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SPEAKERS

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Some years ago, I heard I guess it's kind of a little Christian story of a person who prays to God and says, Dear God, thank you. Thank you for this day and that I have so far not harmed anyone and been angry and greedy. It's great. But I'm about to get up this morning out of bed. And I don't know how it goes on from there. But the way the poem is this story set up you know, you don't realize that person's just woken up and it sounds like you know, person has had a full day maybe. And but then now it's couldn't get out of bed and now you know, now it gets challenging. So for people who meditate every morning it can be similar you know, meditate and perhaps touch into a level of goodness inner goodness or calm or feeling like now I feel touch with myself with some good way and the intention will be is going to be I'm going to be this way now the rest of the day I'm gonna be calm and be centered connected to my goodness can be nonreactive Not a single irritated angry cynical words gonna come out of my mouth all day and that's the aspiration and you make it to the first email or you know, or the first you know, something you know, it doesn't last long it's something happens and then it's challenging. And, and it happens on retreats as well that people go on meditation retreats, will be very inspired sometimes, by somehow the connection they have to themselves. to their goodness to being peaceful or to their integrity or to feeling connected to what really feels true. And it becomes a great aspiration and sometimes even an expectation I got it made now. I'll never be angry ever again. Because now you've ever been on retreat and I feel so good. This is so strong. This is like, wow, is this strong. And two hours later, you're having a fight with a friend, you know, argument and didn't last long. So this idea that we could have be connected to something that's very valuable and important. some sense of way of being some connection to truth, to love to something and, and really feel this is how I want to live my life. But then, as life unfolds, it can be all too easy to lose touch with it and get swept up by conditions and causes of what's going on is a pretty common phenomenon. in meditation practice, the same thing can happen. But to give it like an old example, it might be that a person is always restless, always fidgeting. And they know that this is the case, but they can't they can't figure out how to stop it. But then when they sit down to meditate, there's kind of a commitment there and meditation during that period of time. Not to move to be still. And the urge to fidget might still arise. But at least for that period, you committed to not move. Or you're afraid that the people around you will judge you if you do. And, and so you hold still. And as you do that, because of that commitment. You start seeing the desire the impulse to fidget more clearly than you ever saw before. And you start seeing that every time there's an urge to fidget. What preceded it was fear about something, there's fear. And then you realize, wait a minute, I thought I was just a fidgeting person. The real issue is there's fear. And so maybe this thing would I did with the fidgeting, not giving into it, but really staying committed to being still that reveals so much that was so important as I got to see this fear I have, maybe I'll do the same thing with a fear. Let me not kind of get into the fear let me stay still, either literally or metaphorically in the middle of all the fears that arise. So let me see what happens then. Let me not get carried away by

the stories and the emotions and may not identify with me just kind of stay present and mindful. And then By doing that,

something greater clarity around the fear arises, maybe it gets clear that yes, now that I know how to stay still. And with the fear, I see how strongly identified with the fear I define myself by the fear. I'm a fearful person, I'm a bad person because I'm afraid. And this says something about me and I'm really feel discouraged. And I'd become critical of myself. Wow, I didn't know it was so complicated as fidgeting. There's a lot going on here. So I just made up that example. Not to emphasize this thing about the commitment to stay still or stay present, not give in to something. It can really reveal. So to bring these two things together, and I've talked about that, on one hand, we can be in touch with something that's really good and practice. And we really feel this is how I want to live my life. It's not uncommon people practice for sometimes maybe some years or something. And maybe they've been doing it seriously. But on retreat or something, at some point, it becomes clear to them that they want to do something about what happens to them when they practice some connection to truth to peace to above to something, that becomes the Dharma, that becomes this, that they want to orient that they want that to be the center of their life. This is the most important thing. And then they make that commitment. And next thing they do, they've lost it because they had a family crisis or something, whatever happened. And then we have these things we know about ourselves that are quite challenging. And we've learned that that by sometimes it's good to kind of have a commitment not to give into it. Hang in there. And sorry to clarify what's really going on and find a way to the other side. So these two examples I want to use to cut to come with a meeting point is a whole kind of Buddhist practice, that we don't emphasize very much in our insight meditation movement, but it's a big part of Buddhism in both Theravada Buddhism and behind Yana Buddhism, and that is having a vow, the O w. So it's not just simply having a commitment to something or intention to something, but it's a higher level of dedication. It's actually simply an aspiration. But when you make a vow, it's kind of like making a promise. But it's promises may be kind of secular, but vow kind of has for some people a little bit more of a religious or spiritual connotations. I make a vow, this is my vow. And vow doesn't have to come with you no obligation. It doesn't have to come with with, you know, some heavy feeling of religious sin or something that you don't live up to the vow. But there's a way in which we practice around a clearly stated vow. This is what I'm dedicating my life to this is what's important for me. And so, when we forget when we're about to forget or something happens and we get all frazzled and upset, then we come up, but I had this vow, I made this promise to myself. So it happened in a small way with me last week when I had a difficult day. And I kind of have a dedication of trust in being mindful and practicing. So you know, Gil, you know, this seems impossible. But I have a vow to practice it might not work. Doesn't matter I this is my vow. And sure enough, when I stayed practicing mindfulness, there was a way I found a way, or a vow to be compassionate. central part of my life was still this, when I was ordained as a Zen priest many years ago, was about to be of compassionate service to others, for the welfare of others, and that's kind of a remained an organizing principle of my life. And sometimes when I don't know what to do, or sometimes I have other ideas of what I should do, you know, I'm tired that day. I remember I have this vow. And so, the vow is a center of life where the vow is the orientation or the, this is where I live my life, you know, based on this vow. And in the Zen tradition, sometimes they they kind of will talk about You talk a lot about emptiness. These in Zen tradition I studied with they would they Would love to say things like, there's no purpose.

