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SPEAKERS

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So I thought of talking about happiness today. And I feel a little bit shy, talking about happiness. Because not everyone's happy. and if we talk about happiness, it might seem like you're supposed to be happy. And if you're not happy, then somehow you're doing it wrong or not quite right. And so it's easier to talk about suffering. Because if you're not suffering, then most people will think, well, I'm supposed to be suffering. And I'm not doing it right, because I'm not suffering enough. So but so talk, the other direction about happiness is a little bit more tricky. And I feel I do it with a lot of respect for the challenges people have and difficulties people have. But there's no way around it that didn't the teachings of the Buddha, happiness is a very important component part of the overall path of practice, that when he described a path, a journey that people took through Buddhism, that that's a journey that the different stages of it involve degrees of happiness and joy, delight and gladness, and that this is kind of part of the deal, well, before becoming enlightened. And so it's part of the whole process. And it's good to have some familiarity with it, or some understanding of it, and how it works. And it's been my experience of my own life, that I have capacity, which I practice regularly, of not allowing myself to be as happy as I could be. Because I'm busy doing things, I'm too busy to be happy. You know, I'm involved in things are concerned about things. And so, but, you know, some degree of happiness, well, being is often not very far away. And the question is, for me sometimes is, should I avail myself more of the sense of well being or happiness or joy that's available? Or not? Or should I continue kind of doing whatever I'm doing, the emails I'm doing? And so the question is, one of the questions behind this talk for all of us, is to how much choice do we have, in the degree to which we feel some happiness, some well being? Some joy, some delight, some appreciation? Some contentment? To what degree is their choice? And what would that choice look like? Where is their choice, and what goes into what choices we make around being happy or not being happy, allowing it to be there and not allowing it to be there. So I like to tell variation of a story that is told often, often enough. And there was a man who was not happy. And he tried, for many years to become happy, did all the all the kind of standard things people do try to be wealthy, try to have some status strive to have a lot of goods try to have a wonderful relationship, many things that people pursue in order to be happy, and none of those helped him. And then he heard about meditation, tried that. It didn't help much, either. And so he went to a wise woman wise teacher, and said, What should I do? And I've done all these different things, and I've done all things that, you know, I've learned, you know, is supposed to lead to happiness, and nothing has helped me and know, what can I do? And the teacher, she said to him, you have to go find a person who is genuinely happy, the most genuinely happy person and ask the person for the person's shirt and bring it back here. So he went off and ask people, you know, anyone who is genuinely happy, totally happy, and some people scratch their heads and no idea and some people who Well, maybe their course would ask you really genuinely happy and they know No, you know, fairly good, but not genuinely fully happy. And it took years of asking and checking people out and sometimes they thought

that this person was pretty happy, but then spent a couple of days with a person and lo and behold, and, you know, it wasn't genuinely fully whatever that means.

But then after many years of search, the search there, they all have their backbone hind the mountain in the back country and, you know, in the next country over something, there's this person who is rumored to be genuinely happy, really happy. So the person got all excited and guess it as the person got closer and closer yet people say, Oh yeah, there's that person there we think that person generally happy, got closer and yes, that person like and got close enough and people, people would smile when this person would come up. Oh yes, we know this person there is power. And imagine the excitement and like the glow as you get closer and closer to this person. And so finally arrived where this person was living kind of in the woods and foot of a mountain quietly by himself. And just use the glow of happiness didn't have to even ask it was just like smiling, happy eyes were glittering and good. And the person Well, maybe if this is finally yet I can finally ask for that shirt. person didn't have a shirt.

