

2007-08-19 The Importance of Skillfulness

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SPEAKERS

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So this morning I want to introduce to talk to you about a key Buddhist concept called skillful skillfulness. The idea of skillfulness. And this is a very key in Buddhism because decisions about what to do choices we make in classic Buddhism, because back to the question is skillful or not, what is skillful or not the Buddha? When people went to the Buddha a few times, when I visited a teacher, what should I ask that teacher? Good question, right? And the Buddha said, You should ask about what is skillful. So, it's a very key concept. When I was in Japan, in the mid 80s, I met a lovely, wonderful woman, American who lived there for many years. By that time. I don't know how many years 10, 20 years studying Zen and she had been studying with one One of the more renowned rinzai Zen masters in Japan and who had a monastery for monks. And so she was able to go study with him every day. And she was able to do retreats there. So she's there. But because she's a woman, she couldn't actually live there and live in the monastic monastic compound. And so the abbot was concerned about her training for Zen training, that it was not complete, she was getting them meditation training, and that training happens and interviews with a teacher, but the kind of training, other kinds of training she wasn't getting because she wasn't living the monastic life with everyone. So he wanted to figure out, offer her an alternative to living in the monastery that could provide her the same training that the monks were getting in the monastery. So he set her up to go study with one of the great pottery masters in nearby. And so she went and did pottery. She didn't know any about pottery because before she started and she started learning how to throw pots and everything. And the Zen master, he saw that the training of pottery making was equivalent to this intensive monastic training that his monks were getting in the monastery. So that's an interesting comparison. What is it that makes it comparable? And I think one of the things is comfortable about it is that both of them entail developing of skill, developing a certain kind of presence of being in the way of engaging with your activities, what you're doing, that is very engaged, very present, but also very skillful. You develop a skill, to put you right into the present, and to be efficient as a mastery over something. And what you learn when you develop mastery over something is very helpful for developing mastery over meditation mastery over Buddhist spiritual life. A lot of the same skills, a lot of the same capacities and abilities that are needed for mastering pottery or music, playing or just about anything at all, any craft is also needed for meditation practice.

There's a very famous quote in the Dhammapada with a Buddha summarizes the teachings of the Buddha's not only himself but all Buddhists in three lines and three little phrases, he says, to not do evil, to avoid doing evil to engage in what is skillful to purify the mind, this is the teachings of the Buddha. So we have these three parts. So and this is also often translated in English and differently because there was skillful is kind of clumsy. You know, it's, of course, I mean, so obvious right off the bat, whatever. means it's not poetic or so it's very common to translate this in English. To avoid evil, do good. purify the mind. This is the teaching of the Buddha. But when you say Good, good is so vague, it kind of maybe feels good. He kind of has you know resonates in some kind of vague way everyone

