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SPEAKERS

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One of the central themes of prayer, one of the central themes of practice of Buddhism is that of impermanence. And in fact, some people have said that all the Buddhism is one, the thoroughgoing meditation, or contemplation of impermanence. It's that central to the whole Buddhist enterprise. And it's not unique to world religions, in the world philosophies, and to human beings, to put some emphasis that the world is a changing place, things are changing, and transient things arise, things pass, things are in constant. And Heraclitus, who made this famous statement that you know, you can't step in the same river twice? So it's not unique to Buddhism. But I think what's unique to Buddhism is how thoroughgoing it explores this topic of impermanence, goes into a deeply. So in Chinese Buddhism, there was a record of a dialogue between a Zen student, a John student and the Zen master. And the students said, what happens? Or what about when things arise? And they pass ceaselessly things arise and they pass continuously. And sometimes there are moments in life where the transient impermanent, changing nature of our experience stands out in the highlight, just seems like everything that's going on is arising and passing, coming and going, and nothing seems to be, you know, that set permanent. And so this student asked about that. How, you know, what, about this time when everything seems to be arising and passing endlessly? And the Zen masters answer was, who's arising and passing is it who's arising and passing is it. And that's the end of the story. And this is one of these teaching stories where it's maybe a little bit perplexing, but he has to live with a story and contemplate it than at the right moment, this story might be quite impactful. So I want to get back to the story later in the talk. So the word for that usually translated as impermanent is a nature, say ancient Indian sense probably word. And literally, it means in constant, meaning that the nature is constant. And the eyes and negatives are not constant. So in constant and that's a different connotations than impermanence, and permanent suggest many people, the idea that it's here now, but it's going to be gone. And for some people, that's just bad news, you know, with Buddhism, they emphasize impermanence all the time. You know, it's, you know, it doesn't always make sense, you know, it's not going to be here. I mean, some things are kind of a little bit stable. Some things we expect to be around longer than you are. And, but we never know, there's no guarantee. And, but they do have in constancy points to the idea not that things are going to disappear. But the things are coming and going. And so like the sunlight is an in constant phenomena, you could say it's impermanent. But as long as we don't think of impermanence, meaning meaning that it's pointing to some day, in a few billion years, the sun is going to disappear, and you know, turn off and we're going to get cold. The but this sunlight is in constant, it comes and goes on a 24 hour basis, comes and goes comes and goes. And some parts of our experience have this quality of inconstancy, they're there sometimes not there other times. And so and some experiences are seen as being very well. You know, some some things are there for a while and never come back. Some things are there for a while they go for a while, they come back for a while they go and they come and go.

