

# 2018-02-19 To Be Changed By Change

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ideas, change, thought, people, sensations, hand, mindfulness, life, clinging, meditation, permanence, feel, experience, cling, flow, concepts, disappearing, mindfulness practice, relationship, nice

## SPEAKERS

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One interpretation of the Buddha's teachings would be that we're invited to take a good look at change. We're invited to like, take a good look at the changing nature of our experience. And we're invited to take a good look at our relationship to change. And a big part of what mindfulness practice is designed to do, classically in Buddhism is to place us in the middle of the changing nature of our life, changing nature of our experience, because there's something about the changing nature of our life for experience that is very profound and very meaningful, very important to kind of address it to meet to see it a deep And then more importantly, to see what our relationship is to it. Because if we don't look at our relationship to it and consider what it might be, then you'll have a relationship anyway. It just won't be so conscious. So part of the mindfulness practice is too subtle enough to really be here and be able to kind of begin tuning into the changing nature. And it's not too difficult to see how things change. The years change. winter comes to California every few years. And so the seasons change. The days come one after the other nights come one after the other. The hours go by, might have breakfast, maybe. And we have lunch, maybe. Then the next day, we repeat the same thing and it's changing, but it's kind of some of the change repeats itself. And there's the return of the same kind of thing, the same season of the year, the same hour of the day, the same dawn, the same dusk, kind of. And then there's a changes of how we are over our lifetime. Some of the changes have been imperceptibly slow. But at some point, it dawns on us. You know, I think I've changed. You know, if you look at a photograph from 20 years before and say, oh, and then you see change. And then you have, some of us have had, you know, that major difficulties in our lives that are no longer here. It's changed. They've gone somewhere. those emotions, those feelings, those concerns those fears. Some people have made major issues going on currently. And it might not be obvious they're going to change. And you might succumb to the delusion of permanence. It's going away it's going to be forever. And I know I've had I've had the delusion of permanence, about plenty of things that ended up to be impermanent. like kind of a kind of a related to the mess if this is how it's going to be forever. And the. And then there's the changing emotions and feelings we have through the day. I found that fascinating for a while to watch. How am I wakefulness and tiredness, waned, waxed and waned through the day, and kind of tracked it and watch it to see it come and go. And it was helpful to me to start seeing how it changed because I had a relationship to my tiredness through the day. That was not very friendly. And now much more friendly about it but it took a long time and I would beat myself up I'd be upset I'd be angry. I feel bad about myself I feel like a failure because I was tired. And then you know now just kind of ride along I notice a change and I accommodate the change in the best way I can. And then there's a changing nature of our emotional life. And I kind of like to think of my inner emotional life is like the weather and so the weather changes. I lived in Tennessee for a while and in Tennessee they had a saying that if you don't like the weather, wait five minutes because apparently changed quite often quite quickly in Tennessee. And so you know, the inner landscape, the inner emotions can change and, but sometimes they're looking upon it as if it's whether

