

2014-05-25 Overview of Zen Practice

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SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsdal

Good morning.

So, earlier this week I spent a few days at that Tassajara Zen monastery in karma and in Big Sur mountains, and had a chance to reconnect to my Zen roots and Zen practice, which was very important for me in my early years of Buddhist practice. And before that, I had the opportunity to teach a retreat with my primary Zen teacher, who have never actually taught a retreat before it was kinda like a Zen Vipassana hybrid retreat. And it was very nice to kind of be with him and also reconnect to Zen and all that. And the idea that everything is better with a little bit of Zen. I thought that I would try to convey to you a little bit about Zen practice Zen what Zen is about. Partly because here is a Vipassana community insight meditation community, sometimes by learning about another way of practicing at highlights what we do and what we teach here, as I see it clear more clearly. So I'll talk a little bit about Zen practice. And the caveat or the statement is that it's not uncommon for people to say send people to say, well, we don't really know what that is. I heard someone say that when I was at Tassajara, one of the teachers there, so you're not supposed to know. Exactly. And also, but also Zen is presented in many different ways, by different teachers. And if you imagine a Venn diagram, your two circles that overlap and one circle Goal is no circle of Zen teachers and the other circle, just circle of insight meditation teachers, there's a few that their teachings overlap to meet in the middle kind of where they are. Those two circles come together. But if you compare them, it seems like they're teaching the same thing. But if you have teachers who are in the outer side of the circle, the circles don't overlap, then you see, well, there's a difference. So is then different than inside is the same depends who you're talking to and how its presented. So I'll present you one way of understanding Zen practice that was particularly important for me and, and my understanding of Soto Zen. So Zen is not so much something to understand, as it is something to do. And there's a number of things in our world that are like that. A, you go to a restaurant. It's not about understanding the menu. It's about eating the food. You might study the menu a little bit but if all you did was study the menu and memorized it and compared it to other menus and talk to the owner the head cook, you know, the way that these are ordered these different menu items, you know, they should be alphabetical or something, you know, it's kind of like you're missing the points interesting, perhaps. But the restaurant is not about critiquing the menu. It's really about engaging and eating the food. If you go, if you've never been backpacking before, and you decide to hike the whole length of this year of mountain mountains, John Muir Trail, then there's a number of things you should probably understand before you do the hike. And so you should you should learn about it to learn what what it's about and learn some of the basic ideas backpacking, and so it's good to study in that. But the point is not to study the point is, the hiking is a doing right. So with is an it is useful to study some of them, but don't be fooled. tend to think that the studying helps you understand the understanding is will help you know what Zen is. Zen is not found in the understanding it's found in the doing of it. So it's really required to engaging and practicing it to really understand

understand to really understand what it is just like, you don't understand the hike and the zeros unless you really do the walk yourself.

And many people engage in Zen through trying to understand it, trying to understand it, go through understanding and, and then if you listen to a talk or listen to, or you know, read books, and you think it's all about understanding it, sometimes it can be confusing. And in fact, then teachers could contribute to that confusion. Because a lot of Zen teachers love paradox. They love to point out how you can't know what you're talking about. There's not really what they mean. And, but, but you know, it's a paradox you have to live with a paradox and so for people who are uninitiated into this soul Zen thing, it's a little bit confusing to hear language like that sometimes. But Zen is more of a doing than an understanding. And one of the another example that I think is works quite nicely for zen, especially for Zen meditation, zazen is the example of a dancer. Someone who has mastered her craft of dancing and gets on the stage to perform is not fixate, fixated on getting over, getting through the dance, getting to the end of the dance. The point is not to get to the end of the dance as quickly as you can. Your race through it, you know. And I once saw someone perform all the works of Shakespeare in I don't know, an hour an hour and a half or something. And they just show it shows all these little snippets of you know, passages from different plays of Shakespeare and just perform them and act to them out and just race through it all. So I've done Shakespeare, that's not don't need to do that anymore. So the point of dance is not to race through the dance, you know, get to the end. And when the dancer does the dance, to do the dance to prepare for the dance, there might be a lot of different motivations. Some of the motivations might be about status and fame and, and money because that's maybe the route of it. Some of the motivations might be more personal, you know, the idea of mastery of a craft and you wouldn't be able to master something would be a lot of motivations there. Going into it, you could imagine many more. But when you do the dance and the performance, if you're thinking while you're dancing, I need to get to the end. I need to make more money. I hope that I get an advance. You know, you know, I get invited to the next big venue. Chances are the dancer will trip. You know, you dancer has to let go of those thoughts and be and be a really good dancer you're really fully in the moment you let go of the gold you let go of some of the motivations that brought you on the stage. And you're fully there in the dance itself. And don't have any other thoughts if you have thoughts or the thoughts, they're really in the background and primarily you're there doing activity in that best kind of version of performing and doing the dance. And I talked, I talked about this analogy with a dancer recently and, and she said that one of the things that happens to her when she dances is that there's an inner vitality and joy that wells up and she's more like she's following and living that vitality and joy and she dances rather than some cognitive idea of why should you be dancing and all that. There's something about the when you master a craft that art like that and enter into it fully. It's the I think the best dancers are expressing something through the dance. So there's something arising out of a person that expresses the sentiments, the ideas of something in the dance. And that energy of expression that comes out from the inside out, is not so much a idea and understanding, you know, you know, here it is, and I'm supposed to be dancing, a lot of joy and joy, I should be, I guess I should do a smile, and I'll make a smile When I dance. And, you know, and they're kind of not calculating what they're doing. That wouldn't work, right. But rather, there's something almost welling up kind of deeper within us then the cognitive understanding logic, that is comes into play that clicks into play.