And something is in something that's considered very changing and in constant is not the things of the world, but how we experience them. It said that the mind is pretty fickle. The idea that, you know, from a Buddhist point of view, and for meditators point of view, we all suffer from attention deficit disorder. You know, because once once you sit down to meditate and try to stay present for your experience, or your breath, for example, stay stay focused. Many people, most people find that the mind wanders off so easily. And sometimes it wanders much more easily in meditation than it does in, you know, reading a gripping book or watching a gripping movie study, or, you know, driving at 120 miles an hour on the freeway, you're probably your attention is not going to waver very much, you're just you're there. And so there's many things in life where the focus, you know, it can be quite strong. For me, it was taking exams in college. I actually love taking written exams in college, I was one of those, you know, strange people. Because I would do study in preparing for the tests. And then I would kind of be prepped, prepared and sit down for two hours, or however long it was. And I would just, everything would disappear for me, but the exam. And when I left the exam room, I felt wonderfully emptied, like cleansed. And my mind was clear, and there was a certain kind of delight, just regardless of how well I did on the exam. I didn't know yet. But just the idea that I got focused. Well, meditation is hard to get that kind of focus. Because sometimes because it's not interesting. For the, For the uninitiated, or it's not scary. It's not like you're sitting there watching your breath. It's not like, it's not like a gripping novel, like so exciting. It's not like someone's attacking you, and you have their you know, they have their attention, your attention. It's like, you know, just like a simple ordinary phenomenon. And that's why it's so valuable to develop concentration and mindfulness, on something like breathing something ordinary natural, because there's not we're not being supported or we're not supported by kind of the minds tendency to be to want something really strongly or be really interested in something fascinating. We're not supported by our fear, or anger, or hostility, all the things that kind of can grip our attention. It just, they're in the ordinary experience. And so we get to see how the mind operates. And one of the things we can see is how much it jumps around. And the nature of our, how we experience the world is quite in constant. One moment we're focusing on, you know, probably, you know, on a computer screen, and the next moment, we're checking email, the next moment, we're checking the news, the next moment, the phone ring, next moment, we're wondering about what's in the refrigerator in the next moment, where, as you know, trying to tune out our partners trying to talk to talking to talk to us. And, you know, there's all these moments of going and going going. So the minds experience of the moment is quiet and constant. And it generally doesn't stay focused for very long on one particular thing. And this is a kind of very important insight to have about the nature of experience, the way that we experience is quite changing all the time. So they do have things arising, things pass is important, that things change is important, that over time things, you know, are relative, that the thing itself might be earning more constant way. But it changes for you know, many ways. You've been relatively constant for yourself and your lifetime. You haven't died on yourself yet. And you haven't, you know, vanished and, you know, then reappeared so much. You know, basically, you've been around for yourself here and your body and, you know, here you are. And, but you've changed over time. And some people as they get older, certain at certain Turning Point different people at different moments, they realize I'm getting older. And then there's just moments, you know, pivot moments, where, you know, first you know, you know, you're not 20 anymore. And you know, you can't do the things you did before your abilities have been decline. And you kind of see, well, you know, maybe if I exercise more, I can keep it going longer. But, you know, it's like some point you kind of just like.

Oh, well, you know, it's me starting to be that long slide. And at home these days, I'm starting to I started to last few days to walk around with two glasses on my head reading ones on top says close by and the others on my nose and I switched them, ones reading glasses, and what is my normal glasses, you know, and, you know, that's the slide, things are changing. And so you know, and that's, you know,

I'm not going to get laser surgery or anything, so. And I remember the moment where I realized that I have bipolar glasses, much of my life, you know, I started wearing when I was 10, I think they're sighted. But remember, when I was I must have been about 45 or 46, or something. And I went into a supermarket. And I was interested in getting getting a bottle of root beer. But I wanted to make sure there was no caffeine in it. So I lifted up the bottle, and I couldn't read the fine print, unless I took my glasses off, and then I could see it. So Wow, that's new. So the slides been going on for a long time. And so the changing nature and sometime at some point in the changing nature is in horizon, some people at certain age and again, it's varies from how old you are. And when this happens. I think some people see on the horizon, that they're definitely in permanent, that the end is coming. And it gets interesting when decisions get made. Because you know, I don't have I don't have that long, I'm not going to go to get I'm not going to get a PhD in physics anymore. You know, I'm, you know, I don't have time or in my mind doesn't work so well anymore. Something, you know, just doesn't make sense. Now to kind of go to school for 14 years and get a PhD in physics. I might not be around for that. So they do kind of okay, this, I remember my father in law's bought a new car. And when he was I forget how old he was, but maybe he was 75 or something, and maybe a little older. And he said, You know, this is gonna be my last car. Chances are this last car I buy. That was kind of interesting statement. You know, in fact, it was the last car he bought. And so this change the changing nature, you know, seeing change, seeing that our life is coming to an end. These are all important parts of life, and getting sick, all these things. And so how do we live with this world? How do we live with this change and then constancy of the world? I think some people when they hear this kind of Buddhist emphasis on the impermanence of life, the changing nature of life, and the teacher says, you know, it's downhill from here, and, and the horizon is coming. You know, it seems like these Buddhists are just party poopers. You know, you know, all those bad news come timesaver bad news. But the impermanence the idea that things change, in a variety of ways, has all kinds of does so in all kinds of ways. Some things change. They come and they go through here for a while, and then they no longer here. And it's a relief. It's thank God for impermanence. You know, I had the headache, you know, and now it's gone. Or I had, you know, something, and no, I had this very difficult boss. But the bosses go and new bosses get promoted, or who gets shifted over, got fired or something. And so thank God, different permanence. You know, I couldn't have taken you know, 20 years of this boss. So things are, you know, sometimes, it's fact that things change and pass is good news. Some things sometimes impermanence means that new things are coming doesn't just mean that things pass away. But new new experiences arise. And sometimes that's good news. And sometimes that bad news, the good boss, leave the good boss leaves. And guess who comes to be your boss? Oh, shut up. Oh, I don't know if I want to this is going to be hard. It's gonna be tough few years now at this one. Or sometimes the difficult boss leaves and a good boss comes.

