

2017-02-06 Selfless Love The Brahma Viharas

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SPEAKERS

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So those of you who have been here, the last couple of times that I've been here will recall that, from Martin Luther King's birthday Monday, I talked about Martin Luther King's teachings on love. And then last week, I talked about history of this very, I think, powerful verse by the Buddha, on love, and how it played down through history, including right here in San Francisco in the 1950s. And so it's kind of like on a theme of love these days. And so I think I'd like to just keep doing that. And I think for the next while that I'm here, I'd like to talk about some of the more particular teachings on love in Buddhism, that's known by the name of the word, the Pali Sanskrit word, brahma vihara, the four kinds of love that are championed or deeply valued in Buddhism. And it'll take me a while to get through them, because I'm going to be intermittent talks, I'm here. I'm away on retreat for a couple of retreats over the next while so when I'm here, I'll pick up that theme. And so there are four kinds of love that are promoted in Buddhism. And they're called brahma viharas. And these four kinds of love, I think of them as the four faces of the heart. And depending on which face you direct, you get a different emotion, different love, to direct to the world. And this idea of that there's four faces to the heart comes from Buddhist and Hindu mythology, that they that one of the great gods of the Indian Pantheon was a god named Brahma. And Brahma is said to have four faces on his head. And then you see, some in Asia, sometimes, like in Thailand, you see statues of this God, and he actually has four, you know, made with four faces, you know, when the front one the back and one on each side. And these four faces represent these four forms of love, which the god Brahma dwells, and the God has created great karma and been born into this wonderful, divine sphere that is characterized as a place to dwell in what's metta, karuna, mudita, and upekkhā. And those are the Pali words for these four kinds of love. Sometimes translated into English as loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. And because this God dwells in, in these beautiful states of love, there and the word for dwell or abide in is the hora. And so they're called brahma viharas. The dwellings of Brahma, and some people into English will translate it as divine abiding things. Because Brahma is kind of a divinity. They're called these divine abiding, which is kind of nice to take it away from a literal God and mythology, and to you know, if we take divine as being, you know, not so much having to do with the heavens so much, but having to do with something that's really super superb or sublime, you know, pretty special for us. And so there's four of them. And the first one love is usually translate is loving kindness. Metta is our tradition is considered to be the primary one, which is the foundation for the other three. And meta is is the basic goodwill, friendly goodwill friendliness we could have towards other people, goodwill, meaning we want them well, we want, we want to see them do well, we want them to be happy. And that doesn't necessarily mean something sentimental, which sometimes is suggested maybe by the word, loving kindness. It's a basic intention or wish for someone else's welfare and happiness.

So goodwill is a nice translation for it. But it kind of good word goodwill is kind of a nice word but doesn't have the word love in it, or doesn't have the word kindness in it, which kind of for some people

is kind of evocative of a certain aspect of this. The one of the aspects about this method is goodwill and loving kindness is a has something that's called its near enemy. And the near enemy of love is the kind of is a state that looks like it. But it's not, that it's actually kind of the opposite, or, you know, not quite, you know, not love. And the near near enemy of love, this kind of goodwill, this kind of loving kindness or kindness, is, has to do with selfishness. Where there's a desire or a wish, for some kind of energy, some kind of attention something from someone else, that's mostly about pleasure for ourselves. So sometimes when we're attracted to someone or want to be with someone, the primary attraction might be for what we're going to get, we might get pleasure from that person, your attention, some people, you know, really would like to get attention. And if someone comes with great loving attention on you, it's pretty good. Like, I'll take more of that. And, you know, and so I think I love this person. Because so that would, that would be very different from metta, which is not about getting something for ourselves, security, or status, or well being, or attention or pleasure or something. But, but rather, it's something we generate from ourselves, and it's a direction the direction of the love is towards someone else we want them to be, well, we want them to have happiness, and joy. And there's not so much concerned about ourselves, or getting something in the in the equation. So it said to be kind of selfish, so selfless, in that, you know, we're not self concerned and what we get in return. And in fact, this form of metta and goodwill is said to develop over time as we practice it, into a kind of an a boundless goodwill that radiates out to all beings. And so that goodwill, if it encounters suffering, gets morphed into compassion. The heart maybe or the orthotic simply, you know, turns a quarter degree. And then the face of compassion shines out. If if it that loving kindness runs into someone who is really happy, and having a good time and successful are just you know, things are good fortunate in their lives, it seems great, then sympathetic Joy, joy is appreciating, appreciating that celebrating that really feeling good for them, and may the idea that may that continue to prosper May the person who continued to have such good fortune, sometimes it said that this sympathetic or appreciative joy is the most difficult form of love. Because some people have envy or jealousy, or just kind of hard to kind of, you know, some people, some people and then if the if loving kindness, this metta encounter someone who, for whatever circumstances is going on, it's not appropriate, to have loving kindness, to have compassion, or to have equanimity, that the love can still be there. But, but there's a balance of minds and non reactivity of mind. And that's sometimes said to be also very difficult to have, but also extremely profound. To have be have be not caught in the drama The person's life, but to stay balanced, but keep the heart open at the same time. Some people are making difficult choices in their lives, and we love them. But it's not appropriate to go and save them all the time. It's appropriate to act out of compassion. You might have goodwill, but not appropriate to act on it. There has to be some kind of equanimity that has to be there, we don't get swept up in the drama, and that's the appropriate thing. Some people need to be left alone so they can learn their own lessons, for example. So the, you know, maybe a kind of a mundane example of these poor forms of love is the if so for some people, if you encounter a really cute puppy