And in fact, I think for some people doing something like dancing or an art, the idea of something clicking that kind of propels us or moves us and expresses through us can be seen and you know, it's quite an important idea and, and part of the joy of something like a dancing is how we step away from our self conscious self, the logic the idea And who would Who am I? What am I doing and what I have to do? And how do I prove myself to my parents there in the audience, you know, those things fall away. And that all these kinds of self conscious concerns falling away as part of the, the joy of the activity

itself. And I could imagine a dancer waking up in the morning, so I'm tired, I don't want to go, I've done so many days in a row. Now this is a drag. I have my coffee drags herself down to the bus and talk to go through the bus. It's a busy city and oh my God, what a drag. I should get a different job. And why am I doing this all these thoughts and, and then but then finally makes it on the stage and starts dancing and all that falls away, and something clicks and there's a joy and a vitality that's that courses through the person as it's, you know, the best in the best situation and just kind of comes through. So, this is what Zen Meditation is like, Zen meditation. Isn't Not a doing. It's not you don't Zen Meditation is not done to attain something. And it's not done where you're not done with a spirit that you're the doer up in a control tower, who's trying to figure something out and do something, or in the control tower trying to understand what is the sand where's emptiness, and how do I express it, what's going on, but rather zazen Zen Meditation is more like a dance that you do without moving. And as a dance. That's why in Soto zen, your posture is very important, because it's a dance. So you're supposed to take a very particular posture, and then make adjustments for people's bodies and things like that. But the most classically, in Soto Zen in Japan, you would sit in a yogic posture of full lotus, and you rack would be very, very straight or chest up, wouldn't be puffed up but just be quite open and you'd have your hands in it. very particular posture, where you make a nice circle with your arms and your your palms, one hand fits on top of the palm of the other. And you make another circle with your forefinger and your thumbs, and they touch gently together. And you keep your eyes open. And it's a very fine posture. And so in Zen monasteries, they'll often come, the teachers will come in the meditation hall, and adjust your posture, because it's so important the posture that you're in. And it might not be the posture. They say the posture you're in is important. But it might be more important, not that you have the right posture, but you're attempting to have the right posture, you're really working, you're you're living the posture, you're engaged in the posture. And so it becomes not so much a watching the posture, but being the posture, being the attempt to dance that posture, just like a dancer would. And so the posture becomes very important. And so zazen is not something they try to Try to make something happen and get somewhere in meditation. Just like you know, try to get something out of the dance and the moment and Zaza and you let go of any motivation you had that got you to the cushion. That might be important motivations, you got to the cushion, you won't overcome your suffering, for example, you don't want to suffer anymore. And Zen practice is one way to do that. But once you sit on the cushion, you let go of all the motivations. So you can fully do the dance you can fully be in the experience of doing the meditation. And so they say a lot in zen, they say that you practice with no gaming idea. In the moment, there's no gaming idea it's okay to have a gaming idea and he just but in the moment of doing it, you have to let go that just be the dance be the activity. And so Zen Meditation becomes more an expression something you express than something we attain or you know, trying to try to do. So just like the dancer has been, when it's going really well, it's an expression that's coming out of the dancer and to the joy and vitality there. When zazen is really, really engaged and zazen there's a vitality and a lightness. And it's an expressing something inside out from the body out. So it's been said that Zen training is a training we do through the body, not through the mind. And many people especially in the West, are oriented towards the mind. And mindfulness training kind of taps into that kind of stream of mind training that's so important for many Westerners.