Sometimes, you know, all kinds of things change over time. And sometimes it's the change implies good sometimes a change in place. Not so. Not so nice. But things do change your Experience change who you are in relationship to things change your your physical mind, your emotions, your life, how you are with things changes over time. And so you might have the same regular job, maybe your job doesn't change from day to day, it's pretty simple and pretty straightforward, doesn't change. But boy do you change change with hormones change with a weather change with life experiences, and you show up very differently every day. And so that's part of what you see. And that goes on. I worked as an a bakery when I was young. And I was the one called the prep cook. But I did the prep work for the baker. So I was going in the afternoon in the evening and prepare for people came in early in the morning to make the bread and the pastries. And I did exactly the same thing every day. And it was kind of fun in some ways. But I did the same movements. And I kind of and so after a while, I'd memorized all the movements, like a dance at the whole bakery to myself in the back room. And it was a stance of measuring and pouring and turning around and grabbing this and all that. And I knew if I'd forgotten

something, if I forgot the movement, it was kind of got entered into my body. And but it was really, you know, repetitive over and over again. But what was interesting was how much I changed. day to day I was a different mood, different situation, different experiences of my life that upset me, that made me happy things I was anticipating, being you know, low energy, high level energy. So it was all this change to going on. Things change sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse, but a change. So things change means that what was is not here now. It also means something it wasn't is now here. And that can be either nice or not nice, depending on what is the third aspect of change and impermanence and inconstancy is very that's a particular kind of emphasis of Buddhism is that change impermanence, the arising and passing of phenomena occurs in relationship to other things. There is no spontaneous kind of creation in Buddhism, like something wasn't there and just suddenly appears out of nothing. And there's no spontaneous combustion or you know, disappearance, things arise, exist and pass away, because causes and conditions come together. It so things appear arise in relationship to other things happening. The day appears because the Earth is spinning. And the sun is, you know, not so far away. The the, it rains in relationship there there being clouds. Here, if you're apprehensive about going to going to work because of a relationship you have with your boss. The apprehension is in relationship to something. And so that things are always there's always a relationship, there's always a conditionality conditions in place for this changing phenomenon that goes on. And one of the important conditions one of the important relationships is a relationship that we have, with the changing things changing phenomena. And our, our experience of life, sometimes is very much influenced by how things are changing. So if something is really nice, I mean, we really enjoy and want to have, disappears, goes, it affects us. We're in relate, we are at mood or emotions or thoughts or concerns, arises in relationship to the thing that passed away. Things are going to arise, we anticipate them arising they arise, they're there for a while, and it affects us. If it's a nice thing. We're uplifted and feel happy. Maybe if it's that unpleasant thing we feel maybe kind of discouraged or upset or unhappy about it in some way. But are we ourselves are very much influenced in relationship to what's changing it all the time. And this can seem like a simple insight, but it's key to the Buddhist insight of our experience and in relationship to some of the ancient Indian religions of the Buddhist time. The emphasis on permanence was not so different.

