

2006-12-03 Dealing With Obstacles

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SPEAKERS

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So what are the very interesting questions, never ended questions is, how do you respond? If things don't go the way you want them to go? Now, the first Buddhist response to that question is to change the question from if to when. Because in Buddhism, the assumption is that things are not going to go the way we want them to go. You know, not all the time, but it's kind of built into human life to this reality of ours, that things are not going to go the way they should. We want them to, of course, the ideal that things are somehow going to go unsatisfactory away. And for people who really kind of understand this take in, they can, rather than being depressing fact, can be can bring on a kind of a lightness, the Lightness of Being, that we're all built into our our engagement of life or walking through life is a recognition, understanding that unexpected is going to happen, and the unexpected sometimes it's not going to be what we had in mind, how things should go. So for a Buddhist, ideally, for a Buddhist, they don't, they never taken by surprise when things don't go the way they should. I mean, somebody was surprised and all kinds of things can happen is like things small things can happen. And really big things can happen. Sometimes, you could say Shouldn't be this way shouldn't be that way. One response, of course, is to be really angry. This shouldn't be this way. Another response is to run away, and other responses and blame myself. And things like being angry running away by myself. being angry towards oneself would be examples of adding suffering and suffer suffering, but adding suffering to our situation. And so, what's the wise ways we can approach life? When we know that sooner or later things are going to happen that are different than what we hoped that they would happen or we wish that happened or ideas or what they should happen? So that's it. You know, I said in the beginning, a never ending question. What do we do when things are not going the way they should? Buddhism has a lot of ideals really traditions often have a lot of ideals. And those ideals can be oppressive. Buddhist ideals can be quite oppressive. If you take them on as this is the way it should be, you know, I should be compassionate. That's a good British ideal, right? So you're inspired by figures compassionate. This is how you should respond, you should be able to you know, do you typically respond great compassion to your family over the holidays and you're all set to do it. And then come New Year's you realize you have to make a resolution. I think I need to make some

effort. So you know, but it can be quite painful to have an idea like, I'm going to be compassionate and then not live up to it more painful. It was not to have that perhaps. Or to be peaceful or to be angry been ideal to be kind or I need to be free from the doctor. Like a cost by the situation and some situations you can cost that over and over again, I'm not gonna get caught. Not gonna get angry. There's a lot of ideals. And what I like to propose is that one of the ways One of the very mature ways of responding to relating to ideals, in the Buddhist sense, is not to go after the ideal directly, but to focus on what is it the stands in the way of the ideal? What's your obstacle to the ideal? So it's being compassionate is your ideal? What is it that prevents you from being compassionate? Now, when you look at that, maybe it's not so called goodness, you know, maybe you get angry a lot, or maybe you're bitter or maybe you're resentful, or maybe you're easily offended. And all kinds of things that might happen. It's difficult to feel compassion to be there, and you're distracted a lot, you know, really paying attention. So it's hard to be compassionate. If you're in Fantasyland. So but it is to look at that, and use the mindfulness use the presence of mindfulness to investigate and really understand what it's the obstacle is. And for some people that's counterintuitive, because some people, the obstacles are embarrassing. The obstacles are the problem, and you're not supposed to have a problem. The obstacle is the thing that shouldn't be happening. And so it shouldn't be happening, right? So we have some people in a hurry to get rid of them. Some people want to deny them, some people, you know, get angry to the obstacles, all kinds of things. But one approach to to Buddhist life is to, in a sense, be welcoming to the obstacles. Not there's a cheerleader cheering them on, go for it. But in the sense of being really interested in them, understanding them, because if you understand them, well, chances are they're going to be less of an obstacle. And more clearly, you can know an obstacle, the less power it has over you. That's the argument here is always true, but, but that's, you know, often can be the case. So the idea is to be welcoming and says, Oh, I'm resentful, and overwhelmed. Let me understand me understand this phenomenon of resentment or overwhelm, as best I can. And then you can kind of consider what are the various ways you have to understand this phenomenon. Sometimes it's useful, just stop in your tracks, take a break, say, Excuse me have to go for a walk, and actually spend some time with yourself reflecting what just happened, what was going on there. Sometimes it's helpful to the end of the day to kind of sit back and kind of just be quiet time of day also reflect and think sometimes it's helpful to actually find a friend and say, you know, can we go for a walk and talk about this issue that I have, you know, I keep getting resentful. And I've looked at it I thought about a lot but it keeps coming up. Maybe it's just, maybe she asked me some questions or I can just bounce ideas off you maybe I can get some more clarity about what's going on for me. Or perhaps some people I could go to There's a place to explore certain issues and they find it helpful in that kind of for spiritual counselor or something. Meditation is an interesting place to look at these things, if it's something like resentment or overwhelm the rises and rises, to sit down and meditate as a way of having a much higher magnifying glass to study to really be present for it, to open up to it inside the inside, like an inside out. And that requires a lot of willingness to be present for discomfort. And some people saying, you know, that's not supposed to be happening. Right? It's a theory, right? It's not supposed to be happening. So it's not supposed to be happening and we pull back, we push it away or something. But the idea is to be welcoming. say, Okay, I'm going to I'm going to open up to what's really happening and be really present for it. What would be like a quote would be like to sit down,

