

2013-10-06 Environmental Stewardship

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Today 11:15am to 12pm Dharma sprouts group for children and kindergarten through second grade, and their parents. Today also 5pm to 7pm. mindful teens group for high school students. Tuesday 7:30pm to 9pm new series introduction to mindfulness meditation in Spanish week one of five, cortisol, the introduction, Allah meditation, introspective and Espanyol. sessio No. Thursday 7:30pm to 9pm Thanissaro Bhikkhu will lead the regular Thursday evening set. Friday seven to 8:30pm mindful parenting series. Saturday 9am Drama friends event, seven mile hike at wonderlic Park includes walking meditation period, carpool From IMC. For more information, check the Dharma friends web page on the IMC website. Also Saturday 9:30am to 5pm Sati center day long there brahma viharas with the Nitro Bhiku there will be a meal offering for ajaan the nice hero and other monastics and attendance. If you would like, please bring food for at that time. Next Sunday Dharma friends event at the Imperial Ballroom in Redwood City, ballroom dancing. Learn to waltz one hour dance lesson at 5pm followed by two hour dance party next Sunday 5pm to 7pm Dharma rocks group for children in third through fifth grades and 7:30pm to 9pm Buddhism and the 12 step support group with Jennifer Lemus. Good morning, Gil.

What a list we do a lot Yeah,

that dance is not next Sunday.

No, it's actually next Sunday is James and Michelle switched so she's and then he is

this month

Good morning everyone. Welcome to IMC. Nice, nice to sit with you all enjoyed quite a bit coming and sitting with a group. So this is the week that the insight meditation communities around the globe are celebrating, honoring, observing Earth care week which seems like a great event that only once a week once a year that we should be every every week right that we somehow appreciate our very deep, intimate connection to our planet. They know what's many beings and life forms and appreciate are the mutuality in which we live in this great world. One of the very strong, mythic symbols for our connection to the natural world, in Buddhism is the symbol of the Buddha touching the earth. And the way the story is told, is that he was in the pursuit of his awakening, and he was sitting up through the night and had a series of dramatic insights that led to his awakening. In the process. He started to doubt whether he was worthy of becoming awake becoming free. And I don't think it's in a symbolic way or representative way. I think it's a question many people have. Is it okay to pursue personal liberation spiritual awakening? when, you know, do we deserve it? Are we worthy of it? Is it okay to pursue that in a world

of so much suffering? And should we instead be kind of supporting and helping others in their suffering? Is it okay to pursue kind of spiritual awakening. And, and so, in response, the earth which was seen kind of like an earth goddess thing, the earth responded and had a little earthquake. And, and the way the story is told that earthquake, the earth was bearing witness to the Buddha's right to become free to become awakened. And I think in a way we see this as being true for all of us, that our connection to nature, if we have a connection to nature can show us that we have a right or we have an opening or a possibility of a radical change in how we understand ourselves in relationship to the world into others. And this radical change is one that people often say has to do with interdependence, interconnectedness. The, in the way the story of the Buddha's enlightenment, the myth of it unfold continues in a variety of ways. Nature comes into play around that time in his life. After he had experienced his awakening, it said that he stay safe for seven days enjoying the bliss of awakening, but during that time, India in I think it was close to the monsoon times and so it rained on him you sitting outside and a big Cobra Came slithered up behind him. And, and lifted up above and behind was big kind of Cobra kind of way neck, whatever they do with a spread out, I created an umbrella over him protected him from the rain. So a cobra represents power. And here's some powerful thing of nature coming forth and protecting the Buddha in the time of his freedom, his awakening.