And, you know, it's a really cute puppy. And just first and nothing's, you know, you don't know much about except how cute it is. And so there might be kind of a heartwarming feeling of delight and joy and goodwill, and kind of kindness or something for the puppy, then we don't expect anything back from the puppy just like Wow, it's so hard to kind of opens kind of, if the puppy gets hurt, then there's compassion is care, you want to, you don't want you either have, you'd like to help alleviate that, that suffering. If the puppy is happily playing and frolicking on the ground, it's kinda lightful to see and kind of you feel happy for the dog, you know, you know, this is great, and was sympathetic or appreciative joy is their kind of joy and the joy of the dog. But if the puppy is, you know, looking out the window, or at the squirrels, and as you know, really eager and happy to want to go chase that squirrels, but then realizes it can't catch them. And then it gets so far Lauren crushed, you know, it's just, you know, collapses to the floor. You know, you have, you still love the dog, but you had a segment empty about

that you don't get caught up in the drama of the dog, and it's the squirrel thing. So, that's kind of, you know, Monday and maybe silly example, but maybe you get the idea of it. And so the idea in Buddhism is to, to value these sentiments, or these intentions, these motivations, that we have these directions of the heart, and to notice them, when there to evoke them, to develop them to strengthen them. So they become something that is already at hand, and become strengths that we carry with us into the world, they can be quite strong. And they do that love can be strong, I think is a very important thing. Because it becomes something then becomes ballast becomes a way of living in the world, that's not tossed around by all the various things that can happen as as we go through through our life, for we're ready at hand to kind of meet the world as it is, with goodwill. So one of the things that we do in Buddhism, is that we, we don't leave it for chance that as we stumble around the world that may be, you know, accidentally, we might end up feeling love for someone, you know, it was, you know, we've heard, it's a good idea. And, you know, maybe it'll happen one day. And, but rather, it's something that, you know, we can not just leave to chance we can call upon, we can recognize it in ourselves, we can begin developing and strengthening it. And we can invoke it at times when it's useful to do so. So one of the ways that it's developed in Buddhism, is by recognizing where it's already happening. Where do you love already? Where do you have the kind of self less love? Where you have, you know, this kind of strong feeling of goodwill, of kindness to someone, or compassion, or joy or equanimity? Where is it easy for you to have it and learn to recognize it there. And it you know, I've known people who made I don't know what the circumstances of their life was, maybe it was challenging, but the only person that's gonna say, the only person that can really have that, like, loving kindness for and they really kind of touches their hearts is their dog. And so you think about their dog. I knew I know, a Buddhist monk, who, when he develops and cultivates the meditation and loving kindness, he apparently there's a very cute monkey in, in Sri Lanka. And somehow that monkey when he thinks of, it just kind of opens his heart worms, his heart. And so that's it. That's his starting point for connecting to it. But the idea principle is to look where it's easy for you to have it. So something which may be natural, it could be your family, it could be a friend, it could be a partner, wherever it's easy to have.