close my eyes, take the one seat to take the seat here. And, and really allow myself to see as fully as I can. What maybe I've never allowed myself to see before and never taken away. Careful time to take it into the present for it. And then you might be in for a wild ride. Because it might be all kinds of things might happen as you really start taking in really starts being present for some of the tremendous forces in the mind and the heart that goes on some of our fear, anger and judgments and criticisms and all kinds of stuff that goes on there. There's a kind of cliché, which I think it's I think, when I first started, I was funny, and sometimes I don't like it. But the cliché, which is also not always true, particular shape is self knowledge is seldom good news. So the willingness to kind of open up to that self knowledge that maybe is not good news to see it. So, part of the spirituality I like to offer is this a willingness to enter into the very thing that stands out Our way from what we want to see happen. And as we understand that much more deeply, then it's most likely going to bite us. I've seen myself often enough where I bypass the obstacle, and held on to some artificial way to the ideal. I'm going to be compassionate here. You know, I'm going to I'm not going to be angry. Just a few weeks ago, my eight year old son, I said, my eight year old son, they could try to find all these new strategies, right to figure out how to deal with these kids. You know, it's just not the way it should be. All the time. One constant, one continuous, it's not that's not the way supposed to be. And the So, you know, I know he was beginning to ask me when he shouldn't act right? According to what occurred to me, and I didn't want to get angry because I learned that being angry isn't always a very good strategy at home. But you need to do something that limits. So I thought, oh, I'll just say to him calmly warning. If this behavior continues, you know, I'm going to get angry. What are the warning like kind of? And so I said that to him, and he looked at me in the big smile and said, Dad, you already angry. Know that I wasn't angry anymore. That was enough. Something very mature, I believe about stopping and taking a look at the obstacles. So seeing holding on to their ideal has come back and bitten me. You know, I've tried to be a certain way and not paying attention and noticing the build up of resentment or anger or grumpiness or something like that. And so, you know, and then it gets out of hand at some point. But it actually does have a habit of keeping an eye out what is the obstacle? What's the difficulty here? I think there's much more realistic way of dealing with the ideal. And one of the amazing things with beautiful things can happen is once you once you deal with the obstacle, maybe it settles away. Maybe a different wonderful thing happens rather than what you had hoped for. So it might be that what you wanted was compassion, compassion. Or say see what you want is concentration. That's an ideal, right? meditators want to get concentrated. And you know, I tried to get concentrated like, you know, just holding on to that concentrated state. And just doesn't work that way for me. And but sometimes if I look at what's what's the obstacle to getting concentrated, then it takes a while, but I look at them and be present for them and concentrated on those. It's kind of like a keto, you concentrate on the thing that makes it difficult to concentrate. And then it settles away. And then sometimes I find myself then concentrated. If the obstacles are not there seems like a natural state to get concentrated, like what's left. But sometimes it's open to something else. Sometimes it's open to states of loving kindness, beautiful state of loving kindness, and that is so appreciated, appreciating that state of kindness. You don't know what's going to open up necessarily when the obstacles drop away. And so sometimes holding on to an ideal Again, prevents something else, maybe it's more beautiful and more appropriate to happen. Here's a little story this weekend. That's not a good example, but it just comes to mind.

