

2001-08-26: Volunteer Appreciation

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SPEAKERS

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Since I had my tonsillectomy about 8,9,10 days ago, we can go Thursday. So, it's been a rough road boy, the doctors told me they kept telling me over and over again being very reassuring saying this is going to hurt that they weren't offering any kind of you know, we'll give you pain medicine or whatever, it's gonna hurt. It's gonna really gonna hurt a lot. It's a it's a lot harder as an adult, I kept saying. So it was hard. I was really surprised, though, I really depended on the vicodin and I tried to take as little as I could, and so kind of push the limits and it would take about 10 1520 minutes for it to take in at once I take in a pill and I would actually kind of crumble under the pain when they finally wore off and until a new pill took in. It was quite intense. I still have some of it, and still dealing with all kinds of bodily stuff in relationship to it, but I feel pretty good. And it seemed like I'm coming to the other end of this one. So, yes, I made it here today. And I didn't know whether I would either make it or have a voice to speak. And the idea of today was to somehow express appreciation mutual appreciation for the many people who volunteer for our community. About a year and a half ago, Cheryl Hilton and Michelle Gassner and maybe some other people counted up how many volunteers we had in our community. And I knew we depended on violence. And I've been very grateful for that for many years and, and when I came back, they listed all the things were done and all the names of people who did things. And they came back with an depending how you counted between 750 and 75 people. And I was astounded. I had no idea that there weren't that many people involved in doing all the things that we that, you know, that take to organize our community. Some of the things were, you know, small things, and some things were huge things. But maybe some people didn't even feel they were particularly doing something that's significant, but added up to this whole kind of creation, his whole community we have in the way we have it, that everyone else participates in creating it. And we've been talking for a long time but having some kind of compelling volunteer appreciation event. And so we thought of today, and with the idea that I would give some kind of talk on that's inappropriate. Then after the talk to have a little bit, everyone, everybody's welcome to stay for another 20 minutes or 30 minutes. But in particularly the people who have volunteered over the years to come kind of forward and sit kind of in the front, and then we'll have something a little bit special for the volunteers. And then we'll have a

potluck potluck will happen a little bit later than usual because we'll extend a little bit because of this volunteer thing. So it all seems very nice and wonderful. When we thought about it, then I was very inspired because I feel very grateful for all the volunteers and everything. But now that I'm sitting here going to speak to you about this topic. I don't not sure what to say. You know, it seems the appropriate thing to do is to come down here and give a very inspiring talk and heartwarming talk about how wonderful volunteering is and our volunteers are and everyone left leave with kind of very good feeling. So but I don't know what the words should be to say that exactly. I don't like thinking about it. I'm not sure how I understand the whole thing of volunteering, I could say various kinds of things kind of very simply kind of obvious things about it. But as I've been thinking about it the last week, I've actually kind of found myself kind of with less than less understanding of what I might say today. So it feels a bit awkward to come down here. With that kind of contrast between the appropriateness of giving a rousing, inspiring talk, and wondering, you know, what do I say? And each day goes along, I wonder more and more What do I say about this topic? So I apologize ahead of time for that. But let me say a few things that has occurred to me. One is that the idea of volunteering is that it's voluntary. And volunteering giving of oneself is a very central aspect of kind of key element of Buddhist spirituality.

