2003-04-06: Feeding Motivations

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SPEAKERS

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So after 9-11, there was a quote that went circulating quite widely. Maybe many of you have heard it maybe many times. And the story went like this. A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he felt. He said, I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf is vengeful, vengeful, angry, is the venge, vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving, compassionate one. The grandson asked him, which wolf will win the fight in your heart? The grandfather answered, the one I feed. And I think doesn't take a lot of mindfulness to realize for most of us, that there are all kinds of different impulses within us, different motivations, different thoughts. different feelings that we have. And we tend to validate some more than others, we tend to get involved in some more and others indulgent some more than others, we tend to focus on some more than others, we tend to feed some more than others. And for people, I think often in life, this can go along, somewhat unconsciously, we're not so aware of the influences behind what we feed what we support, what we indulge in, kind of the food, the conditions that support the particular states of mind motivations that we have. And part of the call of mindfulness practice is to start being aware of the diversity, the range of what goes on within us feelings, motivations, thoughts, ideas, and then to begin to relate to them in a wiser way, in a wise way. And one option that that exists is like the grandfather here is to feed particular ones. The useful ones, and that the unusable ones may be starved for atrophy away. You know, it's been a long in my mind these last weeks about the war and particularly in my role as a Dharma teacher and our center and what kind of what to say about it, how to respond to it. And one of the very interesting things, I think useful things that people who practice mindfulness can do in this context, is to be very carefully aware of how they're influenced, so aware of our body or feelings or thoughts or belief systems or state of mind, by often the subliminal messages that come around at this time. And so rather than kind of just going along with the current so what's happening, to really stop and be mindful of the immediacy of what's going on in our body, mind as we do things. So something is very simple as I've noticed that some of the news around the war, I don't watch television, so I'm not sure but I've been told that happens there quite a bit also, but is couched in patriotic, patriotic, patriotic music and tones and images and beautiful banners of the American flag

across it just feels, you know, so uplifting to see these beautiful colors and, and whatever and, and, and then they talk about, you know, a family of 11 kids, you know, killed in a checkpoint in Iraq. But you know, so you have all these influences that come and the subliminal influence I could imagine of patriotic patriotic flag and the music and even NPR has this kind of music that is kind of I don't know how to characterize it exactly. But some of its kind of when they talk about the war, has music in between little segments and some of it is is marching music. You know, like war music kind of marching along and a little bit patriotic pitch.

And and so how does that influence us? Does it influence? Does it influence us in any kind of way at all. And we know that from television advertisement, all kinds of things, the tremendous power of subliminal messages, the fact that can humor has no humor in it at all, but because we hear the host laughing going on, it's contagious. Or we hear this music and the drama and builds up and it sounds like something really tear you know, you would have people walking beautifully down a wonderful forest path. Then you hear this ominous music. And you realize, oh, something's about to happen. And so, you know, the music kind of affects us. So what are the what are the influences that come our way? And how do we relate to those influences? There's influences of our friends or people we've talked to and colleagues, and they take different positions, and then pay based on their positions around the war, you know, then we are maybe influenced a little bit by either by their position or perhaps influencing the degree or what you feel safe to say how you say it. Sometimes it can be contagious, a group mind, everybody rallying around some particular cause. And the anti war movement in San Francisco when they had the demonstrations, friend, his friends of mine who were there, were quite distressed that the degree to which the some of the protests were so virulent, you know, a lot of anger and aggression being expressed. One one person I know who went up to San Francisco planning to be arrested as soon as the war broke out the first day. And she wasn't able to she went to work really early that day so she can leave work early to go. But she wasn't able to leave. work early enough to really get up there first thing in the Morning. And so she got there of midday, I think 12 o'clock. And by that time, she didn't want to be arrested because the atmosphere was so angry. So, you know, even people, you know, an anti war movement, the peace movement, could you know, the group minds and they get enough people together, it's sometimes it's contagious, and we don't really know, how we're being influenced. And then, you know, it's the way in which we're influenced by discomfort. You know, we see painful images, we hear painful stories, and it hits us in the gut that hits us in the heart in some way. And then we might not be so cognizant of how that motivates us. how that changes our thinking and what we do based on that. We might get angry, we just kind of anger seems justified and we let the anger pour out or, or we run away or we close down in some way. So the very interesting thing to do with some, for someone who has a mindfulness practice is to be attentive. There. The influence of the camera away, and how we take them in what we do with them. And I think this is a really great time to do it, because the influences are so strong. And the consequences I think, are quite significant. I think it's very significant for people very helpful for individuals to be aware of these influences and be careful with what they say what they do and what they want, you know, how they act. So which will do you feed? And then the questions are also are, what are the values that you live by? Because the values that you live by have a lot to deal with a wolf