Friday evening, I went out for dinner with some friends. It was offered in with two friends. And one of them didn't show up. So we left anyway to go down the street here to go to the restaurant. And eventually he calls and says that he's in car trouble. But he said, I'm going to make it anyway. Even though I can't seem to start my car. I'll come anyway to dinner. And we'll deal with it not starting car when we finished dinner. So three of us went out after dinner, to the parking lot. In fact, he couldn't start his car. And none of us had jumper cables. So, you know, this wasn't supposed to be happening. It was pretty cold finding the standing apartment freezing and so I came back here Get my car because it was here as we walked. And when I came back, they this tow truck pulled into the parking lot. And they had gone down to the Safeway parking lot to do something to look at the long sleeve long cables. And there and in front of Starbucks there that ran into a tow truck guy. He's all come. And he was just this lovely guy. And here we had this problem. It shouldn't be right, the car should work. But for me, I was so delighted to meet this wonderful tow truck guy who showed up. He was so warm and so generous. As far as I know, he didn't ask for any payment was just like here, I'll do it, you're in trouble. So it used to be easy for him and for battery pack. So it's a little, maybe a little teeny example of how something when something doesn't go the way it should kind of open up to something else that may be that's really beautiful or nice. When we did the beginning of the chaplaincy training program this year. We are we went around In the room, people talks about their experience of receiving spiritual care from someone like the hospitalized hospital chaplain came to talk to them or something. And one of the things is one of the highlights of going around was how many of the people who decided to become Buddhist chaplains had been inspired by the care that someone gave them when they were sick. It changed their life, you know, it's moving a whole different direction. They shouldn't have been sick, right? That's not sure that people shouldn't get sick in human life. That's not the way life should be. Right? It's a mistake to get sick. The purpose of personal mistake, right, the personal fault that you get sick. That's sometimes that's the way some people relate to it. But it's built into human life we get sick, and what's happened and as unfortunate as it is, what is it open up to? Does it open up to something that maybe wouldn't have happened if you weren't so you never know what's what will come out come out what I what I found out is being present is the doorway for the unexpected, wonderful things to happen. And I never quite know what's going to happen and what should happen. But being present for what is for what is and being present for what is is a different strategy than running away. It's a different strategy than shutting down. It's a different strategy strategy than blaming and attacking. It's also a different strategy than trying to fix let's fix it. Now there's a company Okay, I'm gonna be present here. Let's see what's going on. Let's look at the obstacles. Let's look at the ideas of circle up on line line does. So there are five different things I can think of that we can help in this process investigating the obstacles. And each of these five things, I think, gives us a certain kind of personal on many ends invested word, language was kind of personal power. strength in situations that often we feel like we're undermined. The first is it's really helpful to have some confidence or faith in yourself in the practice and an approach. So just the idea that he has confidence in the idea that life is often unsatisfactory that things don't happen the way that they're supposed to happen. There's a way in which that can give you some kind of faith or confidence, that so that you're not overwhelmed or criticized or see that this is a terrible mistake. There's a saying in Japan, that Zen master Dugan said, Zen masters life is one continuous mistake. It's very helpful for me. Think of it as