knows what good is their own language, but good doesn't really you know, people have different opinions what is good mean wise, wise if and when you say translate is good, you don't quite get the meaning of skillful. Cultivate what's skillful. In other translation for this word akusala probably would quit akusala it's very common also in English is wholesome. And certainly improvement to good. Avoid what's evil. Cultivate what's wholesome, purify the mind. This is the teachings of the Buddha. And the wholesome has a different connotations of associations and the word skillful as well. wholesome I think of salsa as a kind of a moral value into wholesome little bit wholesome means it's holistic, I guess its whole feels as a kind of goodness in it. But it's kind of a state. It's kind of like a wholesome has my mind has as a suggestion of something as wholesome in and of itself. Were skillful has the idea that is for purpose. It's it's forward leading, you develop a skill in order to do something. You're skillful in order to develop something, Master something. And so, the word kusala means skill. And so a very big part of what the Buddha was trying to teach was cultivation, development, of skillful quality skillful things. And primarily when the Buddha talks about skill, he talked about the skillful qualities of mind developing your mind so it has skillful skillful qualities skillful characteristics, still skillful capacities, skillful ways of engaging. Now, you know, skillfulness, I suppose means things like mastery, proficiency. efficiency, means you can do something, you develop something, it also speaks to that side of human human humanity, where we can develop ourselves, rather than taking who we are as a given. And just accepting what we are said, Well, you know, this is how things are and I'll just have to live with this live this way. And, and just accept it or somehow leave it at that, then, you know, and then if we do that, then we just kind of just attend to victims of what's already happened to us. But because we have the capacity to develop ourselves, we don't have to be the victims of what's already happened. We can cultivate and grow and develop. This there are people who engage spirituality Buddhist spirituality, as As an issue of knowledge, that's a matter of understanding something. And so they people pour over Buddhist books, endless Buddhist books, look at PhDs and Buddhism as a way of trying to get the right understanding if they have the right understanding, then everything will be okay. Because you know, then you know, and sometimes it happens in small steps, people, you hear a teacher say something, or you read something in a book, and it shifts your perspective on something. And there's a new understanding that can make a big, big difference. And so we can have, you know, different relationships through our life. But ultimately, if we're only relying on perspective and knowledge understanding, then we're not really developing ourselves. And so then we are not really able to meet all the challenges. Life might bring us in different situations. If we develop a skill, develop skillfulness through all of our skills, then those skills are portable. Can we take them with them wherever we go, we can use them to different situations. In addition to separate from video of knowledge, there are some Buddhist practitioners who are experienced junkies. They think the whole point of Buddhism is to have a particular experience. And they go on retreats, and they want to have a really good experience on the retreat. And they go, they go,

or they come back, and they want their experience to be the validation of the recruiting experience of how it was credited for them. And in a sense, experience is not that important in Buddhism, as people would think of because people think of meditation as having particular experience. And we're looking for that right experience. Experience is not as important in Buddhism, as again, developing skill, developing an ability, strengthening an ability you know, going to the gym might be a good experience, but we don't go to the gym to have a good experience because the gym to develop ourselves get strong. And if you have an injury for example, then it's good to go to the gym and develop some strength. On the muscles, maybe that are weak. And so you'll see develop that capacity as you have. In a sense, this is pointing towards the good news of Buddhism, which is that part of the good news is that we're able to develop ourselves, we're able to develop skill. The unfortunate thing about developing skill in some people's minds, is it developed many skills takes repetition. And repetition takes time. And time, spending a lot of time in developing a skill is inefficient. And things that are inefficient are not very

popular in a culture where getting things fast and quick, is really important. And I think meditation practice, in this sense, is one of the most inefficient things you can do.

