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SPEAKERS

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One of the important distinctions, that's helpful to know if you're studying Buddhism is a difference between causes and conditions. One way of talking about this is an example, I just gloss over of water here next to me. And I might wave my hand and spill the water. And it's reasonable to say that I caused the water to spill. But if we look at the conditions that had to be in place, for the spilling of the water, we see a lot more than just me sitting here waving my hand, there's a condition is it's there's a water here, there's, it's a glass of water that's tall and narrow, so it's easier to knock over than it be wide base or something. It would be you know, that someone thought to bring the water here and the fact that we have a custom here at IMC that the speaker has provided with water when they speak, and it goes on and on, you can do you know the fact that we have water pipes in, in, in Redwood City that bring water to us. And the fact that you know, those water comes from Hetch Hetchy in the Sierras. And so you know, there was someone had to plan that maybe more than 100 years ago, and that condition is going to multiply pretty quickly. And if you want to do something about spilling the water, you could stop me from ever doing it again, you can tie my hands down, because I'm the cause. But you could also shift the conditions, you can not have the water glass here, or you get a different kind of cup, or we could, you know, create the kind of holder for that glass. So that disconnect, you know, it's embedded in the platform. So you can never spill the spill, all kinds of things you can do. Or if you so when you talk about conditions, you have a much wider range of choices and options. And you know, the example wasn't a very good one. But I hope that you know, you get the idea that you have a much wider range of things you can do if you adjust conditions, that can make a difference than if you're only trying to address the cause. One of the consequences of only addressing the cause for many human beings is that they take they see the causes me or the causes you or them. And so there's assigning of blame and fair amount of self criticism or conflict, or there people have to do by looking at the responsibility of who's the cause for something. And sometimes that's appropriate for sure. But, but there's also looking at the conditions. And sometimes the conditions is more interesting, more valuable to look at the wider conditions of what's happening, that we can understand them and be adjust them or address them. Sometimes it's easier to do it that way or more more strategic than, you know, the blame thing. So in terms of Buddhist practice, the same thing is true. For our practice, that Buddhist practice has a lot to do with creating the conditions, rather than creating having causes. And people who approach the practice through the lens of cause, feel that I'm the cause. For my practice, if I'm going to get concentrated, I have to cause it to be concentrated. If I don't get contract concentrated, I'm the cause of that. And I'm to blame of that. And so there's like I have to create the cause I have to do it. Whereas if the, the if you look at the conditions for becoming concentrated, there are many, many more conditions than cause. And sometimes it's actually more beneficial to look at the of that the conditions and set different conditions in place. Sometimes it's easier to put conditions in place than it is to have a causal

effect on things. So in Buddhist practice, a lot of it has to do with creating the right conditions. And we're kind of mustering together how to create conditions. And you know, some of the ancient texts talk about, you know, if you're a that some of the conditions for good meditation is to meditate in a clean, orderly room. And this thing's like have clean clothes on or don't eat too much just eat just a mountain dew, they have all these conditions that they say are supportive. And so it's helpful to consider these different conditions. Some people find the meditating in a group is a helpful condition. Some people, some people find that it's not a helpful condition. They'll put up with it so they could hear the talk or something. But, but you know, meditating at home quietly is the condition that supportive. So begin to recognize what condition is supportive for practice overall is important and we're trying to create the right conditions.