But the Zen Meditation classically, is a training that's done primarily through the body or first and foremost through the body. And so you enter into this dance of Zen. And as you do that, many of your problems will fall away temporarily, right? Because just like for the dancer on stage, her probably respect that she hasn't paid her taxes. You know, she forgets it. In the moment, you know that maybe that's why one of the reasons she dances to forget to her problems, but you know, a lot of things fall away in that full engagement, so and then he talked about fully engaging, fully wholehearted being really present in this thing. And so the the, all these problems, issues concerns even ideas of self and self identity fall away. And it's quite remarkable to have all these things fall away. If we use it as a

reference point to understand how we pick them all up again afterwards. We use them for the purpose of wisdom. If we use it simply to escape, and then we come back into our life and we haven't paid our taxes. That's a whole you know, that's a there's a problem there right? But if you let everything fall away, and then with fresh eyes Come back into the world and see what needs to be done. Engage in it, then, you know, then maybe you do things more wisely. So there's this spirit that there's a Zen saying that in zen, there's only two things. There is sitting zazen sitting in meditation. And then sweeping the temple courtyard with the temple courtyard doesn't stop at the temple gate, basically, is the whole world. So you come out of this kind of way of being, and then you meet the world and you care for you take care of it, you do what's appropriate, what's next. And so, you know, there's a lot of self learning that goes on there if you're really required to have local resistance to doing something right or have a lot of fear or something. So Zen training is very much mediated through the body. And a lot of learning can happen in there. But also what we also learn, we also has other effects on us just just take saws and for example, we learn about how to engage wholeheartedly in activity. That can translate into the rest of our life. So we really when we do something, we do it wholeheartedly. It also changes us psychologically, that is a very dynamic relationship between our physical body and our mind. And if you sit like a couch potato slumped over and your shoulders around it and all day long and are depressed, that posture will reinforce the depression and kind of make you feel kind of good all the time sit that way, it has a psychological effect. But if you're sitting in a strong posture upright, the best you can chest open the best you can, fully engaged in activity or doing, not not giving up. It begins to change your psychology. And during that time, you'll be feeling confident to begin feeling open in a confident way. You begin feeling engaged and involved and present in a variety of ways that has a psychological effect. Since a well being begins to well, a sense of personal power, inner power begins to be there. So that also then translates into the rest of our lives. Or because it's ours, and we're not going to move in this posture and just confident upright posture, we get to kind of confront and meet all the other things that are the forces within us that wants us not to have that posture. So if you're discouraged and feel like giving up, you can't give up because you have to keep the posture. And so you get to kind of not want not being able to do what you want to do is a powerful way to see what you want to do in a clearer way. Sometimes if you give in to what you want to do, you don't actually see it and understand it and learn how to be free of it. So I don't know if this is a good example, but one of the teachings in Zen also is It's like putting a snake in a bamboo tube. It'll fit the bet that the snake but it has to stay straight. And you can't move, right. So it's any attempt to move in any kind of way kind of like. So you sit still in zazen all the different ways in which we want to move give up. And I remember when I was in the monastery in Japan sitting zazen I wanted to punch off my neighbor.