And because it takes a lot of repetition takes a lot of kind of growth. And some people, of course are, you know, can settle into meditation very quickly. This can be easy for them. Some people, it takes a lot longer. But sometimes it's the people for whom it takes a long time to be able to settle into good meditation practice, it's actually more productive for them. Because again, the point is not having experienced the point is to develop themselves develop skills. And if it takes a long time to develop, to figure out how to sit settle in meditation, it means that you're kind of learning about yourself learning a lot about yourself, learning how your mind works, how your body works, how your relationship to things is, how to activate certain qualities, how to let go of the qualities that are overactive. And so you have to learn a lot about yourself in the process of learning meditation, develop a lot of skill, someone who's kind of living a very calm life, you know, has some natural ability to get concentrated. They sit down to meditate and Boom, they get deep peace. It's nice for them. But it might not help them. When there's some big crisis in their life, because they haven't learned anything about themselves, they just kind of dropped into some deep place. So to develop skill takes repetition. And in this regard, it's interesting that the word skill in indo European, it's kind of linguistic origins, indo European origins. The word skill means to separate and actually believe it's the same thing in Norwegian, they use the word Schindler shield is almost like steel right. And it means to separate the probably connected also. And so the, and then to separate them came down further down into the indo European kind of trees down towards us. It became to differentiate to make distinctions And then and then we have skill. So there's something in the in the least linguistic routes or the word skill that involves making differences making distinctions. And that's part of what happens with training to repeat, repetitive training, repeat something over and over and over again, you're able to make more and more refined distinctions, the author makes more and more refined differentiations so you can make slight adjustments or appropriate adjustments for developing a skill. So you know, if you want to master swimming, for example, at first us kind of flop around, teaching my four year old how to swim right now. And, you know, there's a lot of distinctions he's gonna have to learn. Right now, I think I can get him to kind of kind of kick his legs into paddle one hand, but he holds on to my other hand, pretty good. Right now I'm trying to work on him, flattening out his hands and having your fingers kind of more or less together flat. Because if you have if you're holding your hands like a claw, you're swimming isn't quite as efficient, right. So that's a little distinction he has to learn between a claw hand and a flathead. And so and then as you learn to swim, and get better and better if you learn to make more and more finer distinctions between how you move your arm through the water, and even someone who's a great swimmer, is still getting more and more, has more more finesse more and more subtlety about the distinction they're making or to master the skill of swimming. So develop a skill we do through a lot of repetition. And as we develop the repetition, we get familiar with the activity. As we get more and more familiar with activity, we're able to understand it more better, better, and make finer and finer distinctions. As we make finer, finer distinctions. We can choose those to stick those parts of distinction that are more and more in our favor for the purposes we have. And some of this happens without even thinking about it. In many, many activities, we just do repetition over and over and over again, the body and somehow the body the subconscious mind. Something does a lot of this work for us not like we have to think so carefully about it at all. As it was a story to tell, trying to teach my other son when he was five, I guess, how to catch a baseball. And I'm not a mean guy to usually, you know, you know, especially with my son's playing catch, but you know, we try to explain to him that he was catching it with his palm with his glove pointing down all the time. And it's okay, but he can't catch balls, you know, higher than your chest or something then. So I wanted to teach him to turn the glove around for catching a little higher ball. So I just explained that to him. And he he started crying pork, you know? And I said, Oh, no, I don't think it was so heavy. I just kind of turned ugly. So I guess I can't tell him how to, you know, I better not tell him anything. Because I did not

explain to him anything about how to catch. I'll just play catch with him. And I played catch and catch. My wife says, I believe Come in much better. Yeah, I could throw the ball a lot better than I could.

But the slowly, slowly, imperceptibly, you know, he becomes better better. And he's, you know, within, you know, a year or so he was kind of, you know, for his age group, Ace baseball catcher, phenomenal what he can do beautiful, elegant, graceful.

So the same thing with meditation and meditation is repetitive act. We do it over and over again. And, and you'd do it day in, day out. And it's really a great advantage to do it day in day out without any exception, because then you start learning the terrain really well. And the idea is to study the terrain to understand what's going on when you meditate. What is your mind like? What's your attitude like? What are the different capacities of your mind that are active and not active? What's going on with your moods, your emotional state, what's going on with your body? energy level, there's so many different distinctions that you can make as you meditate. And some of these, again, don't have to be doing so consciously, they kind of come along, just like my son didn't consciously learn how to catch the baseball just kind of have this, you know, increment by increment. Some of this can happen incrementally just keep meditating over and over and over again, develop the skill of meditation. But the skill, skill set you need grows faster. If you pay attention to what you're doing. When you meditate, you pay attention to what's going on with you. So the insight practice is very important. You want to understand you can get your condition what are the different aspects of your condition you sit down to meditate, and how should you meditate given the conditions you have? You sit down to meditate and you're tired. After meditating for a few months or a year or something, you realize that when you're tired, it's really important to sit up straighter. And so you sit up with more energy. So you kind of overcome this sleepiness little bit. Or you say that you're really aching. allot somehow emotionally or physically. And you find out that maybe certain way of meditating helps you stay present. Because the eight tips to trip you up and you tend to wander off into thoughts a lot. So you find a book that put a lot of emphasis on paying attention to my body much more on my body than on the breath, then I can stay present, because otherwise the mind will drift off. Or you'll learn that a lot of strong emotions going on, you'll learn that maybe if you're agitated, maybe it's really good sometimes to count your breath. So these are kind of gross distinctions but you can learn but as you do learn meditation you learn more and more of this stuff. And you learn how to skills skill set needed in order to be able to settle into meditation and a deeper way. The so then this famous saying of the Buddha, avoid what's evil, cultivate with skillful and purify the mind These are the teachings of the Buddha. The third line is purify the mind. And this is shorthand for liberation, for the kind of purification of what the fetters, the defilements, the torments the different kind of ways in which the mind is attached. The Velcro of the mind, the way the mind is obsessed, caught the frayed hateful, all the ways in which the mind is not free. So purify the mind is to purified of the bonds, the bondage, keeps the mind heart unfree, so the mind heart is free. And so we can ask, so that's the ultimate goal, then the skillfulness of Buddhism is what is it? You know, has skillfulness has a purpose, because the direction you're going with it, the skill for its own sake. So what is the purpose and the Buddhism is to purify the mind and so to liberate the mind, so what is it that skillful To do for that purpose. So, rather than saying what's wholesome, or what's good, which is about rather vague, you can ask, what is it a skillful? Because it's, or I like this, I like to translate this word pusilla. Sometimes it's helpful. Rather than trusting is even skillful and like helpful, what is helpful and what is not helpful to may be able to make that distinction. Remember, distinctions here are important, right? So what is helpful and was not helpful? It's a very simple binary question. Some people would say it's dualistic. dualism gets a really bad rap in, in some spiritual circles. So I try not to use the word because I just be hounded out of town. The, so I'll use the word binary. And here in Silicon Valley, there's a really important Binary thing going on. It's like the whole the whole economy is based on binary and non dual economy, it's Silicon Valley wouldn't work. And so historically simple question, is it