And then after he was finished sitting under his tree of awakening, the myth continues that he took some steps away from the tree, turned around and looked at a tree and bow to the tree and gratitude. And the idea of having some feeling of gratitude to the natural world for the support that gives us I think is a beautiful thing and a worthy thing appropriate thing to do. You know, it's a phenomenon that we should even be alive right. And what do we own our life to, but certainly the natural world that provides us with, you know, pretty much everything we need. One of the important experiences in my life was when I was a college student at UC Davis, the and I was taking introduction to botany class and there was one day where they were talking about this carbon oxygen cycles. And they had this memory they had these beautiful large chalkboard drawings of cycles of co2 and oxygen, how they all works and how the plants mostly take up the co2 and produce oxygen and, and how we humans take mostly take up the oxygen and released all the co2 and so he had the nose kind of absorbed in this class probably got fairly concentrated in all this diagrams. And then I left the classroom and to this beautiful courtyard, and UC Davis has very beautiful old oak trees in a valley oaks towering above us. I walked out in the courtyard and I just was stunned. And I stopped in my tracks, and was just quiet looking at these trees for a long time. And what stopped me was the thought that you know, I need these trees or I need plants to produce oxygen so that I could live and I need them more than I need one of my kidneys, more than I could do away I could I could, you know, manage without a hand without an eye both eyes, I suppose, all kinds of parts of my body which are so important parts of me I could do without maybe not all of it, but but you know, enough of it. And, but I can't do without those plants. And so the question then was, where do I stop and the plants begin where the plants stop, you know, and, you know, we know where it was a boundary between us. And, you know, it was kind of a little bit my thinking mind operating, but it was more than a thinking mind. It was kind of a The mind had gotten quiet and still. And in that quiet and stillness, there was this feeling or sense of interconnectedness, interdependence, where I didn't feel separate from it. And this idea of not being separate is a very important part. I think, for me in a connection to the natural world. I can have I could I can read I can read a lot of manifestos and strong opinions about what's happening to our environment. There's I mean, there's lots lots and lots of horrific things going on to our natural world and to the people who live in it. And it's very easy to get get kind of almost puritanical, moralistic idea that we have to respond and do something kind of strategic imperative or moralistic imperative, it makes sense logically makes sense. But it's a little bit of a burden, and kind of a downer, to kind of feel this heavy burden of obligation and distress. But there's a whole But the similar similar motivation for responding to the needs of our environment can come out of this feel this feeling a sense of interdependence. When our selfishness abates, when our greed, hate

and delusion, your preoccupation with things abates, and we have a quiet mind or open heart, they're just a remarkable feat of feeling or sense of interdependence, interconnection, that can be where the feeling is that the natural world isn't as much part of us as our hand is. And just as if you'd wash, use it as as you would wash your hand, if it's 30. You would care for the environment you live in as well, because it's an extension of your you're an extension of it, this mutuality.

And this is why I believe in Buddhism. There isn't so much the language of being a steward. I think sometimes in the West coming out of the Judeo Christian kind of mindset, they being stewards of the natural world has been very important because We've been granted natural world by God. And so we have to take good care of it. And we have it we have a privileged position where the caretakers but to be a steward of natural I think a little bit odd and the way I see it is like say you ask a friend to come and house it for you for a week while you go away. Or they need a place to stay and so you offer them when you're going away you could stay there for a week and then while while you're away, they just trash the place and you call you know halfway through the weekend so well how's it going there and oh, it's great Don't worry I'm I'll be a good steward for your house. And maybe by the time you're back that's all cleaned up right there good steward right that taken care of, but to be a good house would have been fine without them. You know it of being a steward for your house when they're the ones trashing it doesn't quite make sense, right? So the natural world for the most part do quite well without us humans. And there's an argument to be made that, you know, the world would be better off. And, and mostly, you know, we're the one who's trashing the world, the environment, and to say we're going to be stewards of it. You know, it doesn't make any sense, right to make that that kind of way. You know, it's mostly what the world needs is protection from us. And so rather than being stewards, the, the idea is, is in Buddhism is that we're in it together, we're mutual. We're all we're all interconnected. And how do we cooperate and libtech together in a cooperative and mutually supportive way. And this is expressed by one of the great greatest of the Buddhist teachers in Thailand in the last century, a teacher named Ajahn Buddhadasa. And he wrote this. The entire cosmos is a cooperative the sun the moon, And the stars live together as a cooperative. The same is true for humans and animals, trees and the earth. Our bodily parts function as a cooperative when we realize that the world is a mutual, interdependent, cooperative enterprise, that human beings are all mutual friends in the process of birth, old age, suffering and death, then we can build a noble, even a heavenly environment. If our lives are not based, if our lives are not based on this truth, then we will all perish. So, the idea is to cooperate with the world and live as if we are cooperating as if we're a mutual relationship to it all. And that requires a number of things. So one of the things requires is being well informed. It's one thing to keep your neighborhood clean because you see that it's dirty, your house clean but It's another thing to take care of the impact that you have. And that goes beyond what you can see beyond your own life. And so so do we have a responsibility to get informed what's going on in the wider world? So I think I'm worried as soon as we talk about the word responsibility. I think people start glazing over it feels like a burden. I don't know if it's so useful to come from a place of responsibility. It is useful to come from a place of ability to respond, which is the original meaning and maybe the word response ability. But way when you took took, take those two words together and second very fast responsibility. It feels like obligation for many people or duty and some people like to operate under obligation or duty but I don't think it's as as inspiring but to feel it feel a kind of open hearted connection, connectedness to A world unto others, so that our innate generosity, our innate love and care can be the motivating factor. I think I put much more faith in that and much more hope that that.

