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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Mindfulness, and I guess Dharma in a secular way into San Quentin into state prisons. It's a remarkable man. He's given a few talks here before and I think a number of people feel like they're the most most moving talks ever given here at our center, quite powerful. And he sometimes he comes with some of his men. He comes with some to give his talks together with some of his, the men who have been released with San Quentin have gone through this program that have been transformed in the process, and it's quite remarkable to meet these people. So he's coming on next Sunday. And it's and then he's coming back again in, I guess, about two weeks later, on Saturday, the 20th. We've offered our building our Center for him for his in his organization is an organization called inside out which is Kind of what supports his activities is now kind of expanding his work beyond San Quentin into the other prisons in the state, very actively involved and he remarkably has the ear of all the wardens in the state of California. So that's something and he's met with all of them as a group a few couple of times. And, and, and so he's training people to go into the prisons. He's also involved with setting up programs for, for people, men who are on parole. So we offered a building here as a benefit for him for his organization. And he's put together what I think is going to be a phenomenal day that he and some of his men that he has trained, real come San Quentin people come here and offer a taste of how mindfulness practice can be applied and used in a situation where it needs to work. You know, it has to have it has to have results in a way that, you know, some people you know, should we have results for all of us but some of us can take our time. And, and then apparently he's going to also going to bring in the afternoon, members of Vegas now Former members, I don't know members of the San quad San Quentin choir and to a bigger city, so it's going to be quite an event. And so it's a benefit. And so there's a suggested donation as part of it. I'd like to see it be very successful. I want to support Jacques, that if you know of anybody who would make sense to invite encouraged to come anybody who's remotely interested in this topic of, of prison or jail, practice Dharma, anybody who is living in prison in their of their own minds. I think it should be quite involved. Also part of this Also to address some of the issues around violence. Any of you any of you have been touched by violence, this is a apparently can be quite a meaningful time to look at this. So this is a 20th of June. And then before that on the 13th of June, the week before or July, so 20th of July, the week before that, the 13th of July. Diana Clarke and I are going to do a Sati center kind of study day on the sukha study day, looking at three discourses of the Buddha in a nice way. I think some of you who like that kind of study are welcome to come. Okay.

So, what I'd like to talk about today is one of the core teachings of Buddhism. That is shared by almost all schools of Buddhism. So it's nice to know what we have in common with other Buddhists. And this is a teaching principle, that is called, sometimes called an English dependent arising, conditioned arising dependent co arising comes up in different words, different terms. The Pali word is per teacher summer pada. And, it can be seen as the first principle, or the beginning principle out of which Buddhism

Buddhist teachings and practice arise. And as such, you can see be seen as an obstruction as a general obstruction or principle. And sometimes it's useful though to begin with abstractions, its principles as a background and then learn how to apply them in our lives to see how they apply in the moment, their relevance in the actual experience of our life. And really the test of principles, the test of general teachings is not in the generalities. It's easy to debate, the philosophy of it, but rather the test is, is it applicable in the moment to moment experience, here and now. So, you know, I offer it as a kind of a first principle of Buddhism, as opposed to what in some religions start maybe with the first cause? And, and so that what's the, you know, the origin of the universe, God created all that stuff at the beginning. Buddhism doesn't begin with a first cause with a cosmic beginning of it all, but rather begins with a principle that is meant to address a particular issue. And so we could say the more central than the first principle is the first problem that Buddhism tries to address. And the first problem or that is that of suffering. suffering. The word dukkha is a very broad term, maybe sufferings, not even the best translation of the word dukkha. Some people translate as Stress, Stress some people as unsatisfactoriness. One Zen teacher translated as anguish, but somehow God that the suffering is kind of a problem that we want to address. And so that in addressing that problem, we have to have some way in some place to begin our explorations. And the suggestion for in Buddhism is we begin with this principle of dependent arising. It's an unusual pensive place to begin for many people in the West. Because I've encountered many people who grew up in the kind of Judeo Christian mindset even if they don't feel like they're belong to those religions. the orientation for religion often In the West is so strongly focused on a relationship, that something external to oneself, there's a relationship to God, there's a relationship to, to heaven to hell. Somehow the, the, the focus on the external relationship is so strong, that sometimes when I've tried to have kind of dialogues with people of other religions, they're perplexed by my presentation of Buddhism. It just doesn't make any sense that that's where it's about. Because Buddhism doesn't posit something that the primary function or place or activity of religious life is in a relationship to a deity, relationship to something external, out there something transcendent, some, some heavenly realm that you hope to get born in or a hell realm you try to avoid. And so it's it's kind of what is Buddhism then if it doesn't have that mean? It can really be a religion and more deeply for some you If they don't, people don't believe in heaven, hell or god, there's such a strong conditioning that religion has to do with a relationship to something outside. And, and so some people then will posit that there's some kind of benign love or benign force in the universe that we relate to that relates to us, because of this need to have something, you know, some explanation, some connection to something.

