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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

This evening I'd like to talk about six Buddhist practices that are not so often talked about in western Theravada circles, Western Dharma circles, inside circles. They're called the six recollections. And they're kind of more like contemplations contemplative, where it's bringing to mind particular themes, and then contemplating or reflecting, recollecting these themes as a way of developing one's inner life. And the way that Buddhism has tended to come into the modern Western world has tend to come for people who not so interested in the religious side of Buddhism, and are interested in kind of a direct pointing, or direct kind of get to get to the point kind of approach. So though, get to the point, you know, people think that meditation is like the highest The best thing you could do. And so you know all the preliminary preparations for meditation, you know, that's not for me. I'll jump in to the deep end. And in Asia, in Thailand and Burma, often a meditation is considered something that you would get to eventually, after you've prepared yourself, and one of the primary preparations is to get your ethical life together. Now, if I offered a course here at IMC a five week six week introductory course on ethics, I suspect that I'd get considerably fewer people than we then would we get when I offer a five, six week class introduction to meditation because of people's interest, but ethics are very important part of the foundation for allows a person to really settle deeply have the kind of inner sense of goodness and, and, and relaxation that allows for the deeper practice of meditation. And so there's a series of practices they have in Asia that tend not to be focused on in the West. And so the six recollections are one of these. So they're avoided partly because they're more religious seemingly. And partly because they CCN is kind of extra not really to the heart of the matter, the important thing we want to get to the important thing. And also, perhaps they're not focused on so much here in the West, because many of us who are interested in Dharma and practice here in the West intend to have kind of intellectual bent, that kind of or, you know, like to read books or Now listen to talks, ideas, the ideas seem really great. And perhaps it makes some sense to culture for whom Buddhism is a new, something new for them, that the idea is is the entryway into Buddhism, the idea of faith that wouldn't be an entryway because it takes a lot of familiarity to have faith in some of the sacred concepts that Buddhism has to offer. And so you know, if you just stumbling into it somehow, you know, it's hard to have that faith. So the sacred recollections are six contemplations around these themes. The Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, virtue, generosity. And devis gods. And one of the ways of thinking about these six recollections is that first, when the Buddha kind of suggested these, I haven't gone back and actually read carefully all the places where he suggests this, but you might want to keep in mind that this is a practice of the Buddha recommended, but perhaps he recommended it to particular people. So that these were suitable for certain people, maybe not for everybody. And so these might not be suitable for you. All of you, maybe for some of you, or maybe suitable for some of you at some times. So for example, sometimes these six recollections are some of them are given when a person gets close to death. Sometimes when you're dying, it's hard to you know, meditate in the usual way. can't sit up straight. It's hard to focus and concentrate the mind.

But what is it that gets your attention and holds your attention and important and useful way when you're approaching death when there's a crisis or something. And so the sixth recollection sometimes can do that for people, especially if you're familiar with these themes. I like to think of these for myself, I think of these 60 themes as speaking to the heart, that they touch the heart, rather than being the intellectual side of Buddhism. Rather than being about you know, using your mind to focus and get attentive or being the present moment or try to, you know, maneuver your way through life. Their ways of somehow opening up the heart or softening the heart or settling the heart. It's maybe perhaps a way of, you know, I don't know if love is the right expression that comes through with devotion or faith or the heartfelt qualities. And for some people, the opening the path of the heart is much more powerful than the path of the mind. And the Buddha when he talked about these six recollections, he didn't say they were about the heart, but that's my idea. But he did talk about how these ideas these recollections can lead a person to the first stage first stream enter the first stage of awakening of freedom. When I was introduced to Vipassana in Asia, the whole focus there in the meditation retreats, was was to reach the first stage of awakening. But it was all kind of understood you do it through meditation. But if you go back and look at the suttas that what the Buddha talked about? The first stage of awakening was reached when there's a very significant unshakable faith that's established in a person, unshakable faith. In the practice unshakeable faith in the path unshakable faith in the people who teach the path or the teachings that come with the path. But that unshakable, unshakable shakableness is not just a light thing, it's a kind of radical transformation of the heart of the mind. So that we're orient our life now in a new way. And the way we used to oriented which maybe wasn't so useful. So the first stage of you know, awakening this radical reorientation, and it said that these six recollections can create in a person that radical reorientation, that radical transformation. And so when I think of the these things, I think of them as, for me, at least, you know, they speak to the heart. And in speaking to the heart, maybe it's kind of like mirror neurons, you know, that or the empathy the way you know, that we have other ways of understanding, then through words and ideas and the mind thinking out and thinking that there's ways of understanding that are, you know, more emotionally based or more they resonate with the body or resonate with the emotional centers in our body. And it isn't that you know, it just just emotional. It isn't that those places are unreliable, they might be very reliable if they resonate with the right place in us. If the resonates with that possibility we have for inner purity, possibility we have inside for inner peace, inner subtleness and relaxation. That place inside that resonates with a place inside where we put down the burdens we carry in our lives. The burdens you know, all kinds of anxiety and fears and family dramas and concerns about the future and past grievances and there's so much burdens people carry and so sometimes you can see something or something something in the world can resonate. And you can feel, yeah, I can, I can drop those burdens. I can see that piece I can feel it. When I went to practice in Japan, I would go visit a lot of the Buddha because Japan is a Buddhist countries, there's a lot of Buddhist statues everywhere. So I spend a lot of time looking at Buddha statues. And I found for me that some some of these statues were dead, had nothing, no nothing, no lightness to it, like any art right that had no art, some of them some, some art maybe, but some of it spoke to me. And usually when a Buddha statue spoke to me or resonated with something, it was I usually my eyes didn't fall on the face of the Buddha, but on the chest.

