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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Morning, everyone. And I am Gil. Yeah, though some of you were expecting Wes Nisker to be here today, and Wes is sick. And we got a call last night that he was not feeling well and this morning confirming that he was not well enough to come down here. So I'm happy to be here. And the however the, I'm in the process of teaching a retreat that our retreat center in Santa Cruz, and it's closing today. So I kind of need to be down there to close it. So I'm going to talk for half an hour, and maybe a shorter talk, and then I'm going to just head straight out the door and, and not say hello to anyone or pretend I don't know anyone. And if you could pretend you don't know me, that wouldn't be because I need to get down there by 11:30.

So today's the first week of the Buddhist Earth care week. And we're the idea being that one day, a year, one week a year, we kind of highlight the importance of caring for our earth in all of its inhabitants. And that it's an important value in Buddhism. And that some of the earth care committee here at IMC put out a table information over there. And they've organized a few things. There was a movie last night, wasn't it that tomorrow wonderful documentary, they showed parts of it. And so I'm going to talk a little bit about this topic earthcare. And I am fond of this word care. Because in my mind, it has two meanings in English. One is when you care about something, meaning we think it's important. And we care for something, we're caring for something, it means that we're tending to it, we're nourishing, we're supporting yet we're helping you get to where, you know, where and these two together to see see the earth as important and to attend to it to to care for it. And the question is, where does caring Come come from? And where do we get the sense of importance for this world? And how does it fit into the idea of Buddhism, Buddhist practice. In a couple of weeks, we're going to have kind of a unique event here. On Saturday, the 14th kind of an introduction, I don't know what to call it to the new field, perhaps called a Buddhist environmental chaplaincy. I've been involved in Buddhism for a long time. And in been involved in teaching chaplains, Buddhist chaplains for a long time. And I've had a long standing love with the environment. And in fact, in when I was in college for a while I was a Environmental Studies major. That was the direction I was going and then kind of Buddhism intervened. And so bring these three concepts together Buddhism, environment and chaplaincy as part of this exploration in two weeks. And the idea of you know, chaplaincy has a lot to do and Buddhism has a lot to do with what we care for caring for things.

So what is it that Buddhism brings to the table, what is chaplaincy bringing to the table of caring for our environment? I think Buddhism for me is a very important ingredient for these for me in my relationship to the world around me, the natural world, the human world, a combination of all those and it isn't a connection which is mandatory in my mind in terms of what I have to do. It's not how I think it's also not a, a first and foremost a to do list, but rather, it's something that wells up or arises as a natural expression or outgrowth of my heart. And it kind of Buddhist practice works this way. Make works many

ways but Buddhist practice, over time will transform people who practice it from being self centered to being something that I call situation centered. self centered in English kind of means we're conceited mean we're caught up in ourselves, we everything's refers back to ourselves, were the center of our little universe. And me, myself and mine is the operating principle of many of our thoughts may have or concerns many orientations we have. And it turns out that the me myself and mine operating principle, operates in more people than who think they have it.

