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SPEAKERS

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So here in the West, Buddhism is often considered a religion. And sometimes there are expectations of what religions will provide. And there's many, many expectations, associations to that. But one of the more maybe profound effects. And that expectation is profound, profound, but one of the more profound aspects that's expected to be provided by religions is some sense of the of human nature, some idea of fundamental human nature, what it is what's going on. And there's tends to be two general huge categories that of human nature that different religious religious views espouse. One is that something about something like the human innate goodness, and the other would be innate badness, though I never heard him say it that way. But you know, here in the, in the West, we have the idea of original sin, that's fairly common. And in Buddhism itself. It's not as explicit, but you do find that range, within all the right wide range of Buddhist teachings, we have teachings that posit what's called sometimes the Buddha nature that each of us has Buddha nature, that we have something, you know, really beautiful and wonderful inside and in our essence, and then we have teachings that are at least kind of emphasis that emphasizes, you know, it was pretty awful in there, we have, we're just kind of filled with greed, hate and delusion, and that's kind of characterized as much of human life and in society. And, and, you know, we have to, you know, that's kind of focuses on how bad it is in there, and how we have to do something about this badness. So this range of that exists, have some kind of like Spark, divine spark, something innately good, something very special that we have in our nature, and something about that's our nature is somehow flawed. And so, in the flawed nature, we have to somehow cope with that deal with that, overcome that. As I read the early teachings of the goes back to the Buddha himself, I get the impression that he wasn't viewing human beings, searching for a particular human nature that defines it definitively who we are. And rather, how I read these texts, the focus is more on our potential. And we have a variety of innate potentials. And we have the innate potential to move in directions of great goodness, great beauty. And, in fact, their early tradition has a word Brahma, which can be translated as divine. And sometimes they use that word for our potential, we can move into kind of divine states of being. And we also have the potential to move into awful states of being, too We're capable of moving into the areas and fields of great evil, or harm. There's a very powerful word in this early tradition, which in America, unfortunately, is papa and papa in Pāli means kind of usually translated as evil, a one to one translator calls it deadening, that which is deadening activities, we do that you know, and so, we have these potentials and go these two different directions. And the question is, which direction do we go. And so, rather than is positing we have a particular nature, we have a potential and with potential can go in variety of different so almost like way, if our innate nature is of two kinds, and to go either towards the good or evil or towards the bad, and it depends, you know, on conditions, which are those routes we take.

And, and so this points to the teachings that I was talking about last week, of the emphasis on conditionality on conditions and putting putting in place conditions that allow certain things to cultivate

and grow and develop. And so we have a choice, we have some choice or we we see We can act as if we have choice. And acting as if we have choice makes the world of difference. Because by active we can make choices to, to bring about the conditions, we can make a choice to move in the direction of goodness, to tap into the potential within us that cultivates and develops goodness. Or we can, could make choices to do the opposite. And occasionally, there are people who intentionally choose that. But sometimes it's not so intentional or conscious. But people do sometimes choose anger or hostility or hate or greed. And that's the route they take. And that puts in place very different conditions than if we act on love or generosity, kindness. And so we have this choice. That's Wait a minute, we can wait a minute. Okay. So I think it's helpful to think that we have choice. And choice is that's where we discover that's where we find what's beautiful about us, or what is ugly about us in our choice, it begins with choice. And so have you consciously thought about what kind of life you want to live. And you're constantly, constantly thought about the choices you want to make the direction you want to go in your life. And what's nice about this is that the emphasis is, is on the choice that you make now. And a wonderful idea that I kind of picked up a long time ago, was the idea that your life always begins a new now. You don't have to burden yourself too much with what happened in the past. You can learn from the past, to try to do better based in the past, but to stay stuck in the judgments and the ideas and the of the past. In such a way that you're you don't make healthy or appropriate choices now is not necessary. In a sense, you can start all over again, every day you wake up, there's can be a new choice. Every moment there could be a new choice. And I think that the teachings of the Buddha, this idea that now is the place of choice now is the place to start a new life is emphasized indirectly over and over again. The teachings on karma, for example, are mostly a teachings on Pay attention to now, it's not about what did you did in the past, it's going to bite you today. It's not so much about how to take care of your future so much, little, little bit more of that. But it's really, the emphasis is pay attention to your choices now. Because now those choices they're going to send, they're going to set the direction of your life into the future. And it can feel like a big burden to have choice like this. But I think the idea is to have some very simple ideas of or vision of the direction you want to go or the way that you want to live your life. And then hopefully some confidence that it's worth doing that that you can do it you can choose for that. So there's simple choice, for example, of being bitter, or being unkind or being angry.

