

# 2011-01-05 A Monastery Within A Book Reading

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stories, nuns, abbess, monastery, people, zen, buddhism, book, teaching, monks, distractions, zen center, path, thought, mirror, reflection, wisdom, places, life, truth

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

So, thank you for coming to this book event. I've never done one of these before. And so I didn't know was supposed to happen. And a big part of doing it was because I really wanted to thank the so many people who helped make the book possible. trouble hearing so better now. And so it was kind of a way of publicly thanking some people who put a lot of time and effort into helping and encouraging me and in believing in this book and Diana Clark who's trying to be anonymous over there in the back corner. There was supposed to look at her but you know, she was really a delight to work with a wonderful editor and, and without her wouldn't have come to fruition at all. And then Elena was, did a fantastic job. She was one who designed the book and designed it and laid it out and then had to then had to deal with the finicky author. I understand that why publishers don't want the authors involved in the process. But it was lots of fun with Diana and Elena and just kind of exploring the, the font and the design and this was really learning that side of the business in a sense, that was really neat. So it was really wonderful to work with Atlanta and Ynez Friedman was always been such a big supporter. And it's edited so many of my things over the years he supported me in so many different ways. And he was also there helping with this and I sent drafts to her she edited and made all kinds of corrections and support. And who else is anybody else's here? That's really the three primary people. So, other people also helped no no help with it then other people that I think in the book and my wife tomorrow, yes, in Turin, my son he was, he got really into the design aspects of the book and, and he actually made the first mock up kind of graphs of a cover that he tried his hand on and so I liked it, there was a group process many people involved and in a way the whole the stories themselves are group process because they came out of the lives of so many people who in the course of their practice, you know, my my my years of practice, which was really collective practice, I practice in monasteries with so many people. And then the events so those those time together, telling there's lots of stories to tell and some of those Kind of informed these stories.

And then since then there's other stories. Some of the stories in the book actually come from conversations that I've had either as a teacher with someone, or as a student, and one of their stories. Many years ago, I was giving a Dharma talk. This is like 13 years ago. So Dharma talk at kendo, which is a Zen center in Mountain View. And I gave my talk. And then in the kind of Zen style of kind of, like, you know, pointed, you know, questions that are kind of like, confronting you. Here, I'm see people are so kind the questions, but then then they kind of like, you know, give you more much, much more challenging. And so I think was Nancy Smee, who now sits here and with us, she raised her hand in the zendo. And she was the one who asked me, How do you know if you waste time I heard myself say, if

you're suffering, and I like, and I thought that was a great answer. I didn't say that at the time. But that became one of the stories. I said what they're the origin of one story.

And the last story in the book was near the end of, of, of putting the book together. I had a phone Talk, I'm kind of like a spiritual mentor or something for man who's been a who's now and he's 94 and he's been a Zen priests for 40 some years. And, and before that he was in a very rich life. He was pulled in front of the American UnAmerican Activities Committee was always called the house on American TV. Yeah, he was pulled in front of there because of his And then he was blacklisted, and he couldn't find work. And before that he was a radio announcer in San Francisco. And, and before that he was a minister and preacher in a very rich life. And he was the one who was telling me on the phone, you know, I've done so many things in my life, you know, we've got so involved in this thing. And then first it was Christianity, and then it was being a doctor, and then it was being a Marxist. And then it was being, you know, a radio announcer, and then is not in Buddhism. And it just all, you know, stories I You see, they're all empty now. And what are we doing now? And so I said, are now you know, now you listen to other people's stories. And then I told that to my wife, and she said, that has to be in the book. And so that's how that got in the book.