In fact, they probably a lot more because many people don't realize how embedded and how much they're operating, it's kind of like the fish that suppose they don't see the water they swim in. Many of us don't see the water of self and self identity and conceit that we're swimming, and it just seems completely natural part of the world. And so it's natural, take care of ourselves naturally think that way. And also, the word conceit implies in English, the idea of, you know, thinking you're better than everyone else. In Buddhism, the idea of conceit, and this kind of self centeredness can also imply that we think we're worse than everyone else who are inferior to everyone else. And that is another form of conceit, but someone who has that thinks it's true, it's not really, they're not conceited, they're not self centered, and just true, that they're lousy. And that's the nature of the universe. And so you know, of course, you know, that there's no questioning of it. And there's many forms in which self identity plays itself out. And it be one of the forms, one of the expressions of it is in greed. And no, there is in hate, and other is in envy and jealousy and resentment. It's so lust, confusion, fear. And I think a fair amount of anxiety, if not all anxiety, probably has some footing some connection to some kind of conceit, some kind of idea of self that's operating there. And Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis on studying understanding the role of self identity, as a conceit as something we get attached to, and hold on to. And so they're being self centered, is, I think, is, you know, as an understandable concept. As people practice something like meditation, the shortcomings of being self centered, their shortcomings are operating under a variety of attachments and cleanings becomes pretty obvious, we can feel it physically takes a toll on us energetically, takes a toll on our muscles and takes it gives me It takes a toll on our psyche and the tightness, the contraction, that constriction, the stress, the constipation that comes with mental constipation that comes with self preoccupation is pretty powerful. And to start feeling sitting quietly, like in meditation, and sooner or later, as required gunned down enough to start feeling some of those effects to feel the suffering, feel the discomfort of being caught up in self centered phenomena. So and so then it becomes relatively natural to want to do something about that. And to, and as we start looking more and more deeply, there's less blaming other people for how we are when we sit and meditate in our state of mind or state of being state of our muscles, state of exhaustion, it doesn't really make sense in meditation, spend a lot of time blaming others for it or the world for it, because they're not going to help while you're meditating. It's not going to do you much good, in fact, to be involved in those kinds of thoughts and hopes, will you'll see as you're mindful, just another form of stress. So at some point, the natural thing is to focus internally, and what is what am I doing here to cause this? What am I contributing to this? And you'll start seeing that there are clings attachments, beliefs, that we have ways of thinking we have, which don't serve us. And one of those is we start seeing that this self centeredness doesn't serve us. I came up against this in the first years of my practice, and I could see that my self centered ideas about myself. I was defending myself trying to present myself to other people. convinced them this is who I was. There's a lot of social gymnastics again. get people to see you as you want to be seen. And I could see that there are shortcomings of that. And I thought this is not doesn't make sense, it's time to put this down. And I couldn't, because I was afraid to, you know, it served a purpose, it protected me, I thought it was going to save me or protect me or keep me from danger or something. And I just felt like kind of stepping over an abyss, to put down this part of myself. But with time, we learned to put it down.

And if we put it down with mindfulness, meaning that our capacity for attention gets stronger, we're more aware, then the decreasing of, of conceit comes with an increased capacity for awareness. Now, where does awareness reside? In a sense, you know, it's your awareness. You know, it's not like you borrowing someone else's awareness. But it's your awareness. So the awareness is kind of centered here on you. But you're no longer centering around a concept of self and stronghold, hard, sharp idea of me myself in mind. In fact, the boundaries between self and other begin to dissolve in some degrees of the heart fixed ideas. And it's possible to be very aware, luminously aware, without it kind of, with feeling em, beautifully empty inside, transparent inside, there's no resistance, no contraction, no pressure inside, that's associated with selfing. And it feels like it's just like a beautiful, sacred, transparent or open space, out of which are within which there operates thoughts, emotions, feelings, sensations, all this is operating. But it's not coalesced in a tight way and defensive way around the self. And so the awareness is kind of here for sure. And it's sent it's, and we become situation center, rather than self centered. Meaning that flowing from us becomes a capacity to pay attention to the world around us more and more clearly. And because it's arises out of us, we don't ignore ourselves. We are aware of our thoughts, we are aware of our emotions, we are aware of our sensations, what's going on for us, we're tracking these things, but we're not glued onto them. This is who I am, there's more of a feeling of impersonality, or freedom from self, as these things operate, and retracting them enough that we are responsible for them. We can decide what to what to do, what to not do, what to speak and what not to speak, because we're kind of tracking what's going on here. The the, so the RS, still distracted, sorry. So what happens when become situation centered, and one of them is the sense of who we are connected to the wider world is not so fixed. And so the example I like to give, it was a very important moment in my life. I was a college student studying botany, botany class. And we were learning with great diagrams on the wall on the blackboard, that oxygen, carbon dioxide cycles and how it worked through the leaves of the plants and in the plants converted carbon dioxide into oxygen. And you know, they showed how they did it, the pathways for it, it was great. And I was sitting near the front of the classroom I was kind of absorbed and taking all this in it's kind of I'm pretty impressed by it. And I class came to an end and maybe because of a little bit concentrated maybe this partly the impact of what happened next. I left the classroom and we go out to this courtyard. College in Davis where I went to, and there was this big Valley oaks in the courtyard. Beautiful big Oaks. And I came out there and I stopped and was kind of stunned looking at these oak trees. And I just learned about this oxygen carbon dioxide cycle. And I said well, I'm breathing out carbon dioxide and these trees are breathing out oxygen converting and you know going around that I need those trees. In fact, I need those trees more than I need two kidneys. I need those streets. More than 90 plus of my appendages. Now I can do without some of these appendages, you know, I could live and you know, without a hand or different things, and but I can't live without those trees. I could go you know, without the trees, that plants, I would probably last you know, a minute that, you know, one kidney I could live my whole life with one kidney or something cuz I was thinking that way.