I'm not saying anything wrong with this, or I'm not one I don't want to be criticize these things. It just makes it hard when that kind of orientation to understand what Buddhism is trying to teach. And that Buddhism in focusing on this first principle of dependent co arising is really pointing the finger back to us. And so, if there is a first cause, it's with us in us not the first cause of the universe, but the first cause, or the or the origin of the problem, which is suffering. If we will, if we have Relationship model to try to understand our suffering, then we'll look outside of ourselves for solution. There's out there there's a, there's a, for example, in a theistic religion, it has to do with your relationship to God or Gods, that somehow we have to get that relationship set just right. And then somehow in that having that relationship, right, the problems of human life are settled and taken care of. If, if it's not a matter of, you know, God, it might be some external reality or cosmic principle out there. They want to figure out and learn and tune into. And for some people they focus on meditation would be, to use meditation to altered states of meditation, in order to have a relationship or to tune into or tap into some larger reality, transcendent reality. In this world, kind of outside it which is outside of ourselves, which will take care of ourselves. We just kind of tap into Everything will be okay. If we have this tap into this larger thing. But I think the teaching of dependent origination because it keeps these keep pointing back to us. Buddhism has this tremendous of these fingers, not pointing at the moon, as they say in zen, but rather always

pointing back to us to understand ourselves understand how we function, what goes on for us how our contribution to our own suffering, not because Buddhism is meant to be selfish, or to be self focused, but rather because by turning the attention inward, selfishness gets dissolved. Returning is focused inward, there's a range we go in, in order to be able to go out again, and connect to the wider world without some of the attachments and clinging and problems that we just bring with us when we go and engage in the world around us. So the pit dependent co arising, there's a story that the tradition gives that cut it to emphasize the importance of this. The two primary disciples of the Buddha were amongst by the name of Sariputta, and Mahā Moggallāna. And the story is has to do with how they discovered the Dharma, or they woke up. And the story starts with saying that they grew up as friends and neighboring from neighboring villages, so they knew each other growing up, they were Brahmins, which means that they were kind of the priests class of the time, which also meant that they were probably much more educated than most people. Because probably the fun part of what Brahmins do is they grew up being educated in the brahmanical lore in the texts, the so called science of the times, the knowledge is at the time and as such, they both grew up and became adults and well respected and in fact had some students of their own. And then every year in their, their villages in their part of the country, there was a festival, a three day festival called the hilltop festival. And they were given nice seats at the festival to watch the festivities. And they enjoyed themselves the first two days of the festivities. And then came the third day. And perhaps after three, two days of partying, the third day of watching it all and being it, maybe the kind of their, you know, they were ready their mind to see it in a different way. And they're watching it and occurred to sorry, Quinta, kind of fleetingly, in his mind, somehow he was reminded or see or woke to the mortality of life. can maybe imagine watching people partying, you know, wild way in a festival, that it's nice, but what's the juxtaposition of that with the fact that some of those people Probably in the festival are going to be dead before next year. Some of them may be sooner than that. And all of us can be dead sooner or later. From time to time, people will encounter the topic of mortality.

