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SPEAKERS

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So reminds me that my son for some time now, but it happened again this morning. We'll ask some version of is that real? And for some reason today, it was about Santa Claus.

And about Santa Claus coming down to the chimney and no matter what, why are we hanging stockings in front of the fireplace and we don't have a fireplace. So why do we hang stockings? And where did that come from? A Santa Claus is real. And mommy's told me he's not real. And I was I was gonna be non committal about it. And, but mommy test is not real. Oh, yeah. But it's kind of real, in some ways. And so what's real? And there's a lot of discussion these days about the new matrix movie. And one of the aspects about the matrix movie, the original one at least, is a question of what's real. And what how do we find out what's real This is I think it's a theme that has runs through much of modern life in various places it pops up what is real hot queen? How can we know what is real? The you know, you can go into almost any field of study these days, scientific study and humanities and find people who are taking things apart the construction was, for example, and what we thought was real turns out not to be so real. And one of the very fascinating aspects of this kind of deconstruction, for Buddhists, at least has to do with the scientific deconstruction of the sense of self. And it turns out not only Buddhists aren't the only people who argue about not self or non self. But modern psychologists and sociologists and anthropologists all kind of show how the notion of self biologists all kind of, you know, how it arises, how it's constructed, and, and how it's, you know, has to do with certain activities of the brain and so they don't leave us with much. So what's real And then psychologists have pointed out memories are not reliable, that the memories get, you know, read, you know, revised in the retelling. So we go and tell someone you know, you did X to X, Y and Z to me and well maybe you did and maybe in retailing it gets a little bit changed likely maybe not a lot. And then there's, you know, the whole idea of what is real what is not real. And some months ago, I got an email from a man I've never met. Who asked me a question, you know, you went to ask me you kind of frozen my the as the Buddhist authority. What is real? What do you know is real? How do you know

what's real? And my reply to him I suspected was unsatisfactory, because he didn't know there was no more correspondence. I'll go here maybe.

And my response to him was that in Buddhism, we're not particularly interested in that question what is real? That's not really in that kind of domain and what Buddhism is about, but rather, because you can get lost endlessly in the discussion of what's real and what's not real. And what Buddhism focuses on is something much more particular. And that is our suffering and the possibility of freedom from suffering liberation from suffering. And it was I think it was an inadequate question. The Buddhists do focus, knowing what's real. And part of what I want to do today is to give the Buddhist more Buddhist response to what Buddhism says at least about what what is real and how you can know what's real. And in order to do this, I want to start off by briefly To the Kalama Sutta. This is a very famous discourse of the Buddha, it's possible it became much more famous and important in the modern West than it ever had in Asia. And partly because in the West we have a very strong legacy or a strong movement, of wanting to be free thinkers of wanting to be independent, especially now in the kind of coming into the more modern times, spiritual circles, religious circles, people want to be spiritual, which has to do a lot about one's own inner spiritual life, one's own inner qualities, and very little to do with externals and what what you believe, but more what happens within you whether there's love or peace or compassion or these beautiful qualities that we can have. And so the idea of the individual individual knowing for him or herself, what the path is finding one's own path, finding the truth for oneself. And you know, has certainly has a legacy or background in the west for example, in the Protestant move We're supposed to have a personal relationship with God directly. And so it kind of jumped over or wiped out a certain class of religious people that no longer we're going to mediate between you and God is personally opposed to fitness personally find a few find it find for yourself. So because of the strong tendency in the West, this particular discourse has been held up as kind of like the great manifesto or free thinking. And so it's very interesting text. And it's interesting to look at it more carefully than sometimes it's done. Sometimes you find it quoted just one or two lines from it. Someone sent me a postcard where one line from this was misquoted. And it said something like postcard said something like I don't remember exactly, they're pretty misquoted. misquote, I misquote the misquote. Do you know what's real? And so and I, Yvonne Rand, who is a wonderful Zen teacher here in the Bay Area. She came here a few weeks ago, I think, a couple months ago. She wants said that this sutra is sutra is so important that all Buddhists should have a tattooed to the inside of their eyelids. So I don't recommend going that extremes but once in a while nice to teach about it. So the story concerns a group of people called the Kalama's and they lived in a town or place called Kalama. And the Kalamas has apparently had a lot of spiritual teachers, different kinds come through their town, and seemingly, the different teachers said, you know, this is a truth. Listen to me, follow my way and This is the, this is the ultimate teaching. And they noticed that there are a lot of these teachers came through and they had different teachings. And they all said, this is true. So how do you know what's real? How do you know what's true? Well, the Buddha happened to come through this town. And maybe we can imagine that, you know, they said, oh, here comes one more of those guys. Or gals, gals, you know, there was one more gonna tell us what the truth is. So they decided that they would take a different approach. So they asked that they went to the Buddha and said, they're all

