not selfness in our reality. And that's why this in Buddhism says everything that we can experience. Everything that has the quality has the characteristic of non self. And because of that, then it doesn't make sense to hold on to anything whatsoever, as being the self. And because people are holding to have it that deep, thorough experience really direct inside seeing for yourself. Yes, it doesn't make any sense. None of this stuff that's in my experience, is the self makes sense to take yourself. Then slowly the grip that we have, for human beings, it's a very deep grip for himself. It's such a deep biological, kind of almost biological, maybe psychological thing that we have to hold on to self to be yourself. And so we begin to release it. And sometimes that release can happen slowly, gradually over a long time. Sometimes it can happen very quickly and very big. So, I've talked about the preparation and the insight. The third kind of context for all this is what's called the door of liberation, each of the three characteristics as a door to door that kind of the way it's kind of metaphorical door that we walk through. And so the door of liberation that we walk through with, not self we really see now itself is called the door of emptiness, emptiness and this is a deep in sight, into the absence, the spaciousness, the, the vastness of I don't even know what universe, thank you the universe that exists when we don't attribute itself to anything. Certainly the emptiness of self, all the stuff has no self in it. But as we let go and let go and let go, there is this sick feeling of everything is kind of like it's everything is empty, it's dreamlike. That emptiness sometimes can actually be a literal emptiness. there's actually nothing in our experience whatsoever, because the letting go is so full and deep. And rather than being a kind of a death, it's kind of an experience of grace of the utmost kind. Or it can be very radical thoroughgoing sense of some people call the dreamlike quality of reality because we no longer has any. We don't attribute any solidity to it. And one of the primary celebrities that Givens reality comes with this idea of self. You know, I'm solid, I'm here somehow. And so the idea that so we stepped into the space of emptiness. So it's not just a matter of letting go. But it's also having a sense of the space we step into when we've left when we have let go.

Some people are more oriented towards what, letting go of suffering, letting go the clinging and that's fine. And some people are more oriented towards the good that comes when we have let go. Whatever that good is. So we step into the empty Buddhism likes the word emptiness, steps into the emptiness, someone else quite say step into the light, step into freedom. So deep experience of not self said opens to this experience of emptiness you have some sense of emptiness from it, understanding of it. And then there's a door, there's a gift. Each of these has a gift. So there's a preparation, there's the inside, there's a door of liberation. And then there's a gift from each of these. And to follow this path of not self, insight into not self opens to the gift of compassion and love. why that is? I can only speculate. But this is a time honored, teaching any Buddhism, that somehow that emptiness, experience of emptiness is almost synonymous with the experience of compassion or compassion is in that experience. And certainly, that's my experience. That kind of my speculation is that when we, when we have this kind of when there's no clinging and we see kind of emptiness of all things, then there's a full functioning of our empathy. There's no barriers, no clinging, there's no resistance, no defensiveness, there's a kind of an openness to it. And there's also no fear. Because there's nothing in there when they're letting go has been thorough, that which could be afraid, has been let go of as well. And so we let go so fully and completely, that there's nothing here that can be threatened by being completely open. And so the empathy can just flow and be there. And so there seems to be a quality of compassion or love in that independent of even being with some person. Just, there's just love No, even without even an object of it. And to have that experience of compassion and love is the great gift of this because then we come back to the world hopefully, motivated by that, offering that to the world to others. Our care for the world, our care for others our love for it. And it cleanses our love and cleanses compassion to go

through this. Because many times love and compassion that people have which is beautiful, is kind of a little bit twisted by some of our beliefs, our attachments. Our fears are what we identify as self, our ideas of who other people our idea of emptiness letting go, is that we also have this ability to be with others see them, but not see them through the vantage point of the filter of ideas and judgments and stereotypes and projections. This is the first insight that they do or the signless not just not to attribute anything to people, and therefore when we meet them in a compassionate way or a loving way. We kind of have to see them more fully because we're not limiting them by our ideas and we're not limited as well. So the teachings are not self are considered very important Buddhism. But it's it's a teaching pointing to insight is a seeing that comes. So you don't have to believe it whatsoever. You know, go home now and say now you should let me tell you how things really are. Things are really are there's, you know, there's no self. Actually, there's actually Buddhist and we don't say there's no self. We're not supposed to at least. But rather there's the insight. There's the insight that's possible that the insight into this is not self. This is not self, not this, not this. And as that insight becomes mature, there's more and more freedom that's found. We prepare, we prepare. Ideally we would prepare ourselves for that insight and develop into people who have a lot of confidence, a lot of strength of care. And that strength of character character helps us to let go of attachment to self. And that strength of character also then becomes the vehicle for our compassion and care for the world. Thank you all very much and please cultivate yourself. It's very important. Take care of yourself this way.