helpful or is it not? And so, what is helpful for you, when you sit down to meditate what is helpful? So for example, it's helpful to meditate every day.

Over the long term, it's helpful. In the short term, you might say, well, in the short term, I don't think so helpful for me to meditate today because I have a lot to do. Or I feel kind of lousy, and it's not gonna make me feel any better. I'll just sit there with it with my lousy anus. And that's not any good. Within the long term, it's actually helpful to sit with your lousy this because then you learn about what your losses is like. You don't distract yourself from it. You don't try to fix in some magical thinking. You learn what's really going on there and you learn to sell Have yourself in the loudness. And so the long term you get more familiar with yourself and you'll learn yourself. So you learn a skillful to not meditate every day. It's skillful, to study yourself, get to know yourself better. I've known Buddhist meditators who have done Buddhism as a kind of magical thinking, if they just sit through their duties if the Christian and somehow be present, that somehow somehow you know, they'll be rewarded. It's so you probably heard plenty of time, the famous quote, of Sumedo if enlightenment came from sitting chickens would be unlikely.

And so sitting by itself, just sitting there and you know, boom, you know, not the point. The point is to sit and then you study what is going on here and inquire What is this? What is this? What's going on here? What's happening here? So that's part of the skillfulness is the ability to question to look to investigate. And the ability to investigate is a skill that gets developed over time and learn how to do it over time. Better and better. And then you learn you know, what is useful to pay attention to, once you kind of get a better sense of the terrain of where you're at. You get more skill can now there know what's happening? Where's Where should I pay attention. So for example, as you sit down to meditate, you might realize that the mind is drifting off and fall off. The mind drifting off and thought a lot is an indication that the mind is interested in something the mind doesn't drift off, unless has an interest. And then you can you can ask the question. progressing. Why is this so interesting? Or is this really the most interesting thing for me? Is this the most valuable thing for me to do? is to go off drifting off in thought? Or is there something much more interesting here, more valuable for me? And unless you have some sense that being present here and now be connected to your breath, your body here now is more interesting than your discursive wonderings of thought, why would you want to be present, but if you notice more interesting here, then you have much better chance of reining in that distracting mind could come in and show up and be here. So sometimes it's useful to do that, you know, discursive analysis. What am I interested in right now? how interested in Am I in any in in my breath meditation? To be honest, I'm not that interested in at all. But can I make myself more interested? What was what's interesting about this? And one of the things that I do for this is that Very simple analysis distinction when I'm in my drifting away in thought. It's not an embodied experience. I'm not connected to the embodied real sense of life, live life, and often kind of a virtual world. If I come back into my body as I meditate, I feel an embodied sense of presence. Substantial sensor, vital sense of being in my body. And I find this very satisfying, even when my body aches. And that distinction between the disembodied kind of sensibility or kind of disbar isn't the right word, but kind of not connected to my body feeling when my mind wanders off in thought, versus being connected to my body is such an important distinction for me, and really helps me then to kind of say, Oh, yeah, this is where I want to be in a take more interest to this experience here. Coming back and being here.