Choosing anger, you might not be able to, to choose whether or not you're angry, but you have a choice about whether you feed the anger or align yourself with the anger or go along with the anger or the choice to go even if you're angry, the choice to respecting the anger or not repressing it, but to not act on it but instead to act the best you can on a different sentiment different direction. And it might just be that you choose to keep your mouth shut. And that could be pretty powerful, powerful, to not speak the anger with to keep quiet because those create better conditions for everyone for yourself and the people around you. And then later you might be able to figure out the appropriate conversation you need to have with someone. So to consider where what you want your life to be based on the values the purpose, the direction the meaning. That is where we find out what your human nature is about, or what kind of what aspect of human nature you want to move towards, or that you want to feed and develop and grow into, you know, for yourself. So rather than looking at human nature as something fixed, it's actually something you can influence and develop. The Buddha seemed to say that, if you have the idea that your nature, your innate human nature is good, then people are less likely to want to practice to do anything about themselves. If they feel that innate nature is bad, well, then it's kind of hopeless, you know, so why practice. And so for the Buddha, it seems that the idea of potential potential reality of conditionality of nothing fixed there's no fixed nature, is the best kind of circumstance, best understanding in which to be motivated, to try to practice to cultivate to develop, to move forward on a path of spirituality of some kind of, and in his case, it was a path of liberation. And so we put together conditions. The other thing that's nice about this conditionality, you know, choosing conditions is, I think I talked about this last week, is that it's different than choosing to be the causal agent. When we say I, you know, if we want to move in a direction or life, we want to move towards

greater goodness, develop our good capacities, and kindness and compassion and generosity and many things. If we decide that we're going to make that happen, sometimes we just kind of mess it up, it's kind of sometimes more difficult to be the causal agent, because it might not be something that belongs to the causal networks of our neural pathways or something. Because partly causal networks, a cause is a very narrow part of the whole kind of ecology of the heart and the mind and a verse of our social life. Whereas when we put together conditions, we're putting together a wider field of factors that can begin influencing how we feel and what happens in what evolves and what develops. So for example, if I decide that I want to become work equanimous about life, maybe. And I decided to do it, I never been there. Maybe it's the wrong example. Maybe it's wrong example. Anyway, I apologize ahead of time. But, but I'll take my chances. The I decided to see if I can cultivate equanimity. On the floor of the kind of stock market, you know, the floor, this is the what is it called with a stock market exchange in New York? trading? Yeah, yeah, Wall Street, you know, just on the floor to put the photographs I've seen people are yelling and screaming and standing there. And it's a very exciting place, I'm sure. And I don't think it's the place where it's the great manifestation of generosity. Or, you know, I don't know, maybe there's a lot of kindness there. I don't know. But I'd imagine that committee can think of a better circumstance, but then the example I'm drawing up, but I could imagine that's a difficult circumstance to become calm and economists. And if I think but if I go someplace, you know, a quiet meditation center where everyone's quiet and calm and settled, then those conditions and let my muscles relax, those conditions, settled my sense of caution and apprehension and not worried that someone's going to run over me as they run across the exchange floor. I'm sitting there quietly in my cushion.

You know, it's like, there's all these, you know, all these divots are the factors come into play, that support me in become economists. So that was probably a very, very poor example of trying to say that if we focus on only being the cause, to make something happen, we might focus too narrowly. And we're supported by a wide range of conditions. And the idea is to create and put in place those those conditions that make it more likely that our whole system begins to move and change and be influenced in a good way. So and so there is a degree of choice about what can do As we put in place where we meditate, the kind of people we spend time with, how we spend our time, the kind of influences we have, you know how much time we spend on monitors is a big issue for many people these days. I've noticed that in myself that I have to be careful how much I'm on, on the computer, and especially of how much I'm on the web. Because I've known especially in the evening, I've been happily on it for a while. And then I find that there's kind of this momentous, self propelled, propelling momentum inside of me to just look at one more thing, you know, let's not get out of the seat, you know, this is this important things going on here, let's see what next. You know, it's like, you know, and so I have to watch because it seems like I'm putting I put together the conditions for this aquis acquisitive kind of movement of the mind that it starts having a life of its own, and it has a kind of pleasure to pursue it or kind of, you know, drive, that's not really that pleasant. And so I've learned to see that, and when I see that, I usually use that as my signal, that's time to stop. Because I don't find that very useful. But if I don't, you know, I've known people who've gotten pretty addicted to that world and pretty debilitated. Exhausted at the plate, you know, it kind of makes mix conditions, very different. So conditionality.