And I think because of my breath and meditation, so there was something about the chest that that somehow came that brought alive or resonated with what I felt With when I'm deeply connected and settled on breathing when I sit and meditate, or I went to a Japanese and Kyoto I went to die takuji they have a sub temple there, the small sub temple that had very small, these rock gardens and rock gardens. And the distance was maybe from I don't know, it was pretty small. Maybe it was only about four or five feet wide, and I don't know 20 to 25 feet long. And you go to his little temple and you come out on a little porch deck. And, and you and I came out there to look down the garden, and the garden

was made. And we made five 600 years earlier. So it's a really long, they rake it every day. But the garden itself was ancient. And there were these big rocks that unmovable rocket had been placed in different locations and then around those big rocks spread out here and there. They had raked around You know, and I was stunned when I sat and looked at this at this and I was so moved by it, that I sat down and just spend up I don't know how long, considerable time, half an hour maybe or something, just looking and meditating on this art this I saw there, because what I couldn't believe, was an artist with rocks and gravel 400 years ago, had captured my breath and meditation. It's such an ephemeral thing, my breath, you know as to how I feel the feeling I had when I was concentrated and settled in with my breathing was expressed in that rock garden. So you know, so it's hard to believe. It's still hard to believe in telling you how could that be, but I was so and then I got up and I've somewhere I saw a plaque. And on the plaque had the title of the art to the garden and the title was in brown. And outbreath. So the idea that some things resonate with us. And some people, perhaps the resonate things, some things resonate more than others. Perhaps some people have different mechanisms or ways in which they learn and know and understand. Some people is more through words and ideas, some people more through images, some people may be more kinesthetically through their body. So maybe it's just some differences also from concrete between people. I think all most people I think, have some sense that some things sometimes some some things speak to their hearts. So these six recollections so the first one is to recollect the Buddha. And now, I think that for someone coming off the street and never heard of the Buddha, perhaps it's not going to mean much. But for me, having done being around Buddhism for a long time, and more importantly, having practice for a long time when I concept Like the Buddha, I refer back quite automatically to some of the deepest experiences of peace, of purity of well being of joy that I've experienced. And I don't know, I don't think it's, you know, I've reached the end of where the fullness of what that's possible. But when I read about the Buddha when I read what he accomplished, the teachings that he put together what he came to understand, and the more I studied them, and the more I practice myself, the more I made I am, how much this one person discovered. It's quite remarkable, and how much this one person discovered and was able to systematize it and put it together in such a way that it was able to pass it on into the future. And he was able to understand something which in my Western Turn rational, if it is rational mind makes so much sense. It's remarkable that he that he was able to present a path of transformation a path of finding peace in life that has no or virtually no supernatural elements, supernatural beliefs, that this this particular rational atheist is got, you know, speaks to is meaningful and is moving and has moved me and to read a little bit the accounts of his life, how

