So welcome to the beginning of the week and a new theme for dharmettes. And this week, I'd like to talk about fear. And one of the motivations for this is to follow up last week's topic on the three roots of the wholesome and the three roots of the unwholesome. That when we talk about greed, hate and delusion being the root, motivator, motivation or root source from which all unwholesome, unhealthy behavior arises. Some people will say, wait a minute, what about fear? Isn't fear just as important for human beings and just as afflictive for human beings as greed, hatred and delusion? Why is it left out? And some of you know about the teachings of the five hindrances desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and regret, and doubt. And some people will ask there also why is fear not considered a hindrance. And then people will try to squeeze it into one of the hindrances, what's probably kind of ill will and that's why it's not talked about because it's included within that.

So this lack of emphasis on fear sometimes is a little bit surprising given how huge it is for human beings. For many people, at some points in our lives, it's often fundamental. It's like a fundamental base from which influences or conditions. How we see the world, how we see ourselves and the choices we make about how to live.

So I'd like to look at this topic of fear for today in the next three days. And one of the very important aspects of dharma practice is in fact, to understand fear, and to be willing to not only understand it, but also to respect it. I think that fear always should be respected. Respect doesn't mean that we give into it, or we give it authority. But respect means we give it a second look, that there's something there to learn. Whenever there's fear, it's a message. Whenever there's fear, it's an indication that something needs attention. Certainly, if there's an imminent danger, something's happening in the present moment and we feel afraid because the cars driving down the wrong side of the street at us, then that's a clear message to get out of the way. And so it's oftentimes in the moment real dangers when there's fear is a message that we better take heed and take care of. But some fears belong more to the imagination or to our prediction of the future and are kind of a construct of ideas of what could be or should be or what will be, and it's not immediate. And sometimes our fears are unfounded. But it would regardless of what kind of fear it is, it should be respected. And because it's a message. It's more like a symptom of something that needs attention. And if it is unfounded or not really necessary. Often what it it's a symptom of something deeper inside of us, that does need attention, does need our care, and our mindfulness.
And so we want to start this process of looking at fear by beginning to appreciate the value of understanding it. And that's one of the great advantages of mindfulness practice. Because mindfulness practice is the practice of giving a second look to everything. Really stopping long enough not to be reactive. But the best of our ability put aside our reactivity enough so we can really be present and see what is this? What is this experience? And of course, it's a little bit more complicated with fear because fear itself is a kind of reactivity. And so we don't have, you know, but when fear rises, then we try not to be too reactive to the fear and try to look at it to be present for it, to study fear.

And one of the ways to begin understanding fear that helps us is if we can kind of shift our orientation to fear, from thinking of fear in terms of I am afraid to I have fear. And the difference of that is that I am is kind of like all of you, it's kind of like identifying and defining ourselves. And if all of who we are is afraid that's a very different orientation and a very different door inward to understand it. Then if we view it as I have fear, or there is fear here, it's not the whole picture of who we are. It's always a subset of our whole being. It can be strong and course through us so it feels like everything. But as soon as we allow it to be our whole being, sometimes we get it's too easy to get entangled in it or caught by it or to judge ourselves for it. And this idea of switching to I have fear or there is fear here is a strategy to not be over identified with it or not kind of be caught in it. So we can't kind of look at it clearly and see it as something a little bit objective, a little bit.