And perhaps that's why it's been hard, a little bit hard for me to know what to say because it's like the air we breathe. It's such a central part of the whole culture, that embarrassingly enough, maybe I haven't actually looked at the air that visible so as clearly as maybe as I should have. But they do voluntary, voluntary offerings and voluntary means literally, it's voluntary, with no expectation or requirement that things begin. And down through the centuries, Buddhism has survived or continued and be propagated and transmitted by people's voluntary efforts. Is this working okay, if everyone hears me fine. And men, many of the ways maybe many of my times in Asia, I was very moved by the level of volunteer participation in the communities in the temples and the teaching centers that I was at, and certainly was the obvious way. in which people gave money and giving money was a popular thing to do. And they treated money giving money donations slightly differently they do here in America, especially in Burma. Here in America, I'm not sure exactly maybe I should generalize. But I want you to realize but what there was a way in which was handled in in Burma. That made the Westerners very uncomfortable. Maybe because of the kind of attitude we have about giving here in this country. It was very popular in Burma, for people to donate the food for the main meal of the day. So people would come in, even donate the food offer money so the monastery can go out into buy food and cook the food for all the monastics amongst the nuns, the lay people practicing there. And there were sometimes 500,000 2000 people to cook for in the monastery. So it certainly was, you know, a big event to have enough food and to cook and prepare it all. So for the Burmese, which is a very poor country, people are very poor. Any kind donation to the monastery was often to stretch their finances quite a bit. And but if people did everyday, we showed up for lunch and their food for us. In the, at the entryway to the cafeteria or the dining hall, there was a very, very big Blackboard on the blackboard. They had written on the blackboard, the names of the people who had donated the money for that day's meals, and the amount of money they gave, and mostly was Burmese. But if it wants to know you see a Westerners name, and they wrote that in kind of Roman letters, or whatever it's called

in our kind of script. So you can see, you know, who made the donation. And this was very embarrassing for us Westerners that our names should be up there, because it's felt a little bit maybe selfish or self centered or a little bit like you didn't want to you didn't want to advertise the fact that you made this donation somehow. was more private affairs kind of anonymous or something. And over and over again, the Westerners commented how awkward it was. But in Asia, that was actually something people were, in a sense, I think in a healthy way happy to do and proud to do and, and it was just kind of part of the culture to, to let it be known. So there's certainly people making donations of money. But there was tremendous amount of people who donated their effort and their times. They're all in fact, all the abilities they had. I was very touched by the medical care we got the Westerners got, we were in the monitors in Burma, because the seemingly the best medical practitioners, doctors and for medical schools in Burma, would come to the monastery to help us if we were sick. I remember I was sitting very peacefully one day meditating, minding my own business, not doing anything to get into trouble. And, and suddenly, in the middle of a meditation session, my feeling fell down. And it was very hard and maybe it's kind of hard to so maybe kind of things expanded as it got hotter through the day I don't know if you noticed, just sitting there we might be not moving and not talking and study. So I went to my teacher and described what happened my meditation and so he went and next day they then dentist came to the monastery, check my tooth. Thanks for it's fine. He said you don't have to do anything. It's still it's just part of the cavity fell out. And so people came and offered their services. Many people offer their time to cook the meals to take care of the grounds to take care of the administration's of the buildings or the monastery in the monastery was quite large. It's kind of like a junior college campus size, built in 1950s kind of long, kind of walkways and wide walkways and big meditation halls and

and, and I was really struck by all the numbers People who were priests contributing and supporting through the volunteer efforts. And I always felt that the teachers that I had in Asia, were also volunteering their time and efforts. They always seem people to be very busy, they had a lot of responsibilities, usually the Abbott's of a place monastery and being Abbot, they had responsibility not only of the temple itself, but they had responsibility of the local community. It was kind of community center and people come from local community for all kinds of needs, and the monitor, but we just say they're kind of usually in his little house, usually one room house or two room house. And, and in taking care of all these needs, would also then be available for us Westerners and they also often felt and this was really a kind of their their efforts. They were kind extending themselves, and they're kind of volunteer efforts to to help us without ever any expectation that we were supposed to get anything in return. There was never any hint by any of the people In any of the monasteries, our practice in Asia, that we were supposed to make donations, no eyebrows raised, if we will cut by we're leaving now after eight months of sitting in the monastery eating their food and we had not given anything. They were so happy that we were practicing. And that they felt that if we practice sincerely, that was their, our biggest gift in return. But, again, the point is that there was there was volunteer effort of the community over the people living there that made the whole monastery function. And this is the way it's been, I believe, since the time of the Buddha and tremendous amount of people offering themselves and built into Indian Buddhism, maybe too much of Indian culture, is the idea of offering.

