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SPEAKERS

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There are two sides to Buddhist practice. There is the side of cultivation and the side of insight. And cultivation is how we develop ourselves develop greater qualities or strengths, different personality characteristics, states attitudes. And then there's the insight which is what we see, and what we're able to directly realize and understand for ourselves. Not because we hear teachings about it, or we read about it, but because the strength of our own power of observation, we see the truths that liberate us to free us. And these two sides, the side of cultivation and the side of insight are best balanced with each other. Because if one is emphasized more than the other, we tend to become imbalanced in the practice. If the insight is emphasized more than the cultivation, then there's a variety of problems that can happen. One is that it can seem sometimes can be contrary, some of the insights or in of themselves, you know, are not obviously, happy insights. It's been said, self knowledge is so seldom good news. And, and also, sometimes it leads itself to it to intellectual understanding of Buddhism because Buddhist teachers like myself sometimes will teach the insights that are meant to be insights, not teachings. It's hard to be a teacher. So then people will internalize them as teachings as opposed to wait until they stand out through the own power ups observation. If the emphasis is on cultivation, and not the insights, then it can be seeming like an endless process of self improvement, self improvement, self improvement project. And there's no kind of real wisdom in that cultivation that comes inside brings wisdom. So, one of the really central insight teachings, in our tradition is called the four the three characteristics. And when I was first introduced to this practice in Thailand, I heard endless Dharma talks on the three characteristics. And mostly in my ears. They sounded amazingly redundant. Like different teachers were teaching the same thing over and over again, it's just like, because it was it was kind of like the dogma was, I felt kinda like the dogma of this tradition. And, and with the idea you're supposed to, everything was supposed to be seen through the filter these three, what's called the three characteristics and it's meant to be the characteristics of everything that we can experience. And so it's supposed to be universal characteristics that we all share. And in seeing deeply into these universal characteristics, something very dramatic can happen when there's a kind of realization understanding deep wisdom can occur. And they, the three characteristics is the deep perception into impermanence, the impermanent nature of reality of phenomena. No one steps into the same river, twice. The deep insight or perception of suffering, the suffering nature of this world of the unsatisfactory nature of all things, particularly a way in which things are unsatisfactory, in a deep insight into the teachings on not self or the insight of not self, the third one in particular perplexes a lot of people, not self, no self Then what self practices, the second one suffering, it can just seem depressing. Everything has a nature of being suffering and unsatisfactory what's left them. And it can be kind of discouraging and can seem like the point of Buddhism is just to suffer better. And then the first one that everything is impermanent, can leave us in a sea of change and instability, where we can't find our bearings very well.

So these three characteristics, however, are the insight side of the two sides insight and cultivation. On the cultivation side, we're actually cultivating what some of the things we're cultivating are the opposite qualities from the three characteristics. And, and the opposite qualities. Go to work together with the insights there, support them and develop them. They actually laid the foundation for allowing us to have effective insight in this way. So The cultivation side. Rather than cultivating impermanence, we're cultivating stability. a certain kind of permanence or semi permanence. Instead of cultivating suffering, we have insight into suffering, because we cultivate well being. Instead of you have insight into the not self nature of our ourselves or experience, but we're cultivating confidence, strength, integrity. Maybe even power is a word, quality and variety of qualities of inner character, which in western psychological terms, in some psychological circles, will call developing a strong sense of self. Buddhists prefer not to call it a strong sense of self because of the there's little little problems that occur with that, because as soon as you were the use the word itself, it becomes a magnet for a lot of culturally conditioned ideas of what it means to have a self. And you avoid those problems. If you don't say a strong sense of self, you say things like you're cultivating qualities of confidence, strength, integrity, courage, writing, things like that. So I like to think of these, these six qualities as working together. So stability, works together as a partner with the insight into impermanence. Well being works as a partner with the insight into unsatisfactoriness or suffering and that personal strengths and strong cultivated strengths, work as a partner together with a deep insight into not self and then it becomes a more understandable little bit. Some of the insights in the valley Have them because if you just hear the insights by themselves, it kind of leaves you like what she you know, there's nothing, you know, everything seems so unstable and difficult. And they are. And you know, you know, I don't even know who I am anymore. It's confusing. So, the cultivation of stability is important too. And so, there are other words that can be used for this. One of the nice words is constancy where you develop a constancy, or continuity and the commitment and a variety of ways. So, or steadiness, I like the word steadiness. stability. So meditation practice and Buddhist practice in general, is meant to cultivate stability. A stable mind, a stable heart, a stable body, with the mind, if the mind is agitated and restless and spinning around. It's very hard to have it give insight or deep understanding of what's going on, we need to have a stable mind to settle the mind, mind that, you know, has some some permanence to it provisional permanence. So we can see deeply into the nature of impermanence. One of the kind of paradoxes or reversals is that the more agitated and spinning the mind is, the more it's going to be caught up in concepts and ideas of future past self, other people, all kinds of things. And concepts have the nature of being permanent because they're abstract, they don't really exist concepts. And so, we get caught up in the idea that things are permanent, when the mind becomes more and more stable and stiller and not operating so much and see through the filter of concepts, the mind sees that everything is in flux. So the so the more stable the mind, the more things seen as as change The more changeable and in flux the mind is the more attends to see things through the filter of certain kind of dilute diluted kind of stability.