He was rather abusive to me. And it continued all the way in the monastery. He didn't like me and was abusive kind of a bully. And I remember one day sitting there, you know, I don't know how many people in in a meditation hall I've thought about punching out their neighbor, but in the hall, but but you know, I didn't because I was sitting still right. So I got to see and feel that. And so that commitment to not moving in this posture, which is very particular tends to highlight all the different movements that we have to be different to change to do that, and then we get to work through That we get to let go of it, we get to understand it, we get to kind of grapple with it, which is very teaches us a lot, a lot of self learning and self growth happens in that process. So Zen training is more about through the body and through the mind. And this also means that training in the monastery outside of meditation. So for example, in the monastery, we walk anytime we walking around the monastery, we run into an other student, they practice was always to stop it and bow to each other. And there's if you do walking around a lot, not people walking around, so a lot of stopping and bowing and, you know, you have important things to go go do and just, you know, slows you down. And, you know, and there's people you don't want to bow to because you haven't, you know, a garage or something. And there were some times though in the monastery, I would see the purpose And coming and I take another route I wouldn't have to bow and

you know, so But, but you're doing a lot of bowing and also no to people. But also I want to count in how many times I had to bow like just before 10 o'clock in the morning in the monastery I forget what the number was, but 5060 times, you know, because you, you get up and you walk into the meditational you bow you got your seat belt to the seat, you turn away in your bow away at the end of the sitting during the bell your bow you stand up you're about to your seat, you bow away, then you go stand in front of the altar and you start doing your chanting and chanting you're buying it dozen times or you know, you know just goes on and all this battling, right and then you write things about it people when you're walking around or too, so there's a lot of buying and, but when you put your body in particular postures, it affects your psychology. And so there's something about putting your hands in front of your heart, flat together and in lowering yourself like This over and over again, that it's very hard, I think for for somehow the heart not to begin to open to not somehow have a certain very healthy kind of him, maybe humility or dropping of unwise pride, a certain willingness to kind of be respectful to others, certain kind of respect begins to kind of slowly develop in gratitude for me with a lot of gratitude, a lot of appreciation. And something begins to change and shift inside. And so a teacher might give a Dharma talk and like and be passing, though, you know, the teacher would give a talk about how important it is to be grateful. It's all this ideas of gratitude. In zen, they don't teach you very much. They just tell you to bow all the time. In Vipassana, we might say give lectures whole talks about so you understand how important is to balance, energy and relaxation, and is having right balance of being in zen, they don't tell you that. But what they do in meditation is If you have to put your hands together like we explained an oval with your fingers and your hand, one hand top of the other, and then the thumbs lightly touching. So the four finger and the thumbs make a very nice oval, one hand resting in the other. And that thumbs have to just ever so lightly touch each other with just enough contact, but not any more than would take to hold a piece of paper between your feet, thumbs so they wouldn't fall. That's the instruction. Well, as you're meditating, if you start kind of not, not practicing so well not so engaged in the process and getting sleepy, the thumbs fall apart. And if you get really tense and making too much efforts, your thumbs get pushed together. So then they don't have to tell you, they just tell you keep the thumb just, you know, just keep the very lightly touching. So this is over and over again. In zen, it's what you do with your body. That is very much the training.

And when I was in the monastery in Japan, It was my job to carry the rice pot from the kitchen to the dining room. And I would just pick it up by the handle of one hand just carry it, you know, one hand with berries and I can carry something else in the other hand, right? And the monks in Japan would get angry with me. Gil, when you pick up the rice and bring it to the right, you pick it up with two hands and really hold it respectfully. And this is one of the characteristics of Japanese and training is whenever possible you do things with two hands, so you give all of yourself to it. And this is what I learned the story I've told many times of working in the kitchen at Tassajara I didn't want to be in the kitchen. And I noticed after a while that I would be turned towards the door when I was chopping the carrots because I wanted to leave and I'd kind of be chopping with one hand like half my body would be there and the other half would be out the door. And I would learn to bring my attention back my whole body and just face that carrot and just me and the carrot the whole body just shopping. And I learned a lot about Zen training, chopping the carrot. I learned a lot of Zen training being the dishwasher in the monastery. I learned a lot of Zen training in sanding, the platforms that people meditated. And I spent two to three months sanding these huge big platforms that people sit down in the monastery. It's something about giving yourself over fully to the activity. And just activity and being there fully, like a dancer is fully for that thing, that some of the training of Zen occurs. So mindfulness, which is such an important aspect of our tradition here, is not so important in Zen. It isn't that it isn't that mindfulness is absent in zen, but it's a bit more like it. It's a byproduct. being alert is important in zen, being alert enough to be fully present and in that full presence. The You know, all our faculties are operating. So there can be mindfulness operating as well. But mindfulness is not put at center stage. Whereas in our tradition, mindfulness is