There's it appears most dramatically in the Hindu word bhakti, Sanskrit word buckety. And Bhakti has kind of this fervor and fervor, different devotion, devotionalism, that can be quite filled with love and passion. But this kind of faith driven devotion of bhakti is often expressed through acts of service and acts of offering to the object of worship. And Indian culture is built up very much on this notion of making offerings, not only to the guru, but in Buddhist tradition to the Sangha. And one of the one of the very central aspects of Buddhism from the time of the Buddha is that people can make offerings to the, to the Sangha, to the community, rather than having to do it to one particular person or the monk or whatever. And I believe I'm not sure about this, but I believe actually the Buddha encouraged people to make donations to the community more than to some, you know, one illustrious monk in the monastery, because if there are many monks in the monastery, if the one who is most wise or most charismatic or whatever, received all the donations, then all the other money would starve, you know, they would be lopsided. So there was a system set up and making donations to the monastery. And the monastery was responsible for distributing them appropriately. So volunteering is a central aspect as we continue down through the ages. There would be no Buddhism today unless there was some functioning. So some some aspect of people volunteering their time, their money, their efforts. So that's one thing on one hand, when I was in Japan, I stayed in Zen monasteries. And sometimes I'd go visit a Zen monastery that would live in town and go visit a Zen monastery for the morning meditation. And one of the things that struck me was that when you when I went to Zen temples in the morning to sit there was an expectation there was a stick as the air in order to be thicker was like, I mean, it was just nobody was. But it was like obvious that this was the system was that you couldn't just show up just to meditate if you should have come to meditate and then left it just was not good. You felt it, you know this you you this was this was not appropriate was kind of like spirit, you're spiritually The rest are yours, you know, misunderstood or you were, you know, just felt wrong you know you did something terrible you did like a football. what you expected to do if you came to meditation, which you came to expect it to come to meditate. And then to do the morning service was which was 10 1520 minutes of chanting usually. And follow that you're expected to participate in what's called synergy, which is the temple cleaning, which also took about 1015 minutes. And those three things made one unit and were somehow considered indivisible by the Zen teachers of Zen communities. There.

If you didn't, if you come and you do all three, they are meant as a package together. If your spiritual life was only about sitting by yourself sitting meditating, your spiritual life was myopic, lopsided, there's something off about it. And part of it should also be an act of faith or devotion, which was a chanting the service, and also a very important part of it, which is active serve of work. So g at the end of this segment of time, and it was often very much fun to do this morning work. In the Zen kind of spirit, you're supposed to do it quite vigorously. And vipassana students would often have some adjustments to do because they should have kind of wanting to do things really slowly and methodically and thoughtfully, and then you're supposed to kind of just, you know, top speed as fast as you could kind of just race around. And And the important thing was to work It wasn't so important what you got done. The make sense was important was the activity of offering. So there was always odd things about that. Where sometimes they would give there were too many people to clean a particular area. But you had

to work until the bell rang. So you have people kind of redoing the same thing. You know, I remember many times, you know, I'd clean I was signed to the one big hall, we had a lot of columns. And after a while we cleaned up we kind of dusted off with damp cloth, all the columns once and then someone come along and Destin a second time, sometimes the three times mean they really clean or we were sent out to rake the pathways, very common. That's one of the most common things to do in the temples is to re cut pathways. You know, leaves, you know, clear leaves and stuff. But often sometimes there were no leaves. It didn't matter you have to rake important was the activity. So it seemed a little bit absurd at times. But the spirit of it was this kind of offering part of yourself in supporting the temple contributing to make the whole temple thing happen. And that this was considered to be a unit, your meditation, your active devotion and your active service or work in return or I don't know exactly return is the right way of talking about it. And there was never any discussion about responsibility, there was never any discussion about why you do this, it just it was just kind of this is what what was expected. When I so I came to our city group in 1990. And are sitting group preceded me I was invited in 1990, to kind of be the future of the group. And when I first started as a teacher, I very much felt and took the attitude that I was here under invitation I wouldn't do anything unless the group invited invited me to do something. And so eventually someone thought of a good idea to have me do a one day sitting. So I said, Okay, I'll do that. And but you know, it was it was a group that pre existed me. And after a while the group kept growing and growing. And I was certainly kind of a focal point for the group. And after a while, it felt like it just didn't make sense to live by this illusion that I was just hearing the invitation. Because I don't know just that wasn't you know, that was happening anymore. But as it grew and developed back there on copper street in Palo Alto, there became a need I don't need but we started to grow with tourists were maybe 15 people and 2030. We got to about 40 people in the in the Calvary Street, Presbyterian Church. And, and as we grew, one of the important understandings that I had is that it's very important for a community of spiritual practitioners to share in taking responsibility for the community. And I felt that as people developed in their spiritual practice, it was important to give some, some people give people the opportunity to grow,