And that's kind of the lesson of the story. And you can kind of fill in for yourself what that might mean. But the person maybe had nothing. And is there something symbolic, at least about not having anything that is a source of happiness. This is the example of a Buddhist monastic is someone who's supposed to have very few things very little, and whose happiness is not dependent on many of the material goods and many things that normally expected in our lives. And I've met Buddhist monastics who have struck struck me as being very happy people, remarkably, with very little things. One of the happy monks that I've known is I'm Ajahn Amaro, and English monk, Don Abbot in England. He used to live here in the Bay Area for quite quite a number of years. And he was taken downtown San Francisco, and gave it when he first arrived tour of San Francisco and tour of American business district, and financial district and the person who was giving him his tour, said to him, at some point, you're more wealthy than most Americans. Now, remember, I had no wealth at all had no money and not allowed to have any money? He had his bowl in his robes, but you know, he didn't really have any things no bank account. And so Amaro said, What do you mean, I'm more wealthy than most Americans. And his guide said, said, you don't have any debt.

So so something about not having, whether it's literally not having, or maybe or it's or it's a way of relating where we don't possess or don't hold on tight or don't depend on our material. Things don't depend on physical appearance, don't depend on status or in work, don't depend on many of the things that people depend on in order to be happy. I just came back from vacation in a country, which is probably relatively poor compared to here. And what struck me was that everyone you met on the street, I don't know how happy they were, but they were always smiling. And they were all greeting you and happy to say hello, and happy to be helpful. And I needed to get to the airport the last day, and we were running a little late to walk me down the country road. pulling a suitcase. I think we'll get there in time to the airport. And now there was little gas station and woman pulled out with it'll pick up truck and right in front of us, you know, she was in had gotten gas. And I said to her Can we get a ride in the back of the pickup truck? She said, of course. And we climbed into the back of the pickup truck and not only she take us down to where we had to go, but she took us kind of out of the way and right up to where we had to go. And that seemed like everyone was helpful and everyone was generous and smiling and it's quite good, quite a quite a different experience than then coming back. That was kind of like all the culture shock for a few moments when I came back to Los Angeles International Airport. That was quite a no one was gonna say hello to me. So the idea of this, I offer this story as a challenge to you for all of us myself. self as well, is how much do we need to be happy? And how much do we yoke? Our happiness? to having things, whether it's physical things, or whether it's experiences or relationships? How much do we, you know, are we requiring from the world and us, in order for us to be happy. And if necessary, do we have some choice about it, what we do, we are with it. The, I think, the one of the

impressions I have about happiness, here in our society, more generally, is there is some current of thought among some people, that happiness is something that we're supposed to be it's a state of being, it can be a happy person. And so maybe we have a right to be happy, we're supposed to be happy, we're expected to be happy. And we're supposed to just be happy. Get over whether just be it. But happiness is not something that just is. And rather than being happy, it might be more realistic, at least from the point of view of Buddhist practice, to talk about doing happy, not being happy, but doing happy. Because if we're just expecting to be happy, then it's kind of like magic thinking. It's kind of like we're supposed to be granted, it's just supposed to be that's how it's supposed to be. And there's something wrong with me because I'm not happy, or, you know, I have a right to be happy and, or have the kind of somehow do some kind of mental gymnastics, in order to come into this state of being happy, as if it's a state of being. But what if happiness is rather than being a state of being is a state of doing, we do happiness. But certainly, if we do happiness is something we're trying to make ourselves happy. That doesn't work so well either. Because happiness is not the same as pleasure, pleasure has a quality that you can anyone, almost anyone can make themselves feel pleasant sensations. You know, it's just a physical thing, you can, you know, rub your arm and that feels kind of pleasant, perhaps, or you can have some food that's sweet. And that feels pleasant, or, you know, you can pursue and love people pursue pleasant sensations, and are addicted to it. But happiness is something deeper, and you can't actually, you know, make it make it.