And then don't stop with that person. But the idea in Buddhism is then to learn the skill, the ability to expand that outward to include more and more people to universalize it. So it isn't so much to ignore the people we love, and, you know, rush headlong into the world at large. But really start with where what you love and then expand that to include more people. And that's can be a, you know, a long term task to do it. And it takes time to learn to do that, because so what a classic way this is done is, is cultivated in meditation practice. And then in meditation, to be cultivating and looking and focusing on, for example, there's loving kindness, choose, someone's easy to do. And then after you after you kind of focus on the intention, you focus on the feeling, you focus on the image of the person, kind of develop an ability to have concentrated attention in the present moment, on the subject of love. It's not much different than keep having concentrated attention on your breathing, which is a classic meditation practice, many of the same issues that come up that make it difficult to be in the present moment, come up around focusing on love, the mind is distracted, it's things but other things, you have to bring it back, it takes a while to settle the agitated mind down. But at some point, it gets settled down and focused. And then lo and behold, you have the experience of not just kind of a fragile, temporary feeling of love. But you're stabilized in a feeling and attitude and intention of goodwill. And now that's pretty cool. That's pretty cool to have kind of your mind is kind of that's the subject of your mind, that's thought of your heart. It's not leaving, it's kind of like nothing is fills your attention. It's not so much not so different, you know, then some of that occupies some of the attention, places of attention, we sometimes pour our awareness. And we're completely absorbed in something for a while. And, you know, we just, that's all we're about. So I know some people watch the Superbowl yesterday. And I think some people were pretty attentive during parts of it. And for, you know, maybe a few plays, it was like back was their whole attention was just super bowl mind. But imagine if your whole attention like

that was on love, love mind. That's pretty cool. I think it's pretty phenomenal. But as people so as to cultivate and develop it. And once it's stable and strong. So that kind of the flavor of the heart, the flavor of the moment flavor or being slow. We're, we're abiding in like Brahma abiding, and then take that and then begin to consider, can I now bring that feeling to other people? Can I bring it down, stabilized it or focused on where it's easy? Now, can I do it where it's not so easy, maybe just kind of easy. And because it's maybe only kind of easy, then the people begin to kind of, well, there's some issues there. You know, I like the person a lot. But there was a thing that person did or what they said, or this or that, that kind of bothers me. And so then well, I don't know, if the person doesn't deserve my love, I don't want to do it. And then we get to grapple and consider all the blockages, all the things that get in the way of us wanting to care for them, to love for them, and to work through it, maybe have arguments with ourselves and kind of find out, is it okay, can we find out how to love other people in this kind of open way to have goodwill. And then as we develop it there, then the Buddhist practice of doing this is you go progressively to where it's more and more difficult.

And when you finally get to what the tradition calls the ancient to language, calls the enemy and in which the modern Western Buddhist teachers called the difficult person at that point, you know, it there might be, I think, a long time before you really kind of feel it's okay and it's safe, and it's appropriate in the privacy of your meditation to to open up your goodwill to them and have a boundless kind of radiating feeling of goodwill for that person. And in the process of doing that a person is working through a lot of their reactions to people, their cut their beliefs around people, their resentments, their angers all kinds of things, which keeps the heart closed, keeps our goodwill and love from flowing. And that's a beautiful thing to do. It's a profound thing to do to work through it. At some point at once, once once in the practice, we do it and find out how to do that even for enemies. At that point, the practice is said to be to be opened up kind of 360 degrees includes everything and can radiate in all directions, without exception to anybody. To no exception, nobody's left out. And then the it's then it's no longer called brahma viharas. But it'll be called the called the immeasurables. Without the measure, because now our love has no measure, it has no limit to it, it just radiates out. And it's one of the great experiences of life, to sit in a field of love of goodwill, or metta. and have it just kind of feeling like it just glows and radiates outwards, as if it has no boundaries, and has no need for anybody doesn't require anything. It's just a strong, pulsing feeling of joy and delight. And the mind is focused and centered and concentrated on just that it's not distracted, doesn't get pulled into other things is nothing, you know, just just that, that's a wonderful thing. I mean, in that imagine that the human mind and heart of human being has the capacity to rest and bathed in an experience of kind of boundless love. It's a great thing to experience.