And so stories here's a story that didn't make it The book that so in their in the land of this monastery, there was a king and a queen. And they had a baby born baby prince who was going to become the next king of the land. And, and so the many people came with gifts for the baby. They came with gold and diamonds and silver and use lots of beautiful expensive things, you know, because that's what you know, what do you give to a king or Prince? But the Abbess of the monastery. He came also with a gift and her gift was on a small scroll. And on the scroll, it said every week, I will send you a story and she did And the boy brought grew up. And which of those gifts that he got as a baby Do you think helped him to be a wise king, wise ruler, and all those stories they counted, you know, the stories themselves are kind of wealth, that they're much more valuable than a lot of other things that people think are valuable. Because they speak to our something deep inside of us, they speak to you know, hopefully they speak wisdom. They speak about our human condition. They evoke different perspectives on our lives, sometimes in surprising ways. They can be places we engage in our lives that can become mirrors for our lives. And, and, and so you can they kind of have this life. And they also made some noise. Also, they tie us to other people, we share stories. There are some scholars who say that what religion really is it's a group of people share the same story and so like you We know Buddhism we share particular stories on the Buddha senator Bodhi tree. And we tell that story a lot. And, and still to this day and was today I was talking to someone where the story of the Buddha touching the earth as part of his enlightenment story. She remembered it at a time when she was offering spiritual care to someone in hospital. And she was really challenged by how difficult it was to be with people in crisis who are dying. And so she remembered that Buddha touched was, you know, had to just challenge them out of his enlightenment and touch the earth. So she thought I had to do something similar. And so she found a She protects tenchu at the hospital, she brought a little stone to hold in her hand. And then she could go through the see the patients and feel much more grounded. So she says she had the story of the Buddha touching the earth and that's a story that was meaningful for her and in a time of being offering being a mentor or supporter for other people in crisis. stories do many things. And there is a Chinese kind of Zen story or Chinese story of a fisherman who was fishing with a straight hook. And people came to me and said, you know, you can't catch a fish with a straight hook. And, and he said to the people, I said, Oh, if you want to catch an ordinary fish, you have to have a hooked, hook, bent hook. But if you want to catch a really great fish, you need a straight, hook. hook right a straight. And so this story about this fisherman fishing with stray took traveled around the country and the emperor of I heard about him and he said, I want to go see this fool. So he went when he went to the fisherman and said, What are you doing? Everyone knows you can't catch a fish with a straight hook.

And you can't catch a great fish with a with a with a straight hook. And the fisherman said, Oh, yes, you can. You're the greatest fish I was catching. That was the date they get the Emperor to come. So these stories were your bait. And you came today tonight and

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and I offered I wrote I kind of offered the book in these kinds of stories. With a hope that people would not just casually read, read, read the stories and you know, just kind of nod they'd like They are shake their head if they don't, or throw it across the room or something. But rather, they would sit and go back and revisit the stories and engage the stories. Think about the stories. Because one of the aspects of, I think one of the opportunities in life is to discover wisdom. Not in something like a text, but by how you engage in the text, you explore it and look at it. Everything is better, everything has a benefit, benefit some somewhere or other. And you could either judge it as a bad story. Or you could say, how is this useful for me? How can I look at this in a way that becomes more useful?

And if you do that exercise, then it becomes useful, then it becomes helpful, but sometimes it takes time to enter the story to reflect on it to think about it to be challenged. by it. And sometimes the things we dislike about the story are the very things we're going to learn the most from. So these are meant as teaching stories or learning stories, not really meant for entertainment. And in doing that, they go along with a long, long tradition, and Buddhism and maybe other religions as well, of using stories to teach. And it goes back to the time of the Buddha, the Buddha, as far as I could tell, he was making up stories all the time. Nowadays, people think that, you know, some people believe that there. There's, you know, some strange and now many people, some people believe in them, but I think there are all these myths, I think he was a storyteller. And he found it very useful to tell stories to to get across what he had to teach. Like the story that I like a lot of the ugly little urrent of a yaksha yaksha is like a little troll, maybe, maybe you'll be ugly, you know, it's kind of like a tree spirit. Kind of And, and this ugly little runt of a troll, went up to heaven and climbed up on Brahmas throne. A Brahma is like the great Lord of certain heaven up there, you know, it's pretty hot guy. And you know you don't go sit in the throne of Brahma that's like a disrespectful thing. But he was away. And so he got up there, but all the court Gods around, saw this, and they said you gotta get down, but the yaksha didn't get down. And so he started, they started kind of being angry with him and said, You got to get down from there. And the more angry they got, the bigger and more beautiful and stronger. This little troll became until it was this huge, beautiful, radiant being. And so the other gods got kind of confused. So they went and found Brahma and said, Brahma Look, there's something going on back at your court. I think you need to come and take care of it. So Brahma came back and he