So, meditation helps create stability, calm steadiness in the mind. So the mind is not spinning and agitated and so the mind is not you know, impermanent with all its churning thoughts going on. There's also the stability or the constancy of regularity, regularity is really important, a regular regular practice is important. So, having a thread of regular daily practice is invaluable for the cultivation, development of inner qualities. If you want to go if you want to develop physical strength and you exercise once every third month. You know, your physical strengths are not can be developed. You have to have regularity and constancy with the exercise to this In the physical strength, same thing with the mental qualities, there has to be constancy and follow through with this. So in some Buddhist traditions, they talk a lot about the value of vow of real commitment. The commitment provides stability or constancy, your follow through or steadiness in the resolve. So this is a kind of a permanent quality, semi permanent quality. We know we have a commitment of just keep practicing. This is very important for our psychology. I think it's, it's very hard for the human psychology heart mind to function optimally in chaotic, unstable

situations. We see that clearly with children, that children who grew up in wildly unstable situation, grow up kind of kind of lost or chaotic or troubled, grew up with fear, grew up with the distress a variety of kinds, and it's really important for children to have some stability I've met met many people who grew up in unstable situations. Some of the more dramatic ones are people who grew up in times of war. And I talked, I talked to people who grew up in times of war in different places in the world. And sometimes these were, the situations were 50 60 70 years ago. And the effects of that instant instability that they grew up with, is still with them. Because of the how strong and conditioning it is. The societies themselves do much better if they're stable, unstable societies, people tend to be agitated and people tend to be afraid and be much more in conflict with each other. And is it you see that around the world, replace it with the world, talk about unstable societies, and the difficulties they have. As a cultures which are stable societies just stable, allow education a lot development and low economic growth allow people take care of each other love for so much more, than when things are economic. In socially unstable, so both societies and, and, and children, and I think it's also true for adults like all of you that when your life is stable, you can tend to be able to respond most optimally, when things are quite unstable it becomes stressful and difficult and, and it's hard to to pull forth sometimes the inner resources to deal with it and an unstable life can happen very quickly you know, because of health concerns, accidents or in family neighborhood problems that might occur. So, how are we we see instability. So, to have some stability helps the heart helps the mind helps our psychology and so cultivating stability is important part of Buddhist practice. So, I mentioned to already I mentioned, mid, calming stabilizing effect of meditation, the constancy of regular practice. There's also the stability Have of having a good character. So being ethical, and knowing that you're ethical and being able to kind of rely on that settle something they say the cliché is that it's a good idea not to lie because then you have less to remember. Because once you start lying to remember the lie and kind of you know, from, you know, keep negotiating it and figuring out what to say. And so it makes things a little more unstable the mind it's always figuring but if you're honest, there's a stability and resting and yourself and some certain kind of confidence that could arise because of that.