So these things that are feel so important to me who I am, I can kind of do without, but I can't do without those trees. Where do I end? Where's the line between me and the tree, the tree and me if I needed so intimately. And this this kind of intimacy and the sense of kind of being in this all together in some deep way, Rose very powerful for me, this feeling of Wow, we're in this together. I you know, this, I did this. And from that, that moment, I felt a lot of care for the natural world, because the natural world seemed like it was me or part of me or we're in it together. We're co conspirators, you know, that can literally Latin root for conspiracy means to breathe together. Isn't that great? So we're all conspiracy co conspirators in this world, we're all breathing together and breathing together with the plants. And we're all in it together in some way. And so this situation center, what happens when we take it outwards without the hard fixed idea of myself? And we start seeing that it's a cooperative enterprise, this world that we're in? And how do we live in this cooperative world. And what I'd like to propose is that as we kind of have less greed, less fear, less hatred, when we touch into the, and when those things don't

operate so much. Those are kind of surface emotions, I like to think of them surface motivations. And when those fall away, then we have access to what's deeper in our hearts. And so we have access to love and generosity, and sense of experiences of peace, fearlessness, all kinds of things love. And so what happens when we encounter this cooperative world is interactive world. And we, we love it, we care for it. Maybe care for it so intimately. That is kind of like the way the left hand cares for the right hand. The right hand cares for the left hand when we wash our hands. Do you ever does left hand ever thank the right hand? there's a there's a, there's a right hand everything. I'm gonna take good care of that left hand and I'm gonna give myself over, I'm gonna sacrifice myself. I'm gonna really, you know, I could do better things. But I'm going to really help out this left hand and you know, and clean it. It's dirty, poor, little, poor, little left hand. Something, right? No, it's just kind of what we do. It's just like, there's no kind of an unselfconscious movement. Can there be that kind of unselfconscious movement in caring for the world around us, the natural world. And we see that in, you know, in kind of a dramatic, simple, maybe symbolic representative way, on retreats where I am now, or retreats, like at spirit rock meditation center up in Marin County, there are certain times of the year, lots of slugs, or snails that go crawling across the, the road where people meditators are walking, and it's quite remarkable to watch these meditators come out. And you know, with Trump, they've like, like, I have all the time in the world stop and kind of, like, help these little slugs, you know, are these little snails out of the out of harm's way. So no one steps on them? You know, it's like beautiful, you know, to know, you know, a whole world will come to a stop, I guess if we stopped for every slug it or something. But, but it's a beautiful sentiment, a beautiful expression, that it comes out of not out of a duty or a requirement. But this kind of, here's something we love, here's something we care for. So the natural world, the world that we live in, what would it be like? If you were a giant, like really big, humungous giant, so big that in order to support you, one foot would be on Mars and the other foot would be on Venus. And you're like, you know, you know looking down upon this see the solar system of ours and you know, looking down and you scoop down and you pick up with your two hands. This beautiful blue green ball that has a little bit of, you know, kind of a little bit moist on the surface. And you just hold it in your hand. I mean, I think that probably you'd be very careful with it. You know, it'd be a beautiful thing, be something that be precious. Maybe you hold it with the kind of care that you would hold a little, maybe bird that was wounded, and you're trying to take it someplace to get it to save it and care for it. Just you know, tenderly or carefully. Or maybe you'd hold it like you'd hold a baby.