these people who come here to this village. And they all tell us this is what's true. And And not only that, but they revile and criticize the doctrines of other people. So how can we know what's true? So that's a great question. How can we know how can we know Which of these venerable teachers are speaking the truth and which ones are lying?

So they're not asking the Buddha directly for what is his teaching, but rather how can you find your way to the truth. And so the Buddha's response and this is the kind of paragraph which is much quoted. The first thing that Buddha says is, of course, you are uncertain. Kalamas, of course you are in doubt. That's very nice kind of affirming. Of course, you should be confused. How many of you are confused? That's his poor showing of hands. People are the people who come here the most the ones that raise their hands shall be worried when there are reasons for doubt uncertainty is born. So in this case, Calamos, the Here comes a real climax of this paragraph. In this case, Kalama's don't go by, don't rely on reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logic, by inference, by analogy, by agreement with your views, by probability, or by the thought, this person is my teacher. much left. And it was often pointed out is somebody's sources of authority for the truth are quite commonly used in religious circles and other places also. Certainly, you know, as you say, so don't go by scripture. There goes the Bible out the window, or Buddhist Bible says, you know, this is a scripture, so I guess you know, so it's a little bit of a paradox, we started reading it, stop reading it. Don't go, don't go buy it just because it's traditional. It's been, you know, you've handed down from your parents and your parents, parents and your society. By using your own logic, the Buddha says somehow your own logic, your power, power or mental reasoning, reasoning things out, it might not be the most reliable way of finding out what's true or authoritative. And don't do it by agreement with your own views. That's quite common. Of course, you know, we have our own views already. And then someone says something and we measure it against our views. And if it's similar to our views, and we say it's true. Or by the thought, this contemplative is our teacher, this teacher, this person is our teacher. So that's the criticism and some people will stop right there. And quoting this passage, just don't do any of these. things. So it's a very radical stance stance kind of pulls the rug from under some of the major sources of authority that upon which society is built. And it could be seen as being very subversive and, and offering, you know, challenging the status quo in many different ways. Because very authority upon which the status quo is based, is challenges that don't go by that. How many of us are brave enough to stand free of any of the sources of authority. Then the Buddha offered this, when you know for yourselves that these qualities, these mental qualities, these damas is the word but these mental qualities, these mental attributes and mental characteristics, these mental activities are unskillful. These qualities are blameworthy these qualities Are criticized by the wise these qualities when undertaken and carried out, lead to harm and to suffering, then you should abandon them. And then he goes on, says a few other things and then he says the same thing over again but in a different way. He says, when you know for yourself that these qualities are skillful, these qualities are blameless, these qualities are praised by the wise, these qualities were undertaken and carried out, lead to welfare and happiness, then you should enter and remain in them. And some people translate this as being when you when you know for yourself then, you know the truth is, and so, it's probably the misquote of the misquote when you know freedom you know for yourself.