And if we have a responsibility to care for others and care for the world, I would like to see that responsibility begin by keeping our heart open, by doing the inner work to keep our mind clean, to clean it of greed, hate and delusion to keep clean it are the forces of mind of separation of egotism, selfishness, that can be seen as kind of the source of our environmental problems that we have. And so

each of us to do to do the work to clean ourselves up, and then to go and try to clean the world or to support support it in useful ways. A very meaningful story that I heard many years ago had to do with you I think it was Gary Snyder who told it in the early 1960s he practice in in the monasteries in Japan. And he was told by a Zen teacher in Japan, that Zen practice involves only two things. So that's nice, easy to remember two things. One was to sit in meditation. His teaching was in the context of a monastery, to sit in meditation and, and then sweep the monastery courtyard. Those are that's all it is that and then he added, but the whole world is your courtyard. And so this idea that meditation is a place where we do the inner work of purifying ourselves, opening our hearts and in terms of this tremendous suffering, it exists in our world, to open to that suffering bear witness of it. We have to make ourselves available Go that's capable of encountering the suffering of the world. It's so tragic. What goes on. And it's easy in the tragedy of it all in this tremendous suffering, to succumb to despair, go numb, get angry, all kinds of things. And so this meditation process is a process of, of being able to witness it be present for it. But without succumbing to despair, and maybe being staying in touch with the wellsprings of compassion, the wellsprings of generosity, and to trust those to have faith in them. Just like the Buddha needed help from the earth, touching the earth to bears witness, we need a witness. We need support sometimes to appreciate that it's appropriate and maybe even better, to respond to tragedy and suffering from our generosity and care than it is to respond to suffering with our anxiety and our despair. Makes sense. And so the I think it's a very important thing that we do this, like meditation practices inner work, to prepare ourselves to make be available to the world around us. But then, do we are we informed? I would say, I would suggest, and I apologize if I leave some of you out and don't speak for some of you that the general people who come to IMC are relatively well to do mean their middle class. Well, to do it as well to do mean, you know, even the poor and a lot of people in America are much better to do than people have been most of humanity in many places in the world. You own a car, many people own the car, right, right. Just and. And in this kind of environment, it's easy to be somewhat myopic, and one very interesting myopic way kind of fascinated when I read this study. It there was a study of the people who Who are most likely to be green to recycle don't to use alternative energy and you know, do all kinds of things. And you're really motivated to do these things. And it tended to be people who were somewhat well to do that. And, and then these are also the people who tend to go to Hawaii for vacation. And if you do an energy audit of your energy use, you'll see that that trip to Hawaii will wipe out any benefits from your you know, recycling, you know, you know, driving a Prius or whatever that you do. Because it's such a big use. I did an energy audit of my life. And we go by family goes once a year to Boston to primary plane trip we do in order to see the family, my wife's family, it's a big day we get together with a family there and you know, it's a family gathering times important for my kids.