he lived his life, how is a person who chose to walk away from security to walk away from the The, you know, the career expectations that people had for him the expectations that his family had for him. The some people are troubled that he walked away from his family from his own family, his own child. And that's a whole topic in itself. But he did, at some point when his son was six, seven, become the primary parent, for a son. So it was a temporary stepping away from his family and,

and then to be willing to live a life of this radical simplicity. And so it speaks to me at least in my heart, someone who is at home, in themselves at home in this world at peace in life. That's very, very Simple. That's from very connected to nature. The, you know, he's been many of Metrobus time living in the woods. It seems like it wasn't necessarily wild woods. There's often grows woods that were on the edge of towns, Mudville, it's pretty nice to live in parks and groves and woods and live on the base of trees and it's beautiful, but also represents kind of simplicity, you know how simple it can be, to be a human being, how simple it is to find peace and well being. You don't need you know, you don't need a lot of stuff to be happy. You don't need a lot of activities to be happy. And many people I'm sure you're familiar with people here in the West, who have gotten the contagious bug, of doing and acquiring as much as possible and staying busy and you know, the frenetic Everything, and always staying

connected. And so for the Buddha, what touches my heart is this person who experienced a peace, a joy. That's certainly greater than I've experienced so far. But did it in a way that felt very attuned to a simple life in nature, simple life of being human being sitting on the earth sitting in this planet, and then had the care and made the effort to offer his teachings to many, many, many people. for 45 years, he walked around his area of India, and he spent a tremendous amount of time being available to people. It doesn't seem if you go back in the sutras, it doesn't seem like he spent a lot of time self consciously teaching. It doesn't seem like he spent a lot of time you know, writing down notes. Dharma talk. But he was just available and he run into people and he would have conversations with people and in those conversations, the Dharma was transmitted, the teachings transmitted. And this idea of being available and teaching and helping other people's touches my heart that someone would do that. And so for me, when I recollect the Buddha, it's it does something to me, that makes that certainly is comforting, but settles me that relaxes me that makes me feel Yes. Can be Yes, yes. For this life. Yes. for being here. Yes, there's a way of being Yes, for me too. If I get caught up in all kinds of concerns, it's reminder. It's so simple here. And then recollection of the Dharma. And the Dharma is sometimes said, the Dharma is visible here. And now, this little phrase, the Dharma is visible here now. And so, in what way? Is it visible here? Now? I like it that it is visible here now because it's not esoteric, it's not hidden. It's not something that you know it's in some secret place or, but it's something you can see directly. So in what way can you see the Dharma? directly? The answer to that question is given by the Buddha said, you see that you can see the Dharma directly. When you experience for yourself, the absence of greed, hate and delusion. That's where the Dharma is found. It's apparent here now. And it's also said the Dharma is invites inspection. So rather than the Dharma being an obligation, that thou shalt learn Dharma live by the Dharma, the Dharma Is Dharma doesn't care what you do. Except there's an imitation there's that you can come and check it out and find out if it's valuable for you. And for me, it speaks very much to my heart, that there's no obligation. There's no, there's no there's this heavy kind of religious tone to Buddhism that overlays that elevating, say that, you know, in order to be a good person or a worthy person or a right person or something. You have to follow Buddhism, you have to be religious in some way. Buddhism, as I see it, there is no one in because there's no God in Buddhism. There's no overarching paternal figure

to judge you. And so, the Dharma leaves you free. And to me that's very meaningful that the Dharma leaves you free. And what do you do with that freedom? They're done. My does say come and look at him look more deeply, but doesn't say come and look more deeply at books or strange, unusual teachings of religion, that hard to believe. But it has come and look at how your own heart and mind works. Read, read the book in your heart, read the book in yourself and see what's in there. It's where the truths are found. And it's not so esoteric. It's not so strange. It's not so complex, what Buddhism is talking about. It's talking about the simplicity of not clinging, not grasping, not contracting. It's not easy to let go of the clinging and to open up with the Dharma is something that's it eminently available to you here now. It's available here. That's the Dharma. And for me, that speaks to my heart. It's inspires me, it moves me, I'm in love with that dharma. It's even when I can't practice it, I can't quite do it. Sometimes I don't think I understand it. And, but I'm so inspired this darm eyes, you know, it's really a simple, direct and immediate, practical available thing here in the heart, in ourselves. And so when I know that I'm reminded of that, something inside me settles, relax. Something inside of me kind of falls away. There's a kind of a warmth and delight and joy that I feel with that. And then there's the third one is the recollection of the Sangha. And there's one place where that's described Have one sutta where the Buddha is talking to one particular person. We instead of talking about the Sangha, he says it's the recollection of your good friends. Those people who have your best your welfare in mind that there are people who care about you. So for people who have, you know, good friends, it's good to remember them and to let that resonate in your heart, open your heart to your friends. But also the Sangha can also mean the good friends that you have, that you practice with. Whether you're actually you know,