And there is an emphasis on this, but you just naively say no for yourself. I mean, without any kind of analysis or kind of critique of what why do you know what, you know? What? What is the basis upon which you know something? There's a lot of people who have intuitive knowing, is your intuition reliable? I have a lot of intuition. I think my intuition is increased dramatically through my meditation practice my Dharma practice. And I rely on my intuition a lot. But my intuition I don't feel is 100% reliable. So when I feel a strong intuitive sense of something, I'm very cautious about it in certain settings. And I'll look at it and wait and wait a little while and see if it does make sense. Kind of I don't I don't just go automatically because it seems intuitively right I've saved myself trouble because of kind of waiting a little bit and getting a little bit of benefit a little bit of doubt there before I go ahead with my intuition, or my logic, a lot of times where I think I know something, because I've reasoned it out in a certain way, and then found out someone else comes along and has a better reasoning, or has, you know, has a better understanding of what was going on. And I realized that my reasoning wasn't so, right. And I go to a lot of meetings to see implemented, but you know, for me, at least, much more than I ever thought a Buddhist teacher would have to go to. And, and I often have ideas of how things should be, and sometimes I offer them, but I'll always offer them or try to offer them least with inside myself in the spirit that I don't really know. And I'm waiting to hear and I'm offering them in the spirit of dialogue. When you hear what someone else says in reply, and maybe someone else has a better understanding. Or a better view or explain something that's missing? So. So it isn't just simply a matter of naively knowing for yourself, you have to analyze why, you know, what, you know how, you know, why do you know what's real. And I apologize for repeating what I'm going to say. I've repeated it so many times. But I'm still tickled by this little story of when there was a study done in the 80s of children in New York City who had near death experiences. And a very high percentage of those kids had some of the classic experiences near death experiences of white tunnel white light and these things. And by the end of the tunnel, the high percentage of them had the Ninja Turtles. So that's interesting. I think

And so what's his what's true? How do we know what's real? When you have when you have the Buddha at the end of your tunnel? Is it you know, now you know, you know you, you know for a fact you've met the Buddha, you know he's real. And you know, you have no doubts anymore. Isn't that Buddha? Maybe the same kind of projection as the Ninja Turtles is with children? Who knows? But it certainly raises the question, how do we know what's true? And I find myself quite disturbed by an expression. Maybe it's kind of a new age expression that I hear around sometimes. People say, this is my truth. And the reason that I'm just disturbed by it is that on one, I think half of it is appointed something very important and very useful. And the other half is naive by saying it's my truth. It's kind of validating beyond. It's what's warranted. They're half as useful as that is that people are really trying to rely on, on how they experience things and how they see things. And they're stating it. This is how I see things is how I understand things. It's been, this has been my experience. But then by saying it's my truth, it kind of solidifies it and kind of gives it a kind of absolute authority, which you know, that's your truth. And that's my, this is my truth and we're not going to meet we're not going to negotiate, we're not going to be in dialogue about it. And it seems little bit hard to me that approach. If you say

this is my experience, then it's quite comfortable statement my experiences, they perceive things this way, how do you perceive things? So the Buddha says these qualities, the word qualities means damas is translate translates damazer dhammas. Which here is understood things mental qualities are mental tivities mental factors of the mind. And when these qualities are unskillful This is a really key word in the Buddhist Buddha's vocabulary, the word unskillful unskillful. I prefer a translated as helpful and unhelpful. When you realize for yourself that having these qualities my mind having these, this color in my mind having these emotional qualities intentions in my mind, this activity my mind present, when I realized that it's helpful or unhelpful, then they are to be abandoned. When I realized they're helpful, than they are to be held on to a kept two by two and those. The Buddha also says when these qualities are blameworthy, these qualities are criticized by the wise. Most of the people who use this paragraph as a champion, championing free thinking and we can rely on our own self can be Easily leave out the section that says these qualities are criticized by the wise. Because of course, we shouldn't be concerned about what other people think. They hear the Buddha says she has some concern about the wise people or about what the wise people around you think you probably have some sense of who the wise people are, who is wise in your life is wiser than you perhaps. And then if they criticize certain qualities, or if they pray certain qualities, then I don't think we're supposed to take them, you know, naively he's offering a truth, but they offer kind of guidance. Oh, if they say that, maybe I should look at this more carefully. Maybe I should explore this, maybe I should hold off and not get into trouble. So some kind of guidance, indicating some kind of guidance is very important because there's an infant it's so difficult to find our way in this complicated life that we live that to be given some guidance can solve a lot of problems. consolidate can prevent, prevent a lot of problems arising. So you know, the Why say, you shouldn't go around killing or stealing or lying or involved in sexual misconduct. And you'll solve a lot of problems for yourself or prevent a lot of problems if you avoid doing those things. So it's getting a little bit of guidance. But the key, the key thing is the first one, these qualities are unskillful. So the Buddha is pointing the attention back at the quality, the quality of our own mind, the quality of our own hearts. What are the core qualities that reside there? He's not talking about the activity here. And he's not talking about beliefs, or creeds. And he's not