And some of the conditions has to do with our attitudes and what are the attitude that we have some choice over But how we meet our experience how we meet ourselves how we're present for what's going on. So I want to give an example of our maybe how this may be the two, for maybe how this can work is that, you know, a person is born with an open hand, that's nice, baby hands are very soft and nice. And then various things happen in the course of a lifetime, that the door gets slammed in my hand, that hurts, tightened up my hand, someone comes along and tells me that, you know, my finger nails and not quite right, and, you know, tightened up even more, someone comes along and pokes me, you know, and says, you know, you're a bad hand, you know, you know, and, you know, you shouldn't keep your hand all in a fist, because that gives a bad impression, you know, undo it, and you're bad and bad, bad. And so as I hear these things, and events happen in my life, it's becomes harder and harder to open the fist, because I want to protect the palm, I want to hide the fingernails, I want, you know, just, you know, tighten up. And after a while I get used to this being tight, and I go around the world with a fist. And, you know, that makes a certain condition and to go around like this in the world and shake your fist at people. But, you know, has, you know, has, has other consequences for doing so but, but after a while, it hurts and gets painful. And I feel it, this is the drag, I don't want this. And then I want to change it, I should be a better person, I internalize the messages and bad fingernails, and, you know, I should be this way, and the people are telling me that I should, you know, that I should unclench my face, you know, they must be right, and I'm happy to do it, I'm going to be a good person. And so like, then I start living these attitudes, like, I'm wrong, I'm bad, I shouldn't do this way. And so then I'm telling myself, you know, come on Gail, get over it, you know, unclench your fist. But that time has gotten so habituated, I don't even know where the muscles are. To do that work. It's just like, where, you know, just I know, I'm supposed to, but what am i How do I do this. And so then, you know, I get angry at it, and I hit my hand, and, you know, come on, you know, and then I get embarrassed, or having a hand that's always in a fist. So I push it away, I try to hide it, you know, but I can't get to these can't go very far. I tried to reject it and throw it away, but it doesn't go that far, you know, because it's my hand. And then I get even more angry with it and more embarrassed, more ashamed, more depressed around it. And that just, you know, and then I get, you know, it's just the whole, as I do that, the fist tightens up even more and more, and I start poking at it, I start getting, you know, you know, drill saws, and try to kind of get in there and, you know, try to get the effective and efficient way of practicing to undo the fist. And you know, and you know, the drill saw just does makes, you know, makes it worse. And so it just becomes a pretty ugly thing after a while this fist. That's it. So, but there's another way, it's possible to take the right hand, the other hand, and gently put it underneath the fist and support it and hold it. And maybe, maybe let it feel the softness of the other hand, the support the care, the love. And as that happens, slowly, slowly, the fingers begin to release, and open and soften and thaw. And pretty soon they're open and the hand is open again in the soft palm is available. And with a soft hand is open and available, then the hand can do so much more than it could do when it's a fist. And it's so much more sensitive, the sensitive part of the hand becomes available to feel the world. But the condition that supported that it was to hold it to be with it in a kind way supportive way to stop poking at it or being

angry at it or it was shifting the condition. And it's not causing the hand to soften. But it's kind of allowing it to it's it's creating a condition for the hand to begin to open up.

So in this analogy, then we can we can have similar things within our mental life or psychological life. We can have all kinds of things can happen to us as we grow up and it's just life experiences will be closed down and tighten up. I can remember very, very specific events and of course my growing up where now I see that I made a decision then it felt more automatic or something to close down. You know, not going to share that I was not going to be open anymore. And I could feel the closing down that happened and it took a while for these This, you know, inner fist, this inner closing to begin to open up. And it had to it even took a while as an adult to realize that I had closed down, I have to kind of remember that and recognize it, it just took a while. And then there's all kinds of attitudes we can have towards, you know, these things that hurts to be closed, and hurts as a drag. So I can be upset and angry or discouraged, I could internalize all kinds of messages about how I was supposed to be and should be, I could come to Buddhism, and they teach me I'm supposed to be open and relaxed and not closed. And now I feel worse about myself. You know, it's just and so I close up even more tighten up and are insured, you know, and some people, some people approach Buddhist Buddhist practice as a, you know, as a kind of self help approach, it's just gonna do ABC, and you're gonna blast, you know, blast my attachments out of the water, just like you know, and but that just tightens things up maybe more. And so what kind of attitude what kind of approach is useful Buddhist Buddhist practice. And this is where the idea of conditions is important. We want to have what are the proper conditions? Are they supportive conditions, that that would not cause us to open up not cause us to heal, that caused us to release what we're holding? What are the supportive conditions that would allow the holding to let go of itself, the resistance to begin to soften and thaw by itself? What are the conditions for it. So in May people know, it may, seemingly more in the last 1020 years, how important it is to have a sense of safety. And so some of the deeper issues in human life are supported by safety. And it's remarkable how many people don't feel safe in their lives. The number, every once in a while that happens on a retreat, that someone comes and says, I've never been safe, and never felt safe in anytime I can remember my life until I came to this retreat. meditation retreat is something my meditation retreats for some people help them feel safe. And you know, you see it in most meditation retreats like ours, you know, there are no locks on the doors. And how many people feel safe to be in a place with no locks sleep at night with no locks on, it's kind of unusual. And so the idea of so we can't always create safety in the world, there's no guarantee you'll feel safe in Meditation Center. But, but Kimmy creates some kind of safety in her safety, maybe some modicum of safety, so that it creates the conditions for something to open up for the mind to get concentrated still to be settled. So we can maybe begin seeing a deeper way that we can see if we're agitated or closed, or closed down or, or some somehow. So what are the conditions. And so Buddhism offers a lot of conditions that are helpful to put in place. And one of the first ones, as usually mentioned, is practicing generosity of all things. It's something about being generous, that creates a very good conditions for the person who's generous, and creates good things for the people who are a recipient of our generosity. But there's a goodness, real generous, you can't you can't obligate generosity. So you hear that you're supposed to be generous. And then you know, you just start giving. But giving is not necessarily generous. So generosity comes from a goodness of the heart. It comes from an openness, kindness, a compassionate care, you know, generosity. And so that's it. That's the ancient texts since the time of the Buddha emphasized that one of the conditions that supports the growth of practice is generosity.