So there's skill skills to be developed in patients developing our patients is probably the one of the first skills that meditators need to learn their skills in investigation, their skills and concentration, your skills and staying nonreactive. Staying economists to what's going on, their skills in, in applying our effort, energy, in our practice, in different situations, different amount of energies are needed. We experiment with different energy levels, different energy applications. There's the skills and maybe in confidence. There's skillfulness in joy. Joy doesn't have to be something just this, you know, comes on its own. But

there's this kind of skill to be able to cultivate to arouse joy and feel joy as we sit and meditate. to evoke it, their skill in tranquility, being calm.

And all these skills that we learn, are then translatable or usable in other circumstances of our life. To learn that in meditation practice, then in other situations Out, out and about town going about, without trying difficult situations, you'll have the capacity to investigate, to stay calm, to be concentrated, to be patient, to be nonreactive. To be quantum is to be tranquil, because you've cultivated that ability, not because you carried with you, then because you carry your calm everywhere you go. Because you learn that calm is a skill that you learn, you can, you can cultivate, you can evoke, you can call forth, you can kind of bring a bit bring about calm you can help yourself become calmer, as people do, you know, people get really angry sometimes will walk away from the confrontation, breed, count to 10 and then come Back to talk to the person because they cut themselves down a little bit. So we can have a skill to engage with change to change us in some way. So that how we are is more skillful or more useful. The situation we're in. Now, one of the kind of very, I think one of the beautiful things about cultivating skill, thinking about that, as part of this one aspect of Buddhist practice is that a skill is developed in a circumstances is an activity where you fail in the activity. Right? So say you said, you're gonna do something. And say you decided you're going to walk from here to San Francisco, because you want to develop stronger legs. And you only get to San Bruno, you failed in your test. You could go home miserable. failed. However, oh, San Bruno is a long way to walk through. It wasn't as far as San Francisco. And you might have developed your strength a little bit in the distance you've walked. So you failed in what you tried to do. But you still had the benefit of developing this strength as you're trying to do it. So, if we're looking sort of from a spiritual point of view for looking at skillfulness developing skills as one of the things we're doing, it freezes up a little bit from being preoccupied or only measuring our activities, whether activities are successful or not. So if meditation one morning is a total failure, I know what criteria to use for that. But say you have a totally you fail totally. It might actually have been a very good meditation from the point of view of developing skill. Maybe you were just maybe a measured failure by too quickly restless. But because you were so restless, you had to actually evoke a lot of inner strength to stay rooted on your cushion. Because most of your muscles were ready to bolt. And, and so the strength of determination was developed, because you determined, I said, I was gonna sit for 30 minutes, I'm going to sit here. And so since the resolve is stronger, and that's a skill sets of resolve determination, I got strengthened by hanging in there to doing what we said we're going to do. So even though we didn't, didn't, didn't get didn't settle the restlessness, the skill is still developed. And because skills are portable, because skills can be taken with us in different circumstances, then the hope in Buddhism is that you develop a kind of skillful mind to skillful ability. So that In situations that are challenging to you, or not challenging, you have the ability to stay free in the middle of those circumstances. So that you come to some situation where someone's angry with you. Or all kinds of terrible things or you get sick or you're suddenly in the hospital emergency. And you say, look, I have the skills now, I can now I can evoke these skills. You don't have to be the passive kind of