For my family so just just just to justify the flight right and so you know, you take you go on these websites and energy audit websites and you type in you know, your the amount of electricity use and how much driving you do everything that you do. And it shows you the how much energy and carbon you put out. And something like half of my energy uses half of my carbon footprint is that flight round trip flight to Boston. Isn't that remarkable? So, so, you know people have some people who are very well meaning and are sensitive and awake aware enough to be concerned with the environment, are doing things, but it's so easy to, you know, then to just go ahead and not exactly wipe it out. It's all meaningful but to You know, change the balance so dramatically by a flight to Hawaii or wherever, you know people might go for vacation. And it's easy to not know. It's easy to not remember what goes on. I mean, here we are in the Bay Area. How many of you remember the Richmond oil refinery fire from a year ago? So I'm seeing about the best maybe more hands are going up maybe half How many of you who remember that or refinery from a year ago know how many people went to local hospitals to get treated for air pollution that happened because of that? Anybody know how many several thousand Any other guesses? So like, several down like three or four, maybe Maybe hire anybody else. 15,000

people a year ago, went to local hospitals to be treated for the air pollution from oil refinery year ago. You remember, Elon remembers, but it goes so quickly we forget. Those are people those are our neighbors up there in Richmond. And the refineries, I don't know where that oil and gasoline goes, what exactly they make up there, what kind, but my assumption it's probably a good working assumption that it contributes the gasoline I drive. Do I have a responsibility? Do I have a response ability? Do I have some way that I feel connected to the people in Richmond you had to go to the hospital. It's not the first time that residents of Richmond have gone to the hospital. It's happens periodically. The biggest incident was in 1993 25,000. People had to go to the hospital. I don't think they were admitted necessarily, but they retreated in the hospital. looked at. That's quite remarkable in the Bay Area. So you know that you know how much trash goes into the bay every year 1.3 1.3 6 million gallons of trash. And then the trash things like plastic bags and soda, soda bar, things like that. So that was quite a it seems like a lot to me. And then it was interesting to see what cities in the Bay Area are most responsible for the trash that goes into the bay and to my distress. Among the Top Worst polluters into the bay is Redwood City. One of the top 10 so that was cut. Yeah, so here we are in Redwood City. And somehow in our community this summer, I saw really dramatic for me documentary of Joanna Macy, the great Buddhist environmentalist, going up to the Alberta tar sands fields in the airplane to fly over it. And they're kind of kind of noisy, a little kind of small plane and she's talking and kind of hard to hear, but you that you look out the window at the tarrifs sand fields in Alberta. And you know, she's talking for a long time, and the planes don't go that slow right? And it's just like miles and miles and miles of completely denuded landscape black, that's been kind of churned up and extracted and it's just unbelievable how much you know, just plain to display goes own on and on and on. And, and so then it said in the documentary that the Alberta tar sand fields which had been kind of completely denuded are the size of England. And I said, No, I can't.

England's a big country. So then I went and did the research and England's about 50,000 square miles in size. And the Alberta tar fields are about 50,000 square miles in size. it's astounding, right? You know, the oil from that, where does that go? does it support me to us? It's out of sight out of mind. So, when I was a member once I was practicing in a monastery, practicing a lot of meditation, and my mind was relatively quiet, sensitive, my heart was open. And in that situation, I was outside under a tree and someone came along and they pulled a leaf off the tree. And it pains me that hurt. Now, I think that someone who maybe has never been on retreat never had that kind of sensitivity. We think that's ridiculous. This guy is too sensitive. But, you know, even even taking the leaf off, had an impact on me. I say this not to be, again distressing but to be inspiring that the fact that a human being can have that kind of sensitivity, to feel the suffering in the world around them is a is a very hopeful thing. Can we be open enough and we will be willing to have the capacity to be willing to be a witness to what goes on in our communities to what goes on to our neighbors to what goes on to the wider world. So we can feel the impact it has to feel the suffering that goes on and in that sensitivity To have the ability to respond, to have the ability to come forth to see if we can make a difference. And whether that's a difference in how our own patterns of consumption, or whether it's difference in, you know, doing political action, trying to change our communities. So, Redwood City is one of the top 10 polluters of the bay, plastic bags and all that. But in October 1, I think it was Redwood City Institute and no plastic bag anymore. It's at the local markets, right. So that's good. So someone had the political wherewithal to pass a law that now you know, is hopefully going to reduce the number of plastic bags that Redwood City you know, spreads out into the world. These things are all I think, meaningful and significant. What can you do? What do you want to do? What do we do as a community? How do we respond? How do we respond in a way that's inspiring and inspiring to others. And here's an idea that I'd like to suggest is that we look and see how we can live in more environmentally friendly ways that nourishes us, rather than taking it on as obligation that diminishes us, but rather nourishes us. So very small example. When I come down here and teach Sunday mornings, whenever I possibly can I walk down here I'm it takes