And it right it causes certain poignancy in their life and they look at what they're doing their life from a different perspective. Is it really relevant what they're doing is it valuable is important. Sometimes this can happen really close to death, where things that seem important and other times start losing their value and they don't seem as important anymore. And sometimes it can happen in the, in the, in one's youth, where something dramatic kind of wakes one up to this mortality. So this kind of happened somehow this happened to these two men. And they looked at each other kind of and they both kind of had the same thought at the same time instead of what's going on with you. You don't look so happy or so involved anymore in the festivities. And they shared what was happening to them. And they said yes, in, in the, in the context of the fact that within 100 years, all of us, everyone here is going to be dead. Maybe we should pursue something different than partying. And perhaps we can search for liberation. So they set off and wandered around. And they discovered found a spiritual teacher, an aesthetic who they joined his group and engaged in his practices. And so these are serious people that are well trained in the spiritual law of their time they engaged in serious practice and teachers of their time. And they came to a point practicing with this their teacher, that they had kind of mastered what he had to teach during his practices. And they asked him Is this all you have? And he said, yeah, this is all I have. You got it. And I said, well, that we are still not liberated. This is not enough for us. So we'll go off. And so they went off wandering. And they ran in, within, like six months of after the Buddha's enlightenment. They ran into one of the first five monks enlightened under the Buddha. And he ran into him. And one of them sorry, oh, they made a pact. They said, they went off separately said, Whoever discovers that wakening first comes in, finds the other one and tells him so sorry, put that into this monk and, and was impressed by this monks calm, his demeanor, the radiance of his face. There was something about his serenity and brightness that he had never seen in a person before. And so sorry, you know, who is your teacher? And what are your teachings who what's going on with you? And the man said, Well, I'm the

teacher. I'm a student and disciple of the Buddha. Sariputta said, what's his teachings? And the man said, Well, I'm just recently involved with the Buddha. And it's a profound teaching, but I, you know, I don't really understand well enough to explain it to you. And Sariputta said, Well, I'm pretty smart. And he said exactly that way. It's in modern English, colloquial way of saying it's translating. But you know, I'm capable and why don't you just offer me because you see what you understand in some kind of in short summary, and I'll fill it in or I'll try to understand it there. So the monk said to sorry, put up the things that have a cause. My teacher teaches the cause. The things that have a cause my teacher teaches the system Have that cause. That's the teachings of the Buddha. And with that, sorry Buddha attained what's called the Dharma I, his first glimpse of awakening.

So, probably didn't happen to any of you listening to that. You probably probably a majority of you, except for the few of you, maybe the majority of you are probably you know, what, how is this important? are the things that have a cause? That Buddha teaches the cause of the things that have a cause that Buddha teaches the cessation of the cause? This is his teachings. What's that about? So, this has to do with his speech, this is teaching of dependent origination, conditioned arising that things certain things occur based on the pre existence of condition causes and conditions. Generally, it doesn't rain unless there's clouds. The clouds are the condition for the rain. And so we can point to many, many things in our lives, that there has to be some condition in place for something else to occur. If it's raining and the clouds go away quickly, chances are the rains gonna stop quickly as well. And the reason why the condition for the rain is the clouds have to be above you. And when the clouds move, it stops raining on you. They're no longer conditioners, they have to be above you, but you watch the rain go away down the street. The and so So, this teaching that dependent origination is summarized in a different way in the texts That goes something like this, with the arising of this, now with with the occurrence of this, that arises with the existence of this, that that exists as well with the seizing of this, that diseases as well. When this does not exist, that does not occur. So, with the push the analogy to great play but with the arising of rain of clouds with the appearance of clouds, rain can occur. When clouds exist, rain can happen with the seizing of the clouds. The rain seizes when the clouds don't exist. There is no rain. Now why this is the good news of Buddhism is when it's applied to suffering. When we realize that suffering has a cause, then we no longer see suffering as being inherently built into the structure of the universe. And you just have to kind of go along with it go along for the ride with your suffering. If it has a cause, then it might be possible to address that cause. If it has a condition for being there, it might be possible to remove that condition. And if you move the condition in the cause, then the suffering won't be there. So if you have a thorn in your foot, you could just continue walking on it and letting go and going and deeper and deeper. Or the condition for the pain that you have you see is the thorn And so you pull out the thorn. If you have a pain in your foot, you know, you have a thorn in the foot. But you don't see the connection between the pain and the thorn. Why would you bother that bending over and pulling it out? It wouldn't occur to you just go along and just, it's unfortunate you have this pain and that's the way it is. The Universe was built to have foot pain and, and I'll just keep walking with it. But that's silly, right? If you understand if you're most people, it's kind of obvious, you understand that the if you know that the sharp pain and your soul or your foot, you know, it's probably coming from something it's not supposed to be there you check you see authority and you pull it out. So with our psychological suffering, the idea is the same thing. And this is a difficult teaching to appreciate or to understand. And, and because sometimes human suffering is so great, and the conditions for our not just in ourselves, but rather the conditions for our suffering and the world around us. It can be put salt in the wound of people suffering, to say that you're responsible for your suffering. But this is actually the teachings of Buddhism. You're not responsible for all the conditions for your suffering. That's why it's good to tell people to stop doing what they're doing to you sometimes.,