conventionally good friends or not, I have a lot of people who you know, as I practice over the last 35 years, who I never became good friends with, I never would have chosen to have been friends with them. But we shared the space together, we practice together, we were in the meditation house together, they sat next to me in the hall. We work together in the monasteries, and, you know, our hearts open to each other in that life. And, and this kind of feeling of feeling this heartfelt openness and connection to people who share the practice with, it has been very, very meaningful for me. It's also been very meaningful to me, they've had teachers, to have teachers, and to have people who have been examples and models of what is possible, and doing this practice and people who develop their integrity, and you can feel that these are people you can trust people who develop their ability to be present, and you can feel their ability to really meet you, or really be present in this life and they're not distracted and scattered to a few people who have a depth of kindness or compassion. And you can feel the strength of that as it develops and the field people who you feel There's no pretense there's no conceit that they're wrapped up and they're not trying to prove themselves or show themselves to anybody. They're just happy and contented and without needing to win Buddhism we call wave the flag of conceit. They're just present. You can feel this kind of simplicity and joy and peace there is a variety of ways in which people can manifest their spiritual maturity. It's been very meaningful for me to be around people like that. And something happens in my heart, I'm around them again this relaxation, the subtleness feeling at home, this love, this delight that happens. The fourth recollection, is to spend time recollection recollecting generosity

and knowing what the fourth one is integrity, or virtue, sila and, and ideally, you're recollecting your own if it's worth recollecting And that you would start, and Buddhism puts a big emphasis on, it's very good to act in ethical ways. Many people I've noticed in the West don't give themselves much credit for acting ethically, because there's so much inner turmoil, that somehow they've internalized this idea that they're fundamentally wrong. And doesn't matter what you do, because you're kind of you were you were wrong before you ever did anything. And so, but then a Buddhist point of view is somebody you take you take inspiration and delight from the times you have lead with integrity. nourish yourself with that. Don't waste a lot of time undermining yourself by getting caught up in all the ways you've had lack of integrity. Focus on your lack of money. Integrity, just enough to learn from it to do better, but not enough to let it weigh you down. And you can be nourished by your integrity. I know when I went to Thailand the first time to practice I said, along Vipassana retreats and before that time if I wasn't so conscious about ethics and it wasn't a big deal for me and you know, if so I'm gonna act st but the importance of ethics. I think my attitude was one that people are ethical are kind of like Goody goodies or something or it's kind of petty or kind of trite, or, you know, it's you know, I didn't have a lot of respect for it. And I wasn't, you know, really unethical. Also, I think mostly because I think of because of lack of imagination. So I was, I was, you know, saved by my lack of imagination. But you know, it wasn't. So I didn't I didn't think. But when it's for that first retreat, long retreat that I sat, I experienced a degree of inner purity that I'd never had before. And it brought me a lot of joy to feel this inside. And then I understood why people can feel joy and delight, and be nourished by their integrity, by their inner purity, by their ability not to be pushed around by greed, hate and delusion and deceit and all these things. And so, too, to be nourished by your own integrity, and sometimes in Buddhism, I mean, there was one story where a murder the Buddha was, sometimes you said, it doesn't matter. All the times he did something bad in the past. It matters that from a certain date you decided From now on, I'm not going to anymore. So, then to be nourished by the by the, by the integrity from that date because it counts for a lot. So, one of the beautiful places to feel integrity is on meditation retreats as a teacher, I am so moved by how much people try to be honest kind, how much they try and retreats to have to act the best and best of what a person is comes out on retreats, I think partly because the function of retreats meditation retreats is not to get pushed around by your reactivity not to be caught by your caught by your quietness by your greed or your hate or your you know, desires. And if you're not if you're if you're trying not to be caught