I have a kind of different relationship to it as if this is it. This is a big deal. Just the weather going through. I'm upset. I'm sad. Happy it's the weather it's a very different feeling. I like the weather I actually very fond of weather I just like to go outside and whatever the weather is like kind of generally delights me and so to say my emotions is whether it's like you know for me is like pretty cool pretty nice. But it's also reminds me of changes and then also reminds me The weather is not me The weather is not something that I take ownership of. And there's a way of being with the changing nature of emotional life. Where it's can be helpful not to identify with it too much not to make a big story about this is that we define ourselves by our emotions. So by calling it the weather, it comes and goes as it does and it's you know, much much easier and then there's a changing nature of moment to moment experience. You know, we be go outside perhaps or inside and the how we experienced the most moment, moment to moment is changing and shifting. We're aware of different phenomena, sound, a sight, a thought, a feeling. All kinds of things are shifting and changing. And, and sometimes we don't see how much our experience our perception of the world is changing. Because we're kind of stuck on something, we're kind of stuck on some idea or some thing that's here, present. And sometimes we're stuck on some idea of being the doer. You know, I'm the doer or I'm the C, or it's all up to me. And even sitting in this last sitting, it was, you know, I was sitting here and that was pretty content and happy and just spent the spelt kind of flow and change of experience. But after a while, I noticed that there was one thing that wasn't changing. And that was me, being the viewer of it all. And I noticed I'd look turned my attention to this idea of being the one who's doing the practice, and I could feel this certain kind of inner tension or pressure or I kind of referred thought of it more as like coagulating or it's a rightward kind of coming together and getting concentrated. And I could feel it kind of the tightening somewhere around the area of my face and stuff is everything else was kind of changing and flowing, but not the doer. And so, but as I sat here, it felt like I was like, the feeling I had was I was in the ocean and the ocean waves everything was changing all the time. And I was a I got like this. I was a, like a, you know, they have these, these little, little round detergent pills. I know what they call they've got, like, like extra big pills, you know, I don't know. And you know, and they dissolve in the water. So I was just like I was, I was in the ocean, of my experience. In this blank this, the solid, you know, the target was gonna start dissolve, you know, and it could feel as I sat here got softer and softer and that sense of hardness and also started to change in that sense of that. And this idea that me being the permanent thing, everything else can change, but me being kind of steady, began to soften in a very nice way. So change. And so in Buddhist practice, there are three levels of change, that are kind of relate to her that are important. And one is the most ordinary level of how things change in our lives, things. Things have been talking about things changing all kinds of ways. And this changing nature of things, some things just change from one state to another. So you are all changing. You're different today than you were yesterday and there's been change and, but you're kind of still here, but you're you're different. than you were yesterday. And then there's things that change because and by disappearing by stopping by dying by coming to their end. And some things come to an end. And very poignant kind of idea is the idea that the last time you're going to do something, or someone's gonna do something. The first time I kind of was kind of kind of took this into account was I was talking to a relative who was kind of elderly. And he said to me, he just bought a car. He said, this is the last time I'll buy a car. That Oh, really.

And it was and so, you know, it'll be the last time for a lot of the things you do most of the things you do everything you do. There'll be a last time and then what is that if you could really no, this is the last time you're going to see someone. This is the last time you're going to have breakfast. This is the last time you're going to look at if you wake up early enough the dawn coming up this is the last time and there will be that and you know I think that there's a it's fairly common for people to be surprised by their death it's not like planned you know put it on the schedule and so you'd be on know your last time that you it's kind of poignant that there'll be a last time the end of something and for some people that's very

sad. For some people, there are certain endings like finally you know, then we just impermanence thing was faster sometimes. Because that boss they paid and stayed and they and finally that boss left and so think permit is one So, you know There's loss with change. And it's also what we gain with change. And sometimes both of those happening at the same time. So there's a relationship to that. And I've noticed I was that there are a lot of people who are not Buddhists, who are really wise about change, because, you know, it's part and parcel of life, we have to encounter it and see it and go through it and, and deal with it one way or the other, all the different changes we go through in our lives. So there's that ordinary experience of change and impermanence and then there's another kind of change that is the kind of more refined, which is the change that this mindfulness practice is designed to see when the practice is strong. And now the word is not the word for change is inconstancy. And things are transitory. They're in transit, they come and they go and And we start when the mind gets quieter and Still, and the mindfulness gets stronger. One of the things that becomes clear and clear, is it in the moment as the moment unfolds, that things are in constant, they're changing and flowing. And if they're not, it represents that either we're stuck in some place we're holding on, or we're kind of coagulated run something like I was in my sitting. Or we're really caught up in thoughts, ideas and concepts. A lot of the ideas of permanence we have belong to the world of thoughts and ideas, concepts don't change very much. You know the concept of ever a concept of a tree, you can have an image of a tree and that original tree that you may be made that image from as long since gone, but you carry that image I mean, idea, concepts have a country of virtual permanence. So if we're thinking about things and relating the world through our concepts and ideas, we can have a much stronger sense that things don't change. So my, you know, my troubles, I have so much troubles and those troubles. You know, I had my head, I discovered one point that I had, one of my delusions of permanence that I lived with was the permanence of the future. I had ideas of what was coming, and that was coming was going to be that way forever. And hadn't even come in I was already had ideas about what it was going to be like. And so it was clearly ideas I had and they might have been accurate enough, but to see them as ideas and concepts, and that I was kind of my hitting my head against or struggling with, not the future, the real future. What we'll future but what I was struggling with is my ideas of the future. And I was banging my head against those ideas. And not a few times, I would say, my predictions, my whole fantasy, my ideas of what the future was going to bring this future permanence. It never happened and even get close to it. But I was struggling and anxious and afraid and living this whole complicated life around these ideas. So it's a rather radical idea that most of the ideas of permanence that we live under our ideas.