one continuous mistake. So the thing is that in Buddhism, we say it's the face in the world and the three characteristics but the faith and the character, what are the characteristics of human life? Is that it is unsatisfactory. There's an unsatisfactory element to it. That doesn't mean that there's a beautiful aspects to it. The word has faith that you know some confidence that things change and unfold and take all kinds of directions. There's confidence and faith in having a practice, like mindfulness practice. There's confidence and faith to know that there are other people who have worked through these kinds of things. And the very things that we call our obstacles can become our doors to vibration doors to compassion, doors to love doors to forgiveness, doors to kindness. There's faith or faith in other people who've gone through these kinds of things, comments very helpful. We had our chaplaincy program on Friday, we had a discussion about suicide. And one of the members there was quite emotionally disturbed by this because of suicide of A parent, many years ago, and he did actually take some time off out of the meeting just to kind of deal with it and be present for us and be alone with it for a while. Quite a big powerful thing to happen. But as part of the way of processing this, one of the teachers in the program asked how many people in the room have experienced the suicide of a family member or close friend, and majority of the hands went up. And I think it's just changed the whole kind of understanding of what we were doing there in the room. When we saw what a common experience it was, to have that kind of tragedy happen. So to realize other people have gone through this is very helpful. Then, so some kind of faith, some kind of confidence, something we trust, something we are willing to kind of face doesn't do a lot. That is not a practice isn't there's no doing but just to know you have faith To say that it's useful to pay attention to the obstacles, that it's useful to stop and look at this stuff is very, very helpful thing. So what's your faith? Do you have faith Do you have couple you have confidence in. And sometimes it's helpful actually cultivate something you have confidence in, in preparation for difficult times. The second is engagement, it's really helpful to engage your difficulties. Now, there are many different ways of engaging your difficulties, not just one. The so engagement doesn't always mean you kind of run full steam ahead and dive into it. But engage engagement means that you arouse some kind of effort to do something in relationship to it. It could be that you go for a walk with a friend. It could be that you stop and meditate. It could be that you go take a shower until you cool off. Could be that you journal about what situation, it could be that you say the truth. You tell someone, you know, I'm really stressed out right now, as opposed to pretending you're not. So they can participate in understanding what your situation is. But actually to have theory, I can engage the situation and do something, I'm not going to be the victim of this, I'm going to be someone who actually engages in anti victim mode is going to give up is not very helpful. So, somehow to engage it. Now, one of the ways to engage it is to do nothing. Doing nothing, not in the sense of giving up, but being doing nothing, and then being very awake, very present for it. So, you know, not trying to fix it, not trying to run away, but rather, okay, this is going on. I don't know what's supposed to happen here. But I'm going to not do anything. And then not doing anything. I'm trying to really make space to understand or to see or the presence or the feel What's going on? Doing nothing. And that spirit can be very, very powerful. I've done it many, many times, and amazed. It was new information with new unfolding happens when I stay present, try these honest, honest as I can and what's going on, but don't do anything. Because sometimes I have a tendency as a sixth tendency, you know, and sometimes that's not very helpful, doesn't allow for something deeper to happen. And then as part of

this, one of the things to do is maybe related to can be related to doing nothing is to be mindful to the, you know, to being mindful of a situation. And there have been times in times where I've kind of had to say, What am I saying? Things I trust is that the present moment, my present moment experience is trustable. If I can be mindful about it, My personal experience is not trustable enough mindful over. And over and over and over again, I found that if I'm really mindful for things, maybe not, you know, the truck barreling down on the road, you know, just be mindful but there's certain things you have to kind of do again on the way over fixed but, but over and over again my inner life and my interpersonal life with people, I find found that the situation is amazingly trustable is when I try to do is to be mindful. And one of the very interesting ways of being mindful is to do it out loud. So you so it's kind of thing to be similar to this the process of making I statements, you know, just services what I'm experiencing now, this is what I'm experiencing right now. Right now I'm frustrated. And then kind of that allows people to have more information they can participate in kind of clarifying situations. But to bring mindfulness is to study the situation. Try to understand a deeper more carefully to study what your beliefs are. Are your thoughts your feelings your mind your body? Your intuition kind of okay stop and take pay attention here. Be mindful of the situation around you what's going on here in this room? What's happening here with these people who are doing all this stuff? What's going on at this, you know, holiday party? What's really going on here and you look around and say, Oh, you know, first person over there is really anxious. That person over there is is feels really awkward and pulling away that person over there is angry that person over there is sad. Oh, now, I didn't realize it was so complex. All these people here, I thought is all about me. And, and that changes the information then you can relate to it differently. So mindfulness, the other thing that can be very helpful is to try to get calm. Calm isn't ideal. And so sometimes you want to study how you're not calm, but sometimes it's possible to calm yourself down. To get more focused or calm or settled, and so sometimes just breathing deeply my son yesterday he went to the school fair to school yesterday. It was it a wild time those friends. It was just like running around like crazy. And it was time to go home but he wants to do one more thing to check on something. And my wife said, he was kind of wild. And so my wife said, okay, you can do it. But only if you orient yourself first. He said, Okay, so you've looked like this. And then he wasn't wild. He's eight years old. Can you do that? Take a deep breath. I didn't teach him this. By the way. I probably couldn't. But he's learned how to what he calls orient himself and he takes a deep breath and closes his eyes and get centered. And then he has like his wildness sometimes goes away. So to calm yourself and have the skills and ability to do some kind of calm, breathing, just breathing deeply, can be helpful. Taking a deep breath and having a long exhale. And just kind of letting just settle the exhale can be helpful in other ways, where otherwise you have to calm yourself. I'm embarrassed by the number of times where I've been agitated by something and then acted, acted to my agitation with my agitation, only to realize situation was different. And you know, occasionally had the experience of actually going, I'm not going to act on this. I'm agitated, they'd better calm first. And then and then I get I find some way to calm down and then I go back into the situation. They realize the situation is different than what I thought. And it's a kind of attitude I have a policy policy approach I have to being angry, is, I try my best not to act. I'm angry. But I'll try to bring that kind of somehow dissipate the anger. But then when anger is dissipated, not to then avoid a situation, but then to go back into the difficult situation, and try to deal with it when I'm not angry. And so somehow