I think of it as a little bit like this for me, I can't make myself go to sleep, maybe some of you can do that. I can make myself lay down in bed. And I've tried for years to make myself go to sleep. And it seems like every time I tried to make myself go to sleep, I just mess it up. And I don't go to sleep. For me to go to sleep, I have to stop trying. And just lay there and then drift off into sleep. So it's not it's a kind of a thing that I have to I have my responsibility in my role to play. But I have to also get out of the way. So this doing happy is not making happy, it's doing what's helpful to allow some deeper thing to serve have a chance to bubble up into surface and to be there. And in Buddhist language, this is called conditionality, we create the conditions for happiness to arise, we can't be responsible to be happy. This always we can always do, we can always make ourselves happy. But we can contribute the cut the conditions that support us to be happy. And then if the other circumstances come or just right, then then those can then happiness might bubble up. But the conditions might not be right for it might be other things that are more important. You might have all the conditions for happiness, but then you encounter someone who's suffering. And so what comes out is your compassion and not happiness. So but we create the conditions for it, but they create the conditions is it doing? So that's why I like to think of we do happiness. We don't make happiness, we don't be happy. We do happy. So what are some of the do dues? What are some of the activities, conditions that help support us to be happy? in Buddhist teachings, the first one that's emphasized over and over and over again, is the importance of living ethically. So living in such ethically living in such a way and in And the Buddhist understanding what that means, is living in a way that your life is not intentionally causing harm to anyone else. So you're not intentionally killing people or harming them, stealing from them, abusing them, lying them engaged in sexual conduct, which causes harm to people that you don't cause harm. And when I first retreat that I did in Thailand, one of the surprises for me was to discover that I could feel happy or joyful, from a sense of ethical purity, from a feeling a sense that I was not involved in any harmful activities or motivations in my life. And that was something I never experienced before then I first experienced through deep meditation retreat. In fact, before that, people who felt were happy or thought or encouraged people to be ethical, I kind of thought they were kind of like, simplistic or too sweet, or kind of goody goody or something, that I didn't have a lot of respect for people who were, you know, to good. And it wasn't that I was unethical, but but the just, you know, I didn't have the imagination for that. But the, but you know, just I didn't, it didn't have a good didn't fit in my universe exactly, somehow. But in that first retreat that I saw a 10 week retreat, I discovered a kind of sense of well being is kind of delight or happiness or wholeness, that only I can only identify with being ethical with that certain kind of

ethical purity. That was really inspiring me to feel from the inside. The other condition that this Buddhist traditions encourages, if you want to have put in place the things that support happiness, is generosity. To live a life, that's generous. And even if you can't feel generous, it's probably might be interesting to be generous anyway. Do generous things, be supportive to people say hello, ask people how they are, open doors for people.

Spread, stretch yourself a little bit to make other people feel more comfortable and happy. Give them gifts to you know, do variety of things that you feel like you're giving and supporting others. And it's not this teaching about generosity is not meant to be a moralistic teaching that thou shalt, but rather pragmatic teaching that that kind of open heartedness to open headed endedness of generosity, and the memories of how that produces good in the world. That's those can be conditions for happiness for ourselves. The third area of happiness condition that supports happiness, that does many things. But the third one that can be mentioned, is meditation practice. And meditation practice, is a condition for happiness in a variety of ways. And I mentioned two of them here. And those can be divided kind of neatly between not inherently completely but between more concentration practice and mindfulness practice. That there's something about the human physiology, neurology, hormones, whatever's goes on the chemistry of our system, that when we get fully absorbed in an activity, when we're no longer divided, when all the different fracture parts of our being come together and get really focused on something that's wholesome, something that's satisfying and good, that it tends to release a lot of pleasure and well being and joy in the system. It's kind of maybe for some people have the experience of reading a really nice novel, if you're really getting pulled in, there's a feeling of goodness, or in the concentration of it. Or some people do a craft or play a musical instrument or something. There's something about getting absorbed into that and the world disappears around you. Problems of our day and what's coming up in the future disappear. And we're really fully here in the present for this activity, absorbed and present. And there's a kind of it's called a unification process and integration process, where we get unified in here in the present moment, focused on this here. And it just seems to be a physiological event that you don't have to want to be happy or joyful. It just kind of begins to welcome From inside, like an inner found during our spring that comes up. And it's quite remarkable to have an experience of a sense of inner well being and joy, that's there in it with for no external reason. We didn't win the lottery, we didn't have a fantastic meal, we didn't have, you know, time with our friends, we didn't, you know, you know, all kinds of things didn't work normal things, what people want in the world, we didn't get a shirt. It just, it just we just, it can feel like we just are being and here is where it begins, it can come into this dimension of life where it begins feeling like I just am happy. Happiness, just a sense of being. Though it's a being that arises from the doing, like we've been doing. Without the doing, without the engagement, the concentration, the absorption, the unification of the practice, that sense of being happy is not going to well up. So this is one of the primary conditions for deep, very deep, and the kind of what's nice about this concentrated happiness is it's very deep, it's very integrated, it's like losing or Suffusing through our body or being a very different way than happiness enjoys, that can happen that are evaluative that come from the Oh, that was a really great, I'm so happy for that or something, it just kind of doesn't require any evaluation at all, no thoughts at all. It doesn't require rearranging our understanding of things, because it happens outside of understanding. It happens just because of the absorption that we have, and what we're doing. Some people, it's revolutionary to have this, because they realize that they can be happy, without getting a lot of things in the world to shift in arrange, be rearranged. Some until they have this experience, some people are constantly trying to rearrange their life, or to arrange things or get things or fix things, if I just get this job or this training or this promotion of this person to like me then. And only then if then if then I'll be happy.