personally, spiritually, whatever, through acts of service to the community itself. And that if people simply just showed up to meditate and then went home, which is it's a fine thing to do. But if that's all we offered, we were truncating or limiting the possibility of growth for people who are ready for more more to grow in other ways. And one of the ways to keep growing is to begin Taking responsibility for the spiritual community that you're part of. So I felt it was very important to begin offering opportunities people to take responsibility. And, but always in the kind of volunteer spirit, that is part of the Buddhist tradition. So, there were things you know, we didn't really need a lot of things I could have done easily. But I felt it as soon as we started, I could see there were opportunities for people to help. I asked, you know, does anybody want to help with this, they will help with this. So spirit rocket, send me all this literature. If he wants to help with a literature, you know, they get back and forth. There's always helpful for me not to have to do it, but but you know, he wants to have the key and open and close, who wants to do this and that and it felt very important to pass on some of the responsibilities to other people. And slowly and so at some point, basically, I kind have invented someone, I can tell someone, okay, you're not you're not the President, or sitting group. And, and oh. And so you're kind of you know

your job, you know you if you want to do this Your job is to kind of keep an overview of the whole thing that we're doing, which wasn't much at that point. And now a couple of things happened as people volunteered in this way. One is that it tended to create community. Because the more people who took responsibility, the more people were visible in those kinds of roles. The more they related to the wider community, we stood out in the community, and the more they people related to each other. It was actually very helpful in creating a stronger sense of community people knowing each other being familiar with each other. And having a strong sense of community is a very important part of a spiritual life. We learn from By knowing them by being in relationship to them by having a mirror us. So as we started having more volunteers, I started to notice we also started to have more community, which was very nice. Also, as people got engaged in some of the volunteer work, sometimes friction would arise between people. And rather than thinking that friction was a bad thing, I thought, great, what this is a great, I couldn't think of a better community to have friction. Because if you have that tendency to we all of us have tendencies to get in conflict with each other. This would be a great community to have it occurring because we're all listening, very dedicated to be mindful and compassionate. And to hang in there and try to see each other in a kind way as we work through these things. And other kind of dismiss people are just kind of whatever kind of dismisses them in ways it doesn't really take care of In the conflict, our communities dedicated I hope to really working with conflict and using conflict as part of the spiritual practice itself. So this should be a great community for conflict. So you're welcome to have some. And no, and one of the ways to have good opportunity for this to rise is to you know, volunteer.

And some of you have had to deal with me. And no, you know, it's great. So that community then becomes a mirror and a mirror for ourselves. It becomes a vehicle for learning all kinds of useful skills, I hope and how to work with conflict and deal with other people. One of the opportunities in volunteering I've also noticed is that in volunteering people can create can create something new and exciting A group like ours, one person's efforts, inspiration can go a long, long way. And one of the things I've learned in my adult life is actually how much one individual can do with their own efforts. And I'm kind of in the school that individuals actually are quite powerful if they put their mind to something their hearts to something, and put the time to create it. And individuals can do phenomenal change for our society. When I started college, I went to UC Santa Barbara. My father, who's a professor at USC, UCLA took me aside he was going to give me some Insider's advice about how to deal with a UC system. And he said, Just remember, that all the rules were made by people so people can change them. So don't feel limited by any of the rules. And, and that sir, when I when I was willing to graduate, four years later enough, four years, but six years later, I dropped out a couple of years that that piece of advice worked really well because there's all these requirements I hadn't taken. So I went to my advisor and gave him all the reasons why I shouldn't do these requirements. And he said, Okay. But the more important lesson from my father was that at least the UC system was that I felt actually somehow empowered to make a difference. I went eventually went to UC Davis. And we got into I got involved with I was studying agriculture, alternative agriculture, organic farming and things. And together with a handful of others interested in organic farming, we were kind of the We organize ourselves as the political agricultural activists on campus. And I was actually quite amazed by how