Another one is the practice of ethical integrity. And so you know, if you want if you spend, if you spend your days killing people, that's probably not putting in place to conditions that allows something deep inside of you to shift and change and to grow, stealing, lying and so forth. So part of you know, the emphasis here is not to be puritanical or moralistic that but rather, the emphasis is, if for your sake, if

you want to have if what you want to do is to free yourself, heal yourself, open up, grow spiritually. You want to have the right conditions that support that. And it turns out coincidentally, there's that if you're ethical that supports it better than if you're unethical. And then there's attitudes. So an attitude of kindness or compassion is more supportive than the opposite. And so to what degree can we bring kindness and compassion to ourselves to our practice? is an interesting question. And the proposal here is that attitude has two sides, there's a kind of attitude, which is kind of like a mood that you can't change so easily. And there's an attitude, which is an intention. And the intention, you can kind of get behind, it's my intention, to be kind to my anger. It's my intention to be compassionate to my despair. Even to have that intention, begins to shift the conditions. And then you try to kind of cultivate and work on that intention or spread it or act by it. So if I was, if I, you know, I would like to be compassionate to myself. And if I was, what would I do? Oh, I think I would get some rest. So the mood might be not particularly compassionate. But then we're acting on that intention. And that creates different conditions. Because if a person doesn't get rest, and gets exhausted, there, everything's more difficult, and the person's views as much shorter. And then if the fuse is shorter, and they snap at someone, that's a condition for something different. Expressing and snapping and being really angry at someone in a mean way. That is a condition that doesn't cultivate the practice doesn't cultivate the heart doesn't help us to heal doesn't help us to become freer and human beings. It turns out that our life is filled with forks. We can go down one fork or the other all the time, do we take a fork, which moves us towards having the conditions that support us that benefit us? Or do we create the forks that do the opposite. And as possible, as people settle into the practice, to get more and more interested in not because of it should, because soon as your burden device should, that's the fork that doesn't help. but rather to be inspired, or to feel generous, or feel kind of a kind of, yes, I would like to see the fork. And I'd like to kind of support myself to go in the white and the direction that's more beneficial, and more supportive, to create conditions that allows me to be more peaceful, more at home or connected, more mindful, more settled, more equanimous reactive. The conditions that allow for me to feel connect to my sense of love and compassion, the conditions that allow me to feel more joy, or happiness. Because the Buddha said that some of the conditions for furthering develop the spiritual life, are all those things. And so it's important to cultivate joy and happiness and equanimity concentration, mindfulness. But you can do it. By taking the fork that contracts you more,

that doesn't work, you have to do it in a way that's very open and spacious and allowing, it's kind of like, you know, Dharma willing, I'm going to try, I'm going to do it this way. I'm going to see if I can cultivate greater compassion here, or greater, just simple nonreactive mindfulness, and then and then, and then we have to kind of make, it's almost like we have to make room space to allow something to change and grow. But if we're writing our experience really closely, and trying to be the cause for the change, and fixing and manipulating and doing every little moment, there's no space for something different to happen, that only can happen if there's space, where it can grow. It's like a farmer who plants corn, and then wants to encourage the corn to grow. So the corn farmer comes out and pulls on the corn, you know, cool little stems, you know, or wants to see how's it doing and pulls it out of the ground, you know, see what it looks like, it looks like it's in fine until now. And corn doesn't transplant very well back into the ground. So that's kind of like it for the corn. So but if you want to be a you know, where the role of a farmer is not to cause corn to grow, plants to grow, but rather to create the conditions for it, they kill the soil, they fertilize it, they water it, they protect it from weeds and other things from farmers who want to check how they're doing. And so and then, and then without condition, something in between To grow, a plant can grow a flower can flower. And so the same thing with us. And this is kind of the principle of condition conditionality of conditions is that we have within us a natural capacity for anyone to do it to use a shorthand word, maybe it's inadequate to spiritual growth, the movement towards liberation, the movement towards maturing further as a human being. And it's a natural process. The but there's many natural processes within us. And so the question is, which natural process do we want