He got got stood in front of the stone throne and bowed to the ox and said, Oh, it's so nice to see you, I hope you're comfortable. And you know if you're well and offered him respect, and as as, as he was offering his kindness to the troll, the troll got smaller and smaller and smaller, and finally disappeared. So then Brahma got up in his throne. And then he explained that was an anger eating yaksha and, and the more angry you get, you were, the more it was fed. And if you stop eating as anger disappears so that's a great story teaching story because you probably have young shows of your own. You know, that you feed and develop with your anger your things and so then to reflect, you know, what is it I feed? What How is it my anger, my greed, and what does that reinforce and build inside of me? And that story, so graphic and you can even tell it to a child And the child can get it in a deeper way than if you just tell tell a child count. By the way, if you keep doing the same thing, it strengthens it. That's not going to go very far be tell a story. And it kind of touches the heart or something different happens. I think also stories speak to a different part of our mind, then logic does or reasoning. And the structures of language and structures of thinking and structures of self that we live under. Many of them are not so

conscious, we don't see how all these things interact. And we don't necessarily understand the full range of our emotional life and what motivates us and what speaks to us. And you know, that's partly why people have dreams or, and, and stories kind of reach in there and tap and touch into places that are deep inside and meaningful to us that move us that maybe belong to some of the subconscious or parts of ourselves or parts of us that we don't really see And then move them and change them. Then you might argue, well, that's kind of manipulating people who tell stories to kind of touch their hearts and get them to, you know, feel all these emotions and open the hearts and all that. And I really what Buddhism is just kind of just tell the truth, it's direct, and, and, and logical and, and, you know, supposed to, you know, cater to people's emotions with a story. But the Buddha did that. Now when you tell stories, but he actually said that it is that when he when he gave a Dharma talk, he was preparing people for deeper teachings. And he taught in such a way to soften their hearts and to inspire them and to open them so they're ready to hear something that could go you know, really make an impact. And now that's your kind of obvious thing. I mean, if you have a very busy day and you're have a headache and feel feel harried and didn't manage to do all the things you're supposed to do, and there's people angry with you. And, you know, you come to IMC and someone gives a Dharma talk here and you have no patience for it, you know, you're not even open, you know, you couldn't care less, you know, you even start stupid. But then you come someday and you're relaxed and soft and open and same talk, you know, same teaching, you know, touches something drops down deeper into touches something and, and the space in the mind for their space in the heart for it. So I think stories speak to a much bigger part of it to a wide range of who we are. That's very different than it did tactic teaching a, b and c, this is the list. And I can give you a list of the five kinds of stories that you know, that's not going to go very far. Unless it lists the lists are fun. And so these stories are kind of mentors, teaching and learning stories to spend time with to reflect on some of the stories You know, I kind of thought maybe we're not quite ever finished. And the one that's kind of meant to be most unfinished is the one about the path. And so should I read it? So it's a book reading, right? But I'm afraid all of you have read it already.