you to be passive, you know, you know, take care of myself. So like Mary or who's vipassana teacher in Santa Cruz, she was in a car accident a couple of weeks ago, and they had to kind of helicopter out to the hospital. She's turned out to be fine in the end, but they didn't know that for a while. And so the helicopter to San Jose Trauma Center and the reason she knows she's fine, she said, I have so many so many CAT scans on me that I can no longer be hypochondriac you know, they whatever I thought where they helped me before I always just always a sufficient, there's nothing. So she's okay does you know or she's okay. But she was in the car accidents, you know was because she was trapped in a car and he had to kind of come in with a clogged jaw and it could have break it open. It's kind of dramatic. And she's she claims that it's the fruit of her years of practice that kicked in, that she was able to take home and be curious to have sense of investigation, what's going on here? What's happening with her

mind, what's happening situation. It was approved, who years of practice. And I've heard I've heard other people make similar claims that it's the fruit of the years of practice, that will come into play in times of crisis. If you have that ability to develop a skill, then you don't have to ask someone else for help. And there's nothing wrong with asking people for help. But you know, sometimes people evoke unseen forces for help, when maybe you don't even have to.

And then finally, this thing about skill as we make finer finer distinctions have the ability to kind of monitor ourselves the more and more refined ways. Then we learn how to settle, quiet down. All the agitation, all the greediness, all the obsessiveness of the mind. All the claims in the mind one more gets settled quiet down. And as we continue to skillfulness and looking and seeing studying, being present, then more and more subtle degrees of clinging, begin to evaporate, begin to dissolve. And subtle does not mean insignificant, subtle, the subtle things that are discovering Mind is quieter and quieter, are actually considered the very root. They're kind of foundation upon which much of our personality or difficulties in life are built. And so as the mind gets, if you have the skill, the ability to settle and quiet and calm the mind more and more, and eventually you can get down to that foundation level. And then by that time, you have so much skill that you develop, that you have the skillfulness and how to address this foundational level, so that you can somehow so the foundation can drop, bottom can drop is one expression to use in Buddhism. Some people have seen with a bunch of drops away. Some people will experience that the bottom just foundation just dissolves. And some constant concerns some kind of frightening, right how the foundation disappear under you. But if you think of the foundation as being clinging, then clinging drop away, is a good thing. In your heart can be free So, I hope this made sense. One of the things I wanted to try to convey this morning was the importance of skill, developing skill skillfulness how important it is in Buddhism, very important concept it is. And, and so when Buddhists will say, you know, what should I do? Look there look often first, what is skillful was not skillful. What's a skillful thing to do here? What's not skillful? So we have five minutes, and you have a chance to ask questions or clarify or make comments if you'd like.

To repeat what the Buddha said about the word acidic. So it's one of the few places where the Buddha summarized his teachings. He said, to not do Evil to engage in what is skillful to purify the mind. This is the teachings of the Buddha.

Like the little story you told about your son and learning how to catch. Would you apply that more generally about was that a skillful approach to learning? I mean, I don't mean particularly in his in his situation but in general to reject advice and all the culture of the world's history you know, I think that I wouldn't generalize, you know, for this five year old, you know, five year olds have complex personalities and and, you know, they don't often they don't have the subtlety or the sophistication to figure out you know, serious alternatives or achieve c grades you know, and see different ways You know, it's just, you know, so you kind of so for him at that particular time, it didn't work. In my son, he had his problem, thought less now that he's nine that he couldn't do something perfectly, then why should you learn to do it? It was, you know, you're incapable or kind of a paradox, right? Anyway, the point was, if you couldn't, didn't have to do it right the first time, then he would just be kind of really hard for him. So I don't know where he got that from born that way. But now he's grown out of it. Now he has more understanding. So there are certainly times with adults for example, it's better to leave them alone. Let them find out for themselves. And sometimes it's really good to teach them. So now my son is nine, and he just finished

pitching camp.