We don't see them that way. But as the mind settles in meditation, we don't live in ideas so much anymore. We don't live in concepts. We don't live in the future. We don't live in the past. We don't make stories up about ourselves. And then the attention the mindfulness starts becoming more and more aware that Things are changing. They're breathing, if you're used breath is admitted as a focus of meditation, it's a kind of this nice flow and change and rhythm that goes on the body sensations. The body sensations are constantly flowing and changing and appearing and disappearing. My concept of a hand doesn't change. I haven't you know, I've constructed my hand to kind of doesn't change, and I can close my eyes and have my idea of my hand. And I can kind of make an image in my mind's eye of my hand. And I can have all kinds of very wonderful complicated relationship my hand by hand is too much this too much that too much here and my knuckles, and too much, you know, too long, too short, too stubby, too fat, too thin. You know, it goes on and on and on. So some people have very nice relationship with their hands. Some people have very, you know, all kinds of you know, they'd rather not show them in public or something, we have ideas. But if you close your eyes when you try doing it here which Now close your eyes and instead of thinking about your right hand, feel your right hand. Feel the sensations in your right hand. There might be tingling pulsing, warm coolness. There might be contact

with your hand against some other part of your body. The contact might feel soft and might feel hard. It might be smoothness or roughness.

Sensations in the back of your hand are probably different than the sensations in the palm of your hand. The sensations and your fingers are probably different than the palm of your hand. Now, if you only are tuning in to the sensations in and of themselves, you probably feel that they're shifting and changing, probably dancing around a little bit. And even if some of them seem to have some kind of constancy, if you get closer in and feel inside of that, you probably might feel that they're made up smaller subset of teeny little dance of sensations tingling pulsing. Heat, that sense of heat or pressure that's slightly moving coming into being and passing away and reappearing with your eyes closed in a certain kind of way. There's no direct experience. Have the contours of the hand, the ideas of the shape of the hand. The edges of the hand are kind of probably diffuse. And the maybe even the idea of hand falls away from some specific idea of what the hand is to just the sensations changing and moving and flux boxing. So you can open your eyes. So I you know, I don't know if that exercise worked for everyone. But when people get into like on retreat, we do this exercise with people sometimes and there because people sometimes been sitting quietly for a while, the thinking mind is settled away, and the hand starts feeling really vibrant and alive, much more so than if you weren't paying attention to it. And there's a much heightened sense of, of sensitivity because you're focusing on it, but also a heightened awareness of all these sensations playing there, that you wouldn't pay it, you wouldn't even notice if you were wrapped in the talk I'm giving. And you know, and it's like, you know, everything else falls away. But you know, you focus on the hand and you get all this stuff. So things are seeing as arising and passing through. And so here, the word for change is in constancy. Some of those sensations were not disappearing. But they weren't staying set. They were, they were coming and going, that coming and going moment by moment is called in constancy in our language. They're impermanent, that particular kind of way, they're not disappearing once and for all, but they're coming and going. When we went in there, so in deeper as we settle into the practice, that's the world we begin tuning into. We get interested in this world of change, and that's a different thing to be interested in. Then what most people are interested in. So because you're getting interested in the process of change, not so much the thing that's changing. So, you know, so for example, I could sit here, and I could be thinking about this, maybe something important that's happening tomorrow. And I'm really fixated on this because I'm afraid or I'm anxious or I'm anticipating in some way. And so it doesn't go away, just kind of kind of locked into it. And because I'm interested in the thought, What's going to happen tomorrow. But if I tune into the process of what it's like to be thinking, I see, in fact, even though there's a kind of a tension that's kind of constant, that tension, the physical tension, just like the hand sensations, especially coming and going, but more importantly, actually, I thought I was only thinking about tomorrow's meeting or something like I was stuck on it. But in fact, In all the nano moments that we have, I'm thinking about, you know, what should I have for breakfast? And what should I pack for lunch tomorrow? And what clothes should I wear for the meeting and, and, you know, I wonder if after the meeting is over, I can go for a walk and, and, and here's a person who's wearing a blue jacket. And, and you know, then look, she has a pillow next to her on the floor, and all these little nano moments of thick stuff is going on. It turns out, I'm not actually fixated all the time on that. I started seeing the changing nature of the experience. So what I'm trying to say maybe in a clumsy way, is that we tend to be more interested in particular topics and themes and ideas, more than how those things are changing.