But to have all the if then is all the arrangements and doings fall away. In their present moment absorption and feel this happiness well up, that's free, cost nothing. You have to pay anyone for it. It's

kind of like a very different game in town. It's a very different perspective of what's going on. And it's very satisfying. And it offers people an alternative, to always be searching for something outside to getting something, we can find a wellspring of delight, Joy well being happiness in our own hearts, and we can carry it with us to some degree. The second kind of happiness that arises out of the condition of meditation is that mindfulness from the past not insight. And this works in many different ways. And I mentioned one here. And one is, at some point, we start seeing one more clearly, what in the world we're doing, and this head of ours. You know, it's I don't know how it is, for most of you, I don't know your and there haven't been in your minds at all. But my mind is capable of a lot of nonsense. And, you know, it does all its thinking and thoughts and planning and remembering and concerning and repeating conversations and planning conversations. And it's got a pretty, pretty crowded in there. And with this inner world, you know, fantasy and ideas and imaginations that we have. And as we do this Vipassana practice and start seeing what goes on, some people aren't seeing what this is a lot of nonsense. Or if you don't like the word nonsense, none it doesn't apply to your mind because maybe you have a serious, mature mind. It's different than mine. It's, it's just crowded, or it's swirling, or it's just always busy. The mind doesn't know how to rest doesn't know how to stop. Some people have no idea how busy their mind is always swirling, always engaged always until they start to start to meditate. Because it's just otherwise it's just like normal life its life as it's supposed to be lived. It's almost invisible. We're so dis we're so involved in our thoughts. That sometimes we don't even know we're thinking because there's so involved so to sit down and notice what goes on in this mind, maybe even independent of the content of the thoughts, but to see the speed of the thoughts or the strength of them, or the attachment or the contraction or the forcefulness that's involved in his thinking, is also kind of a revolutionary thing for people to experience. It's a very important insight. Because then it's possible to put a question mark, after under, or on top of that thinking mind, this really the way it has to be, is required for me to constantly be thinking this way. And then maybe the answer, first answer might be Yes, because my family expects me to do this. My friends expect me to do this, or my society is forcing me to have these thoughts and take this into account. Is it really necessary. And one of the one of the great contributions of meditation is that it's one of the time one of the times in human life where it's supposed to be okay, not to be involved in thinking, it's good to have a few like thinking free zones. And because it's such a good relief, it's such it gives us such a different perspective on our life. If we're not so caught up or wrapped up in our thoughts. So meditation is meant to be a thinking free zone doesn't mean that we automatically stop thinking. But it means that we begin to dis invest ourselves in the value of thinking, we stop investing so much important in their thoughts. And it's possible to see that, in fact, not only are you thinking, but you're, you're getting a lot of importance of thoughts, a lot of emphasis on them. There's a searching and a one thing and a desiring that fueling the thinking. That's a part of the investment. But to stop the investment, partly because the return has been so poor.