said you feed and then that is useful to reflect on, reflect on, what do you really believe? And I find it I find myself a little bit disturbing. Some of these polls that they're reported. And they post something, just the idea of a poll about war and killing. Just you know, seems I don't know, it just seems so sterile, I don't know, just kind of technical. But you know that if 500 Americans are killed in the war, you know, half of Americans are okay. I forget exactly numbers, but it was more than 500 then the majority of Americans against the war. So, you know, the value value or values, you know, as a country are released by the provost, the posters find out seems to be related to such issues as how much loss there is. I suppose we've been similar polls on how many Rockies okay to kill and get killed in the war. And it's above a certain threshold is not justified and causing, you know, then the exchange but what are the values that we live by? Because the values we live by affect, you know, what we're going to feed where we're going to support

And the values we live by also have a lot to do with what we feel is possible. And what we feel the consequences are of both of our beliefs and our actions. And if we feel that there are no consequences quenches, if we feel like we're helpless or hopeless, you know, then certain values of falling through them don't have any point, then we're not going to feed that particular wolf feed that kind of way. But if we feel that does have value, then we're more likely to do it. I think a lot of people a lot more people would go and join anti war marches. If they felt this was really going to stop the war. Oh, yeah, maybe it makes a difference. Or people who are for the war, maybe have comparable kind of thing. If they really felt that their voice really mattered, they would do something. So how do we how do we maintain hope? Or how do we maintain a sense of the consequences? revalue says we hold to hold to. And one of the things that I find a lot of value in your belief in is that there are benefits from holding to our values that are independent of the external consequences, that our own welfare, our own sense of well being for ourselves is dependent on the values that we live by also. And so even if you're the only one on your block, who has a particular value, and you feel that that's where your integrity resides, to live by that value, preserves your integrity. But you know, to give into it, give up give it up for the sake of the group or other values, then, you know, it feels wrong inside.

The Greek philosopher Plato had an idea, as I probably don't have it quite right He says something like, if all things are equal, between two people, same kind of background, same, you know, everything's equal between two people, except one of the people is unjust. And the other one is just the person who's just will have greater happiness. So they have all the same kind of conditions around them same success or, you know, Hulk, you know, the person who's just will have greater happiness and the person who's unjust, and why is that? Why is it that this is the suggestion I think of Plato is that the just person will be in harmony with her himself, the unjust person will be fragmented and will all these different forces pulling them left and right and, and their desires will take the you know, the various kinds of desires will take over and they have no control over it over their own, what they do, and just persons out On certain kind of unwholesome impulses, whereas the just person is trained themselves, perhaps or you know, in harmony with themselves, and that harmony produces a greater sense of happiness. For the person who's just the Buddhist paraphrasing of this would be the train person. If all things are equal between two people, the person who's trained their mind or their heart

will have greater happiness in the person who's untrained. And think simply the reason is that an untrained mind will you know, can have a heyday. It's like, you know, the, you know, if your mind is completely untrained, you're not paying attention. It can be like, you know, the parents have left in the teenagers at home. I don't know if that's necessarily a good example. But for some people it is

the

and you know, that the our desires get pulled around by the nose, or our aversions or hates or whatever Train mind is a mind that that is not going to be led around by impulses not being led around by the first motivation that pops up, but have some ability to be present and mindful