to calm ourselves, another approach. And then another approach is to use our not only our mindfulness situation, but to use our intelligence to understand it better. Think about it. Think about together with some friends, think it out, try to understand what's really going on. Try to investigate in a deeper way. Try to understand the causal connections, the causal Nexus that kind of brings these things into place, trying to understand What is it? How are they useful to respond? What are the various choices you have and how to respond to the situation? mindfulness doesn't teach you how to respond. It's your intelligence which will do that. So to engage your intelligence, you know, what can be done here? What are the different ways what's the solution and then the overarching ideal, which maybe can inspire you, even though it's difficult to have is whenever you find yourself in a situation that's difficult for you, painful and suffering is where's the compassion can be some compassion in this situation, compassion towards yourself, compassion to others. And I've seen some situations where compassion was the great jewel that the situation gave birth to and, and that was the only thing that was needed was compassion. Sometimes the only thing that's possible, some situations might compassionate presence. It's a beautiful thing. So had to have the ability to be compassionate for yourself. Do you have that ability? If you don't have that ability, what can you do to find out how to do it? If you don't have the ability to be compassionate for yourself, what is the obstacle? So how do you relate to life? When things are happening, that shouldn't be happening? How do you relate to that is your assignment the next week, next life and to look at all the different aspects of that, and every age, different people have different strategic ways. Some people are more than running away type some of the more than attacking type, some people in all kinds of ways, what's your way, your way, with your way of responding to things when they're going the way they're not? goes to how do you respond when there's no wisdom? And what how can you respond when you do have wisdom? You do have wisdom perhaps these five things can be helpful to think about. Engagement, mindfulness, calm and intelligence. Although all of us are apprenticed to the same teacher that the religious institutions originally worked with, namely reality, reality inside says, master the 24 hours, do it well, without self pity. It is as hard to get the children herded into the carpool and down the road to the bus as it is to chant sutras in the Buddha Hall on a cold morning. One move is not better than the Each can be quite boring. They both have the virtuous quality of repetition, repetition and ritual and the good results come in many forms, changing the filter, wiping noses, going to meetings, taking up around the house, washing dishes, checking the dipstick. Don't let yourself think these are distracting you from your more serious pursuits. Such a round of chores is not a set of difficulties we hope to escape from. So then we may do our practice, which will put us on a path. It is our path. Gary Snyder had a little bit of time if anybody has any comments or questions. Anybody felt this talk was the way it's supposed to be. Behind you. My name is Sean. I think one of the things that helps me is recognizing expectations. Someone once told me that expectations are just premeditated resentments. So whenever I realize that I'm entering those situations expecting something to happen, then I know I'm probably not going to be present. So anyway, that's that's one of my indicators. If I have an expectation, then I have an obstacle. I need to work on that. Thank you. What's the difference between expectation anticipation. I anticipate that the that the traffic lights will work on El Camino. I don't expect them to anticipation you acknowledge that you really don't have control of this situation. So, the differences between non control you have over through anticipation suggestion is that maybe you realize you don't have control