And what we're trying to do, or at some point in the mindfulness practices shift, from focusing on the thing, the ideas, to focusing on the process of change that goes on then we can start seeing our relationship to the change, we can start seeing how we create the idea of permanence, how we hold on to things and get stuck. We can see how we coagulate, we can see how we resist it, we can see how

we hold on to how things are, we can see how we try to stop the river by putting the tries you know, where you can see our, how we try how we paint, or overlay concepts and ideas and feelings and aspirations and fears on top of the change. And so just start seeing in the moment the flow of change, flow change, the constancy constancy of inconstancy, as we sit. So, some of these can be seen in daily life, when we start focusing more on how things are changing more than how things are. It's a fascinating study, to do that. In mindfulness as a practice, because deep deeper, we enter into a world where all there is is change. And there's a great story from the Chinese Buddhist tradition of a student that comes to the teacher and says, When everything is arising and passing incessantly, what then? And the teacher says, My imagination teacher kind of looks at the student, be very clear kind of clear eyes, direct eyes and says, who's arising and passing is it? And what this question does is it's kind of like me sitting here, I, you know, I saw everything was kind of changing as I sat here, except for me being the doer. But if you're really, you know, as that's begin to dissolve that sense of a doer, and that kind of sucks. dissolved away. There was no you know, if I turn to look for the doer anymore, there was no duer there, that's just part of the continuous arising and passing a phenomenon. And so if you're really in that, if you're really practicing deeply in that flow of change, you'll find at some point, if you take around and look for that, the self that's due or the self that you thought you were, as if you're outside that flow of change, you won't find it. So it's a so some people when they have when they're asked to kind of look at, turn around and look for that, in the flow of change. Something releases is that kind of freedom that happens, oh, I have to hold on to this or there's a space here, there's freedom here. There's, there's, you know, whereas in the past people might be so So, basically our whole life and the idea of self, me, myself and mine, that's where it's all based on that. But but to turn around and wait, it's not here, the very thing that I'm so attached to, it's not here. Some people get disoriented. When this happens. Some people get home afraid the first time it happens, but it's really liberating. I mean, you know, you've been carrying yourself around for a long time. It's time to give yourself a little vacation. You know, it's okay. You know, nothing's really gonna, you know, you'll come back soon enough. Some people say it, some people get what already. It was so nice not to have it. And so. So as we do this in constancies, and really see things arising and passing, there's a number of ways that that helps us to begin letting go of the clinging of the coagulating of the tension to holding that is really kind of deeply embedded in how many people live their lives. And some people don't even see how embedded this tension is, until they start doing mindfulness practice. You know, we don't advertise that, you know, come and do mindfulness and realize how stuck you are. You know, we're out, you know how much tension or coagulation you're, that you know, nowadays, mindfulness is more you know, in the popular world and secular mindfulness, it's more about stress reduction. And, you know, you don't, you don't say come and realize how stressed out you are. But that's how it kind of works right? You have to find out first in order to know so it can be a surprise for some people to sit down and meditate. Wow, I didn't No idea. But that's the beginning of freedom.

And so they said there's three three levels are kind of aspects of change. In Buddhism, versus the ordinary one that anybody can see. The second is the one that is seen. As the mindfulness meditation gets deeper and stronger. The third kind of change is a change, that's liberating. It's freeing. I kind of already touched on a little bit. So when we turn around and see there's no self here and the flow of change something something like oh, this can be liberating. Or we see the constant change enough. And we take a look, it's very interesting to take a look at between the ceasing of one thing, and before the rising of the next and interesting place to do that. If this is why meditation can be kind of helpful for this is in meditation, you're thinking can slow down dramatically. Come thinner, lighter, not so strong, not so heavy, not so dense. And the mind can you know, the thoughts become kind of wispy, and sometimes they seem like they stopped working disappear received far in the background. And a person can have the experience of, of the, you know, the ordinary life thoughts come like a mile a minute and you know, it's like no gap, you know, like they're coming one on top of the other and before