The soul in the ancient Buddhist texts, all this is described as something as developed in meditation practice. So as that such as a practice, something we do we focus on, is it excessively sentimental? Is it unrealistic? Is it pollyannish? Is it you know, you know, is it artificial? When I first encountered this kind of practice, in this kind of idea, I was disinterested in it, because I thought it was artificial. And I ignored it. And my teachers would sometimes do guided meditations on loving kindness, and I tune them out. And then at some point, as I went further and further into this mindfulness practice of the various blockages I had inside the various limitations I had about my heart, kind of relaxed, and my heart, in a sense, opened up. And I found myself bathed in this feeling, and this radiating idea of goodwill and love. And that was kind of the primary character of my how I felt was used to talk to loving and kind and or physical, tremendous goodwill, just sitting there kind of, and I was just surprised to sit there and see it well up. And not only that, well up wasn't just temporary, it wasn't just like, fleeting and coming through, it was like, it was like there for quite a while. And then when the teachers did the guided meditations on the mechanics, they said, Oh, that's what they're talking about. And it no longer was artificial is no longer something I had to kind of make happen. It was just I recognize what's there

like that. And so one of the when it comes to that strong, it's a little bit like I said, if I can explain it, it's like little bit like having a little space, if you had a little space heater, you know, blast south, no bit of heat. And you put it next to a huge furnace, that just, you know, just kind of just blasting out the heat. That little furnace, the little heater space heater, it's not really going to make any difference, it's not really going to affect the furnace furnace is not going to care. So when your love is so strong, so powerful. It doesn't need love from other people. It's nice love from others, being loved by others is a wonderful thing as I don't want to shortchange it or say it shouldn't be there. But there isn't that need to, there isn't a need to have, it isn't like we nurtured or, you know, it's like it's not like a craving or attachment as needed. Because the love that radiates from us is so much bigger, it's like strong. That's where we're established in. And so much so that I have a kind of a belief, maybe it's a little you know, maybe it's a strange, idiosyncratic belief of my own. But it's a little bit based on seeing a lot of people who longtime practitioners, longtime teachers of partially Buddhism that it seems that my impression is that the more more developed and more mature a person become spiritually, the stronger the tendency to love. Stronger than needed is to love it for us to love and that's stronger than the desire to be loved. And we might still be loved. But that's not where where the need is. With a neediness is where the, there's no hole to be filled. Because we're so fulfilled with this kind of feeling of goodwill and love. It's a fantastic thing. So maybe it's developed meditation, that's where it's easiest to do boundlessly. Because when you're sitting quietly meditation alone, people are uncomplicated. You know, it's much more complicated when you're with them. And so, and that's where kind of, you know, the rubber hits the road kind of thing, you know, when you're with people. And it's, you know, it's complicated for many reasons. But to have the experience of a boundless loving heart, in meditation, or boundless, compassionate heart in meditation, gives a reference point.

For when we engage with people in the world, we know what's possible. And we have that reference point, we see, we can see more acutely why it's not happening. So we see, you know, yes, I could, in theory, love this person. But I'm angry, or the person's a jerk. And then you said, Well, you know, you know, maybe I should look at that, maybe I should kind of, you know, look at my judgments or my anger. And maybe I don't want to have that anger, maybe I should see if I can see through it. And maybe I can find some way to meet this person in different way. So one of the one of the ways it plays out for me, this idea is that there are some times I'm angry at people. And I have learned that if I'm in their presence, it's hard for me to maintain my anger. Because my anger is kind of made up out of my imagination, my stories and the conversation I'm having with them, that, at some point, if I spent too much time away from them, having these conversations, reviewing what happens and all that, it begins kind of losing touch with reality. It's kind of like, you know, my inner world. And so I've learned that when I'm angry with someone, to go find them, and be in their presence and try to talk to them. Because I find that then I see, I kind of see the multi dimensional aspects of the person, that my mind and the story of my resentment, it's like two dimensional, or it's probably a bit less, that's one dimensional, my poor little mind, you know, and so, but if I'm with a person who's press three dimensional, and then I begin kind of softening, and I begin kind of seeing them in the different ways and you know, and I feel kind of a different attitude, I don't hold my resentment the way I was before. That desire not to hold my resentment, it comes partly by knowing that it's hurts me to have resentment or anger, and also comes from knowing that it's theoretically possible to be with this person and have love for them. And I would like to do that. How do we do it realistically? How do we do it? So we did to take care of ourselves? Well, one way that I've learned is you don't tell them. They don't have to know. You can just have goodwill and love and just kind of privacy of your own inner life. And then you know, you don't have the complications that arise if you tell them in, you know, all kinds of things, you know, ways. So, you know, there's no obligation to tell them. And that's a nice little, you know, or to know that there's a strength behind that love.