But you're responsible for the cause. And the difference between the condition and the cause is the condition. There's many conditions that that might be in place, but those conditions don't necessarily translate to a result. The cause is that which is responsible for something arising. So, you know, to be apologize for using the same analogy poorly, but the clouds, right. Clouds are the condition for rain. But I don't know if clouds are the cause of the rain. Sometimes they they send up an airplane Salt the clouds, and then they somehow precipitation happens and it starts to rain. So somehow there has to be other atmospheric conditions or other things in place for the clouds to somehow translate into into rain. So the clouds are the condition for the rain but not necessarily a cause. Someone being unkind to you, being mean to you, doing something bad to you might be the condition for your suffering, but it's not the necessary condition for you to suffer as as the school yard you know, saying goes, sticks and bones can break my bones, but words can never touch me. So the words can be awful. But it's a wonderful time to talk back to the other kids. Say, that's not touching me like that, you know, you're calling me saying my mother wears army boots. You know? You know, I just thought that doesn't bother me. That just irritates the other kids right? Rather than being irritated yourself. You leave it with them. And then with a wonderful story, the Buddha did this. When he was the Buddha, it didn't say it that way. But someone came to him was angry with the Buddha. And but they, and when he came to the Buddha, to express his anger, the Buddha said to him, if someone comes to your home with a gift, and you refuse the gift, who then owns the gift? And the man said, Oh, in that case, I know the person who comes to give it still owns it, they still have it in their possession, to say it's not accepted. And the Buddha said in the same way, I don't accept your anger. It remains with you. Isn't that nice? And I suppose that story implies If you accept some, if you get angry in return when somebody gets angry at you or if you get upset or feel hurt, then you've accepted it. Is there such it? Do you have a role in that acceptance process? Or are you so focused on the other person's responsibility, blaming the other person that you don't see the small little step that has to take transferring step where we have to accept it, we have to react to it or to respond to it. That which is our responsibility. So, to apply this teaching of dependent origination, this abstraction abstract thing this and that, we have to begin looking at the details of our life. That's where the proof is. If we keep staying staying general, it's easy to come up with exceptions. It's easy to come up with doesn't quite work and these kinds of ways. It doesn't really work with the rains and clouds are to say that when rains when clouds exist, There is rain, right? That's pretty obvious, doesn't always exist. But so I shouldn't have used that analogy so. So you can kind of go into those kinds of lines of arguments just stay in the abstract. But the way that any teach spiritual teachings are useful for you, is not whether you get involved with questions of whether it's true or false. It's not so interesting if true or false, I propose. what's most interesting is is it useful for you? Does it help you in some way? And the way to discover that is to ask the question, in what circumstances is this helpful? So again, come back to the particular and then use your ability to be creative, think creatively, and ask yourself, where is it useful? For me, even the most outlandish, outlandish teachings might in some little teeny teeny little corner of your life, be useful and if you only say it's not useful, That's not true, you might not benefit from it.

But if you find that one little corner where it's beneficial, maybe, you know, you get more benefit. So the idea of this dependent origination is core teachings of Buddhism is to look, where's it useful in me? How can I apply it in my life? And if you remember that the first kind of principle of Buddhism, my guess is the, or the first problem is suffering. That's where we try to address it. How is this relevant to my suffering? And here we are back to ourselves, as opposed to looking scanning out into the cosmos, for a relationship with a cosmic principle or deity. So the Dhammapada begins, kind of the incense the first opening line of the Buddhist Bible. It begins by saying all that we experience is preceded by mind made by mind created by mind guided my mind by mind, that the mind is at the beginning of all this. So Buddhist, the tendency of Buddhism is to look into our own minds. So if we understand this dependent origination their mind, where do we look for understand suffering in our own minds? Where do we look? If we want to take responsibility for our suffering? Where do we look for that responsibility in ourselves?