And now this idea that we're not necessarily in charge of everything, but we are in charge of the choices we make. And then we it's kind of like put the conditions in place the best you can, and then trust the Dharma, put the conditions in place, and then make space and allow for something which is not you to operate. And what that not Yunus Is, You Could you know, who knows, but there's a, you know, it might all be inside of you, because we have this huge, you know, inner ecology that's much more sophisticated than you are much more developed into you in terms of your, what you can be self consciously aware of about yourself. And so to, uh, to put in the conditions that allows this huge apparatus that we have to operate effectively in the direction of our goodness, is the name of the game.

And so we have some choice. And we have to keep asserting that choice, but also at the same time is not taking too much responsibility. So this, the idea of being responsible for the choices, but not necessarily responsible to make things happen or not necessarily responsible for how it unfolds, is kind of the balance the act of this whole approach. So I've sometimes sit down to meditate, and my intention is to be present for whatever's here. And I might, in the back of the mind my mind have some idea, I'm gonna get nice and calm. Or, you know, I'm, you know, I'm gonna get concentrated. But I sit down and I'm going to be present, that's a choice, I'm going to be present for what's here. And then as I'm present for what's here, sometimes the Dharma has other things in mind for me, then becoming concentrated, or becoming calm. And I find that very interesting. Because then I get to study that I get to be mindful that and see what's going on. And I kind of trust that whatever shows up is the task of the moment, as opposed to getting upset and angry, because it's not going the way I expected it to go. So this balance between making choices and being relaxed about the effect of that or being relaxed around that. And you can enter make choices in a way where the choices are not demanding, where the choices don't have expectations built into them, where the choices have not a lot of self identification with them. Look at me, I'm making good choice. but rather to make choices over and over again, in a very relaxed, light hearted open way. Putting together those conditions. And then the Buddha when he described this unfolding, that happens from the conditions being in place, used all kinds of analogies or similes from the natural world to describe the natural flow. And one of those natural flows that I'm fond of is that of rain falling on a mountainside. And I've talked about this before, the so he talks about when the rain falls on the mountain starts rolling down the slope and then The raindrops start falling into the end, filling the clips, little gaps in the mountainside. And then when those are full, it overflows, and it fills the gullies. And when those are filled, it overflows and fills the creeks and the creeks flow down and fill the ponds in the ponds, when they get full overflow, and flow down to fill the lakes. And when the lakes get full, they overflow and fill the rivers that go down to the ocean, and end up in the ocean. And so this example of you know, something, something is coming along, and we take our fill of it or fills us. And when it's full, that's a condition for to spill over and move into the next thing that unfolds. And so he would have said that, if you have confidence or faith in the practice and how the practice unfolds in our potential, the possibility of moving in a good direction. That if the when the confidence gets strong enough, and big enough, feels that the goalies maybe goalie full of competence. If you don't need that much, then then it overflows into gladness.

And gladness. When it gets full enough, it overflows to joy and joy when it gets full enough overflows to tranquility, and tranquility, when it gets full enough flows into happiness. And happiness when it flows when it gets full enough flows over to do concentration. So it goes all the way until we get to the ocean of freedom. And but the way he describes it, it just have water. That's the nature of water to flow in a certain direction. If we put conditions in place good conditions in place, and we make space and allow for some profound inner potential to unfold, it will flow in a good way. But the Buddha used the same analogy of the raindrops going down the mountainside for the opposite. That if you choose unwholesome or unskillful, or evil states, if you choose to be hostile, for example, or angry or awkward, he described a list of different kind of painful states that people can choose. If you choose those, those are conditions that do the same thing. But then what it flows into over time, the bigger and bigger pools of water and rivers and becomes you know, more and more painful and more more difficult. So they do there's you know, conditionality can keep unfolding and developing, so be careful what conditions you put in place. Interestingly, the Buddha also used this idea of the natural flow of the rain down the mountainside, to describe the effects that a good person has on society and others, that someone said, a good person who's interested in us living for the welfare, happiness, and just one more that for the welfare and happiness of others, that that person's influence will have this act in the world the same way. Suggesting that maybe even in the wider world, the focus is not so much on causing change, but rather putting in place that conditions for change. And part of that condition is bringing our goodness