So we can take care of ourselves, we can say, No, we can be confident and say, you know, this is as far as I can, what I can do for you, or, but you know, to learn how to be with it. So the brahma vihara is these divine, a bindings for forms of selfless love. And the selfless in the fact that they're selfless? I suggest gives them real depth inside of us making really a deep phenomenon. Because selfishness I think of as being kind of a surface phenomenon, surface chatter of the mind that is active, but to really let go of that deep drop into some deeper place inside, I think it makes this love deep. And it becomes stable when it's not mixed up with greed, lust, desires, neediness, which kind of keeps the mind agitated, and unstable. So they have this deep, stable sense of love. That has this particular flavor. There's so many the word love in English means so many different things for different people. But in Buddhism, it means one of these four states state of deep goodwill or loving kindness, a state of compassion, the state of appreciative joy, and the state of equanimity. So what I'd like to do when the next time that I'm here is to hopefully give one talk on each of those, so we can appreciate it better and understand it. And so you can maybe understand that these are fantastic resources, they have great value. In fact, the Buddha called them Inner Wealth, they're greater than any outer wealth that you can have this Inner Wealth. And it's a nice wealth to have, because it's portable. So those are my thoughts for today. And you have any questions about that, or any comments you'd like to make?

So sometimes when I'm doing metta practice, I'll get to the difficult person. And there's like this roadblock. Sorry. And there's like this Roadblock, right? Yes. And sometimes what I'll do is, sort of turn that around and to ask myself, Well, do I wish this person ill? And? And usually answer's no. And that somehow seems to open up, create a space for some sort of meta goodwill to arise. Very nice. Yeah, I'm angry with you, I wish this person but ill will do I have ill will for the person. It's interesting that in the there's in this tera, vaada, Buddhist tradition, there's a very big 1000 1500 year old book, that's the meditation manual. You know, it's, it's like 800 pages in English, the translation is a really, really big book. And they have a big chapter on practicing these brahma vihara, as these four forms of love. And the biggest section is about loving kindness. And in that section on loving kindness, I don't know 90% of it, is how to work with anger. How to work with anger, anger being misunderstood, I think that people who were people who wrote the book considered anger to be the biggest obstacle to having love.

Go ahead. Um, I have the kind of the opposite thing I've been accused of being over empathetic. And it gets me into trouble. Because I can usually always see the other person's side, and I lean in that direction. And something gets mixed up there. That's not it's not healthy, or I don't know why I'm doing it. I don't know if it's projection or what it is. But do you have any insight into kind of where to work on that? It's too easy to hear maybe, I mean, generally, people consider empathy to be a nice virtue, nice motion to have. But if empathy involves over identification with someone else, then we can get in trouble. You know, we can meet have to, if empathy means feeling the suffering of someone else, you know, you know, we might be of no help to anyone, if we're having the same suffering as them because just because we're next to them, you know, they don't need that. Both be miserable together. So, I think empathy, you know, over identification over kind of absorbing it is not useful. But to have some kind of sense or inner sense or an experience, wreck of recognition, oh, that person's suffering. And the recognition of it while we can stay stable, relaxed, open, but not taking it on or not letting it be filler, who we are. That's a more, I think, more useful kind of empathy that then has space for us to, from, hopefully, from a strong place, kind of an independent place maybe to be able to and to recognize and sympathize and be there with them and kind of empathize to some degree, but don't get lost in their experience. Yes, this is on right? Yeah.

You were talking about these four different phases. And you said something about while toward the end about, it's an inner strength or an inner joy. I don't know if you said joy. But you had also mentioned joy

at one point, this is a way of, I guess, with equanimity coming towards every situation, even the person, that's your enemy. Could you talk more about this quality of joy?