You know, he's really into baseball, right? So he did this, you know, three or three times a week last week. camp where there's this guy who was a professional pitcher for the Florida Marlins, you know, who came and showed, you know, he was showing that he was teaching them. You know, he didn't protest, he was really into it. He was really jazz and professional player. He listens rapidly. But when I was a father, and I wasn't professional, so but but so sometimes it's useful to teach people things for sure. But sometimes it's useful to stay out of the way that people learn on their own. There's something about learning by oneself. That is sometimes more useful than having somebody else teach you. There's some learning about self self reliance, learning about we learn to learn, we learn how to develop a skill and sort of to be told they things too easy sometimes we don't develop ourselves in the process. And we don't do our patients. We don't do that. Some of the inequalities that are needed. So I know there's some meditation teachers who would be aghast at how much I teach, you know, it's like, it's like giving. It's like giving expression. like giving baby food to babies, is what they say sometimes or something like that. Just to get killed, don't tell them everything, it doesn't work, you have just let them learn themselves. Usually it gives a very vague abstract talk talks that doesn't really tell them anything. So that so they're kind of left on their own. And they can kind of have to figure it out amongst themselves and they come and talk to you. And if they got it right, then you kind of just nod approval. But I even know, compared to those teachers, you know, I explained a lot. And so some of you probably don't think I explained enough. But anyway, so that was a long answer. That's addressing your question. Okay, so I'll try to be brief. We're

not sure this is that brief. But I'll try to be quick probably by posing this question, I'll answer it. You know, I meditate and sometimes I become mine. And sometimes I'm an agitated mind. And one of the things that I'm trying to learn a skill for and so this is a specific kind of question is that sometimes when I sit in my mind is really agitated. Later on that day or something, I'll be having a conversation with someone and I'll be expressing something that's going on and all of a sudden, it'll dawned on me that the agitation, that of what was going on in my mind and what where my mind was wandering off to whatever was not really the key, that it's really not the key and that is That there was something else that was really bothering me. And it happened just recently where I'd found out that this friend of mine has really advanced stages of cancer. And yet when I sat on my cushion, I was agitated about this really stupid stuff. And later on I it suddenly hit me that that was really what was going on that was kind of keeping me off center. So when I'm sitting there, and I have that agitated mind and I'm on a cushion, you know, what's a skillful mean of getting means of getting at, you know, push, getting rid of that stuff that's just kind of coming up and distracting me and figuring out or, or being present with what really is there that I should be sitting with?

Great question. And probably a different kind of circumstance like that different responses are appropriate, but one I'll give today is that you know, sometimes so much of what goes on in our inner life is connected. It's slowly tentacles into connecting this going on there. So even though on the surface it seems that this, you know, this concern, you have no no connections, what you're really feeling was really going on deep inside while you were agitated. You were thinking about what to make for dinner, maybe you know, but really said about your friend. Still there's a connection. And one way to find the connection is if you bring your attention carefully to thinking about dinner menus, whatever it may be, and see what's going on here. What's going on with dinner menu, what's kind of look around the edges of it? What's the full picture of you know, what's emotionally what's going on what's going on my body, you'll probably very quickly discover that underneath dinner menu, there is a level of anxiety, perhaps. And so then Okay, let me connect to the anxiety. As you connect to the anxiety, the anxiety might open up to this issue around your friend. So there's a way of whatever's going on with connecting to it and opening up and seeing all the different aspects of it. Kind of as you open up to different aspects of the full ecology of it, you'll find what part of the ecology is the one that will take you deeper

into what you're experiencing, experiencing what's happening. But if you try to, if you try to get rid of the superficial thinking too quickly, you're doing yourself a disservice, you know, because there's conversion there and some judgment. But rather than having a version for something, if you study it, and study the full ecology of that thinking, then you'll discover you don't even naturally find your way down. And it's kind of like the principle which I don't know. If I want to kind of make an absolute statement. It's kind of like a principle like believe that everything will lead you to the depths. Everything, everything has its roots in our depths of our being, so that no matter how superficial it might seem, it is a way of connecting to it. It'll lead you to the depths, and it's leading to the depths you'll encounter these kinds of issues like your friend In a way to address your concern. So thank you very much