When arriving at the monastery, new monks and nuns would commonly ask the Abbess for instructions on the path of practice. If they were insistent enough about finding the path, the Abbess would take them to a remote corner of the monastery garden, where people seldom went. There she pointed them to a narrow walkway that disappeared into the bushes and trees. She told them, you will find the path at the end of this walkway. Then the old habits turned away leaving each novice to walk on alone. Intrigued the new monastic set off in search of the path. Before long, however, the trail took a sharp turn. When they rounded the corner, they came face to face with a very large mirror. It blocked their way. See, seeing their own image reflected in the mirror confused them. Some wondered, maybe I've taken the wrong path. Still, no matter how many times they tried to retrace their steps or start over. Sooner or later, they found the mirror blocking their way again. More than a few assume the mirror was placed in the trail to show them that the real path was in them, not in the external world. This understanding frightened some and they ran away. Others collapsed and hopelessness. Some simmered in anger. Occasionally someone would become so upset. They would hurl a heavy rock at the reflection. The mirror, however, was impervious. Each time they threw a rocket at the stone bounced back and struck them instead. There were some monastics who lingered in front of the mirror, each gazing at his or her own likeness. It mesmerized and delighted them, their conceits spilled over as they perceived themselves as somehow being the great Buddhist path. And of course, there were those novices who simply tried to walk around the mirror. believing it blocked their way, they plunged headlong into the surrounding thicket of bushes only to emerge scratched and bloodied by an impenetrable web of thorns and undergrowth. From time to time, one of them would see his or her mother or father standing next to them in the reflection. This was an eerie sight since they knew they were alone. And other times the reflected image was obscured by crowds of people and Duke Course some of the monks and nuns calm down enough to stop and look carefully into the reflection. For many,

it was the first time they ever really look deeply into themselves. More than a few concluded that the mirror and the reflection were the end of the path goes did ended up stuck for a very long time. Others whoever remember the abacus directive about finding the path at the end of this walkway. When these monks and nuns stopped and looked deeply into their likeness in the mirror, a wonderful realization arose in their minds. The reflection is me, but I am not the reflection. Then when they reached out and lightly touched the mirror, it gave away like a great door silently swinging open. It revealed a bright, expansive, sunlit section of garden, unlike anything they could ever have imagined existed. So you think that's a good place to end the story? Right? But the last sentence says, just beyond at the edge of the pad, stood the old Airbus holding two shovels What does that mean? What's the thing about two shovels, they just made it, you know, through the path? What is you know? So that's supposed to be that's supposed to be a challenge to you to consider what what's this thing but to this person who got enlightened, you know, and two shovels, what's that about? So, you know, to shovels means, in my mind, I don't know what it means, but I can tell you what I think it means. Two shovels means that it's one for the Ibis and one for the monastic. They're both going to and being enlightened doesn't mean your practice stop starts stops. It means there's more work to be done. You still got to dig in the garden. You still have to Continue, but now you do it together. So that's the, you know, there's still no enlightened retirement. And, and for me, as I wrote this story, there was in the background was, was all kinds of ideas

that are kind of, some of them are not so obvious to many of you probably not at all. With they're kind of tucked away various ideas coming from the history of Buddhist thought, are kind of embedded in the story. So, if you know about Buddhism, or Buddhist history, you know, whose philosophy some of these things would jump out? Like a small thing perhaps would be the saying wonderful realization, through reflection is me, but I am not the reflection. That's a great you know, so it's very intriguing. Why is that such an important insight. And so then you engage Big question that you wonder what it's all about. But the, you know, Zen there's Japan, there's two schools of Zen. There's rinzai and Soto Zen. And in Soto's and the founder of Soto zen, when he had his enlightenment was characterized by that sentence, or that statement, he was looking over a bridge into the river below. And he saw his reflection. And he saw through reflection is me, but I am not the reflection. So it's not original with me this right. But this is a really important statement for people to know about history of Zen. So here it is, like as you know, it's not just so. So again, what does it mean? How is this useful for you? And that's for you to engage in. And then all these lists of things how people, you know, become frightened, they run away. When they see the mayor, they collapse and hopelessness. They simmer and anger. They throw rocks at it, I was kind of thinking that most people would maybe see a little hints of themselves there. Because, you know, spiritual life. Buddhist practice isn't usually kind of just straight, you know, straight line for enlightenment. The path is challenging, especially when you realize that in order to walk the path, you have to go through yourself. And I'll tell you a story of my own life. That's, I think it's, I think it's a good story. It's actually happened. Maybe it's maybe any of you heard the story of I was a new Zen student. And I would go sit the small Zen group in Davis, and it was a very small little bedroom in there and we would sit meditate. And so we would, as the Zen style you sit with your eyes open facing the wall, but because so small, basically these are almost touching the This bedroom, and I sat down in my good Zen posture. And this big majestic Roman column rose up in front of me. And I'm not prone to elucidation. But this big column rose up in front of me kind of thing that shows like a bank shows that bank has a lot of authority and power and trustworthiness. And then written down in black, engraved black painted letters on this column, where the letters z, e, and