When we started IMC, or when I started, see this group was a sitting group before I joined and I was invited in to be the teacher in 1990. We met in Palo Alto, back then in a small, small group and the way I was trained in Buddhism was that was the idea that teachers constancy was very important for a group of people, a sangha community to support their ongoing regular practice. And so I made it kind of a commitment to keep showing up. So every month I tried as much as I could, I've made a real effort every Monday evening to show up because of this idea that the constancy of a teacher creates stability that allows the community to be supported and continue with their practice. I can't say that's actually, you know, the cause and effect relationship of what happened. But, you know, look, what did you know, we're, you know, we've been fairly stable as a community now for too, you know, I've been involved for 23 years and we've grown and developed and, and after a while, it wasn't just me that provided the constancy, but there became Kind of other people kept showing up on a regular basis. And that supported everyone, including me in this growth and development. So having a constancy of a place of practice is very helpful who people are practice to keep showing up. I mean, imagine what would happen if instead of owning our building, oh, we thought it'd be you know, we're renunciant tradition, we're supposed to be homeless, we're not supposed to be have any possessions, you know, and just be relaxed and not attached, and just kind of float around and not care. And so what we'll do is we'll just rent the different building every month. And, you know, if one month we'll be in Redwood City, and the next month we'll be in Fremont. And then we there's a good ranch available up there and out in in Richmond, so we'll go sit up there for a month and, you know, kind of go around. It might be very effective and very nice to bring you sit in groups or different communities. Maybe it's a nice thing to do, but for the community here on the peninsula, that's not going to create the stability and support the ongoing presence that's helpful. So these are all ways of emphasizing the value of stability and having

it can be overdone. A person can get attached to stability and to permanence. And that's considered to be one of the greatest forms of suffering and is to be attached to things being permanent, that illusion of permanence, or, and so, you know, we have to understand that we can't rely on things ultimately remaining stable and constant. But developing enough of it to support us while we can is very important, and then when it goes away when we lose it, then we're prepared for it. And so then we can handle it better when that occurs. The second you know, quality is that of well being kind of the opposite of the insight into suffering and unsatisfactoriness and hear a lot of Buddhist Practice emphasizes the cultivation of variety of forms of well being. I like the word well being because it's significantly vague. What it means that you can fit a lot of different things under that. And there's a lot of words in Buddhism that qualifies forms of well being. Buddhist texts talk about the light, they talk about contentment, they talk about joy, happiness, ecstasy, rapture, many things that you know, fit them that sense of well being. I also like the idea of well being because it feels more modest, then, you know, more attainable than if I say, you know, ecstasy or something. It also for me, the idea of well being just feels nice to my body, and I hear the word well being, I kind of soften and relax and open up it just seems kind of accessible in a way that maybe being happy. You know, that word doesn't seem immediately accessible. So one of the fundamental practices of cultivated in Buddhism is the practice of contentment, not contentment that just just, you know, silly or naive content and just content with everything as it is I'm suffering therefore, I'll be content with my suffering, but rather than contentment that supports the deepening of practice of Port stability. So for example, we know that desires can be endless. And to always want more to always think the grass is greener somewhere else to always want what the Joneses want to always kind of assume, assume that all the advertisements are true and gave good advice for living. And so the mind always wants stuff and wants stuff and wants more stuff, but what we have is not good enough. That kind of driven is of the mind creates a lot of agitation, and in some ways alienates ourselves from ourselves. It keeps us always running ahead and looking outside, contentment, being content with what we have, is considered in a lot of spiritual circles, a form of wealth.