into the world into what we do in the world. And then there's also a natural unfolding a natural flow that can go from there. And so I find it very inspiring myself this emphasis on conditionality as, as opposed to the emphasis on causality. I find that it frees me from taking a lot of kind of personal, the burden of personal responsibility. But it does give me the lightness or the inspiration of personal choice, because I'm not expecting you to choose for me. It has to be an eye to eye to choose. And so it's not a burden to have to choose. It feels like a certainly a privilege. It feels like a wonderful thing. It feels to me the idea of choosing how I am in the world, how I am for the next moment, how I encounter someone you know, it can be done in such a way that it itself feels really good. It itself feels light and easy and an opening. One of the things that I find very helpful about this emphasis of conditionality is I don't have to take on the burden of the world, which is kind of, you know, the world is pretty heavy. And the sense of obligation they can come in the sense of, we have to do something about all the suffering of the world. You know, that sense a burden obligation, that in itself, is a condition that opens up to something that moves in a certain direction, at least as I paid attention to myself, I don't feel it's created a very good condition in me to move to in a good direction in my life, when I take on the burdens of the world, as an obligation that I have to deal with it. It can sound very cruel, it can sound very privileged, it can sound very cold to say that. But I feel confident saying at least for myself, because I recognize in me that I can be greatly inspired.

To want to respond to the suffering of the world to conditions of the world. I don't take it on as a burden. But I do take it on as an act of generosity, I do get on some be inspired, I do take it on, or I do kind of sit, it's more like I don't take it on at all. It's rather a Wellspring that flows from out of me that this is what wants to happen. And so what wants to happen is to respond to the suffering of the world. But I'm not cheap. I'm not exactly at this point, I'm not choosing it, I've chosen to kind of stay open and present for this world that I live in. And the degree to which I'm at equanimous, peaceful, at ease, connected. My heart resonates with what goes on in the world. And there's a there's a movement of desire arising out of the heart to be responsive. And that desire to be responsive, I trust. For myself, I don't trust the burden, an obligation to change. And what I found in myself, that I have a lot more energy to be involved in supporting and helping the world, if it if the motivation comes from the heart as a condition of the heart, than if it comes from the demands of the mind and the expectations of how it should be and what should happen. When I live from a sense of a burden, and obligation, it's a condition for me to get tired. It's also a condition where I feel I can never do enough. And it just seems like so daunting. But when the instrument the motivation arises from within, then it doesn't really matter that it you know, it's sort of in the way how much I get to do, I just feel so happy to be able to be engaged. And that sustains me so much better than the other way. So conditionality putting in conditions, I want to respond to the world. That's a desire, I want to respond to the suffering of the world, I base my life on this desire. And so what are the conditions that support me to do that? It For Me, personally, I found the conditions that most important is to be at ease, to have a degree of equanimity and peace since a well being being settled here. And then the motivation, the desire to act in the world flows out of me. I found that the opposite is not a good condition for me. obligation, demand, expectation from myself or expectation from others. that I found is not a very supportive condition.

And so, since I want to be supportive in the world, that's my desire and what I've learned about myself, I chosen to have no obligation to respond to that was that cruel? Said indifferent? I think not. Not, not in the way I described it, I hope. So. We have choice. But we don't not necessarily in control of the consequences of our choices. But we do have a better choice. It's good to be thoughtful and considerate about this issue of conditions and choices. And choices have a lot to do with your vision. What is your vision of your life? How, what is what is what is it? What kind of person do you want to be in this world? Rather than looking for your true nature? What is your true vision for who you want to be? And if it seems like a realistic vision, what are the conditions you have to put in place to make it

happen. And your life begins fresh and new, every day, every moment. And so at any moment that you find yourself in, you don't have to be weighed down by the past, as much as you can say, okay, from now, I'm going to live this way. And maybe you're successful for two seconds. But don't underestimate the value of those two seconds. Because then you can do it again. And again, and again. And it begins to shape you begin to change your biggest influence, you're putting in conditions, and slowly over time, and much quicker than you ever realize, you'll change dramatically for the better. The Finally, I'll say that, in terms of change, all of us, whether we thought about it or not. Every moment of our life, we're being conditioned by something. And one of the big influences is what how we think what we think about is a big conditioning. And you've been thinking when you've been some people have been thinking one way for decades. And it's shaping them and conditioning them a certain way. once people start practicing, and beginning to change the conditions of their mind, it's remarkable how quickly we can change, though it doesn't seem that fast, because we're looking at our stopwatch, you know, looking for the change. But if you can think about how many mind moments you've had so far. You know, you don't need to, it's not like one to one, you have to have all the same number of mind moments to balance out all you've done before. It's a small fraction of all the mind moments you've used in the past to condition yourself that are needed to make a big change. So it's possible. So those are my thoughts. And and, hopefully, this idea of choice. By the time I finished this talk it I emphasize how you have choice, that you're not taking it on as a burden, because that would not be a good condition. So we have about five minutes. And some of you have the choice about whether to ask a question or comment anything you'd like.