The idea that life is impermanent that's lots of change is easy to see. Some other religions in ancient India emphasize that this But they're so and they've impacted the world of impermanence as a world of suffering and challenge. It's no, there's no reliable, continually remote roll out reliable happiness to be fine found in the world of change. You can be happy for a while. But because things are inevitable change, you can't give put, you can't expect to have constant, permanent happiness, if, if the things that make you happy are changing. So the solution for some people in ancient India was to basically not live in the world of impermanence, the world of impermanence was not the place to abide in. And so there was an idea that there was a transcendent realm. And if you could somehow move your, your consciousness into this transcendent realm, which has a sense of permanence, and, and happiness, and a kind of essential ultimate value, and kind of check out of this world, in that that world, you'll be liberated in that realm of consciousness, you'll be liberated. So that created a very strong bifurcation between the world of impermanence, which was considered to be not such a good place to be in. And then the other world's ultimate world, which was really transcendent. And so the equation was, if you make this in a very simple equation, suffering are impermanence equals suffering. And so if that's the equation, the only way is to just get out of the world of impermanence, the Buddhist equation emphasizes the relationship relationality that exists between the changing world and ourselves. And the Buddhist equation is, I think it would have to be impermanence, times clinging, equals suffering. So not suffering equals not impermanence, equals suffering. It's impermanence, times clinging, equals suffering. So then you have a choice. Because if you take away any if making one of those into zero, so impermanence time zero, you don't get suffering. So it is not a check out of this world. The idea is to

check out the clinging is somehow overcome the clinging to experience. And so to have a relationship with the changing world, where we're not impacted by the changes, where the mind is not pushed around by it, where their relationship with the changing world is not one where we're basically pushed around by it, you know, something happens, and we're impacted by it, we get upset, we get angry, we want more, we're running away we're going towards, but rather have the ability to not let the changing nature of the world have any deleterious effect on us to have a level of equanimity or peace, where things change, and we can watch it, things change, and we can be present for it. But we're not. We're not amoebas we don't have this Amoeba like mine, that automatically reacts to what goes around us. It's not automatic, that connection. So if you leave here tonight, and those of you who drove here, or biked here, and your tire is flat. So what happens to you suddenly get the spear? Oh, no, no, my this is terrible. It's hopeless. What do I do now? You know, and you know that then you then do it, then the world of impermanence has you under its control? The world changes and it got it has you? Right? Because it's impacted you. If instead you go out there and see your flat tire, you say, Oh, well, of course, things are always changing and it changed in our change this way.

You know, I can, you know, I wasn't relying on everything being just this right and here it's not right. You know, you know, some response like that, then you're in control. You're not kind of being impacted, and automatically responding to things to change things that are not how they want them to do. So one of the primary hooks, or buttons, that the changing nature of the world uses to influence us to have an effect on us is our clinging or grasping to things, our attachments. And so we don't have to live with attachments, we don't have to live with clinging. So the Buddhist approach is to stay in the world, stay, don't transcend the world stay in this world that we can live in and live with everyone else. But somehow work on that relationship between us and the world. So we're not impacted everything, every time or when things change and shift. When impacted negatively, we don't lose our center, we don't lose our autonomy, we don't lose our freedom, we don't lose our ability to choose and to be wise in the situation. We don't succumb to the experience. And so then the Buddhist approach is to learn to notice, clinging and attachment, and to learn how to develop equanimity, to learn how to gaze upon the experience peacefully, look at that, rather than kind of getting all excited and running around in circles, or whatever we do. And so this is one of the reasons, one of the purposes of mindfulness practice is to learn how to attend, learn how to see or be aware of what goes on in the world, with a kind of clarity, where the experience of the world don't push the buttons we have, because there are no buttons. So those buttons are active or not upfront. So we can carry with us a stability, a kind of constancy, a kind of stability, of as law of mind, the mind becomes stable, or the hearts become stable. The heart has a constancy in the changing world, the heart and the mind doesn't change so quickly and easily. It's not influenced so strongly by what goes on around us. And so while the world is seen as being impermanent, the inner life starts becoming more stable, it has a little more permanence, or stability, or constancy, the world around us see is very unconstant. But it's seen with an awareness which has constancy in it, because stable continuous here settled. And one of the paradoxes is that for a mind, which is in constant, meeting a mind which is agitated and thinking and jumping around a lot with a lot of different thoughts and ideas. It tends to project permanence onto reality, and wants permanence. So if the mind is constantly changing, it's tied up sees things out there once things out there to be unchanging. When the mind becomes less changing, mind becomes more constant, it tends to see more change out there. And that more inconstancy and more Wow, things are always changing some maybe subtle ways, and big ways are always changing, lightest changing through the day, and the people are coming and going. And, you know, my feeling of mice, my being my body changing all the time that was I was satiated from lunch, and now I'm hungry, and just all kinds of things are constantly changing and shifting and it's phenomenon which they are. So it's kind of reversal that happens. And part of the reason is that when people are agitated, and the mind is swirling around a lot of thoughts, those thoughts operate, tend to operate by assuming that things are things are nouns are our objects,