No, he's not exactly coming back and saying this is the truth. What he's saying is you should know what you know. Some ultimate sense. But you know, this is how you know what's true. its ultimate way. He's pointing to a process that moves a person from suffering, to freedom from suffering, from being under stress to being freed from stress, from being oppressed, to being freed from oppression, from being caught up in the mind, consumed by greed, hate and delusion in the mind to being free of those. And having your mind filled with the opposites. So the qualities of the mind is what we need to study and become aware of. And that's one of the reasons why we practice mindfulness is that we can recognize and see where the quality of our own mind is. And then take that into account. And if there are unhelpful qualities of mind, then do figure out some way find some way to work with those to be involved in a process with those so they can be abandoned, be let them go. Or so they can not get in our way or keep us enslaved or imprisoned. The focus on the unskillful and skillful, the unhelpful and the helpful for learning how to study ourselves know ourselves that way, is the way in which we find the path. If you want to find the Buddhist path, these are the guidelines for how you find it. You find it

for yourself, by knowing what is it in your own mind, your own heart, keeps it in suffering, and what is it that gets it free of suffering? Now, it's very easy to say that it's not so easy necessarily to abandon the unskillful qualities of mind. So then there's a whole path of practice that involves you know, different practices, different understandings, different levels of acceptance and forgiveness and compassion and all kinds of things that come into play. That will massaging that on unskillful qualities of the heart, so we can eventually let go of them will be free of that free of them. It turns out that in later Buddhism, some centuries after the Buddha, when people were systematizing, the Buddha's teachings, they did come up with a list of the four ultimate things, the four things you can really know that are real, they're real, being really real. And one of those four is this thing that you're meant to your own mental qualities. Another one is what's called the four great elements, earth, water, fire and air. And what's interesting about these four great elements is that they're not a form of early physics. They weren't meant to be kind of physical description of the world. They're meant as a way of categorizing the sensations we experienced in our body. because much of the way we experience the world are all everywhere we experience the world is through the filter, the avenue, the channel of our senses. And so these four elements are the experience or experience or the level of sensation. Before there's interpretation before there's categories on top of it, but just immediate level of sensation. So for example, if you're feeling hot, or you're feeling cold, then you're feeling a fire element. If you feeling great solidity, or softness in your body, or hardness in your body, it's the earth element. If you're feeling movement in your body of some kind, then it's the air element. So it's a way of categorizing the ways in which we experience the sensations we feel. And why this is interesting is one of the ultimates one of the one of the things we really know that's real, is it it's there's a sensation level of our experience. We can show us sometimes times that we're suffering, or that we're free of suffering, to have a cue to have some kind of cue some kind of wake up signal that says, Oh, I need to stop and pay attention to what's going on now for me is really helpful. And, and having your physical body as that mindfulness spell as that cue is phenomenally useful to go about your life, and to develop a capacity to be in your body, to check in with your body in a very regular way. Find out what's going on this body of yours, you'll find is tremendous amount of information.

Some people would say wisdom that resides in your body. Because so much of our suffering has a physical component element. Sometimes we suffer and you don't have to know that you have physical suffering as part of it. Your tension or tightness or something. It's just so blatantly obvious that we're suffering were depressed or something. But sometimes we're busy with life. We're preoccupied and We're searching for the truth. So actively, we don't even notice what's what's here in the present moment. And we might not notice that our stomach is tight or shoulders are tight. But if you check in, in a situation normally where you wouldn't check in, you might have Oh, my stomach is tight. Why is that? And then you might notice your little bit afraid or nervous. And it might not be enough nervousness to make you kind of stop what you're doing or even normally pay attention. But having noticed it gives you a chance then to turn back and try to liberate that nervousness, to do something about it. So the subtle sufferings and also grow sufferings, some best ways to learn about it is through the body. One of the very useful ways of being present for it is also through the body. To feel our embodied experience, is to feel things in much more broadly and directly. Free of the story making we

