There is a story of a monastery where whole of the monastics one day were given the instructions. As they went about their life in the monastery and were talking with each other if they had to, that they were not allowed to initiate any conversation that involved the use of them saying, I me mine. If someone asked them a direct question that involved answering with that, then they were welcome to, but they weren't going to take any conversation, unnecessary conversations with using the personal pronoun for oneself. So this seemed like strange instructions. But the practitioners in the monastery said, well, let's give it a go. And the morning was kind of confusing as they kept stumbling around this instruction. I me my pronouns kept kind of tumbling out of their mouth. But then in the afternoon, they started to get the hang of it and seemed to go a little easier. And then the evening was even easier. They got the hang of it and, and they were all surprised when they went to sleep that night. They didn't feel so tired. There was more ease and relaxation. It seemed like not so much stress had built up in the day and they thought that was curious. So the next day, they got up in the morning and they had Abbess of the monastery said to them very well. But now for this day. Anytime there you're thinking, and the thoughts are about yourself, that somehow you're the main actor or the main subject, or the thoughts somehow referred back to you. You're the main character of You're thinking, I would like to just let go of those, just as soon as you notice that they have to do about you just let go of them. Keep doing it throughout the day. And as it had been the day before, it was kind of awkward at first, I mean, who can control their thoughts and their thoughts where, and even just the very idea, it's like, telling someone Don't think about pink elephants, and you had never hadn't thought about pink elephants until someone told you not to and then you can't stop it. So this idea of not talking about not thinking about oneself, was a little hard in the morning, the afternoon they started to get a little bit their bearings and stop being self conscious around this instructions, which really made it difficult. And it seemed like they could start recognizing the thoughts they had there. Were about me that were about me, myself and mine. And they started letting go of those thoughts. And by the evening they got the
hang of it. And they found that there were long gaps where they weren't really thinking about
themselves. They were still thinking, but the thoughts weren't so self focused. And when it was time to
go to sleep that night, they none of them were tired, none of them are ready to sleep. And so each of
them went to their bed and sat upright and meditated refresh to open, feeling fair, much freer than they
ever felt before. So this little story, points to the cost of the incessant way in which many people are
concerned about me myself in mind. We get socialized in such a way that that's often understood and
validated as being important that we should affirm ourselves project ourselves. Seize the day. Do
things for ourselves, assert, you know all this, you know, and we should be thinking about ourselves.
Even the mindfulness movement, you know, like, pay attention to yourself notice what's happening
here can be taken it's just more of this focus around the self. But the cost of the constant thinking
about and wondering about oneself is can be exhausting. There can be constant thinking about what
should I say that I say too much that I say too little? Will they reject me if I say it? Did they reject me
should I apologize? So if I take it back, should I should I What should I do here and all this kind of
social gymnastics in order to find our way?