Zen

and the pillar of Zen. And so then I went to embrace that pillar. And as I embraced it, it disappeared. And I fell forward and hit my head against the wall of bedroom. So that got my attention. And what it taught me was, I shouldn't relate to Buddhism, or Zen is this great big authoritative thing out there. That I was supposed to get and have, there is no Zen Actually, I believe that actually isn't a Buddhism in a real way. But there is a profound confrontation meeting of yourself and seeing yourself that opens up to the freedom that the Buddha was pointing towards. So sooner or later the mirror has to be on you. And then what do you see? And how do you really react to what you see? Do you run away? Do you collapse? Do you despair? You throw rocks? What do you do?

Some of the stories in here are very brief if they can be called stories, but they're kind of meant to kind of have a hopefully have a little twist in the usual way of thinking about things. So they kind of opened a little space in your mind. So that Maybe you think about yourself or your issues or something in a different way. One evening, the Abbess thought, your problems won't be solved in this monastery. So that must be disappointing, disappointing to everyone to hear that I mean, monks and nuns had come there to really kind of overcome their problems that they have. But no, your problems won't be solved in this monastery. They will be dissolved. And my hope is when people read that they would think or maybe the way that I'm relating to my so called problems. Maybe there's another way of looking at it. Maybe the people that are problems, maybe their solutions not found in the way I usually think of them. There's some other way what's that other way to dissolve them rather than solve them? What's that? What's that? He's kind of so. So open some new possibilities. Another perspective is by hope

A young monk complained of having too many distractions to be able to meditate. And I think most people meditate. Think that probably many of you explained to the abbot that he had tried every possible approach to overcome his the distractions he had redoubled his efforts at concentration. He'd been diligent in trying to let the distractions go. He had also tried many antidotes, including ignoring them. When none of these approaches worked, even tried turning toward the distractions to include them as part of the meditation. It also investigated the reactions, feelings and beliefs he had in relationship to the distractions. None of this had helped. He remained plagued. So I tried to list some of the more common techniques That I might teach someone or, you know, in the past the moment we say, you know, here's what you can try doing and if you have some problems and distractions in this ideal world, but what do you do when none of this works? What do you do when Gil gives you bad advice? not relevant for you. In that case, said the Abbess, the remains only one thing for you to do. Please, like he says, Please, so respectful. Please, gaze upon the distractions with kindness and be still. And this idea of gazing upon whatever anything, your problems, your difficulties, gaze upon them with kindness, and be still, I think, to me is a very powerful practice and powerful thing doesn't mean you change it or solve it. Get rid of it. But you kind of are kind you're friendly to it to kind of acceptance allowance, but then you become still and see what happens. See what goes on. Maybe that's that's all that needs to happen.

Some of the stories I'm perplexed by. So if you're perplexed by them the monastery librarian was an intelligent and inquisitive nun had lived there for 25 years. She told the story about first coming to the monastery. As a young woman, I was passionately interested in the truth. After years of unsuccessful searching, I brought my quest to the monastery. When I asked the abbot, if he would ordain me so I could continue my quest in the monastery response confused me and almost prompted me to leave She said, if you want to be a nun here, you must follow two rules. First, you must abandon any truth to discover. And second, you must never lie. perplexed but intrigued, I decided to try the monastic life under these rules. Before I could even begin I knew I first had to find the truth. When I finally started to have some inkling of what it is, I found it quite challenging to let go of it. I had a lot of doubt about the wisdom of doing so. So began to let go of it, I found I felt lighter. It was also more apt to see situations