put center stage, which sometimes lends itself to confusion, of confusing it with self consciousness, self conscious attention, and, or, or a logical attention or thoughtful attention to what's going on. Whereas Zen did a little bit protected from that, because the main thing is, is non cognitive, non conceptual presence in the activity of the moment. And that's what's welling up that's where the energy of the life is following. And that's where the center of gravity is. So to the degree to which there might be cognitive awareness of what's going on or when it's going on. It's just a piece of the puzzle, just piece of it rather than the primary thing. And so I found it very helpful for me when I did be passing a practice that I had this strong grounding in the body as part of the practice, so that the mindfulness was very important training for me. I learned a lot from Vipassana I teach it, of course. But it was more like it wasn't like the primary thing I did. It was one of the things I do, the primary thing is to be fully present for the experience. So in that full presence, things begin to unfold. It isn't that there's no change. But the point in the in the full engagement in the moment, where what you're doing, we're not thinking about the change that's involved. So you know, whereas if we don't understand that the full engagement is important. It's very easy sitting in meditation, and to be measuring yourself, how am I doing? What am I supposed to get? You know, and so And then because they don't say much about the attainment and getting something in zen, not a fair number of Zen students will start reading non Zen Buddhist books that talk about what can happen in meditation. And in fact, some of the conversations I had at Tassajara, when people asked those questions about, you know, should I be studying the jhanas? You know, the deep sense of concentration, or what about this Dzogchen and his other kind of Tibetan Buddhist practice, you know, all these different things, or should I be doing mindfulness practice, you know, and, you know, this is what I'm doing. And when I sit and meditating, it's I do mindfulness practice, you know, rather than, you know, zen, it's all fine to do these things. But it's a misunderstanding, it's a it's a lost opportunity. If a person hasn't really understood what Zen is and practice, and if the orientation around Zen is a meditator is to try to get something to measure progress.

Then you can actually do Zen practice in the in the moment, moment, moment. Because you have to drop all that just like a dancer drops it. And then the results, the change that happens is more of a byproduct than it is something in the moment you're intentionally trying to create a couple more things and then I'll take some questions if you'd like. So Zen is more of a something we express way of expressing ourselves in life, then it is something we do to attain something. So a very different orientation. And the Zen master Dogen there was a founder of this particular school of Zen of Soto Zen. He had a quandary when he was a young monk, because in his scriptures that he read, it said that everything everyone already has Buddha nature, as a nature of being a Buddha. And he wondered if that's so then why should I practice And so there was no one could answer his question apparently. And eventually he answered the question for himself. And his answer was that, or the answer is that, yes, we all have Buddha nature. But that nature has to be expressed. And it's expressed through practice. So then he came up with it coined a term, hyphenated term called practice realization, that in zen, we're doing practice realization, where that moment of expressing ourselves fully in the activity of Zen, for example, and then meditation, we do it because that's the expression of his language of Buddha nature. That's expression of life going through us that's expression of, of attainment. So rather than dissolves endings, in order to attain something in the full engagement, it is The practice itself is the expression of being a Buddha, which is the kind of language of Zen, you're already the Buddha they say, but you have to express it. And you express it in ways that all Buddhists have expressed down through the ages. You meditate, you follow the precepts, you practice generosity, do all these activities which are a Buddhist practice. But the motivation understanding for doing them is not to do them. So you attain something, you do them so that you're expressing some deep abiding truth of who you are. So it's a it's an it comes from the inside out. And, but because it's the same kid, very much the same activities or they're Buddhists, it puts you on the same path of personal development and growth. But you're not so focused on the personal development growth years happy that it happens. And in fact,

what you do see with mature Zen practitioners is that they are mature, they are very developed. And changed and they've grown in many ways, and they're exemplary people. So it isn't that Zen says no gaming idea, practice no gaming idea and you'll just continue to be a jerk. Because you know, don't supposed to get anything, but rather you be fully what is and that will begin to change. And one of the reasons it begins to change you is because most human activity is not being fully what is most human activities is trying not to be fully what is to avoid or get around or reject or fix or something. And so it kind of begins pulling the rug from underneath a very common human functioning of mind when we just fully are present in this activity here. And then our problems or difficulties or that we have that like like our attachments and psychological difficulties, rather than being something that we understand And penetrate and let go of IE they become more like the skin of a snake. As the snake becomes bigger, it sloughs off the skin. And so as we develop this power, Sen talks about powers and power, develop the strength, it is become bigger and bigger person become grows. And in that growth and bigness, all kinds of things slough off. And so I think, you know, Zen is a great practice. So a little bit of that a little bit of Zen is good for everything. So a little bit of Zen in the past now, it'd be really great. Just so that I just before one thing I like to say just a little footnote, just so you don't misunderstand me fully, you know.