And some of the happiest people I know in my life. I've been some of the poorest people. And even here in the peninsula, relatively affluent area, I know people who here who are very, you know, pretty, very poor. And one person I think of in particular, is one of the happiest people I know, because deeply content with his life as it is, and is a good life and, and doesn't have a lot of stuff or be anything, nothing of his own almost. And so the idea of cultivating contentment in a wise way, being content with what we have being content with. You know our physical goods, we have our situation, perhaps sometimes appropriate to be content with work. Sometimes it's appropriate to be discontented at work and get the hell out of there. Sometimes I wish some people were being more discontented there's a wise discontent to it, you know, just but you know so but there's wise contentment. And so a contentment brings certain joys and so well being, so to look, how can we cultivate wise content, and then there's a developing a certain sense of happiness or joy or well being, because of the things that we do. Rather than expecting that happiness to just, you know, be inherently there if we just try not to know what wishful thinking that there's a certain kind of joy that comes from doing certain things. And so we have to engage in doing those things that cultivate and bring us that joy or happiness or well being, even though it might be temporary. The Buddhist tradition emphasizes these things as bringing joy. And you might, this was a foreign idea to me when I was young. And now I've come to appreciate it. So what I'm about to say is foreign to you. think more deeply about it and explore it. So the joy of being ethical, the joy, I assume that most of you are pretty ethical people. But Has it ever occurred to you to feel delight and happiness at that, to take time it's going to celebrate that you haven't killed or stolen or taken advantage of people recently. The so that Buddhist tradition emphasizes that if you can live an ethical life, it's actually a healthy thing to feel good about yourself have a certain kind of well being from that ethical behavior. It's hard for some people to do that because even if they're being highly ethical, some

people have this deeper understanding. underwriting operating system that they're inadequate or wrong already. So like for me when I was in my early 20s I wasn't guilty before proven so I was guilty before I did anything. I didn't have to do anything to be guilty, I was just guilty. And so it took me a while to see that see how deep this operating system was for me, and to learn to let go of it and not have it trouble me. But the joy of being ethical, in other activity that the Buddhist tradition says brings joy or well being can his generosity to practice generosity. It doesn't have to mean you have to give money to anyone. But it could mean that you give your time and your labor. It could mean you give your you sit down and listen to someone who needs to be listened to. It's a generous act. It could be that you go shopping for someone or you know many, many ways of being generous opening the door for Someone and letting them go before you is a genuine, generous thing to do. If you walk around your neighborhood, and you see trash blowing around on the street, you know, it's not your trash, you think that there is someone else's problem, and you keep walking, that's okay. But if you pick up the trash as an act of generosity, for your neighbors and for the beautification of your neighborhood and creating more sense of a stable community, that's a simple act of generosity. So to practice generosity, as a way of availing yourself of joy and happiness. Some people find it hard to think of their good acts that done the good deeds they've done, and allow themselves to feel good about that or feel happy about that. Because it seems like that's selfish. It seems like you're supposed to be just altruistic and not kind of benefit yourself from it. It seems like self centered.

It can be so you have to watch out that You don't end up with too much conceit around these things. But you don't have to be conceited and attached to self and self identity in order to spend some time just being delighted and open hearted, open handed way, for the goodness that you've done your own goodness. So reflecting on your goodness and the good things you do. So even if you don't feel good, you can do good things. You don't have to wait to be good before you do good things, be bad, but do good things. And then and then and then you'll see that you know, with that certain you know that the start feeling good about yourself because of what you've done. It recreates good memories, good connection, other people and a variety of things. One of the functions of meditation practice itself, is also to cultivate senses of well being feelings of well being and joy. And so some of that just comes from developing the concentration And as we get more settled and concentrated meditation, a wellsprings of inner well being delight, joy, rapture, have a chance to arise. If you've been meditating for a long time, and you've never felt any kind of feeling of well being as you melt, meditate, even mild states that states of joy or delight or lightness, then probably it's a good idea to go talk to a teacher and explore what's going on. And try to understand that and see are there ways that you can touch into a tap into joy as you get met as you meditate? The primary obstacle to feeling joy and meditation is thinking too much. And thinking about how you're going to be joyful just gets it makes it even worse. So there has to be a kind of a deep command of letting go of thinking. That having desires being caught up in the world of desires and aversions also makes it difficult. The deeper we can let go, like all that call that go, it might seem that letting go is going to diminish you and you lead with leave you with nothing. Deep, letting go and meditation actually enhances you, and, and opens up the wellsprings of, of our inner life that are often covered over when we're busy and lost in our thoughts and our desires and things. So we cultivate well being, and just imagine, let's say, let's say I'll give you a story from my practice life. A very important moment for me when I practiced in Burma was on retreat in Burma. And I was doing walking meditation. And I had an insight that sometimes this kind of an insight that apparently many people can have a certain stage of practice is a comparable insight. So it wasn't unique and unique but came with a practice but it was doing walking meditation and My mind was relatively quiet. And I was having, I noticed that I was thinking about something that was a relatively innocent, lightweight kind of thought. I don't know what it was. It's very simple, ordinary, innocent kind of thinking. But my mind was still enough that I saw even that very simple, innocent light thought had a quality of suffering or duco or a tension or pressure or tightness connected to it. Very mild irritation,