fresh without preconceived ideas. dedicating myself to avoiding lying proved even harder to learn. I had no trouble with not speaking ordinary lies to others. I was much more challenged to learn how not to lie to myself. But as I learned, this added to my sense of lightness and ease by abandoning the truth and Never lying. I eventually found what I came to the monastery to find. So I'm gonna look to Plex for that story. I mean, how does that work? So, you know, so that's, but I find it kind of interesting you know that here's a story I mean, I kind of made up right but but what does it mean to why wouldn't Banting the truth and never lying be significant? How might be useful? And I mean, I suggest here you get lighter if you do that, but what you know what, what's, what might be valuable in that approach? Could it be that religious people, even Buddhists, sometimes cling to the truth? Could it be taken by views

and I got a couple of stories and you know, almost not stories. I mean, useless teachings, but um, thought that if I put them in a book like this, these are things I've taught and regular Dharma talks, you know, kind of straightforward way. But I thought they would have a little bit more weight or power in the form of a story like this. A scholar came to the Abbess and explained, I've spent a lifetime studying Buddhism. Myth has not helped me much. What am I missing? What is it I need to understand? To prepare the scholar for her answer, the avocet silent for a while. Then she said, breathe in as breathe in an easy and relaxed way. And then study what causes you to lose that ease. Everything you really need to know about Buddhism will be found in that investigation. So I believe that it's quite powerful to tune into your breathing and understand what takes away and useful breath. But since I've taught that here, and some people have found that valuable to hear that teaching, but I had no idea that if I put in a story which Kind of linger in people's minds or somehow they take it more seriously or wonder about it more deeply.

This story I hope that would that would prompt people to consider or rethink, or deeply or Rican to consider what wisdom and compassion really is. Because the title and title is very important for the story is wisdom and compassion. When it was time for the monastic community to meditate, the new nun headed for the meditation hall, placing your shoes on the shoe rack, she looked down and saw they were not lined up parallel to each other. This helped her to see that she was slightly distracted due to the excitement of her first day in the monastery. Letting go of her distraction, she looked more carefully at what was in front of her. She saw that her shoes were old and worn. Remembering when they were new should reflect it and how all things are transient, and how quickly they change. Soon she thought, I will be an old nun in this monastery. reflecting on how precious each moment was, she reached down to straighten her shoes. Doing so she noticed that if she moved them to the left, then there would be a space for another pair of shoes to the right of hers. Thinking of the other monks and nuns who are coming to the meditation hall, she gently pushed her shoes to the side, happy the new nun enter the meditation hall. That's a story. But then what does that say about wisdom and compassion, such as simple ordinary things, like putting your shoes in a shoe rack looking at your shoes, moving them aside? I mean, I mean, that's not that's not that's not Mother Teresa. And that's not the Buddha, you know, wisdom and compassion. And but i think you know, wisdom and compassion is found in the ordinary details of our life, that people are so quick to overlook important things to do important places to get important real realizations to have. But perhaps it's in the details that it's all unfolds properly. Zen and then they say that Zen or Soto zen, they say, one definition of it is attention to detail. That's interesting. That's a whole definition of a religion, attention to detail. And we could almost say that mindfulness because mindfulness involves careful looking at what's actually happening here.