So this approach that I just described in zen, which I think is very, very effective and has a lot of value has its weak sides as a Well, so it has a kind of difficulties as well. And so and so that, you know, just don't you know, just and so just take that into account as well as well. It has to be done with care and attention, a lot of wisdom so that the wisdom of Zen can really come out fully. Yes.

I spent

I took a break from Vipassana and spent two years in a Zen center in Berkeley, and it was San sneem and empty gate Zen center.

And

he stressed don't know mind, keep, don't know mind. That was the teaching. That's basically everything that he taught. Plus, if he went in for an interview, he would present you with some puzzle that short circuited your brain and all you had to do is slap the floor. And you're successful, and then you could leave. And I was turning into a space cadet.

And I went to a therapist, and

the therapist said,

well,

as far as finding out who you are and individuating this don't know mind is like a rat poison for you. And I quit and went into therapy. And then but I continued to sit, but I didn't try to say, don't know mind on every exhalation. So it seemed anti cognitive in a way and not helpful to me. So what would you have to say?

I've never resolved in 30 years.

Well, I, one of the difficulties in teaching Buddhism for any Buddhist teacher is that we have to say something, right. And, and, and in saying something in saying something, we lose the audience, if we

say at all. And so, you know, they're all everything that needs to be said, right? Because we'd be here for years, you know, let me tell you how it all the all the exceptions at all how it works, right? And so the tendency is, when people hear a certain particular particular practice, they generalize and think that's what's supposed to do all the time. So like, just practice, don't know don't know, don't know, is a very powerful and useful practice. But it's best to understand its limitations and the situations where it's best to use that practice and when to throw yourself into it. And other things are useful to you don't go you don't mean the IRS knocks on your door and says you didn't pay your taxes. You don't say I was a practicing doctor. No, I don't know. And they say Well yeah, that's fine you smoke no in jail now. You know, you're you're, there's things you're supposed to know and supposed to engage and understand. So but like in a scene, or when you're in a monastery, in a kind of protected environment, fully getting into the Stone, no mind and having a pretty fresh and empty mind and dropping all the cognitive kind of organize or ways we organize our life can be very, very effective. But it's not meant to be the only thing we do. So same thing with mindfulness. You know, sometimes mindfulness teachers will say, practice accepting mindfulness, just accept whatever is happening. That's very good teachings for meditation. But it's not good teachings, you know, in many circumstances in life, right. So you have to know when it's useful and when it's not. And this is called when it went to be cognitive, when not to be cognitive. It's useful to kind of make that you know, to understand that and if you understand that the each has their own domain, time and season Then it's up to you can move forward fully throw yourself into the training, when it's appropriate for that, and something else when it's appropriate for that because you forget fluid back and forth.

And the other thing, you know, he reminded me of, you know, they Zen they give these coupons, these indignant, enigmatic statements or stories that then you have to come back and present to the Zen teacher the answer to and, and so, you're not supposed to tell people the answer because you're supposed to people have to figure it out for themselves the answer, and, but it's very common that you come back people come back with a cognitive answer, like, you know, explain Oh, this is the answer. And figuratively or maybe in Japan literally. Sometimes you get hit didn't get sent away, you know, I went to see my, my con to Paris and I stayed at koan with Robert Aiken, you'd show up and I'd given my answer, and he'd ring the bell. thing, you know, I said I was sat in front of him for literally less than a minute before he and sometimes the teachers leave and ring the bell before you sit down. Because they kind of, you know, they can tell when you walk into the door and you know, you got to work on that question. So more. And so the so anyway, you're not supposed to tell people you got I can't tell you the answers because because you might do the do the cons, right? You need to do to discover it for yourself. But Robert Akin, he once gave a public talk where someone asked him if he would kind of present the answer to one of the colons and so because of the public talk, and it wasn't a real official Cohen. I'll tell you that. Cohen, it was quite quite touching. So Robert Akin said when he is first sent teacher, I think was neocon since Aki long ago. Had an apartment I think in New York City and he would go visit him In police department, and in the entryway, there was a bowl a ceramic bowl that had a spiral in it. inside the bowl was a spiral. And so his end teacher asked him Is this a spiral go clockwise or counterclockwise? So what's the answer? Some of you want to try Yes, yes. Somebody else yes he got