and independent of

There are all kinds of forces of the mind in the teachings of the Buddha, this kind of discussion of which wolf wolf to feed, fits under the particular fits into the category of right effort in the Eightfold Path. And the formulation of it was one that for many years, I ignored and actually didn't like so much and I thought it was kind of moralistic and it required kind of a life you know, exhausting effort And coming out of the Zen tradition there, you know, the it was much more of a non dualistic practice in the sense I had was doing this kind of dualistic way of thinking. But in recent years, I've come to appreciate this lock this particular formula formulation. And it sounds a little bit dry, but it says the definition of right effort is the effort to avoid or prevent the arising of unhelpful states of mind that have not yet arisen. It is the effort to abandon unhelpful states of mind that have arisen it is the effort to prompt or cultivate helpful states of mind that have not yet arisen. And it is the effort to maintain or protect those helpful states of mind which have arisen those four things. And one of the turning points for me in looking at this, these four efforts where it became much more real and personal for me was I stopped looking at it as this external teachings in Buddhism is another list that I had to somehow weigh myself down with one more list of things to do in Buddhism like God. And it's enough just to pay attention, my breath. That's hard enough. The, the, but rather, I turned it around and said, Okay, I'll assume that I'm already doing this. This is something we're already doing. And then it's okay, let me notice how I'm doing that. And then I found out that I'm doing it all the time. And I kind of was, I don't know if unconscious is the right word, but it seems like we just built into the structure of my mind or the activity in my mind to some degree and probably most of you that you're doing it all the time to some degree. So you might think about, you know, are there small ways in which you already do this? Many years ago, I mean, very small comes to mind. Many years ago, I noticed that when I lived in San Francisco and would commute down to Stanford, I noticed that the state of my mind would be better. If I drove to 80, then one on one. And, and I decided that I liked that better state of mind. So I would take 280 even though, if you know, if all things were equal, it was little bit longer to go to 80. And it seems like a pretty sensible thing to do. I've noticed in my life that the minds aptitude, appetite for food is different than my stomachs appetite. And this the quality of my mind quality of my heart, the word mind heart of the saying in Buddhism is vastly improved when I listened to my stomach rather than my

mind. So I so to notice his impulse for desire in my mind, I have learned pretty took a long time but I learned that usually that alone and I've learned through my practice a lot. For me, that desires are a dime a dozen.

You know, they're really cheap. They're really easy to have. And, and I've learned most of the time now, that was your thing. Most of them certainly much more than they were before. I've learned not to pick them up. Just say we talked in Buddhism, about things being self liberated. So let the desires be self liberated, which means I don't pick them up, you know, do anything, don't do anything with them and then they poof you know, sooner or later, sometimes not soon enough. But and then I've noticed that when I was at Tassajara, the Zen monastery training there, they had a practice there of it was kind of a goalless practice just be fully present for how things are radical presence for how things are. And liberation was found in that radical presence and kind of a radical acceptance of things in the present moment as they are not seeing things for against things not seeing things as being good or bad and particularly with just being fully present and full presence, trusting that you'll live an ethical life and a wise life. And for a while I was assigned to the garden. And I loved being in the garden and just kind of maternal I call it then maternal and paternal instincts came out to and, and, you know, go around every morning, check on the little plants and seeing how they're doing will take me a long time to start working because I just go around and check on all the plants. And but I noticed you know that in the garden, that it seemed like a good thing to pull the weeds out. And it seemed like a normal thing to do is pull the weeds out. And there are all kinds of theories about how to weed in wise ways. But, you know, there you pull the weeds out to help the plants grow and once you want and it didn't No one told me it was dualistic to do that. And when he told me that it was somehow, you know, wrong to be picking out the weeds so that the tomatoes could grow. And I started thinking of About my own mind and I thought, are the things in my own mind that I would like to weed out so that I can be a better and more helpful person in the world? And it isn't that as common sensical thing to do as brushing my teeth, we brush our teeth, because that's a useful thing to do. Shouldn't we brush our minds? Some people choose there's some people choose their clothes, better. Spend more time choosing what kind of clothes to wear, than they spent choosing what words to use, or what kind of mind states to support or what to feed. So what I came to was that the in Zen practice, the non dualistic Zen practice, didn't exclude the possibility of weeding out the anger from my mind, but it is actually included that was weeding out the anger of the mind was within the context of This big mind that we were being taught there. The so it's appropriate you know not to act on anger, is it appropriate to see notice the anger that arises and to not, you know, to abandon it when it arises or not pick it up? Is it appropriate to look ahead, think ahead about what might arise in certain circumstances, what might arise in our in our hearts, and then to do what it takes to prevent that. Some people avoid reading newspapers these days. because of that reason, they don't find it useful or helpful. To have the states of mind takes a heart that arises when they read the paper. Some people don't read the paper because they earn their versiv or to the pain that they feel within themselves when they read the paper. And you can avoid the paper for healthy and helpful and unhelpful reasons. Simply because it's painful read the paper is not a reason to avoid the paper. But if unhelpful states of mind arise if you read the paper and spend the rest of the day being angry, maybe you need to be careful about reading the paper. The, the