We spend a lot of time Diana and Ynez Bruce help some trying to figure out a title for this book. That was a bit of a challenge. We had different ideas in our head. Like Bruce's spirit, what was the one you had chaos to sweep you away. I thought that was nice to sweep you away. But it didn't work for the whole committee. So we hung in there and hung in there and tried to come up. And finally we came to

this a monastery within. And I can barely happy with that this has certain kind of something suddenly be taught right there. It's a teaching and a title, I feel. And then, and then it gave us the opportunity to organize these, these stories and these three different categories. As a way of somehow getting across the idea that you can build an inner monastery, you can build these inner qualities of life, through the trainings of Buddhism and kindness, clarity and wisdom. And I thought that was a nice little teaching thing. And so when we when we organize the teachings, we put them in different these three different buckets and No, it wasn't a perfect fit but is better than not organizing them better because it was richer with more associations more kind of prompts prompts, it prompted more thinking more ideas more, as you know, or something. If it was just a series of stories, that would have been fine. But, you know, now there's a little bit more depth, I hope in the book because of this association with the three trainings. So here's a modern story. It's real. About stories, that a few weeks ago I went to the San Francisco Zen Center. And where were I i've first time I went there was I suppose was 35 3435 36 years ago when I went there I was a long haired hippie wearing t shirts and baggy pants, bald pants and

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one of the first books I read when I came there was Zen flesh and bones by Paul reps. It's a great little collection of Zen stories that those stories through that book have become part of our culture, almost some of the stories and I repeated a lot and people remember them and the book I think, maybe came out in the 50s or something 60s at first. But there you know, so I was reading it, the people reading the stories and we talked about the stories. So I was there at Zen center a few weeks ago. And I came out the front door and baby steps going down to page streets and sitting on the steps in the sun. was a young man who probably was 22 with long blonde hair sitting there in a T shirt he had his iPhone or something or iPad you know with a little box that he was listening to music on and feathers a little different and but otherwise it was just like he looked like he's just like, you know, maybe in some ways kind of like he fit in 35 years ago or 45 years ago. Another one is long haired young guys and T shirts. barefoot or something sitting there on the steps hanging out doing nothing. And you know what he was reading. He was reading said flesh and bones some things don't change. So I don't know how I don't know how many years this book is gonna last. And whether it has any real life and whether these you know, I'm curious to see if some of these stories have some life in them. Outside of the book here, anywhere, some of the stories I read on retreat, like the story of the pilgrimage. And in the context of retreats, people have been simply silent for a few days. And sometimes you'll listen in a very different way, if you're in silence you take it in. And I think when I read these in retreat, people hadn't heard the story before it was the first time and some people are really moved by the story. Because, you know, they expect one thing to happen. The monks are going to monks and nuns are going on a pilgrimage, the holy sites of Buddhism. And then so that sounds great. In the bad guy. Sorry, not these great places, right. But then they find out that the holy places the sacred places are places where someone is sick, or hospital, someone is dying all day at home or someone's old and that kind of you know, that sacred that's, you know, how's that? How does that work? And then to point out that by meeting those and coming through it, there is a place there's a possibility of finding peace and love in spite of that, or with that, or with that with those existential conditions of ours. And I've been quite pleased or happy that this story has moved. So many people and retreats when they hear the story. I wasn't quite expecting it, but you know that people would be moved, but that's been a nice so maybe that story will have a life for a while. 35 years, you know, walk out the door here and they'll be somebody sitting on the steps. Reading a monastery within something. So those are some of my thoughts to share with you. And any of you have any questions or things you want to bring up or anything you want to teach me about how to do book reading But I haven't understood what's supposed to happen.

Take this.