something very, very mild. Something that normally I would never have noticed because you have to be very sensitive and quiet to notice it. Nice. So actually, this is a quality of all my thinking thinking always has this quality this way. And then the flash, I felt, wow. This must be true for everyone. And I thought there is much more suffering in this world than I ever realized. It isn't just a big suffering, it's obvious, but there's this underlying layer of suffering. It's Wow, I was just like blown away. Wow. So that was the insight into suffering. So that you think that was depressing. You know, however, that insight occurred at a time, where I had a tremendous feeling of well being happiness and joy and my, as I was practicing there, I was just, I was just kind of, I felt kind of radiating with well being with joy.

As I was doing my walking meditation. And that juxtaposition of having all this joy and having this insight that made it create a context where the insight created a context where the insight was not depressing, but it's actually was inspiring to keep going with a practice and to reset and then to go with the practice, not just for myself. But for other people as well. So, the joy was very important for me for that holding the insight and suffering that I was having, it isn't one or the other, the two can work together. So, then the last insight is that of not self. And the corollary for that in the, in the cultivation world is to cultivate the qualities of strength, confidence, courage, and we see this in the, you know, kind of in a mythic way, perhaps, in the life story of the Buddha. You know, the Buddha was the one who taught this very deep insight into itself. And he himself was belong to the warrior class of his time in India. And as is often the case traditionally in warrior class, there's a tremendous sense of dignity and presence. The nobility sometimes in warriors, there's strength, there's courage, they're the word that's used for energy to have energy for practice is *Varia*. The Indian word we use *viriya* comes from the word *hero*. And so you find some people want to translate it as heroic effort. Rather than just, you know, you need to have more effort. Or you need to have heroic effort. And now that can be depressing also, like where am I gonna find that? But, but this idea of Buddhist practice is not meant to make us kind of self effacing blobs, kind of us kind of calm and relaxed and accepting go along with everything and it's all fine man. But rather, we'd rather there's a kind of cultivation of action, not just strength, but maybe a sense of personal power and efficacy, of stability, of dedication, of courage, of confidence that goes along with it. There are other personal qualities that can be cultivated as well like the qualities of integrity, honesty, of patience, of loving kindness of equanimity, all these things can be cultivated. So they become strengths, concentration, faith, wisdom, discernment, all these are qualities that could cultivate an image to be cultivated. So they become strong qualities that would carry with us and support us. And to some people will kind of somehow rather go fast in their practice and develop these deeper insights into impermanence, suffering and non self and find themselves that throws them off makes them unstable, makes them afraid, confused, disoriented. However, if they inner strengths are developed, then there's a strength to hold the insights and benefit from those insights. So someone you know, someone who feels kind of very powerful confident and is told there is no self. There, you know, so they say they say, Great, I'll just let go of myself. But they're still standing there with all the strength and confidence didn't go doesn't go away. They're there and present in a strong way. So the teaching of itself is not meant to diminish us is not meant to make us kind of naively humble. The teaching itself actually, in some ways is supposed to help us become stronger people. More fearless, more able to stand up for ourselves and respond to the world. In the ancient texts, they even referred to people who have a deep insight into not self as great selves. Their word is in the Pali texts is *Mahatta*. *Atta* is self. *Maha* is great. And it's though it's you bring those two words together. And you get Mahatma Gandhi, in Indian language, Mahatma Gandhi was the great self Gandhi. It's an ancient Indian title that even the ancient Buddhists used to describe their, you know, the people who are most realized that you know, it's not just about disappearing as a self. So the teaching of not self. Imagine now that you have a lot of confidence, a lot of personal strength and your mind starts getting calmer and calmer.