out of control. Whereas expectation is idea that you have some control over it. anticipation is preparation can be can be kind of like preparation. I was trying to find a word. I agree with Shawn about the difficulties expectation. It seems like it should be something should be okay to have some some foreseeing of what you might expect now, but what you might anticipate that doesn't involve necessarily suffering because of that. Right. So I can I can, I can, you know, I can anticipate or I can visualize what might happen with what what it might be like. But I would expect it to be that that is always going to be that way or I don't depend on it. I'm not I'm not attached to it being that way. I'm not depending on you. And I think often the way people hold expectation it really comes back and bites them so premeditated resentment towards well. Yeah. Like you expect things to work. You go to India flavour curiosity in anticipation that maybe isn't there is expectation anticipation is more has more open ended feeling to it could you elaborate a little unexpected situations How to apply my principles, the think I think not to be taken too much by surprise. Because, you know, sickness is part of human life. Don't feel like it's a personal failing. It's quite unfortunate. It's quite tragic in many ways, but we never know. You know, I kind of walk around you never know I never kind of never sure when I'm going to die, you know, death, sickness and, you know, just around the corner. So I often reflect on that. So, you know, I don't know to what degree I would be. I'm sure I'd be quite surprised and distressed suddenly. receive some terrible diagnosis. But that, at least in my mind, I don't think of it so far away. It's impossible any moment to happen. So the idea that so has expectation is supposed to always be health and perfect health expectations supposed to be a long life, the way this is what it was all about, is this isn't set up for problems. So some of that has to do with how you prepare yourself even before how you practice or the wisdom you have even before. The unexpected thing is, has arisen. Part of the functions with this practice is the kind of preparation for dying and the preparation for things, you know, that happen, this shouldn't happen. And then if you have some, some, some confidence or faith in a practice or an approach, you know that oh, well, maybe this is unfortunate that I have this thing but I can I have a state I have an understanding that I can approach it in a way that's wise I can approach it in a way that may be compassionate, I can approach it in a way that's helpful. If you don't have any faith or confidence, you have an approach, then you may be at the mercy of the medical profession, they're going to help you and, and, and I've known people who have gone into surgery, and did loving kindness practice going in to surgery. And they thought that was so helpful because until they had a meditation practice, like loving kindness to do, they were kind of passive. passive recipients, victims of the surgeon, they couldn't do anything in situation. They were just there. People were doing things to them. But they were just kind of like, you just kind of have to kind of be there. So once they felt they could do a meditation practice, like loving kindness, being wheeled into surgery, they feel like they're kind of some of their own personal power or abilities or engagement, to take on some responsibilities there. So to have a practice that allows you to take or find personal responsibility, and then to engage in it to feel like Okay, okay, I have this serious problem that's happening. Let me engage it as my hard my spiritual practice. And if you're not sure how to do that, then we talk to someone about it. And then to be mindful, it's a really important time to be mindful. The more serious the illness is, the more infant voice point of view is more important it is to start practicing mindfulness practice. Being very clear, Michael is very clear understanding what's really going on here. Also practice concentration practice or a common practice, so that your mind is as long

as your mind is clear enough to have a mind that says I'm stronger than your fear and your agitation. So you have pulled away in there. So it's not uncommon places like in Thailand, when someone comes like to the teacher there, and they have a diagnosis of cancer. The teachables will tell them meditation teacher will tell them now's your time. To develop concentration on the breath, and to really kind of develop that really strong mind. So you can work with this right up until the point of your death. And then use your intelligence. So you're not the victim to it. Also your mind, your mind, your thoughts, your beliefs are not just kind of like old habits kicking in with some new intelligence is opening new pathways of understanding. So you can approach it in wiser ways. And remember, darling Cohen is coming talk here, sometimes wonderful teachers, serious arthritis. And some points I thought she was dying. And her mindfulness practice just skyrocketed. When she took her illness seriously. She just kind of was laying in bed and give enough wasn't making any effort at all. And there's no teacher came to her and said, If you continue this way, you're going to die. And so she's kind of rallied her forces and she got out She was studying things like, you know, how you would, how she would place her weight down on her knee. So to minimize the amount of pain that she walked, to pay very careful to use their intelligence to kind of learn how to walk, given all the horse riders to do. How could she walk in such a way that actually not only alleviate the pain in the legs was a little bit healing or helpful? And so a lot of studies, a lot of intelligence went into kind of understanding the engineering feats of just walking. So to use your intelligence, you know, what's needed here? What can you do? So I don't know any of that was helpful. If you're thinking about so. See, it's now 1048. We were supposed to stop at 1045 things happen the way they're not supposed to sell easily. But I want to express my gratitude before we go. Thank you for sitting with us sitting with me and thank you for listening and I hope that this paves the way to a good holiday season.