and relate when we really think to two concepts. The concepts usually don't acknowledge that things are changing that they're verbs or processes.

But when the mind is still and quiet in constant, stable, it's not living in the world of thoughts so much. It doesn't live so much in the world of concepts. And it sees and experiences the present moment much more fully. And as we experience the present moment more fully it's just become increasingly aware of how things are constantly shifting and changing. And so the Zen student asked, When things are arising a passing, ceaselessly rising, a passing without end, just continuously. What then? And the Zen Master says, who's arising and passing? Is it? So what do you if you then turn around and look at yourself? What do you identify in yourself as the self that knows the arising and passing? And if the mind is still enough, then you'll see that you can't find anything in there that has the kind of stability that says, Oh, that's me. So for example, some people might say it's their thoughts or me. But if you look quietly, and steadily, at your thinking, your thoughts come and go? And who are so who are you? With when you don't use your thoughts? To answer the question? You haven't died? You're still here? But who are you? I don't have a thought to answer the question. And if your thoughts come and go, who are you, between the end of one thought in the beginning of the next one? If you kind of get a sense of that, then it doesn't make any sense to use a thought to define yourself? Because if you're not defining yourself, and who are you? What are you then are you are your emotions, some people identify very strongly with their emotions, but emotions also come and go. And so if you, and who are you when maybe you identify very strongly with one kind of emotion? But then when it's not there, then who are you? What are you in the gaps between the emotions? Some people identify with their desires or their intentions, but they also come and go, and who are you when they're not there? Because they come and go. So there's something that happens when the mind is quiet and peaceful, settled on itself, not not worried or anxious about anything. And it turns around to look at itself to find Who is it? That's aware? It's actually difficult to find anything in there. Nothing kind of qualifies, if you really look carefully. If nothing qualifies as the self, who are you? More interesting question then is, why bother? Who cares? We have a society and also kind of human psychology, that is very much focused on wanting to have an identity, wanting to be something and be someone. And for some people, it's quite neurotic. For some people, it's quite desperate, because there's so much challenge, maybe danger in their life, harm that's been done to them. And one of the ways we try to figure out how to be safe is to decide figure out who we are, and have an identity we hold on to. But the sense of identity is a brittle thing. Because to try to hold on to identity like I'm this way, when everything's always changing, you can't hold on. In fact, the more people hold on to an identity, the more brittle they become identities are kind of brittle, especially if you hold on to a tight, try to prove it and show it to people. It sort of turned out to be able to turn around the mind. Quiet, stable, contented mind and realize you can't find anyone who is aware. There's awareness, but no one who's aware. There's thoughts but no one who's thinking. There are feelings, there's emotions, but no one who's emoting. There are intentions but no one who's intending points to a radical, new paradigm of how to live in the world. It's one where the clinging doesn't operate.