much a very small handful of students were able to accomplish by just kind of plugging away and working the system and, and made a huge difference in the things that we did set in motion we started in mid late 70s continues at UC Davis today. the cleverest thing we did was we wanted to start a student farm alternative ecological farm on campus. You know, UC Davis is the great to agribusiness center of California for the world. And we've done various things. We started teaching classes, we got permission to teach our own classes and that were valid class and people got credit for taking them and we want to start this farm. So we organize yourself for that. And then during the summer of 1970 Probably 9078 we petitioned to the state legislature to grant us several hundred thousand dollars in money and a certain plot of 40 acres or something of UC Davis land. So we could start a alternative farm or research center on campus. And the person who actually did the actual work of approaching legislature, maybe who's kind of savvy to these kinds of things. And he noticed that this was going to come up. He wanted to he actually arranged it to our substitute suggested legislation came up with this exactly same time as a piece of legislation in favor of the California farm workers. So that said the story, which was a political wasn't going to go anywhere, and it wasn't going to win this thing about the farmworkers. There's not enough support for it. It was also very embarrassing for the legislators to, to vote against it.

So by offering ours at the same time, it gave legislature a way of saving face. So they voted \$200,000. And then we got and 40 acres of land. Suddenly we were a bunch of undergraduates at UC Davis with a big budget and this big plot of land and we had to hire a full time farm manager and figure out what to do. And that farm still continues to this day, and that farm managers, activities and stuff. One person can make a big difference as a group of people can make a phenomenal difference. I'm amazed at what we've managed to do here in Palo Alto and compare that peninsula with our sitting group I would never have imagined 10 years ago, 11 years ago, that the fifth group of 15 of us would have ended up being 11 years later, at the brink of perhaps having her own center on building and And being able to offer so much to the wider community. I think that we have a big impact. I don't know how big I don't want to get it, you know, be too grandiose about it. But we have an impact and very important, wholesome impact on our wider community that we're part of here in the peninsula. There's a lot of people who'd benefit from coming through here, a lot of people come through just a few times. And we'll come back seven years later and say, that made a big difference for me. They didn't come regularly, I couldn't, but those few times made a big difference. There's a lot of benefit that kind of spreads out from our community into the wider community. A lot of people in our community have tremendous benefit from their involvement with the community with our practice with the teachings. And one of the privileges of being in my role as a teacher is that people will come and talk to me about the impact that the practice the teachings, the community have As many of you don't get the opportunity to hear, sometimes they feel need to kind of private or whatever. And they come to me and, and, and sometimes people open the hearts in a very kind of very full ways. And so I get to hear the impact that we have. And I'm actually in awe of the tremendous impact on people's lives. This practice has, I know for myself how powerful it is, but to see that this community of ours, and the practice we offer and the activities we offer here, offer so much to so many people. I can't I couldn't have imagined living years ago was going to be like this. And now that we've come this far, now I can

imagine much more. And I'm really inspired by the possibility of getting a sense of whether we get this place in Redwood City or we get some other place. And one of the things that inspires me is not the building so much. But is that the building becomes an opportunity for more people to practice and more people to channel their inspiration, their joy, their volunteers in their offering back to the community. One of the reasons why people volunteer is they feel so grateful that they want to somehow it doesn't feel right somehow to keep it just for oneself. And they want to return with the gift that they've been given. And I feel that way profoundly that the gifts that I got from my teachers and the communities I practice with here in America, Indonesia, you know, we're so when probably the most precious gifts of my life, and it doesn't make sense to kind of keep them kind of bottled up inside of me. It's like, you know, someone who sits, you know, on a treasure, you know, has all this wealth and they just kind of put their wealth on the mattress and sit there for years and years until I die very happy to have all this well, what good is it do? So you want to share it with other people and give back and And I feel part of what I do as a teacher's is offering back the best I can of what I feel I was given. So that's another reason why people volunteer is to offer back.