Thank you.

This bit about taking the burden.

Last week, when you talked about setting three conditions, in particular, generosity, morality, and loving kindness. I found I was at a very difficult situation, I was taking some clients camping and the clients weren't difficult and the camping wasn't difficult, but like coworker, I could say was difficult, or I found her difficult. And it was very important to get to those three conditions. And as I realized that it It opened up all kinds of wonderful ways of being generous, and, and, and everything. I also realized that I felt a great deal of compassion for my coworker, because she couldn't find a different way to work in that situation. And I wanted to take that burden on.

And I realized that that was the burden of being compassionate

for her know the burden of helping her Oh, changing her helping her to find an easier way because she was clearly distressed and it's not my burden. I can only set the conditions and I still have a lot of joy for the positive things that happened. Did you try to help her?

I did. It did make a difference.

I have in the past normally It didn't, it made it. It entangled us, okay,

that's too bad. Because you know, so you know, it's not it's not a, you know, it's not a sin to take on the burden of obligation. It's okay. So you know, if you ended up helping her in the end, we can celebrate, it's okay, you're allowed. But But this time you didn't. So I'm sorry.

But it wasn't my job. It wasn't your job. So it was my job to set the conditions now and to work with.

Yeah, we won't be careful how much responsibility we take on how other people are and how they feel. Yeah,

I guess. Thank you.

There's a

good topic, because I've been working with this past week. So do we choose anger? Or does anger happen, and then we choose how to respond to it. Because I haven't always chosen anger, which I think has not been the best for me. And something came up this week, and I chose anger. I tried to choose it generously, and as lovingly as possible. But I felt for me that I hadn't choose anger for so long, that it was time to choose it. And I spent a whole week struggling with that. But I actually think that that was the right choice. And I'm not an anger seems to be something that arises. I guess I'm struggling with the like, we choose anger because it arises. And then I think maybe the choice is how we respond to it, or am I not seeing that?

Yeah, I'm not sure how to answer Exactly. But my little my way of understanding this is that because I've looked at this kind of issue is that we only have choice when we see the choice. If we don't see the choice, we don't have choice. But it's possible to heighten your perception. So that you can see more and more moments of choice, and then you have more choice. So when I was in my 20s, I got fascinated with how I fell in love with people. So I wanted to see it, do I have any choice in this matter? So take very careful attention, you know, best I could you know, with this kind of phenomenon, you know, I'd see someone Oh, you know, the moat, the moment of kind of falling in love, you know, was that a choice? It was not a choice. And that was very interesting to do. I'm not gonna give you the answer to what I found. But you might want to, you know, so also with anger. So anger, can it rise seemingly out of instinct, or just kind of just seems to be so much frustration that it just kind of boils over on its own? Seems like there's no choice. And that's how it is sometimes and then, but what what choice do you have? What choice does there exist in the anger? So one of the choices is anger doesn't have to be acted on. So there's choice but how we act on it? And the question here as it's sometimes useful to be angry, or acting angry, or anger or allow the anger to surface or stimulate the anger? I think there's a time and season for everything. But, you know, hopefully, you have a lot of wisdom understanding. But part of the answer to your question about is the anger, somehow, the right response, in certain situations, has a lot to do with what other skills we've developed. If that's the best option, maybe so I'm not saying yes, but maybe so. But, but if a person has learned sophisticated forms of communication, other approaches other things, and is skilled and using them, then maybe it wasn't necessary to be angry. And so you know. And so anyway, so that's my thoughts. Is that enough for now? Okay, so it is time to end and sorry for the people had your hands up. And so the last thing I'll say, but this guy said that this flowing out of the rain down the mountainside, the Buddha uses that as a simile, both for putting in place that conditions in the flow of conditionality for our own inner life and practice, but also for the influence the effect we can have on the world around us in our society and how society unfolds. And It's possible that what we develop in ourselves and cultivating ourselves is inseparable for how that works in our society, that babies the same things. We cultivate generosity and kindness and compassion here. It benefits others. If you cultivate mindfulness, equanimity, patience, wisdom, it benefits others and yourself. So may you consider what conditions you would like to put in place as you go forward in this life, precious life of yours. Thank you