When I was young, my big fear was the fear of rejection by others. And I spent a tremendous amount
of mental effort energy in trying to get everyone to like me and the place where it really came to a
head was when I was a kitchen manager for the monastery and had a crew, sometimes a big crew of
people who are working, cooking. And the way it works in the kitchen and Zen monastery, it's kind of
like a pressure cooker, a social pressure cooker. And being the manager who's directing the show,
telling people what to do is a kind of can be a thankless job with everyone angry at you or everyone,
you know, somehow, you know, and, and so that's where I found out that trying to get everyone to like
me, was a lost cause. And, and I had to really face this constant kind of incessant most addiction to try
to always find myself safe and safe from being rejected. And as I did that, I noticed that there were, as
I let go of it was able to let go of it. I was doing a lot of meditation that helped. That in fact, Do a
greater sense of ease happen? The mind didn't get so tired and exhausted. So if you know this whole
question of what is the self and what Buddhism says about the self, if we are allowed kind of just a
kind of flip answer, what is this self? One answer would be the self is exhaustion. It's just what gets
exhausted, is his constant kind of circling around self and self concern. And we know it can be a real
problem when they're pregnant when we are excessively self conscious, and we can stumble, stumble
into words some people can't speak some people get all flustered when they're self conscious. And,
and so you know, we that can be recognized as being a problem. The there's a lot of ways and people
under Stand themselves, which undermines their ability to be in the world in a free and relaxed way.
And so some of the attitudes of not good enough, I can't do it, people won't like me. I'm not as good as
other people, I'm better than other people. All those are kind of takes a work to maintain those. The
and then there's the ideas of I have to be a certain way. Like I said earlier today that, you know, I had, I
assumed the identity of being an artist, and then I stopped doing art. And that probably a good thing
because somehow doing it because of the identity didn't work for me. But we had these identities,
these roles, these ideas of this is the kind of person I should be and people can spend a lot of time
energy into maintaining it, projecting it, approving it. And sometimes these some of these identities we
hold on to some of these self definitions can be quite fragile. And can be easily threatened by people.
And some of the anger that some people, sometimes explosive anger is when somehow or other, their view of themselves idea of who they need to be is threatened and so it's too difficult idea of giving up or having your self identity or self definition challenge and threaten for some people is very very difficult. Some people when they've defined themselves as being in relationship to others in the world, if that somehow falls away, it can be very difficult frightening, discouraging. People who get sick people have injuries and can no longer go back to activities that they're used to doing that they identified themselves strongly with can find it very difficult to make the transition. And you probably know people I've known people who had some serious something serious happened to them. And the who they thought they were in terms of being an athlete or some activity that they had, you know, met wonderful mastery of and it really was fulfilling for them. And they kind of that's who they shaped themselves to be and went out to prove and be and everything. And something happened that they couldn't do that anymore and illness and injury. And it was quite devastating at first. And then there are people who say, that was the best thing that ever happened to me. Because I saw that I'm much more than that. It allowed me to open up to greater possibilities, rather than always holding to this particular idea of who I thought I had to be.

So this idea of identity, how we define ourselves is a complicated thing and certainly a delicate thing that we have to be careful for not to be too simplistic about and certainly have a lot of respect for the different roles and identities and definitions that people assume and develop over time. And some of the difficulties around this is the identities that other people project on us. And they see us a certain way the bias and prejudice that exists and racism that some, such as in the forefront in this country right now is clearly about how other people projected entity onto others. And so we don't just do it for ourselves bad enough sometimes, but we do it on to others as well. And it can be quite, you know, as we know, as we see quite horrific. Split the whole question of this, who am I What am I What am I doing is a profound question. And what mindfulness contributes to this is a very interesting and Vipassana is a very interesting perspective rather than helping us say to find exactly who I am To have a definition or an identity or something, what the personal practice does is points us to the experience of selfing. The experience of how we construct a self, how we hold onto ourself how we protect yourself, how we identify with things. And if we see and watch that construction happen, watch how it's operating. There are times not always there are plenty of times we feel how exhausting it is how tiring it is a lifetime of trying to prove yourself a lifetime of being self concerned and everything swirls around self and me myself in mind, can be felt and seen as the mind gets quieter and quieter. And, and sometimes as the mind gets quiet or this is what's the at the layer that's left all this self concern and There might even arise with that kind of fear that if I let go of that layer of, even though it's so tiring if I let go of it, who am I? How am I going to be safe? And so to look in the past not to see what is the actual felt sense, what's the stress? What's the impact of how we construct identity, how we hold on to identity, what we take is me, myself and mine. That's a very different exercise than coming to a decision. This is who I am. That might be useful. I'm not going to say it's not useful. But even when the identity is accurate, and appropriate, how we hold that identity, what our relationship to that identity, that's what the specialty of mindfulness is. The you know, are we holding it in it with freedom are we holding it lightly? We holding clasping a tight, are we afraid of it? Are we insisting on
it? Are we entangled with it in some way, so that we can't be free of it, even if it's a good identity, appropriate identity. And that can be seen again the cost in meditation practice, because as we get quieter enough to see what's going on, one of the things we start discovering is how much we're thinking. And there's a way in which thinking is kind of like an addiction. You know that this very strong desire pool into the world of thoughts investing in thoughts, believing in it being tricked by it being pulled into its, its temptations pulled into its promises pulled into its, you know, dramas and soap operas, that these thinking thinking world, thinking mind has And we start noticing that a lot of these thoughts have to do with me, myself and mine.