to support? Do we support the natural process that helps us become more and more bitter? Or do we support natural process allows us to go to a greater sense of joy and happiness and openness. And so putting together conditions that, you know, effects it. And if you're more focused on conditions than cause, then hopefully there's a greater sense of patience, a greater sense of allowing greater sense of, of appreciating that there's something marvelous working here in this universe of ours. That's not just our doing it, you know, that we're doing and responsible for, there's something really remarkable happening here, there's a remarkable plant inside of you that they put the right conditions it can grow. My own feeling is that there are you know, different layers of our inner life. The surface layer, is where we tend to get in trouble. surface layer places, we live things like anger and despair and meanness and greed and things like that. And you can certainly have conditions that support those that surface kind of operate and develop and become expert, that what it does. It's also possible, but I think what's, as we drop down into ourselves more, more deeply, in the deeper wellsprings of our inner life. It's really a beautiful thing that can grow and develop. And so how do we create the conditions that allow this deeper Wellspring this deeper, this plant that's deep inside, to grow rather than remain in the dark. And so this is where mindfulness is supposed to be very helpful. Mindfulness helped us to recognize the attitudes, the activities of the mind, the thoughts, and all these things we do. So we can begin discerning, seeing what is helpful or not helpful, we can see what we're doing. So we're not caught in some of the more unhealthy things we do. So we can make create more space around it.

So we can learn not to be angry at ourselves for being angry. Because that's not helpful to learn how to be present for our personal shortcomings. And not only feel okay about it, but actually, in a very peculiar Buddhist way, be happy that we know we have shortcomings. Because if you have them, it's much better to know you have them than to not know. And so Wow, I get to see it. And so now there's now I can try to meet it with the condition that's helpful. Now that I know that it's there, I'll try not to take it. So personally, I'll try not to, you know, get all tense around it or blame myself for it, I'll try to kind of be more, you know, more spacious around it, or more objective about it or more, you know, not caught in it. So, and if, as we do this with mindfulness, then we also start recognizing that there are depths in us as other places that can motivate us, there's other ways of being. And I think that some of those places that's deep inside is, I think of it is very shy, that it does not going to come show itself very easily. If the surface is really agitated and busy and swirling around and reeling with life and everything has to be done. There has to be a Sabbath, there has to be some kind of ability of, of opening up and kind of settling the surface activity, surface chatter that we have, and to create and create the conditions but we are where that which is deep inside of us, wants to surface. And so what kind of person what kind of mind what kind of attitudes? Do you think your deep, shy, inner life feels welcome to come into. If you're demanding, if you're, you know, critical of it all the time, if you're always judging if you're always, you know, greedy, and what more and more if you're always trying to fix things and actively kind of manipulating and controlling whatever is there. Maybe this thing that Shai doesn't want to come up maybe what's needed. is a very different attitude that in, I would, so I kind of proposed that for some of this modern culture around here in the peninsula is not very well appreciated, maybe I don't know it so well this culture but, but, but it requires a lot of patience and requires a degree of contentment. I've heard of companies who don't want their workers to be content, because then they don't work as hard. And so you know, you shouldn't be they shouldn't have can be content, you should always feel dissatisfied that you want more and more and more wealth, more money more this. But you know, if your content then why work so hard. You know, so I think Buddhism is a little bit subversive, sometimes, because it encourages people to be content. So content, certain degree of contentment, certain degree of patience, certain degree of willingness to be inefficient. You know, that's a lot of people want to be efficient, you know, you know, please get me enlightened as quickly as I can. Because I've always other important things to do things to buy, you know, all kinds of things. But I think that there has to be a degree of inefficiency, or patience, or space, or allowing something to begin, have a chance that's shy

to bubble up and grow, until it can become strong, and it can flower. And so I think maybe it kind of a wonderful word for this inefficient patient, allowing contented kind of way of being is to call it a Sabbath. Because Sabbath is kind of like, you know, Sabbath is called a sacred and some religious traditions. And, you know, when you say, I'm taking my Sabbath, you know, you can't mess with someone then. So, you know, for Buddhists, every, you know, every morning or something every day, they, if they meditate, the meditation is their Sabbath, doesn't have to be like literally in a Sunday or Saturday, but it can be, you know, it can be, you know, an hour or half an hour, sometimes I'm understanding that there has to be some different space to allow something to develop and grow. So, conditions, putting in place conditions, rather than putting in place causes. And that means you have to have the patience of a farmer. And,