There was a man who went through our chaplaincy program some years ago. And he got into interested in chaplaincy, because he started started volunteering at a hospital for a few years. And his volunteer work was he would go into the ICU a couple of times a day for a few hours, a couple times a week for a few hours. And he would hold preemies premature babies, they've now realized that it's really good for the development of premature babies to have physical contact. So, you know, they needed volunteers to provide the physical contact. So he would just he would just spend two or three hours holding these babies, that that was his thing. And that was his meditation. And slowly, that changed him. I can imagine that would change all of us to do it. What if What if the earth was like this the natural world? For us? Maybe what if what if we had that kind of feeling that kind of relationship to it? How would we treat it? How would we be with it? What keeps us from seeing the world that way? I don't think it works to for someone to tell you you should see it that way and get on with it. That doesn't that doesn't develop this natural capacity. I think that it's something we discover for ourselves. But I think for people who meditate, I think to appreciate that this is happening. I appreciate there's a softening of the hard edge between being in the world, that there's an opening to feeling, care and love. There's kind of an equivalent of Midas touch, you know, King Midas touch became gold, there's the mindfulness touch. And there's a way as mindfulness gets stronger, that everything mindfulness touches, become something precious becomes something valuable, something that we care for, not something that's instrumental for our enlightenment, not something it's instrumental for, you know, you know, being stress free, or, you know, something for me, but rather, it's becomes, you know, it becomes

a kind of a contact of love, or methow, or care, that becomes something, something, something that we feel intimate with or connected to, or the lines between us and them are not so strong. And so this world that we live in invite the natural world. How can you know, does it make sense to begin caring for it, to leave our houses and look at the trees to leave our houses and see the snails to leave our houses? And think about this? Where our sewage goes? And is it really going someplace to get into our cars and wonder about the smog we're making? Where does it go? What happens to it? out of out of mind, out of sight, out of mind, out of responsibility? Is this part of what we're contributing to the world? Is this what we want to create for the world? How do we want to live in this world? Here in the United States, there were, I guess, the end of the 1800s, beginning 1900s. Two very important, I guess, environmentalists who had different philosophies of how to take care of the environment, and one was John Muir. And he kind of developed his environmental philosophy here in California. And I think he was the founder of kind of the catalyst for the National Park Service's right. And he, his idea is that the natural world or parts of it, are sacred for their own sake. And we want to protect them so they can be as they are. The other person was a man named Gifford Pinchot, who was the first head of the National Forest Service. And he wasn't he's not called an environmentalist John Muir years called the environmentalist and pitting show is called conservationists. But the difference is that pin show wanted to run the natural world take care of it. So it was a natural resource that humans could use. And both of them wanting to care for it in some way. The extreme versions of these two views, live in tension with themselves with each other. The idea that we should leave the natural world alone, I read someone recently who said that the natural world can take care of it just fine. If only we left it alone.

And so just leave it alone, let it go back and come to homeostasis. The other is that it's all about what's best for us for the economy. And for me, myself and mine private property, I get to do whatever I want. And, you know, I don't care about anybody else. And those are those two views kind of leave intention. And they probably live intention, inherently in themselves. So just probably live intention within individuals at work as well. If we only left in the natural world, completely alone didn't touch it, I think we'd all die. You know, we need the natural world for food and for our sustenance. If we only use it for our own sake, you know, me and myself in mind, we probably die because we destroy it. And that's happened down through the centuries over and over again locally. I grew up for about five years, living on the Adriatic coast, just a little town let's city called Trieste, which is was around the border of Yugoslavia. Back then, I mean, just like just four minutes away or something. And so we were doing a summer, sometimes we get in our car, and we go down the coast of Yugoslavia on vacation for a day or go down. So I saw a lot of the coast of what's called the Dalmatian coast to beautiful coast, beautiful place. It's mostly rock. And back then the 1960s, we went snorkeling little bit in some of these islands down there and dimension coast. And you go and very few people that ever snorkel there. And you could still find mostly this point charts, but few people found hold basis, from the Roman times, because the Romans would grow through the grow grapes on the, on the islands. And then they'd have boats coming in, and then the whites would lose their bases or over the side or they drowned, I know. Sink or something. And so you can still find shards of these vases in the water, some people found whole basis, it's kind of pretty cool. And it turned out that back 2000 years ago, what wasn't what is now just rock used to be forested, and lots of soil, and wonderful conditions for growing grapes, and olives, Greece also the same way, and then it was over farmed, and eroded. And now they can grow nothing on it. Except tourists. And, and, you know, it's kind of has kind of a certain kind of beauty. But it also something was destroyed. And the local economy I guess, disappeared? Because, you know, it's that's happened repeatedly around the world that people have overused the environment, and then that in thereby ruining sometimes host civilizations who disappeared, because of that, you know, didn't see what they're doing. And so we're still quite capable of doing such things. And certainly, that's just, you know, in the cards for us, in some ways in some places. But what about caring, caring for this world, caring for the natural world? What is it about being situation centered, that allows us to take care of