So one of the things I was uncertain about in giving this talk was how to reconcile the idea of volunteering being a voluntary activity, with the notion of responsibility, of taking responsibility being responsible for a community that you're part of, whether it's the local community or sitting group or the wider community, whatever. Because when you use the word responsibility, it's a much heavier word than volunteering. It has a feeling a little bit of being obligatory when you hear your responsibility. And I don't want to have anyone ever feel this obligation to volunteer to be involved in our community. I think it'd be kind of a death of part of our the spirit in which we do things if that's becomes part of it. But But I don't want to say there's no role for responsibility. I think responsibilities are very important. So I'm not sure how to reconcile these things, but hopefully that maybe some of you can come up with ideas, or we can sell them but certainly I feel that the responsibility that we take should be voluntary and come from the kind of joy and inspiration that volunteer volunteers, volunteers, and I hope is an expression of

Part of the beauty of the idea of volunteerism is is that it's voluntary. And people can offer whatever they can, whatever their circumstances allow that it's a responsibility kind of feels Morgan, like, you know, everyone has this responsibility. I have to kind of extend myself now. And it's hard for me. I think everyone, you know, everyone hasn't. Everyone's in different circumstances. It's very important to realize that we all had different circumstances. Some people have big families, some people have health difficulties some people have, are there places that volunteer that are very important for them or, or their activities they do and people's people's lives are very different from each other. And so, I don't want to be there's there's no need for anyone to measure. What is their appropriate way of being involved in our community? There are some people who come for years, and never, in a sense, volunteer their time and their efforts in any way. And that's completely fine. There's no problem With that, there are other people will come for years and just come and sit in the same way and never volunteer. And actually, there's something off about it. There's something quite quite right to come for years and years and not to offer something of yourself in return. What's the difference between those

two people for those people who it's fine not to do that, and those people who it seems a bit odd not to give something in return. I don't know exactly the details of their lives. But I'm very conscious of how different people's lives are and some people don't have the ability or the time or whatever. So people in our community, I hope very much that people feel completely comfortable to come as they are, and with no sense of obligation at all, to participate in any volunteer efforts at all. And if you but if you feel inspired for all the different reasons a person might be inspired, inspired to volunteer The channels for volunteering, the opportunities, the doors of volunteers are wide open for you. And if you find the opportunities easily available and fun and really enjoyable and rewarding

so that's about all I have to say. There's a little bit awkward for me and the whole talk is awkward now at the end because I'm in Ghana, kind of giving a talk about how wonderful volunteering is aspects of it. I don't want to leave kind of lingering feeling in people's minds that oh, maybe maybe I'm supposed to be volunteering. That's not what I had in mind is just but so those are my thoughts. And if we had more time and would have been nice to hear from all of you, but your thoughts about this also, what I like to do is switch Now in those people who like to leave now can leave, it's almost time 1045 those people who in any kind of way, even it's the most miniscule, small way you can imagine have volunteered in our community, if you would stay and come up and kind of sit close to the front. And those of you who haven't volunteered, but like to stay and be part of the next part, it'd be really neat if you stayed just to listen to hear what's going to happen next. And no one's going to look over the shoulders and kind of whatever let's think about why isn't that person volunteering, whatever. Is that okay with folks? So why don't we kind of rearrange the room a little bit, if that works. And those of you who would like to go home can go