suggestion of the Buddha is not necessarily avoiding things, but rather to be very attentive. Just add the place where stimulus from the external world hits you in the moment comes to you. It's called it's called safeguarding the sense doors is the technical word. It's protecting the quality of your mind by being attentive to what is coming your way, and how you pick it up. And that requires being in the present moment to notice that.

And so to notice what comes through the eyes, what causes what comes to the ears, the nose, the thoughts, you know, cognitively, to safeguard the quality of your mind so that you don't pick it up in a way that has It brings up an unhelpful state of mind. I think the advantage of people who meditate or do something like meditation, but other things do this also, not just meditation is certain activities we do, improves the quality of our hearts, and makes a heart more loving, more peaceful, Kinder makes it more non conflicted. And then how do we protect that? Is it valuable to guard that and to protect it? And so the teaching of the right efforts is, is if you have a sense of what's your own good quality of art, and do what you do, do what you can and it's helpful to protect that. As think Tom Jeff might have said last week, or certainly people like him say at times and Buddhism is that the most precious resource that you have as an individual is the quality of your heart, the good qualities of your heart, and the most valuable thing you can protect are those things so let's make the effort to avoid the arising of unhelpful states of mind which is no longer has not yet arisen to make the effort to abandon those unhelpful states of mind which have arisen. And the to make the effort is not easy, you know, once they've arisen, but it's really noble, to be interested in making that effort. Whatever it takes, there's all kinds of different strategies that people make have of how to deal with that. Some people just find, going for a walk or sitting in meditation. There's many different kinds of meditation to be done, but some way of not feeding or not adding to or to helping us let go of, or not being in the grip of these states that arise.

One classic way of one classic practice in Buddhism is the practice the antidotes to these states, when when we're in grip, a very strong Desire, then perhaps we can. One of the antidotes for desire is set to the impermanence. One of the another antidote for desire, depending on the kind of desire is to think of the unappealing aspects of what you're desiring, or in terms of lust, the unappetizing aspects of what you're lusting for. And I'm sure there's unappetizing things in your, in your fantasy that you can conjure up. And so when you're really in the grip of lust, and you're really powerful, and you seem like you're sweating because of it or something, then Buddhism suggests that you think about the unappetizing. body parts of the person, a version when you're in the grips of aversion or hate or anger. One of the beautiful antidote is loving kindness, practice, to somehow feel the heart with love and kindness. Remind yourself or touch to that part of the heart, to the corner of the heart to that wolf in the heart that's capable of loving kindness. It's a beautiful thing to do.

And then there's thinking, the effort to prompt the arising of healthful states of mind which is not have not yet arisen. And there's many ways of doing that, prompting that one of the beautiful ways is to sit and meditate. I find that not not always, but meditation gives access your beautiful part, one of the

beautiful things about meditation, or things like meditation, is they can prompt the arising of beautiful states of mind. without there being a reason for them to be there. Like you don't have to be you can be you can have joy, without having a reason to be joyful. So many of us are looking for reasons to be joyful, and we run around looking for things to make us happy. But in things like meditation, or maybe you know, if you leave yourself alone, and If you the mind is fried enough, then joy will just bubble up by itself. Happiness will come, a state of peace will tend to come and it's quite beautiful. It's quite a trick though to leave the mind alone enough like that, and to have that arise, but it's possible.

And then there's the effort to protect those beautiful states of mind that helpful states of mind that have already arisen. So which wolf Are you going to feed? What do you do with the influences come your way? What do you know your own walls

So when I when I did this reflection on how is it that I'm already doing the four right efforts? One of the things I realized for myself is that the four right efforts were a description for me, of leaving my heart alone were description of getting out of my way. And so rather than striving and pushing for some kind of goal in practice, I found I found over and over again they were the most useful things I could do is to get out of my own way to get out of the way of the natural arising of helpful states of mind the natural arising of freedom The four right efforts were descriptions in a sense for me of getting out of the way, which was most obvious with the first two unhelpful states of mind.