You're strong and calm and settled. And your mind is not thinking a lot anymore, not churning away thinking about the future and the past, not trying to solve your life's problems. The mind is getting calm, quiet, settled in the image of a subtle, quiet mind that some people like is that of the still Alpine Lake. Like early morning, very quiet and still, which works well about the wide Alpine lake is how the mind gets very wide still expansive. agitated mind is often contracted and full of churning waves. So that in mind gets quieter and quieter and quieter a few of your waves in the mind, still learned still there. And as the mind gets still learned still there. It's possible to watch and see how the mind thinks. Or has the impulse to feel that certain things are mine. But it's an impulse of creation activity, the mind to say this is mine. And you can really see it and you can because you can see it arising. You can say, you know, this is an activity of the mind. I don't think I need this activity now. I don't need to be involved in this. I mean, it now is just creating more waves when you put it down. So for example, many of you are sitting in chairs some of you are sitting on cushions that you borrowed from IMC. So it's possible that you were sitting here calmly minding your own business and meditation, maybe your mind got quiet and calm. And as you were sitting there a thought arose. This is my chair. And nobody better have it. Take it from me, because I'm shy, claimed it for myself today. And you see this arising of this thought my chair and you see this is kind of ridiculous. My mind is really quiet and calm. Why sacrifice my calm, for starting to think about my chair and protecting my chair. That's a thought arises in a kind of conventional light way while you hear this, in a sense is kind of your chair. If you go to the bathroom and you come back, and someone's taken it it feels a little bit odd, right? Because you kind of had it. But maybe you don't have to hold on to this my chair. My chair is an activity of the mind. It's not inherent in the chair, we don't have your name inscribed on the chairs here. It's an activity of the mind. When the mind is busy and fast, it doesn't see it as an activity of the mind. It just sees it's the truth. It's the nature of things which operate as if it's true. So if you're busy and agitated and need to go to the bathroom, and you don't want to miss anything that I'm going to say, and you rush off and rush back and you want to sit close enough and you come back and someone's taking your chair, there's no presence of mind to notice how you're responding, reacting yours, like punching the guy out. Because you know, it's my chair. But it's still it's an activity of the mind. So as the mind gets quieter and stronger, it's possible to notice the activities of the mind. A lot of what we do around Self, taking things as mine. taking things as who I am identifying with things, defining ourselves by certain things are activities of the mind. And they're not necessarily inherent there. Where if they are inherent in who you are the identification, the involvement with that identity is an activity of the mind. So, if it's an activity of the mind, is there a time and place where we put that down? We're willing to relax and let go. And at least a meditation is a time that's meant, where are the opportunities there to put down every last bit of vintage memories every last kind of trace? vestige Thank you less than vestige, of, of, of that activity of making money. myself in mind, identifying with assuming I am. So here's a good question. When you don't have a thought, if you don't use your thinking, to explain to yourself who you are, who are you?

If you don't use concepts and thoughts and ideas to explain who you are, who are you? What are you left with? You're still here, nothing's changed. You know, you haven't disappeared. Maybe you don't, maybe you don't need as many concepts and ideas. So part of part of the Buddhist teachings itself is to begin understanding how many of the activities of the mind the constructs of the mind that we create around self are really just constructs. As and not always needed, sometimes they're useful. And we, if they're useful, we can act on them. But they're sometimes they're not useful. They're not useful when they create suffering. And a lot of human suffering, a majority of it perhaps, is deeply connected to the constructs the activities of the mind, that center around me myself in mind. So the insight into itself is meant to be an insight that sees through this constructive activity of the mind activities of the mind rats, be myself in mind and frees up frees us from the grip of it. And then we're left hopefully, if we've cultivated ourselves strongly, we are left with stability, well being and confidence. Isn't that great? Who needs self if you can have the Three.

So now in the future, if you hear a talk on the three characteristics, suffering, impermanent, suffering and itself, you might want to remember how important support and foundation for these insights are the opposites that they're there in the background for that teaching. stability, well being and competence fair enough.