And it has to do with our reactions and our responses. And so, and the good news, it's dependent origination is that we can do something about it. If we can understand the cause. For what brings about our suffering, then perhaps we can do something to eliminate that cost. And if we eliminate that cause and the suffering is not there. So what are some of the causes of suffering? There's an infinite variety of them the Buddhist tradition 10 to generalize, give a generalized answer rather than giving the list of 10,000 different examples. And that generalization falls into falls under the word of craving. That craving is the condition for suffering. And one of the ways of seeing that is that is a craving is an experience of compulsion compulsive desire that is unpleasant in and of itself. There's suffering just having it and the more you're aware and really feel it, rather than being caught up in what you want, and really feel that what it's like in your body and mind to be in this compulsive grip of craving. It just feels kind of yucky. It feels like you've lost your freedom. Buddhism talks about sometimes being caught in the grips of craving, as kind of like being in jail. You're not real you are being a slave. Because you're not really in charge if your compulsions are in charge doesn't feel good. And so in and of itself, it doesn't feel good. But craving has secondary problems. It can create tensions and great disappointments. It can create grief, it can create, it can be the source of anger of hostility, it can be a source of tremendous amount of secondary kind of suffering in our lives. And if we see that the starting point of suffering, and all its varieties, is in craving, then then in principle, at least we know that if that craving is no longer there, perhaps all the things that follow in its wake, won't be there as well. And so, the teachings dependent origination is to go back and look, where do you find the clinging the craving, that gives birth to the suffering? And so then there's an expanded teaching of dependent origination that many people know as that the principle that dependent co-arising, which is a 12 fold step 12. As your consumption referred to as a kind of chain of reactions that are the Genesis or the background for when we suffer, and I won't go through all of them. But one of the conditions that that is said to be the genesis of suffering is ignorance, that if you're suffer, there's something you don't understand. It's not nice. So that means that when you're suffer, I think what's appropriate is as a teeny bit of humility. Maybe I don't quite understand a little bit of healthy doubt. Maybe there's something I don't understand here. Sometimes suffering is made worse when we're actually absolutely convinced we understand. This is how it is, but maybe we don't understand. So ignorance is considered part of it. The Other a second kind of condition for the arising of suffering is our basic disposition.

The attitudes with which we go into the world with the attitudes with which we see the world and experience the world. It's called dispositions or mental formations. And this is so central to this whole enterprise in Buddhism, that then Buddhism says that, that basic that disposition, dispositions and attitudes you have, color, how you perceive the world, color, the quality of your consciousness, something as fundamental as how we're conscious of the world around us, is not an innocent thing, but rather something that's been conditioned by our dispositions. And then based on those how the conscious and perceptions are conditioned by ignorance and attitudes, that affects how we proceed, perceive touch, meet the world around us. How we meet it affects how we feel about it, and how we feel about it affects what we want to do about it. And what we want to do about it affects what we crave, cling to. And when we cling and crave, as then it gives birth to eventually to suffering those steps that lead to suffering. So, this is more obstruction, apologize. The idea is how do you find it here? The principle I said earlier is when that exists, this arises, I think this will be the words of that and this are very important. They're meant to be like the like the word this. Where's this? It's here, here not to take these ideas home that I'm saying and then consider them at home. But how are They true for you. Now, here at IMC listening to this talk, if you would now not just listen to what I'm trying to say, but also look at your mind. What's happening with you? What are the ideas? What are the attitudes? What's what what's available to you? What is the state of your being? what's what's it like to be present for you here and now? Are there ways in which you and so maybe hopefully Suttles subtle ways are suffering right

now? uncomfortable right now. And if you are and you're spending your time looking at your watch, think when's this guy gonna stop talking?