And I think because of this, I have a very optimist optimistic. I don't know what to say. appreciation of human nature. I think human nature is quite beautiful. Because the heart that is left alone, the heart is not in conflict with itself, I think is radiant, it's beautiful. And when evil arises in the world, it's from a heart which is not left alone, radically alone. So those are my thoughts for this morning and You all your walls be happy? Do you have any comments or questions?

I saw

Joe's website

and there was a trigger that there was the one thing I

said we should kill.

You find in Asian Buddhism of all kinds, much more the language of spiritual warrior and they talk about the torments of the mind those things which torment the mind or cause suffering. Then us as the enemies, you know, cut them down or kill them, things like that. And here in the West, most people don't appreciate that kind of language. Maybe it's different mindset here for the kind of Western conditioning, that that kind of feeds feeds into kind of self loathing sense of self lack of self worth, or to have a moralistic approach to understanding your life and, you know, sin, original sin and bad and

things like that. And so the tendency here in the West is presented Dharma, independent of this kind of spiritual warrior language, again, taking the sort of wisdom and slashing off the head of your anger, things like that. And certainly, that's the case in the spirit rock scene. I've noticed that's particularly true for male teachers. They don't get close to this idea of talking about you know, being a spiritual warrior and killing your defilements though some of the women do some of the work We're talking about the spiritual warriors in a much more organized, fight those things, and I think has a lot to do with our cultural, not only our conditioning, but also our to say exactly, but not, I'd be very reluctant to talk about being spiritual enough for me, I'd be very lucky to talk about snow killing and stuff, because I'd be seeing Oh, that's just a male way of talking. You know, it would be discounted, you know, but woman says it is okay. So, you know, we have our own thing here in the West, we have to deal with in in Asia, they don't seem to have that problem. And it seems to be very inspiring for them that kind of approach. I suspect that they don't have this automatic negative thought about who they are. And, you know, they don't think I'm an angry person. Therefore, if I am attacking myself, there's anger within me. I'm a great guy who's angry with me within me and that anger is my enemy, and I'm going to kill it. So it lends itself sometimes to kind of a little bit more ferocity in spiritual practice. Let's get down to business here. So is that okay? You didn't actually ask a question you just kind of made it. I just went on and on. Yes.

One way one very easily easy. One way that I love is mindfulness concentration practice, like, mindfulness of the breath. You know, I'm in my way, I'm kind of lost in my thoughts, my judgments and my all kinds of desires and aversions or whatever. And then, you know, my mind is preoccupied in some way. And when I start putting the energy of the mind the energy of attention into my breath, I'm pulling it away from those preoccupations. So I'm getting it. Awareness. Attention is kind of like a food thing to use. We'll think of it as a food And where do you What are you feeding. And if your attention is lost and preoccupation, you're actually feeding those preoccupations. And if you're feeding your something wholesome, like staying on the breath, then you're feeding that and you begin to get out of that get, you know, not feed those things that get in your own way. That's one way to do it. One way simply to note one very powerful way also is to notice it works for some people is to is to stop all you're doing and if you want to do is very radically you'd even stop all your you still sit down to meditate. But once you sit down and close your eyes, your dedicate your dedication and practice is you're not going to do anything at all. You're not going to follow the breath you're not going to spend as little little idea comes up I'm going to do this kind of spiritual practice now. That doesn't mean you're doing and then you notice that you begin going down some kind of thought train I'm not going to follow that thought or, you know, whatever the mind does is kind of like a doing you let go of any of the doings and you needs to be somewhat concentrated in order to be able to do that. Yes.

Without doubt, artists

against limitations in my practice is mindfulness about the current political situation. It's fairly

easy to accept or to see what is happening.

At first part of mindfulness, acceptance of it.