Now one of the reasons, one of the theories, why fear is not one of the three routes for unwholesome behavior, or one of the hindrances is that there's a wide range of fear. And there's fear which is motivated by the three unwholesome roots and fear which is part of the wholesome roots. Fear, the word fear itself, like the word anger we talked about last week, maybe should be seen as an umbrella term for a broad category term for a broad range of feelings that kind of fit within that category of things that bring up a sense of caution, of care of wanting to become safe, wanting to be protected. And there are healthy forms of that. And there are those which are not so healthy. There's helpful forms of fear and not so helpful forms of fear. And so to make a categorical statement that fear is a root for what's unwholesome and unhelpful, it just doesn't fit for that range of what this emotion is. It's more useful to see it that fear can be motivated by the unwholesome roots. It can be motivated, in fact by greed, hatred and delusion. Or it can be motivated by non greed, non hate and non delusion. It can be motivated by a feeling of generosity or friendliness or care. It can be motivated by love. It can be motivated by self respect. It can be motivated by a deep understanding and wisdom of what's really best for ourselves and best for others. And so certain behavior, when we see up against something, some behavior, some way of thinking, some way of speaking, there can be a healthy fear that comes along when we see the danger of speaking that way, or acting that way, that way it causes harm in the world, it causes harm in ourselves, causes harm in our relationships. That we have capacity for something like self respect. And so there's some caution around harming that, some caution of, you know, protect ourselves for our own sense of confidence in ourselves and sense of trusting ourselves. And so we want to feel some fear when we're about to do something that's going to cause us to lose that. And that's considered healthy. And then on the unhealthy side, if there's a lot of greed, then there can be fear about not getting what one wants, or have greed by we already have and we're fear of losing it. There might be a lot of hostility and nationality, we're afraid of the thing that we're hostile for, we don't want to get too close, we want to push it away. There can be a lot of delusion or confusion, ignorance about all kinds of things. And one of those things is the nature of self. The ways in which our self constructs the ideas of who we have, are, maybe are not such useful ideas, maybe not even true ideas, but holding on to ourselves as being a certain kind of person, then that idea can easily be threatened.
So for example, if someone grows up feeling quite insecure, but then they find a group of people, maybe a gang, a gang of people, and in that gang, they feel a sense of belonging, they feel safe. But it comes along with an identity of being someone who is really tough and strong and kind of bosses people around or worse. But this idea of being strong and tough and bossing people around, turns out to be a construct which is actually quite fragile, and is easily threatened. And so then there's fear. And, but if we study that fear, see that fear is a symptom, we see that down deep down inside, it began with a sense of maybe insecurity. And that insecurity, maybe has a better avenue of being resolved and dealt with than other ways besides being part of a gang and belonging and being, you know, taking on a gang persona. So, to study our fears, and be able to hang out long enough with it, to respect it long enough so we can really start feeling and sensing what is going on here? Questioning, reflecting on it going for walks and really what's happening here with my afraid? And then asking yourselves is there any greed or non hate, non greed? Love, self respect, generosity, care? What is it what's underneath here? And what is it underneath that really needs our attention? And this idea of going down deeper and deeper to look, kind of goes along with this story that I’d like to read a fairy tale. “There was once a beautiful princess, who was engaged in a hideous serpent monster. Terrified, she sought the counsel of a wise old witch. The witch told the princess that she should go ahead with a marriage and that she should wear 10 white gowns on her wedding night. And when it came time to go to bed with a serpent, she should take off each one of the gowns, one at a time, and ask the serpent to take off one of his skins for each of hers. After she took off her 10 gowns, she was to embrace the serpent. The princess didn't like it. But she took the advice of the old elder woman. As she took off the last of her gowns, she saw that the slimy repulsive serpent was still there. And although she was a repulsed, she nevertheless had the wisdom to follow what the old woman had said. And she embraced the serpent. When she did, the serpent has transformed into her wonderful spouse." We don't know the gender of the serpent in the end. And so the. So take off the gowns, these things we've built up the fear layers of fear that we built up over lifetime, layers of personas, layers of ways in which we understand and see the world and measure the world, and expect of the world, and afraid of the world. There might be layers and layers of kind of taking things off, taking it off. And it’s fantastic process to learn how to come from a deep place of trust. Or maybe better said in the Buddhist language, a place of fearlessness and to know how to be safe. While at the same time being fearless. To have the wisdom of how to live fearlessly is part of the direction that the Dharma is going. And perhaps to become fearless without fear is that maybe ultimately, a better place or wiser place deeper place, then to live with trust. And so discover this place of fearlessness, is part of the gift of studying fear and understanding it and becoming wise about it.

So we'll go go through this a little bit more for the next few days. And if you're one of those people who have some fear or anxiety or worry, maybe this week could be a time for you to take a different look at it. And if you find it hard for you to kind of stop and be sit and be present and study your own fear, you might do one of two things or both things. You might journal about it, just write about it kind of. And the other is you might find a friend or total stranger that's willing to talk to you a little bit and you just kind of talk out what you understand about fear and just kind of explore it and find out and let's let's get to the bottom of fear this week.

Thank you so much.