by your activity, you're going to be ethical, because unethical activities are an expression of having been caught by something. So as people try not to be caught it the best People come out. And I've had people it's beautiful on retreat, where I have an interview with someone. And we're having a discussion about their practice what's going on and, and then they'll later in the day, they'll send me a note or they'll come to me as I have to talk to you. Or have, because I need to apologize. Because I didn't tell you the truth. I said, Oh, why don't you tell me what was what? And it'll be usually something very small. You know, they'll, I don't know what they'll say. They'll say, you know, I don't know. But they usually you know, in conventional world you wouldn't think was such a big deal because eventually people exaggerate all the time. But on retreat, people are so sensitive to that. And so they sit there feel off,

it's off the fact that they exaggerated or they didn't quite get it right. And so they want to come and I don't exactly feel a need for that. They apologize usually. But it's so beautiful. I'm so moved, that that's what they want to do. They want to make amends. They want to clean the slate. They want to You know, clean clean, the air starts over in a sense. It doesn't take much to reflect on how much better place the world would be if people were just a little bit more ethical overall. It's a beautiful quality to be a person that no one has to be afraid of. to go through the world and not be a source of fear for anybody. And if you can't be delighted in your own ethical integrity, then the ethical integrity of other people can be a source of delight, source of joy source of love, can be very meaningful and are just the abstract idea. Yes, human beings do have the capacity sometimes. And that corner of the heart that can be ethical is really beautiful. And to be inspired by that is meaningful. So the fifth one is generosity, and to be inspired or to recollect generosity, and here also, it's said to recollect your own generosity. So to recollect your own generosity, it helps if you were generous. So they say it's good to practice generosity, and it has a lot of benefits to you. Perhaps the benefits are more to you than to the person you give things to. But to be generous in all kinds of ways, and just with your time and your smiles and your questions, how are you and things like that many ways of being generous. But the word for generosity is Chugga. And chug also means relinquishment. And it's many people have kind of strange that the word for generosity also means relinquishment. But the idea here About this kind of generosity is generosity that's not just kind of giving half heartedly, but it's giving Will you give yourself wholeheartedly, or you give completely freely of yourself Here, take this have this. There's no strings attached. There's no reluctance, just hear. And so that there's a relinquishment of any kind of any ways in which the gift that's given and relinquishment of any way in which the gift is not completely freely given, handed over openly. And that that is a beautiful thing to feel something offered and offered so freely and completely. Nothing is asked in return, it's complete here to clean again, that first retreat that I sat in Thailand, there was a very meaningful moment, a few moments there. I was given a small cookie, a small meditation at the edge of the monastery kind of far away from videos. And it was on top of, I think it was, I think was more or less dried out then but kind of on top of a swamp. And there was a long plank of wood that went on top of the swamp that, you know, didn't sink. But to kind of that up to the cootie and the steps up to there. This is what I had on there wasn't on stilts. And every morning early in the morning, the monks of the monastery go out for their alms rounds. And they would come back with a lot of food for the monastery more than they could eat to cheer for the other people in the monastery including me. At the meal at 10 o'clock, we don't have one meal at 10 o'clock. But I wasn't a monk, so I wouldn't go out for the alms round. I would just stay in my little quickie, little hut and meditate. And so there was meditating early in the morning inside. And after meditating for some time, I decided to get up, maybe do walking meditation outdoors and so I got up quietly and I opened my door and on the front of the port the little hut had a little porch to these little steps coming. There's this long, long series of planks of wood that went across this wet sore, swampy kind of area. And then it came up this flight of four or five steps in this porch, covered porch, and then this little one room, little hut that I lived in. And so I opened the door. And on the top of the steps, was an apple and some cookies or crackers or a little bit of you know, snack food.