Then you're missing an opportunity and The opportunity is to take responsibility for your discomfort for your impatience for whatever is going on your and what what do you what do you have to turn towards and look inside of you? What do you have to find? So you can release something, relax something. And so you hear more fully in this moment now. And if you're not suffering, which I hope none of you are what is it? If you if you stay here in the particulars of this life and being awake and present here and now if you feel like being here now is a value. What's it like for you to be awake, to be alert, to be conscious right now? What's experience like for you? It's not about a transcendent reality is not about a transcendent experience. It's not about having a relationship to something external. But it's about the lived experience right now the taste of what it's like to be alive now being conscious now. What's that tastes like for you? What is it feeling like? And perhaps, to give you a little taste maybe or little kind of give you something to maybe can point to the poignancy of what's available here now just being present. I'll tell you a little bit of and I think I feel like I it's important to tell some of you that Some of you know that Victor Medina, who has been part of our community for many years, very big time, participant in our community is right now dying. He's been dying for over two years. He has. He's one of the wonderful people who flunked out of hospice already once. But now he's back in hospice. And they suspect that he's probably going to die in the next couple of days. Very soon, he's trying to start to stay alive long enough for his daughter to come back from abroad. And she's supposed to arrive at the airport around 11 o'clock this morning. And so I've been visiting him this last week and talking with him and he's a happy and peaceful man. And you go into his house is home. And there's an atmosphere in that house right now. of calm of peace and of love. It's quite something to go in there if you like. Think you know that he has the he has a fortune of dying slowly so that there's been a lot of time for his family to gather and be and just be and there's nothing, not much to do. So, you know, people, some of the people, some of their doing their life, they do them in the normal things of their life that they do and they're also not doing much and just hanging out.

And so yesterday I was sitting with Victor talking and we were talking about the poignancy of this moment. And the idea that for him this small had been one of the one of the important things that he's learned from doing us practice mindfulness Buddhism is the refuge, the meaningfulness, the importance of being present in the moment as the moment occurs. And now as he's dying, this is what's supporting him supporting his family and everyone, just to be here for this moment. And in this moment, there is no time. At this moment, there's something that people sometimes Your sense of the timelessness of this moment. And for Victor, he feels his timelessness. There is no time. And he talked about how time is a concept, future, the past our ideas, and he's learned not to get pulled into the world of ideas and concepts. But to stay present in this moment, for itself an open, receptive, willingness, just stay in the moment come back to the moment. concepts are useful and important part of our lives. From a certain perspective, the stories we tell the ideas we live by the concepts that we try to apply to the world are kind of like it's kind of like trying to paint with watercolors on a moving river. Isn't that something that says something about concepts and about this moment? Really in the moment, the concepts but what is not what was not a concept for Victor is that is the certainly his physical discomfort which he feels from time to time. He talks about it's quite something to talk to someone who feels physical discomfort, but then his mind seems to be at peace. With it, the sense of peace, calm and the love the care, the friendship that's there. All these beautiful qualities are there and that timeless moment. So I told Victor that since he was so available to me really good to feel that I said to him In this timeless moment, there is no distance. In this timeless moment, there's no distance between you and the Buddha. You share this timeless moment with a Buddha and you share it with your family. And after you've died, your family will share this timeless moment with you. In this timeless moment, there is no

distance. He smiled. So we start with general principles, suffering, cause of suffering, possibility of the cessation of suffering. We engage in a practice of being bringing ourselves into the present moment. Here now are things Victor kept saying to me? Last week was how extremely important ethics is sila. They being a life of integrity, then nice, timeless moment integrity gonna go hand in hand. So there's a path away, do engage in this, this path. And as the awareness gets strong as we let go as we find ourselves here, then some of the things that cause and condition some of the grasping and cravings we have our own way grasping and cravings, to concepts and ideas. In fact, one argument can be made that unless you're hanging on to the railing of top of Yosemite, Half Dome, something like that. When we crave we only crave two ideas and concepts.

And to be able to see through the veil of concepts to let go that clinging in such a way that we relax and settle in to this moment and find it being alive and present in this moment is the most satisfying and meaningful and peaceful place to be. So that perhaps now or perhaps when you're on your deathbed you're a gift to the world to others. Just as its gift, Victor's gift to his family and friends. Your gift will be your ability to be at peace, calm, open, heartfelt moment moment while you're still alive this net nice gift. So thank you. Thank you for today for this. And for those of you who know Victor, probably when he once he's past I don't know if we'll probably put a notice up on the on the What's New page at imcs website so that I don't know how else to let everyone know probably people want to know. And now we have a potluck and perhaps as a transition to a potluck. So either you're not just stunned by the timeless moment or by death, or whatever. I think it might be nice if you gently kindly respectfully, turn to someone next to you and just say hello and say Say something Little bit, especially if people are new so they feel welcome to. Then we can have our potluck in a few minutes. Thank you