about a half an hour to walk from my house. And I am very aware that in walking, I'm not driving my car. And that's a good thing for my car for the environment. It's a you know, so that's one of the motivations, but I love the walk. It's good exercise. I love to be looking. Hey, man. It's great. trees in Redwood City. I like looking at the trees as I walk down here. I like to be mindful of my environment and what I'm doing. I like to think that kind of time I think about my talks coming down here. So I feel like my life is enhanced with that walk rather than diminished. I offer that as an example, are there ways that we can see that we can enhance our life by consuming less by being careful with our energy consumption, by changing our patterns of consumption and by being politically involved in trying to make a difference in our world? Because I think that if people see that we are enhanced by it, that our life is better by it, then it's inspiring for other people. But if we other people feel that we're kind of like bitter or we're distressed or anxious, or it's kind of burdened by the responsibility, that's not going to inspire a lot of other people to do much at all. So,

two things, meditate and sweep your courtyard. And your courtyard is the whole world. It takes a little bit of wiggling willingness or interest, to expand your horizons for your courtyard not to stop at the edge of your property, but to educate yourself and take time to learn. But what goes on further afield? You know where the not to distress you anymore. You know which city in America has the most amount of smog? Anybody know that? I grew up in LA so I would have said LA, but no, Portland, really. I didn't know about Portland. Nothing the list that I So, Houston, you've been to Houston and bad there, huh? I don't know. It wasn't in the list that I saw. So probably not Denver, San Jose, the city that in the study that I saw, the city that has the most amount of pollution, air pollution in United States is Bakersfield. It has something to do with the way that the small kind of travels into the Central Valley and stops there. And where does that smoke come from? They say that a fair percentage of it comes from the Bay Area. So we kind of just, you know, we have good air push it out. So do we have a responsibility? How do we do what do we do with it? So to educate ourselves to learn and if we learn these things that does affect our behavior does affect our choices that affect and I think that, you know, it's a good thing to educate ourselves. I you know, we have my fulness and then we had we have environmental mindfulness, we have neighbor mindfulness, we pay attention to our neighbors, whether they're in the neighborhoods of Richmond, or Bakersfield or, you know, our immediate neighbors. To live a life to be awake means not just to live a life of enlightened retired bliss, but rather to pay attention and pay attention to something we can do actively and with choice as well. So one of the things that I think is important in this whole environmental thing is, is certainly energy reduction, using clean energy and also mitigate what's called mitigation. We cannot expect everyone to stop flying and not use as much energy but we can mitigate the damage of it. Is this carbon offsets you can do with the recent reforestation is available Important thing to do. So if you know if you do a lot of flying, you might consider making a donation to someplace where you can mitigate the effects of that flying by someplace where they make a difference in plant forests and trees that can be a carbon sink. The so one of the things that we're trying to do for our immediate community is to put in a solar water heater at our retreat center. We now have two properties, this property here at IMC and IRC our retreat center, and we have we've looked into kind of putting solar panels and things on the roof here and doing things this building but we actually don't use very much electricity energy in this building, oddly enough because you know, we don't use it all the time. And it wouldn't really doesn't really make sense to do something here, but it makes a lot of sense to do something for our retreat center. We use a lot of propane down there. We use a lot of hot water because he didn't wintertime our heating is a water system kind of radiator system. And so we were, you know, we really would like to be able to have a solar water heater to be able to lower the amount of we feel like the next step for us to lower energy usage at the retreat center. And so I'm so inspired but it's so important to do it. That's where this earth career week I'm kind of dedicating all the dāna both teacher dāna for me and also for the IMC as a fundraising drive for doing the solar water heater, so if

you make donations tonight today, that's what it's for. And it's also as someone pointed out to me last week

for those of you who would like to mitigate some of your you know, energy usage, you know, balance it all out a little bit and make a difference. donating something that caused like that is one way to do that. So out of your generosity and compassion and inspiration and happiness, maybe that's relevant today, you'll support us in in trying to get that water heater up on that roof. So I hope this talk my hope in this talk was to share a little bit Buddhist kind of view on this kind of topic a little bit to inspire you. And I tried to do it without distressing you. So 50,000 square miles char field fields in Alberta. Wow. It's quite something. So Let's all make a difference. Thank you