Was it always an Abbess in your mind? No, it was

start out with an Abbot. No, it wasn't in, in my mind. It was a Zen monastery in Japanese mountains. And Japanese and Zen monasteries are, are unisex. And so I had this that was the image I had and I spent time in Zen monasteries in Japan. And so, that just kind of came out because of that image. That's what came out. Then I started reading some of these stories on retreat. And then Merry Christmas. Who's a colleague who teaches in Santa Cruz was teaching with me and I read and she said she appreciated the stories, but she asked me to please have some nuns in the stories as well. And, and I saw that a little bit I stretched as well, I mean, they don't have nuns in those monasteries in Japan. And then to say it has to be in Japan, who has said it has to be a new place. And in here, you know, I've been to monastery Buddhist monasteries in California or co Ed. I've been a Zen center where they've had offices, so I'm familiar with that. So I said, Well, you know, and then we had this huge problem and you know about because you were on the board of the nuns, you know, this last year, year and a half ago, three years, three months ago or so. There was this major controversy and very painful controversy in Theravada Buddhism around ordaining women has full nuns Because you're not really supposed to do it anymore because the nuns lineage died out and no one's authorized to start it again. And if you started again, you're doing something unauthorized. And so you can't do that. You can only do things that are authorized. And but who is but no one's authorized to reauthorize it and if you authorize yourself, that means you're diluted and you can't do that and you're breaking the rules and there's all this misogyny and all this kind of, you know, gender conflict and it's it was embarrassing mess. And that I'm embarrassed to even be part of Buddhism because of it. The only redeeming factor of redeeming but, but and, and so that also that whole event, so by that time, they were already nuns and an Abbess and, you know, I thought once I once I went the route of nuns, I thought, well, I'll just go all the way making an abacus. That's a strong statement. So I thought that I felt really happy with that. And also then I didn't have to worry as much about changing some of the stories, you know to have more nuns because the Ibis has a strong role. They don't have to worry too much about the gender balance. On the head honcho is a woman, I thought. And so that's the story behind the Ibis. But then that dedication was inspired directly out of the conflict, a year and a half ago of the nuns and the monks, because it happened just around the time when we were putting this together. And so it was kind of on my mind. It's dedicated to the fellowship of monks, nuns and laypeople practicing on the path together. They were all together supporting each other and walking the path together. And part of the whole conflict around monks and nuns also involved in directly a kind of a conflict or kind of a tension that exists between monastics and lay people. And sometimes there's a hierarchy and elite Isn't that involved that comes together with being monastics we not inherently but how people hold it. And I have a lot of respect for the monastic life. But I don't have a lot of respect for the elitism that sometimes comes with that. And so the combination of the my concern about the elitism and a concern about the bad position of nuns in a tradition, I wrote the dedication this way. That's so you might be interested in that.

heartening to me to read it and that it's an Abbess, and for me, it's part of the teaching that you included it or did it that way. And I'm appreciative of that. And that, you know, I do get used to it too, so that's really nice.

Yeah, hope I hope you get really used to it. I hope it gets so used to it. It seems like obvious there would be an app Abbess

Any other?

Yes.

That just goes along with what you were saying about abs. I was able to spend some time at Tassajara this summer. And the head of Tassajara is an Abbess, and she's wonderful and, and that image in your story of the end of the trail or the path was the Abbess with the two shovels. And one of my images in Tassajara was blacking out of the zendo in the morning, and we were freezing and we went to get some tea and there was the abis raking the ground with the other students. Same thing, I mean, just powerful, really, really powerful. And, you know, so, yes, I appreciate it very much. You know, Hear, including that.

I haven't read your book yet, so I'll have to get it when you're done. First

just minor correction, I think and as the title tells to sweep you away, Oh, those years, I'm sorry. That's okay. And I think I came up with into the Abbess

AB SS.

So the last thing I'd like to say is that one of the surprises for me, in doing Buddhist practice was the way Which, as I got settled, concentrated, calm, more open whatever. It also awoken me, creativity. And, and so kind of it kind of as a kind of a move or kind of a certain kind of aesthetic creativity. And then periodically I put that into action to express that the various things and sculpture or drawing or painting and different things, sometimes poetry. And it seems that, you know, I don't know if it's always the case, but it's been pointed out by a number of people, that there's an overlap between aesthetics between creativity and religious life and spiritual life. And so these stories here part of that creative world of mind that creative but comes out of a little bit. And, and I hope that it you know, awakens some imagination and creativity in you that you realize that the creative side of your life that that can also has a place in Buddhism. And I hope that some of you will come up with stories that some of your wisdom will be shared with the world in in you know in creative ways, but that you also will have stories to share.

So, that seems like enough.

So, thank you so much for coming and I appreciate it a lot that you came here to share with the joy of this book and thank you