one's over the other one is started and just like, you know, incessant, but in meditation it gets very, very quiet in there can and some points people have the experience of a thought will arise. It will fade and disappear. And then the next thought doesn't arise right away. And that gap is fascinating place to be. There's freedom there. There's space there. There's a lack of definition, all the definitions we have of who we are, don't exist there. And what's it like for you to be alive without the any definition? Without any idea? Your history is not there. Because history is, you know, history, what is history? I mean, it's mostly in your memory, right? So when you tell yourself a story about the past, but when you're not telling the story, because there's no thoughts, what happens to your history, when you're not having a thought about the future? What happens to the future? Who are you? Who are you? When you can't use thoughts to answer the question? For some people, that's a liberating moment. And to kind of, you know, see, Oh, look at that. I'm still breathing, I'm alive. And I don't have to always live in the world of thoughts and ideas. I don't have to always live racing after the next thought concerned for the next one, fixing that thought, solving the problem of the thought that I just had, defining myself in thoughts. I can be here and breathe and be present and Have a certain kind of piece in that gap at the end of one thought and before the next begins, it can be a kind of game changer for some people kind of realize there's, there's no, there's no other game in town. You know, there wasn't just a thought game. And so it's not only about having the better thoughts or more knowledge or read more books or better understanding. There's a whole other thing about it's not an understanding. You know, that's kind of strange. It's not an understanding, it's kind of almost like the absence of understanding. Not that understanding is unimportant. But it's not the only show in town. There's something else too. And that, that the gap You know, there's a gap from and it's a freedom from understanding Freedom from definition. And also it's a freedom from clinging. Because clinging tends to arise more often than not in relationship to thoughts. It's a rather kind of, you know, maybe it's a little bit embarrassing. You know, you're clinging is not going to like this idea. In that I kind of think that's what people cling to when they cling. Unless you're holding onto the ladder and you're climbing up the ladder, we cling to ideas, to thoughts. In that gap where there's no thought, No idea, there's nothing to cling to.

So some people have the experience of, you know, in of deeper meditation, of kind of wanting to cling to something and their mind kind of goes out to grab And it's kind of like grabbing the air. You know, you end up with nothing, you know, or something or water and the water just, you know, runs up your fingers and you can't hold on to it. You can't cling, there's nothing there. Because clinging tends to be two ideas. It's kind of a radical idea, itself, don't cling to that idea. But the it's, you know, it's kind of changes the game to film it. I mean, if you're clinging is always to ideas. I mean, that's, I mean, is that worth is it worth clinging to ideas? Or is it better to have ideas and use them to guide our lives and support our lives, but not cling to them? To have ideas be light, the thoughts we have been like, then ease for our breathing to be at Rather than this movement of contraction and movement of holding movement of clinging, resisting that goes on. So the third level of, of seeing change is seeing change in a way that frees the mind that frees us that gives us space and openness and peace, the kind of seeing of change that brings peace. And they say in Buddhism, that there's peace, there's a peace that belongs to kind of in a cut in a certain kind of way belongs to an unchanging dimension of our life. So how are they how and everything's changing, there could be some dimension which is peaceful, it doesn't change is a little bit you know, that's a whole topic in itself, but to experience peace, So, whether you know it or not, you are living in a world of change, or the you know what not or not, you yourself are a walking embodiment of change. Change is part and parcel of this life, it's kind of intimately part of your life. What is your relationship to change? What happens if you tune in for a while to the changing nature of phenomena, rather than to the phenomena in and of itself? And then can you use that to see your relationship to it? Are you trying to stop the change? You're trying to encourage it, trying to get you know, try and you know, you're clinging to something. When is your relationship to change? Are you comfortable with change, since they do change frightening? The city of change

confusing is what you really relationship to change. If you continue doing mindfulness practice and meditation, chances are that your relationship to change, become more and more trusting and comfortable, more and more easeful with it. And certainly it'll stop being an enemy or a problem. So those are my thoughts today. And we have a few minutes. And if anyone has any questions or comments you'd like to make about this, or if you have any protests, do you feel like you know, this is not right. You know, what's permanent? Please, anything.

Is there a mic over there?