Okay, I could. And I guess I will, kind of the hesitation about it is that I can give a whole you know, I could spend the next hour talking about joy. I could spend the next hour talking about joy to even scratch the surface of the topic. But the primary joy that's directly associated with these four brahma vihara is is a third one, which is sympathetic joy, or appreciative joy. So if I see you, and you're just really happy, maybe even for no reason at all, imagine that Abraham. And you know, and then you come to see me and I say to you, huh? Get over it. You know, it's impermanent, everything. So, you know, Abraham, everything's impermanent. You know, I'll give you a dose of wisdom. You know, that's, that would have one result. But if you come in, you're so happy, and for no reason at all, just you're settled and happy. And I see your wonderful face smiling. And I just like, Wow, great. And I saw, I feel, this is wonderful. And I just celebrated with you, I feel joy, that you feel joy. And it's contagious. And I'd like to share it with you. And let's celebrate, let's appreciate this. So there's, that's, that's the appreciative joy that we can have. There's other forms of joy that can be connected to this, kind of, and that is that it can be joyful, to know that we're not easily going to fall into anger or fall into resentment or greed or lust, repeat the Brahma vihara, those are considered protector protections, considered to be very profound protect, they protect you, in many ways. And so if you can live in this kind of way, you're protected from all kinds of problems that might run in, you run into. And there's a certain kind of joy or gladness to know, well, I'm safe. There's a strength here, there's a ability to negotiate the world this way. And there's certain safety, that and so that we appreciate that safety, that's just a joy. And then there's the meditative joy. And that is that if you can get stable and concentrated and focused and so that the tire field of your attention is only about one of these loves. Anytime you get concentrated, then there is concentration factors that get woken. And there can be very strong states of joy and happiness that arise, not so much because of the joy of the love, because of the concentration on the love. But then it's kind of sublime, that these strong states, strong states of concentrated joy are mixed with love together. That's pretty sweet. It makes us even more joyful. So these are good things. So that's something is that enough.

Let's rejoice in those three. Let's rejoice in those three. So I saw one more hand somewhere. Yes. This is

great, thanks. Earlier this year, you kind of left us with a provocation to be a refuge for others. And that was really compelling idea to me, because it's kind of resonate to this idea, an idea that I had of what I liked what I like to be, and just now also this big fiery furnace of emitting this heat for others as well where you're not deficit oriented and looking to get that love back. So wondering if you could comment on how to balance aspiring to those ideals of providing refuge or being that fiery furnace with also meeting your own emotional needs.

Thank you practice your next question. I think anytime there's been religions and Buddhism's you know, does it too has a lot of wonderful ideals. And sometimes it's wiser not to pursue the ideals, but to understand what gets in the way of them. Because then then, if you understand what gets in the way, and you can drop those or resolve those, then you're available for the world without those blockages. And without those blockages in my turnout, the ideal you're pursuing is not what the situation calls for. And but now you're more available and more, more adaptable, to provide what is needed to make sense. So one of the ways to start answering your question is, look at all the ways in which all the things you do they get in the way. And then after you look at that for a while, maybe you'll learn something about the ideal. That's an F, you know, more, more your own. To see, okay, it's an answer. Great, thank you. Great. So

it is not unrealistic, to love. I think it's a profound thing to do, and can come from tremendous place of strength and wisdom. And it's for the betterment of yourself and the world. And to give Abraham a fourth kind of joy is that if you have goodwill for others, they benefit hopefully. And you benefit, as well. It's a mutual benefit that goes on. So what a great thing to do. It's a wonderful path, the path of joy. And I would say that, a, if I speak about it from personal experience, I found it to be tremendously meaningful for me in my life, these kinds of love into, and it's kind of like a reference point that I use to, you know, quite often for how to live how to be, how to how to try to figure out how do I how do I deal with this situation with this person now and in a way that has integrity, but it's their, you know, their question. And it was a long time coming to learn this. It wasn't something that I learned easily and quickly. But it's something over these years that I've been practicing slowly, slowly, I began to understand if you value it, and I'm sure I could have learned it quicker if I if I had a sense sense enough to really apply myself to it. But I didn't. So it happens slowly, over time, slowly as I did this practice, and I just feel like it's been one of the great treasures of my life in my practice to have this and then I'd like to suggest that don't be so slow. Don't be slow, but as I was it's well worth developing well worth focusing on and learning. So thank you all very much.