And then to be in to experience something else. A quiet mind is still our mind, or a larger, more spacious mind, that might still be thinking, but the mind is not defined, or delimited. By the thinking. thinking mind is very narrow and small. But a mind that is more meditative, has a lot of space in it, a lot of openness, expansiveness. And then the thoughts can occur within that the different kind of way. So in relationship to happiness, to begin seeing, understanding the nature of our thinking mind, gives us some point, some choice about how to be involved in our thinking, and say, wait a minute, maybe I don't have to think these thoughts. Maybe I don't have to always be thinking about the future. Maybe I don't have to keep repeating the past and all the hurts that I've experienced. Maybe I don't have to always be thinking of these thoughts of desire of wanting and wanting and wanting, or expectations, we start seeing more and more clearly what our expectations are. And how we're latched on to them are limited by the expectation frustrated by them, and how it maybe keeps us from having an openness where happiness can flow out. So at some point, we start understanding more and more what our thinking is about. And as we do that, it's a very personal thing, personal exploration, because it's going

to be different for every person how this works. But we're hopefully started finding a way where we no longer are delimited by the thinking world, the way we think, or we find a door in the mind, we can go through and step into a much bigger room that is not claustrophobic with this whole, you know, cocktail party or whatever your you know, thoughts and ideas and things going on. When we can then shift our attention from our preoccupations into being more spacious and open. Then it's then it makes sense to ask, Is it okay? is it available right now, to be more happy? Is there more happiness more well being more joy available right now that I've been availing myself of? If I leave here And I'm get mostly concerned about what's the traffic going to be on the freeway? And what's the best route to get home? And now I want to avoid the traffic and I'm late and why did I stay so long? And I should get on to what I could have been consumed with these thoughts. I can see myself being consumed in those thoughts. And say, why don't I just relax, open that door of the mind. And notice, it's a nice day. And maybe I can be like those friendly people that I saw last two weeks. And maybe I could say hello to someone on the street, and smile, and notice someone. And I can feel happier. It's a pretty special. I'm living in one of the most opulent places in the whole, maybe the universe sprawl, we know. You know, it's pretty phenomenal. It was hard pulling a suitcase down the road, because there was much asphalt we have asphalt. You ever thought about how wonderful that is? Especially if you're, you know, you're driving a car. You know, it's pretty, pretty cool. It's a lot of cool, wonderful things that support our lives and make it all go well. To look around and open up Is there a set some joy, some happiness and contentment that's possible. I'm not trying to make a pretty picture of everything and not say there's not problems and difficulties. I don't want to do that. I want this kind of to help us actually be more available, to look at the difficulties.

But to be able to look at the difficulties. I don't know if being happy is the right word, but being looked at the difficulties without the unhappiness that we're preoccupied with and caught up in, to be able to understand the mind, understand ourselves put together the conditions, so that when we step out into the world, that we're not caught up, preoccupied, guilty, angry, frustrated, but we're able to avail ourselves of an open heart and open mind and be able to feel the sun, the smiles of other people and the goodness of this world and in doing that, being able to meet other people without goodness, have the joy spread. And if we meet the difficulties of our world, of flew immediate with more generosity and care and ethics than we would otherwise muted with our goodness, he tried to make a change. So, I hope this talk will encourage you to reflect a little bit about yourself relationship to happiness, the place of happiness in your life and or the absence of it. And is there something useful from this talk or from this consideration, that might support you nourish you point you in a different direction. So that whatever your challenges are, whatever your unhappiness is, and difficulties are, maybe there can be a sliver or little whiffed of well being of contentment or encouragement, that that there is a possibility of finding a happy life with or without a shirt. Thank you all.