For some of you who can also set up for the potluck if you want to do that instead

so one of the one of the things I tried to get more people to Sinhalese. Oh, sorry. Yeah. One of the one of the I tried to in my talk if some of the reasons why a person might volunteer. And one of the reasons I left out was I think that volunteering or helping create community is an expression of love. And that as we as our hearts become more open and more friendly and more sensitive to others, It becomes almost a natural instinct to offer ourselves to offer help to offer the volunteer in many ways. And I think is also an expression of love. And one of the things that also I've been struck by over the years as our community has grown, is we've also grown I feel as a community of friendly people of love loving people, I feel tremendous amount of kindness flowing within our community in all kinds of different directions and angles and ways and it takes many different expressions. Just very small ones just caring about people and smiling and asking how people are getting to know each other. Sometimes we will come new to the community takes a while to meet people because we spent so much time in silence or listening to a speaker. But slowly if you can, people get familiar with you and slowly people you know, you get to know people and, and that kind of becomes kind of I feel very powerful center. Are love at times in our community. And I'm very grateful for it. I'm very grateful to be part of this community. It's become one of the more important things of my life. And a very central aspect of my

own practice is to be involved in this community. Slowly as you know, when I first came here, 11 years ago, I had no thought of what's hanging hanging around. I mean, I came, I came to be a graduate student at Stanford. And it was just like a, you know, and I was supposed to, I was being trained to be the pastor teacher. And part of the training was to kind of lead a sitting group. And I was wondering, well, how is that going to happen? You can't just kind of materialize sitting group. But then, but there haven't been one in Palo Alto that was looking for a teacher. And so they they're connected to me and they asked me to come and so I was doing a partly because it's wonderful. offer what I love to what I love to teach. And partly because there's a homework assignment as far as training and, and being trained as a passionate teacher, I thought that was being trained for was to be retreat teacher. You know, that's really where I thought the heart of the practice was to teach long retreats The longer the better. And, and what happened over the years of being here, that I came to slowly more and more appreciate the value and profundity of this kind of practices kind of way of having a community. So that now, I still think it's very important to teach retreats. But it's as important for me to be involved in a community like this is the graph and teach retreats or sit retreats that the level of personal change and transformation that happens when a community arise out of people's daily lives is very, very intense. essential to one's overall spiritual development. If one only goes and does retreat, practice it goes deeper and deeper and practice and retreat. It's very easy for that practice to become lopsided. But if we if our spiritual life or understanding our psychological hang ups and everything, I've been to people in spiritual, spiritual community, we get purified. We find our find ourselves, we work on ourselves. And it gives us an avenue for expression of our love or devotion or caring for each other, which without an avenue of expression will sometimes stagnate. Sometimes, horrible things happen to you. If what is

the I feel like ending by saying kind of echoing what Courtney said. Sometimes it feels like almost like magic. Though. That shouldn't be the last word because Because magic is kind of like a generalization of all these, all these individual little people's good intentions and choices, environments, but somehow the synergy of of it all, how it all comes together and how it all makes our community seemingly run so smoothly and, and I am also in orbit and quite appreciative and, and so if I step back and look from a distance, it just seems like magic. And so May the magic continue. So, I just again, express my tremendous heartfelt gratitude appreciation for everyone that comes to our community. Those people who volunteer in what's called volunteer positions, but actually anyone who comes to sits with us is volunteering. And it just simply simply the act of coming and practicing and in our community is a gift that you give to others. You don't have to look for any any more activity You know, look for, you know, just the kind of regular commitment or just any kind of involvement with practice encourages the people around you. You might not think that you might be sitting inside your own mind think this mind is out of control. But, but the fact that you're sitting there, trying to do your best to try and deal with it means that someone else might be coming in and they open their eyes up and look around and say, well, wow, these people are sitting here with all still maybe I can do it too. they close their eyes, and lo and behold, they managed to get to the city and they got through it because there were other people to get through it with. So even just sitting with us is a volunteer phenomena. And it's a it's a gift. So I'm very grateful to everyone. And now I'm very grateful that we're going to have lunch. And please, I hope that as many of you as possible can stay in Whether you brought something or not,

will enjoy our company outside here and then at 1230 and happens to be it's somewhat of a coincidence but that this church kind of kind of to a head, that we also have a second meeting at 1230. Thank you.