and also the resilience of a farmer, because sometimes they plant a crop and it doesn't work out, storm comes and destroys it. And then next year, they try again, next year, try again, and so with my spiritual practice, it's not necessarily efficient, it is not always, you know, works out just, you know, you know, it's not like, you know, paint by the numbers, and then you have a beautiful painting, it's, it's more like, learn to paint and you have to try a different, you know, many different times until you get it right or something. So, to end this little talk, what I'd like to say is that, for me, I'm confident that each of you has tremendous Beauty Inside tremendous capacity inside that's waiting for you. And that you might want to consider it a little bit. What are the conditions that you want to put in place that will allow this beauty or this treasure that you have inside? To come forth? and allow it to be there? And how and how do you create the conditions, given the circumstances of your life? Many of us have many challenges in life, all kinds of challenges. And so how do we approach those challenges? How do we live with those challenges, so that we're putting together the conditions that allow something deeper and wonderful to happen. And again, the idea of conditions is important because you can't necessarily get rid of your challenges. But it might be possible to change some of the conditions, maybe how you relate to it, your attitude about the challenge you have, or how you interpret them or believe or the story you're telling around them. So what are the conditions and how can you shift your change or conditions or contribute conditions, and it might not require a huge change. And this is the analogy I like to give for this is that if you have two parallel lines and they go on forever, then then they're always parallel and they never go further away or closer together. But if you take one of the lines and nudge it ever so slightly away from the other one for the first time Long time, you might not notice that they're slowly going apart. But over a long time, they get further and further apart. So sometimes even a relatively small change in one's daily life might not seem so big when you first do it. But if you really keep doing it, it's over time, it might make a huge difference. So if you don't meditate every day, even if you meditate 15 minutes a day, it might not make a big difference today or tomorrow or next week. But over time, I'm sure it's going to make a big difference. If you start being a little more careful with your speech, and try to speak just a little more kindly, when you go through life, it'll be more supportively of people and yourself. That might not seem a big deal today or tomorrow, but in a year or two years, you've it's put you on a different track. And it's changed, it makes change. So the role of conditions. So those are my thoughts today. So we have a few minutes, maybe we can take five minutes, if someone has any questions, comments, or wonderful testimonials, examples of how conditions can make a difference, as opposed to causes.

So I have a question about conditions. And so you create conditions, and even over time they make changes and you notice them. I'm curious about some some things, their conditions existed, they become habits, they go away. But there are other things that are conditions that remain in place that are causing negative things at the same time you're creating new conditions, could you could you speak about that a little bit

is that some display understand is that there's many conditions at once, you know, life is full of conditions simultaneously. And so you might be put into putting in place a helpful healthy condition, while some of the unhealthy ones are still in place. Right? So comment about that. You start where you can you address what makes what's effective. If you try to do it all at once, that's exhausting. That's, that's going down the wrong fork perhaps. So you start where you can and so do the parallel lines, even even starting in one place, you know, can get you a toehold into the path and start talk you off. And then later when it's appropriate, maybe you can address some of the other things. So you have to kind of so then the things that you can't address, what's the right attitude towards them, maybe patience, maybe forgiveness, until or compassion until you can get to them. So it creates a different attitude. The other the other other things, and sometimes some conditions will never go away. You know, and so. So sometimes it's learned to be more economists at ease, and have certain things happened within us. And just kind of like oh, you know, there it is again, and we see it more spaciously. So we're not caught by it or not pushed around by it. One of the things that I've loved when I have a chance to spend time with very senior Buddhist practitioners or teachers, is they are the ones who still have some some of the same foibles to say it nicely. That they might have had 40 years before. So they still have it. That's a bad advertisement for Buddhism, maybe. But what inspires me is that they have some of these foibles. But how relaxed they are about it. How how you can't even tell they have it because they don't act on it necessarily. They've know it well. They're spacious around it, there, see it coming there. It doesn't push them around, they don't get pulled into its orbit. But those things still aren't those certain things rise still arise. They might still get angry, but the anger arises and you know, they just leave that let it be they don't get involved. So this idea of you know, inspires me that people would have a boss you know, we're all avoid Boston so they did that was supposed to be you know, for a bolus is, you know, maybe it's even that idea is the wrong fork. Maybe it's possible before Ebola Someday, but but, you know, to insist on it or expect it or demand it and measure yourself by it. Maybe that's the wrong fork. Maybe a better fork is just, this is why this is what I have now I'll do the best I can with it. And I'll try to be free of it without being rid of it. So I don't know that that good enough answer. Okay, so I'm not saying any of you have any foibles. But if you do, what conditions do you want to hold those cables and I want to thank you all for being here.