I don't know if you're supposed to be accepting of it. What acceptance so the word acceptance is very problematic. It's a very, very, very much used by our seeing our Buddhist seen and I use it a lot. But it lends itself it has a range of meanings. And so it lends itself to an idea that being Almost condoning the situation, always iterations it switches to situations, Okay, I'm gonna accept it as it is. The acceptance of practice is not an acceptance of that things are good or bad or nothing to do with kind of a healthy discriminating mind about what's going on out there. Acceptance means that your heart is not going to close down because of it means that your awareness and you stay open and not contracted because of this. So you're accepting it into your awareness without being for against it, as opposed to accepting the situation. It's situations. Okay? So the situation you might feel some situation is terribly wrong and unjust. And you notice suppose to not have that discrimination. But even if seeing something's being unjust, the acceptance means that you're not going to do you know, tighten down and contract within you because of it. Does that make sense? So because of that, yeah. And like lately lately, rather than using the word accept acceptance, I'm preferring the word non violent. So rather than to accept what's happening, we want to have a non violent relationship to what's happening. And that comes to the same thing because it hasn't been. I think, a better range of meanings. But non violent mean, you're not going to succumb to anger or aversion to what's happening, you're not going to contract around it. Because even anger in your own heart is a kind of violence. And so how can you beat remain non violent in the face of this? But even then, it's difficult. And I think if, when something is when we're our reactions are extremely strong, to some problem in the world, some suffering in the world, some injustice in the world. I think that if we don't in some way, act in the world that's in response to it. I think we'll get sick, I think will feel off or wrong. So it's just a matter of accepting it. Okay, let me just sit and assert your peaceful it's accepted, accepting accepted. I think actually, it's kind of inhuman. If it's, you know, if a child is, you know, screaming in front of you or sitting and meditating the child's they're known, some terrible cut and wound and hungry and just a horrible situation, I'm gonna sit and meditate and accepted, I think you would get, you know, these get sick and sign if you do that, you have to kind of get up and do something with a child and help the child out. Forget about your meditation. Forget about your acceptance practices, like take care of this child. And so that's an extreme kind of example. But I for some people have very powerful responses to suffering in the world. I think unless they feel that they're responding actively, something, you know, the acceptance doesn't quite work. And maybe it's easier to find the kind of acceptance that you were talking about, if you also feel like you're responding. Now responding can take many different forms. And it doesn't have to mean that, you know, the war in Iraq that you go and directly can try to stop the war in Iraq. But it might be so from ticular suffering, but it means that maybe that maybe some great suffering in the world inspires you to be of service locally. And so you know, in your community, in your neighborhood or in your family, or inspires you in your practice to put more fuel on the fire into your practice, so you can resolve the forces of greed, hate and delusion in your own heart. So I mean, that's, that's a way of acting, it's powerful. It doesn't have to be you know, directly. There's so much

suffering in the world, no one person, you know, can respond to all of it. So we have to make some discrimination. Where are we where our effort is best spent, and sometimes locally. That makes sense. That Okay, so answer your follow up. To start

used to try to accept him quotes situations that I don't like

to recognize that exists first acknowledge that it's kind of exactly like, accept the rain when it's raining. It's raining. That doesn't mean it's good or bad. Maybe it's about the flood idea.

Except in the sense that I think it's fine if

we're in wrath because something was terrible, or it's been good or bad, but it exists and we just say, okay, that's okay.

It's not going to change.

I think I think there's a lot of wisdom to what Nick is saying. And then part of that, in addition, part of that would be that what hopefully also exists is some the birth of some motivation in our own hearts in relationship to that. Oh, compassion, also Yes. Yes.

Could you say something about

the idea of one country going into another country to liberate it so that it can be free

society of freedom and how we stand for freedom and

from talking to my son who's

actually pro service

it's a big topic and I feel the strip. I feel I feel the strength of how that hits you their feelings and I think that is not really a response but What comes to mind? After what you said is, the Buddha said, a Buddha can only show you the way. You have to walk the path. No one else can liberate you. You only personally can liberate us, you're yourself. You have to do the work yourself. So maybe that was true for countries to do, it's not really possible to liberate another country, because everybody has to liberate themselves. And that's what they say about Iraq. Right? They people have a lot of doubts, whether Irag has the kind of

has the conditions in place, to have democracy in the way that's recognized in the West. And so to come there and impose our ideas of democracy in the country, which is doesn't have the conditions for it. Are we really gonna liberate it? Then you know? So.

So I like the idea of wolves too, because the wolves are kind of energetic and, you know, the wolves, you know, are, there's energy, they're ferocity, they're all kinds of things and it's kind of playful playfulness and strength. And so may you feed the helpful wolves. And you may you retire the unhelpful ones.

Thank you.