no spam You guys are slow learners. You didn't listen to the talk. What did I say about the body? That is mediated through the body? Not through words and concepts in the mind. They're all those old mental ideas. So the answer to that colon, and a condition is Oh, dignified, elderly man, dignified, tall, stately kind of man. He got up from his chair for this conference we were at, and he spread his arms wide. And then he turned around clockwise all the way. And they turned around counterclockwise all the way. And then he came back to center and he bowed. That was the answer. Now, you know, it's not it's a very different answer than what you know what we think is supposed to be an answer for a question, right?

You think someone asks a question you're supposed to answer with a word right? But in zen, you don't often you don't answer with words. Sometimes colons have Word answers, but but one of the ways is you post it, embody it, live it. And so you become in a sense the spiral rather than explaining it. It makes sense.

Yes, I think I'm beginning to see the answer to my question, but I'll ask it anyway. Why did you transition from Zen to

given talks on that topic? The best a whole topic in itself. Even I think in December about four or five, six years ago, I Nordea Dharma you probably find it talk. My talk about that issue, I think was in December month. But the simple answer was that I was very happy and Zen I think, sends a great practices to have a lot of respect for it. But because I needed a new visa to stay in Japan, I went to Bangkok to get the visa. And while I was there, I decided to go Just try out some monastery I had an address for until the abbot. I'm here. And I'll do whatever you practice you have to have me to do. And so I was at a vipassana monastery. And he told me to go to school, cabin the edge of the monastery and sit and walk all day, meditate all day. Come see him the next day that went on every day, sit all day. meditech exhale, day go see him every day for instructions. And after 10 weeks of doing that, I realized my visa wasn't going to come. So my first Vipassana retreat was 10 weeks machine 10 week intensive retreat. And it wasn't so much that to be pasilla got my attention, that retreat, but rather it was that ability to sit and meditate for such a long time, because then you don't long as you sit that intensely is seven days. And so that and something happened in me something I touch something in the stillness of that, that I had never touched before that became important for me to continue. And so then I did. The other thing, the last thing I'll say among those, maybe do Your question reminds me is that this no gaming idea that's and people have the idea this practice realization or one leads to sometimes to particular idea. And that is the idea that in Soto Zen The idea is to be fully present to accept everything fully and be there full of quickly everything is precious Buddha nature, everything is everything. Except for one thing. One thing they dismiss, sometimes some teachers and that is the actual the actual experience of of enlightenment. Then some something that some teachers have something to say, Well, that doesn't really count. It's not really real. It's practice realization is fully present present here, no gaming idea that what we practice, but what happens is that, I think that's Dogen and Soto Zen recognizes how important it is to have that can show that seeing into the true nature that happens with liberation. But if you don't live, you don't have a gaming idea. You're not trying to work for that. There's this deep expressively, there's a great controlled presence here. And as we're fully present, being here in this activity, all the extra, all the things we do that are extra, begin to fall away all the things that are not just fully there, and including trying too much to do it. One of those end problems sometimes is people, people are too intentional, try too much to be wholeheartedly involved in what they do. And then and with time it comes there's more more ease in what we do just ease it just a natural and almost like naturally they're doing these things. And at some point in this ease falls a certain way of practice realization of zosen in that ease and that tranquility and peace equanimity, Dogon talks about there is the dropping a body in mind, and that dropping a body of mind is the realest is the same thing that all Buddhism points at most Buddhism points to, as. And so the no gaining idea, having no goal, practice realization being one is important to understand its place and how that works, and not to somehow dismiss or close the doors to the possibility of some deep dropping away that has been part of Buddhism classically for since the time of the Buddha. So I hope that made sense enough. If it did, oh.

And, and of course, you're welcome to leave it all here. You don't need to take it with you today. If it didn't make sense or you didn't appreciate it. Or if you're confused you Thank you