There's no purpose, nothing has any purpose. But we can have a vow. So even there's no purpose to the value supposed to have a vow. And, and so, or if everything's empty, if there's no self, in a sense, yes, maybe there's no self. But I have this but there's this Val that's operating here. And so this is my commitment. This no matter what, this is what I'm going to do. Now how that Val can arise out of some real deep place so it's really appropriate really right for you is one of the interesting questions. And for

me, when I when I started countering this idea of a vow and Buddhism was with the what was called the Bodhisattva vow. In zen, what really clicked for me was that it was not like I had to allow have wasn't like those were good vows out there that I had to take into myself. But rather, there was some way that the inner life wanted to respond to the world that those vows mirrored. And so I took those vows not because they were something external, because they gave voice to something I discovered inside already. And so at some point, as we practice in small ways, in big ways, we start discovering that it's valuable, we start discovering that we're not infallible. We can easily lose touch with what is our deepest intention or greatest values or what we're trying to do here. And it might serve you to have a vow as opposed to this vague idea, you know, yeah, mindfulness. Good. I should be mindful. Yeah, yeah, this is a challenge situation. And yeah, I should be mindful. But you know, kind of lazy today, or no one around me cares about mindfulness. In fact, that kind Have disrespected so I'm not gonna do it today. You know, but if you have a vow to practice, then it's a whole different orientations that this is like, you know, it's like you feel like maybe like a marriage vows. wake up one day and that that was good for yesterday, but today is not a good day for my marriage vows. I'll take it. I'll pick it up again tomorrow. But there's all these beautiful people out there for today. Now, I'm just, you know, you know, I'll take I'll take a break from my vows and pick it up again tomorrow. And, you know, okay. There might be, you know, who knows, but you know, so that then then, but rather, if you stay with a vow, and it becomes like a mirror, it forces us to look at ourselves more deeply and question ourselves and what's driving us and what's motivating us not to live by the vow and to really cause us to really investigate and look and deepen so whether it's a vow to stick connected or practice with what's the best in us? Or a vow to not give in to what's worse than us kind of come together maybe in a single vow. And what would that vow be for you? Would you kind of feel like this is what I want to do how I want to live my life. This has value this has greater value than looking at one more website or eating one more doughnut or complaining one more time about something which I'm not going to influence have any influence in the world whatsoever. And I keep complaining over and over again about this thing. Is there something you something that's you have much better, much better for you to be committed to? And would it make sense to actually make a vow to articulate that for yourself?

So this is a long standing Buddhist tradition to have vows. And it's a whole practice in itself. So it has seen all these different dimensions person's life lives by it and goes by it. So it doesn't have to be as big as I'm talking about. It can be very simple. But you know, for for this year, I'm going to vow to meditate every day. And then, even if your house burns down that day, before you go to sleep, you'll sit and meditate. But you don't meditate while the house is burning down. that that would be a silly Bell, but no matter how difficult it is, you know Hi this vow I bet this year are supposed to do this. So, think about it. See if it has what I'm talking about has any value for you or, or if it doesn't today, maybe someday. The idea of living a life based on bow will be interesting for you. Thank you