ourselves properly, not only allows us take care of ourselves, but allows us take care of ourselves in a very deep way, the kind of careful attention of mindfulness when it's really well developed in real understanding capacity to really tune into what's happening inside, we can actually take care of ourselves and some of the deepest and most effective, healthiest ways possible, this way that we can't if we're out of touch with what goes on inside. But we also in a situation centered centered model. We also become other centered or other aware, and this other aware includes the environment and also includes the whole natural world, including other people. There's no you know, there's no line hard line in terms of our survival, in terms of what we depend on to live in our lives, between me and others. There's no hard line between the emotional connections that we have with each other, the heartfelt connections with each other. We're social beings. to varying degrees, different people, you know more than others in a sense, but we're still social beings.

And to live in this kind of open situation centered way, allows us to find a very rich and valuable connection to people around us. It allows our mindfulness, to have the mindfulness touch, where we touch with our awareness, other people. And it's possible to love them, it's possible to care for them, it's possible to feel kinship with others. And it's possible to do that in the, in the, you know, locally that people we encounter. But it's also possible to become interested, or naturally inclined to care for people we read about in the news, the people of Puerto Rico and Virgin Islands and some of the Caribbean islands right now. I mean, they're gonna that's a huge challenges amount of suffering there. Is it happening to us or to them? You know, who is it happening to? I think it's happening to our fat human family, their family, the people in the poor people in Africa are the people struggling in in the two Koreas the people in you know, all over the world? What happens if we are situation centered, so that we don't have these sharp lines. So we can have this this mindfulness touch that's inclusive of at all. And my proposal is that, then we care. That caring is something that wells up inside, not as a requirement. Not something that anyone should say you should do. But what I like to do, I don't want to say anybody's what you should do. But what I'd like to suggest is that maybe, if you're, give yourself a time, give yourself the development of attention, do this inner work of free freedom that Buddhism points to, that you'll you'll you'll be able to recognize that you care, you'll begin to recognize that, in fact, your mindfulness practice, will have the mindfulness touch, everything will turn into your kin, everything will turn into your relationships, everything will turn into you. Something that you care for, and your love. And that to then be motivated to actually have how we live our life. Come out of that care. feels like we're coming out of a deep sense of belonging, a deep sense of meaning, a deep sense of, of purpose. It's a beautiful thing for the heart to be able to have these qualities. And that's what chaplaincy is about. chaplaincy is a lot to do about supporting helping people with issues of deeper longing, issues of value, themselves personal value, purpose, reconciliation and healing of the divide and harm that exists between people. And so for chaplains, to be environmental chaplains is to help the world help people have this mindfulness touch, to love the world behind we're in kinship with it, connected to it, and support them in these very important human needs of belonging, of purpose of personal value, of direction of healing, work. And in doing so, I hope that we feel like we find ourselves and a way that brings a lot of peace and a lot of ease. So that when that doesn't bring us into a world of distress around the environment, but rather brings us into a world of that, you know, comes out of that mindfulness touch because the touch of the stress is very different. We don't want the distress touch.

So earthcare week, so this is a good week to consider this. So I'm going to leave as I said, but you know, we still have, you know, 15 minutes. So if you're willing, what I'd like to ask you to do before you leave, is to turn to two or three people near you and share with someone here. One way in which Which you have had a meaningful, inspiring or loving or something, contact with the natural world. Just one way. And then while you're distracted doing that, I'll leave Thank you all.