When you talk about

Find a way to be free of an idea of things. The closest thing I had to experiences like this one when I had quite a serious brain damage experience in a car accident. I don't think I thought about things very much for a while. Also a few years later, one of my friends had Alzheimer's. I used to go see her. We didn't really talk about things we didn't talk that much. What do you think about that? Is that is that like, too much of a shortcut or not getting away with something you know, it wasn't really you know, working to get into this state we just sort of like this garbage truck hit me and then you know,

please don't go out and look for an accident to have Yeah,

please don't.

But what was it like for you? We met for you after the accident and with your friend. Was there something that we did was not there the right word is but something that was important. For you are valuable and that experience useful in that experience,

I felt like when I was with my friend, I felt like I had access to something that a lot of friends, other people come see or two, that they it was harder for them. There was more contrast between their regular life and life with her. So with me is like, Okay, here we are

on it. What was it like for you? Was it? Do you appreciate that opportunity in some way? Or?

Oh, that was great. I could be with her that

way. I mean, I really appreciated. It was a great being with yourself that way. Ah,

ah, I think when you're recovering from head injury, you're aware that other people can do things you can't do you know, that you can't do things that you could do two weeks ago, you know, so that's hard. on there was a point early, where I knew how to get around in the bat. They showed me how to get to the bathroom and stuff in the hospital. And I just was functioning and then one day I knew that you go to the toilet and then you wash your hands. And then I go back to my bed. You know, I knew how to do these things. Then there was a point where I looked up, I was washing my hands, I looked in the mirror, and I saw that is kind of like my face, except I have a black eye and there's bandages. And I hadn't really thought about my face or who I was, it was sort of like, Oh, yeah, that's, that's this person. That's me. And, you know, then I asked somebody what happened, where why was I there? But before that, I was just doing stuff. You know? I didn't really reflect on how I felt about doing stuff. It was just now you know, at first they had to take me in a wheelchair, and then I found I could do it by myself.

You know, was there anything that looking back at that experience? Yeah. I mean, as you're living your life now, Uh huh. Did you learn any important lesson about a way of being from that that you that was been useful for you or is that just an interesting phase in your life and

ah, I found I can I can Have more tolerance for being with people who have some difficulty like that. Nice. That's about it. Um, I mean, I didn't have this I don't think I had this experience like what you're talking about, like some realization, you know? But what you're saying sounded very similar to it. That's all

I've had I've known I've had friends who've had serious accidents and concussions and stuff and they said it was it was kind of mind life changing for them because they felt like they they experienced their life in a whole very nice way. I think everything kind of pressures very still kind of peaceful. And they did you know, there wasn't spend barment of thoughts and ideas that they were used to. They didn't even realize that they have been living with that all the time. And show them another way of being and that things came back and sometimes they came back and they were a little disappointed.

I think when you come out of a coal mine Yeah, I felt very clean. Like it's a very clean slate. And I've heard that other people feel feel the same way?

Yeah. Yeah. And I've known people who've had that kind of experience and then in, you know, a non accident kind of ways, try to get back to it. And they spend years trying to get back to something like that.

Mostly experience in companionship with someone who has something like that where it's, it's easier for me to go into it.

You know, that's a great gift. You have them to spend time to have spent time with people like that. It's very nice. Thank you. Maybe Time for one more. Yep, up here.

All right. I just liked what you said about, you know, change and how well I guess All my life I've sort of struggled with the conception of, you know, like, reality, like life being real or not. And I've always been You know, what, really afraid. But, um, I like what you said about how a certain, you know, action that you do could be your last, like, you know, my first meal. I mean, my last meal, or my, you know, my last time talking to one of my friends and you know, even though I'm young, like I could still, you know, unforeseen circumstances can occur. And you know, it's nice to accept change. And

yeah, actually Louisiana. So I think one of the one of the hopes and saying this is that, that if you if you that you allow you allows you to really be present for your experience as being lived, and really present for Don't miss it because you're lost in the future lost in the past or lost in fantasy or ideas or thoughts. There's something wonderful about awake in Buddhism, the idea is to wake up. So you wake up to this moment. And for some people, this idea, this could If somebody would like the editor to remind themselves, this could be the last time and not so much to, you know, mostly so they can be more awake in what they're doing. And they might live again for 50 years, but, but those 50 years become a lot of special moments. Okay, so things change. There's been a lot of small changes and 30 seconds that can be a big change in this room. And that the change will keep going on. So thank you all very much.