Make about anything. So say that you're angry with someone. It's very easy to go into story making around that anger, who did what to who? And what you can say and reply and, and his whole, you know whole world of story making about it and you might have no basis in fact at all. I've been angry with people when I found out later, I had no reason to be angry when I found out more what was really going on. But I kind of jumped to conclusions. So my fantasy my anger was completely based on projection and fantasy. And I've had other kinds of anchors to where had good cause. But there's all kinds right but but you know, it's so easy to get lost in the story making and actually, to have good cause to be anger angry, and to be caught up in story making. It's like adding a match to gasoline. It's very dangerous. So one of the one of the things that mindfulness practice teaches then, is to learn to drop down into the body and experience the anger in the body in the physical aspect of anger, for various reasons, one reason so that it interrupts the story making processes. And we can connect with the anger more directly in Raleigh. There are times when story making aspect of the anger might be very important to look at and work with. But it's also it's a very important tool to have knowing when to drop that and just to be with experience directly for itself. Also, the body is a wonderful it's brought body is a process of being a process, if, in the mind when it's preoccupied, tends to lock or freeze the process. If you can stop the story making and drop down into the body and hang out what's going on in the body. It tends to liberate the process the body is, and so often the body will will if you present For your bodily experience, will also often facilitate the healing or deliberation or the loosening. That can happen if you just get out of your own way. Just stay present to what's going on. So these two ultimates, there's two things you can know are real is the qualities of your mind. And what is going on in the sensation level of your body? I don't feel a need to call these what's real, as if that's going to validate it. what's what's what I would say is that all you need to know in order to follow the path to liberation, is that how you're suffering the qualities of the mind that support and causes suffering, and how you can be free of suffering and the qualities of the mind that lead to that. I don't know if we need to say any more about whether those are real or not. Maybe it's very uncertain. And maybe another good philosopher or something. But I think what's what we can what the Buddha was pointing to, is not what's ultimately real, as if that was really important. Who knows what that is? Is it necessary to know what that is? Maybe it is. But what the Buddha was pointing to, is knowing where the knowing how to find the path to liberation, the path to how you can become free.

The fourth of these ultimates that later tradition says you can know is ultimately real is Nirvana, or anybody's called Nirvana in our tradition, and, and this would be the mind or a consciousness that is liberated or freed or become completely independent from any of the conditions of the world. Normally our mind or consciousness is very much colored and tainted, and influenced by all the mental qualities, mental factors that are playing itself out, and how we, you know, and through them how we relate to the world. And so the wareness is conscious is always about something engaged in something. So it's like our presence is always being pulled and pushed by the world around us And the world inside of us. But when our presence can be at peace at ease, set free from any of the conditions that we tend to be pushed and pulled against or with when our presence can just abide peacefully in its own right self supporting self floating, perhaps I don't know what the right languages when you really know you know, you can really know for yourself, when your presence when your

consciousness when your mind has that freedom and that piece was completely independent and freed from all the conditions of the world. That's not a rejection from being involved with the conditions of the world. It just means that that you're not going to be caught by them. You're going to be able to go through the world and be free. So how do we know what's real? Do we need to know what's real? From the point of view of the Buddhist path? We only No need to know which, which, what's, where the suffering is, and where the freedom from suffering is. And I can, it's probably a very, you know, in terms of, you know, somebody who's probably philosophically very unsatisfying. because it'd be nice to have a philosophy that was grand and offered a you know, great unifying principle of the spiritual universe. But what Buddhism does in the end, is really offer you on a silver platter, a mirror for you to look down into your own hearts and by having that mirror Learning how to attend lovingly, compassionately to what you find in your own hearts. And then slowly learning to transform that heart to one that's at peace. And as I, as I said this weekend, to paraphrase myself to misquote myself in the weekend, to be at peace, and to be a person and never again needs to complain about the world. So those are my thoughts about what's real. And it says here, do not believe the person just because he's your teacher. Or if it's in the Scriptures, or if it just makes sense. To put it into into practice, test it for yourself. Find out through your own testing of this, whether this is something that's useful for you and helpful. So those are my thoughts. And now it's your turn in about five minutes. Yes. What is not useful? What's a more useful question?

Perfect. You understood you summarize the talk in two sentences. Beautiful, thank you. And what I would what I would prefer to kind of, I prefer to add something to what you said, for the dangers, all the dangers that involves adding and that is what That you said something like what is it that brings peace to oneself? And now add unto others. So there's not just simply, you know, self absorbed process. It's a process that in some ways includes everyone we're integrating together. Yes.

However, we know that it seems like the, the, instead of asking for reality, we say, you know, what brings us

more or less

fear, greed, delusion.