I saw it there. And then I looked up further and farther into this long plank or woods. There was a monk who was walking away. And what struck me immediately was that the monk did not know I was going to open the door at that moment. And he had left his treats for me as gifts to me without any expectation that I'd ever know who he was. And that surprised me being young and naive and whatever. Wow, why would someone do that? And, and I was so inspired by that little act of freely given generosity. You know, it's moved me and down through time over my adult life of practicing the Dharma. I am deeply, deeply moved, you know, in ways that helped me to trust life trust, letting go trust, the practice of Dharma by all the many people who have offered their support to me into other people to practice. When I went to Asia to practice, I when I was in Burma, I felt like it was just as it would blow you away. blew me away. how amazingly generous. The poor Burmese were for us Westerners who are practicing there. There's a kind of story that I think someone says I forget. Some English person writing about Burma wrote kind of a travel account from, I don't know, good number of years ago. He said he didn't realize that he was that he would had he had eaten at someone's private home until they asked for the bill. Somehow he thought there was a restaurant maybe because they had tables on a porch outside or something. And they came in to serve them. And that kind of believed that the way the Burmese are tremendously generous and supportive. And when I was in Burma, I knew that no matter what I actually needed, not what I wanted, but what actually needed if in order to be practiced, there would be provided for me by the whole country. The best you know that the doctors would come and see me in the monastery if I was sick. a dentist came to see me because my feeling fell out. And I and he came to look at me and treat me. Never any requests for money at all. clothes, food, whatever we needed was provided freely. And the same thing in Japan. Same thing in Thailand. And same thing in this country. There's a tremendous amount of support that I received from so many people. And it's very, very moving for me to feel certainly people's support, but and how freely was given, but also how it represented or helped me trust. The practice of the Dharma helped me to trust that I could let go and devote myself and commit myself to the degree to which I did. So my life, you know, my adult life has been, you know, I feel like you know, so much of what I've done in my life I've been able to do because of people's generosity. I live in a world of generosity, and it moves me and inspires me and this feeling of love and delight in this whole world that I live in, as you know, blossomed into a great degree because of this experience of generosity that I've had. And then the last of the recollections is the recollections in the DevOps and the gods. Now, this is one that doesn't do much for me. So I'm not sure what to say but when I try to make it do something for me, I this is what I come to maybe some of you have a different approach. First, the idea in Buddhism is that in order to become a devotee, You have to have a very high degree of ethical purity. And you have to be probability to pretty generous life. You can't be you can end up you can end up as a god if you're miserly, and you can't get reborn as a God, if you are unethical. And so, recollection of the gods is kind of recollecting, recollecting, the great joy and happiness, which is available in the next life, if you live these ethical ways, these good ways.

So that's nice, but you know, I still don't believe in it. So it's hard to hard to be inspired by it. But what I see for me, right, the best I can do with these demos, is I see them as being symbolic. representative of the unseen world of goodness, the unseen world world of integrity, the unseen world of what the way That generosity and love and kindness operate in our world, the devil is we can't see. But there's ways in which the goodness that we live by somehow travels and unseen ways in this world around us. And, you know, I don't always understand how it's going, how it's working. But I've many times felt and scenes been surprised by the different ways that goodness travels, it comes back and circles and goes around and around. And so this unseen world is what the devices represent. And to be inspired by that to kind of relax and just be settled. So, the six recollections can be meaningful and nourishing for people. But there's more than just nourishing. There's, there's what the what the Buddhist is saying is there's a way of taking these in, I would say, take it into your heart, I would resonate with some inside of

you, maybe something you already know if you recognize something in them, it is another foreign to who you are. But they somehow they're there they reflect or mirror, something that's true for you inside of yourself. And there's some way of opening the heart, taking it in being informed in this deep inner way that can allow something to shift inside of you, which is radical. That brings you to a whole new way of living your life. A life that's not based on fear, a life that's not based on greed, lies not based on cultural expectations, familial expectations, but is based on these beautiful qualities a beautiful possibility of freedom, of liberation of profound peace and joy and well being. The simplicity of being costing nothing less than everything, as TS Eliot said, so

maybe for some of you, these six recollections are interesting. And the nice things about them is you can do it anytime. You know, you can be sitting in traffic waiting for the traffic to moving. It might be better than some of the things you do. And, and don't underestimate the value of these things in times of crisis. Or a times when you're going to die. Maybe you won't have access to your breath. Maybe you only have access to see where you're clinging when you're holding on to when you're dying. Perhaps you can remember this and in the remembering something thoughts Something we can relax, something can settle and let go. And if this talk tonight made no sense to you, or if it made sense but your don't like it too religious then you can leave it here with me. I'm happy to keep it here. Thank you