It's one where there's no buttons to push. Because one of the buttons is identity is some idea. I'm here me and I already have needs I need I want I want something I want to be seen as certain away. I want to prove myself I'm a defend myself, I want to apologize for myself all kinds of it. And not to have the eyes operating. Not to have that button allows for us to operate in the world in a very different way. And it takes a little time to get to get wise about that, to understand how we can trust, this place where we're not clinging to anything, it's realized that we're probably safer going through the world. And we don't cling than when we cling. And that's a that's a big, big lesson to learn that we're safer not clinging than we are when we cling. Because I suspect that a good percentage of clinging is an attempt to try to be safe. So it takes a while to learn that to relax, to let go to experiment, to walk into some place. And try not clinging to anything kind of being open. Trying not to be anybody, just be transparent, be open or

just be and, and get a feel for it. What's it like? go someplace where it's safe. Like maybe go like to the supermarket where no one knows you. And then no don't be any money. You just just you know you show up, show up at the counter with a clerk and, and see what it's like not to be anything. But to prove yourself or show yourself or show smart you are. You know, just you know like clinging to anything. Just there and see what you'll learn from that. See if there's another way of living your life where you're relaxed and open. You can watch things change, come and go. But there's a stability, a peacefulness and equanimity. A transparency, a spaciousness, a stillness. Beautiful stillness. That can't be there, when the agitation of self is there, when the cleaning of self is there. So we live in a world of change. We live in a world of a world of inconstancy and impermanence. And we live in this in the world of impermanence in relationship to it. And it lives in relationship to us. And we can be in the excessively influenced affected by how things change. So we go, we have ups and downs, by how things are changing around us, who we can learn to become free, independent, peaceful in the midst of the changing world, so that we're more in charge, rather than the world, the world uncharged of us. But we're in charge of not the world necessarily, but we are in the world how we're affected. And to make that shift. At some point, we also begin seeing that one of the ways we stay agitated is by those who are strong identification, I am. And then to be able to turn strong attention inwards, and find that nothing in there, there's nothing in there that can be threatened. At the essence of who we are, it's, um, it's not It can't be threatened that can't be harmed. That it's clear, it's spacious, it's open. It's, there's nothing there. But rather than the idea, there's nothing there as being bad news. It's like the best thing and best show intent on it's like the best thing not to have anyone in there, because then there's space. For what's really in here to express itself. I think that was the topic of last week's talk, that there's tremendous wisdom, compassion, love. There's, there's, there's something that's very unique about you in this world, your gift to the world, whatever that is, there's a chance to bubble up in the space that's been created. When you're not holding on, or preoccupied with self.

And then the world of impermanence, flows and changes, and both inwardly and outwardly. And learning to trust this flow that flows from in the heart outwards is part of the art of living a free life. So as a way of ending, I would like to encourage you to experiment. Find sometimes maybe just five minutes here, 10 minutes here different circumstances, find a place where it feels pretty safe to do this. And experiment to the best of your ability to go into that situation without clinging to anything, or without any self preoccupying thoughts about who you have to be what you have to defend, or how you have to prove yourself and just just be there in a simple open way, it's probably best to do it in a situation where no one knows you. And you're probably never going to see these people again. And it's, you know, they're relatively safe people. So you know, and, and then run the experiments to try to just see what that's like and see if some of the preoccupied ways you have about being concerned about self or caught up with desires, how things should be, if you what happens if you let go of those for those five minutes, 10 minutes? What's that, like? What you learn? Does it feel good? Does it? Does that show promise? Is it interesting to continue to experiment and try it in other places? What happens if you exercise the muscle of freedom? and small little bits here and there? So I hope this talk of impermanence made some sense. And if you strongly agree, no, no, no, I meant to say to strongly disagree, say but but there are some things when you do your little experiment, put aside those thoughts. Don't hold on to them. And hold on to anything and those little experiments through the day. Thank you very much.