And

I imagine someone could say, well, alright, so that seems like the question that we've chosen. It does seem relevant to me that would be agreeing with my view, that it seems like a really relevant question, but

How do we

it does seem like the fact that we chose that question. The Buddha chose that question is, if you could conceivably choose some other question one question,

how do you know which is the right question? So, if you want to get to Los Angeles, you have to ask the right question. If you ask, what's the way to Boston or, you know, what's the weather like in the Sierras? You know, that's not going to help you get to Los Angeles. So you have to know what you want. And so if you want freedom, then you have to know what's the useful questions for this. One of the one of the inspirations for this talk was that someone came to me recently and said, Again, I misquote the person my memories doesn't work so well. But it was something like very roughly he said, You know that he uses the some of the Buddhist teachings to understand his experience, you know, which was and he said all things like impermanence and not self and things like that. And I said, Oh, those aren't meant to be teachings to apply to our experience that way. Those are supposed to be realizations, but not not, not ideas that we try and let us try to understand our experience. If you want to find the path, if you want to ask the right question, what the Buddha said, was, you, you you or you formulate your questions about life, from the point of view the Four Noble Truths and so the Four Noble Truths which is the framework for understanding your experience, it helps you find the path. And that's another way of talking about what I've talked about today, I think. So you have to know what to do they have to know what the right questions are. And in order to know what the right questions are, you also have to know what you want. And there's a kind of a catch 22. And so if you if you've met someone, for example, who offers or exemplifies a path to liberation and freedom, there has to be a little bit of giving them a little some confidence and then what they're saying might be worth testing and finding out for yourself. But you don't really know for sure until you've done it for yourself. The beauty about this process though, is that it's verifiable in small steps. You don't have to be fully enlightened to find out this process of the four note of studying through the Four Noble Truths or monitoring the qualities of your mind and abandoning the unhelpful and By adding in the helpful ones is helpful for you. You'll learn very quickly with that works.

There was a good question that and I think my answer was inadequate

his reply

so be it. Other comments, questions? Yes. How do you know when you're deluded? Well, it helps me have good friends who can make kind of you know, suggestions you know, I think you need to let's let's look at this together. And And certainly, we know where you looted we can know a little bit about delusion through our past experience. You can also know you deluded when you very clearly can see how the mind is fabricating and construction constructing the illusion, you know, you've probably seen your mind construct a fantasy. And you know it was a fantasy. Well, when the mind is very attentive, you'll see how any kind of thought that arises, is a thought. And so we're seeing it as a thought. It can kind of remove ourselves from the thought, we can see it a little more as a supposition as a possibility.

And then it's easier to see it as interpret interpretation or as a delusion. So that's one way to acquire it requires a lot of mindfulness to really be able to kind of step outside and a sense of our thinking and see it for what it is as it arises. And some people, some people define an enlightened person or mature practice as not being not being free of delusion, but rather being able to really see clearly delusion when it arises. So you're not caught by it. So that's my best answer. That's also that's not a good I don't have a good answer for you for that. And To find out for yourself. I did want to one of the things I thought of doing today was because I was talking about these mental qualities that we're supposed to study and become familiar with the risk of some risk, I guess, the later Buddhist tradition after the time of the Buddha a few centuries after, when they tried to formulate and systematize the teachings of the Buddha. They came up with a list of 50 different Buddhist tradition came up with the with different Buddhist traditions come up with different lists, but the Theravada tradition came up with a list of 52 mental qualities. You only have 52 right, very convenient. And so I thought I would just read them and as I kind of lit with the liturgy,

contact feed tone, perception, volition, concentration, vitality, attention, initial application of attention sustained application of attention, determination, energy, effort, joy, zeal, ignorance, shamelessness, restlessness, attachment, wrong view, conceit, aversion, envy, stinginess, regret, sloth torpor doubt, confidence, mindfulness, conscience and regret healthy regret for what we've done. That's bad, unhelpful. Non attachment non aversion, equanimity, tranquility of body tranquility of mind, lightness of body likeness of mind pliancy of body pliancy of mind, wheel, wheel fitness of body realness of mind, uprightness of body a brightness of mind, compassion, sympathetic joy, and insight. So what's beautiful about these, these are all the qualities of your mind, which are like capacities that you all have. And so the question is which of these capacities Do you support and develop in which of these capacities Do you abandon and let wither up so that they don't trouble you anymore? So,

so may all of you know for yourself