And, in fact, it's once we start realizing how repetitively the mind is self focused and self referential. It's kind of I don't know if so brings the right word. It's quite, you know, surprising and, or maybe amazing. Wow. And so to realize that and then see through the practice, that the exhaustion the stress the addiction to that, maybe it's not necessary that maybe it's possible to put it down. And for a little while at Rhys least, and take a vacation from self. I think most people realize the importance of taking a vacation from time to time from like, regular work. It turns out, it's actually quite important to take a vacation from the whole enterprise of self constructions, self concerns self preoccupation, self conceit, all kinds. And some people will find that kind of vacation by there's some activities which give them a real break. Some people will go spend time in nature in a park, go, you know, going backpacking or hiking. Some people will find it in certain kinds of sports or playing music or a craft or certain certain friends we're with we've kind of abandoned ourselves in a wonderful conversation. Turns out that there's but certain friends we kind of lose ourselves lose our self concern. Or maybe it's just taking a nice nap in the afternoon and waking up and it just seems like the self concern world has fallen away for a little while. Or it's in meditation. That's Somehow, as meditation becomes less self concerned, less self conscious, less focused on me myself in mind. For some people find that meditation is the place where it feels safe enough or appropriate enough to give ourselves a vacation from self. This is not an abandonment of self. It's not a betrayal of self, though maybe the little self voice will kind of, you know, get a little bit worried that's going to be forgotten, or you're going to realize it's not needed as much. But it's just a rest from justification. And the deeper that vacation is, the more we'll understand the nature of the self concept constructing activity. We'll understand how it's come about what motivates it, what emotions come into play that helps support and fuel The selfing me myself in mind concern that operates for people. And we start seeing that some of this selfing some of this concern around being myself in mind is provisional. Maybe it's a role specific, it's born in a certain role where it makes sense to have a certain identity in that role. And when you take off the uniform of that role, it's easy to drop. And, you know, so for example, I'm, I'm in the role of being a teacher. If I take being a teacher, to be my fundamentally true, inherently essential identity, and then go home to my family and continue to be a teacher. It's not going to be very, very appreciated at home. That when I come to teach like at IMC, I'm calling quite happy to enter the role of being a teacher and offer the best I can. But, and then I'm very happy to take it off when I go home. And it's a role and the identity has a certain behavior, it goes with certain rules of the game of how it's played, that I hopefully do, do respectfully and carefully. But those those don't apply at home, where they're being a parent has its own identity, its own things that have to pick up and ways of being. So we have identities that have

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two roles. And in the teachings of the Buddha, that's primarily how he saw identities in terms of if we have a name around what kind of person we are. It's, it's how we behave is what we do. That gives us a name. And if we're not doing that, then there's no need to hold up that identity or have that name. These are provisional it's also possible to see Some of the identities and ideas of self are not useful, or maybe not even true, that maybe are learned by our society or been taught to us. Maybe it has to do with life experience. We were something got solidified and held on to and this is how it is

when I was when I was in seventh grade, so what was I maybe 13 or so, I I remember taking my first art class in school, and I was busy one day and leaning over my desk with a pencil drawing with my right hand drawing my left hand and I for the first time I noticed how many little wrinkles and cracks in my young hand there were just teeny teeny ones all over. So I started drawing them all in and I was having a good time. And the teacher came over and looked over my shoulder and she said to me, You have no artistic ability. So, you know, I had never thought about having artistic ability, I had no identity around it. No need to have artistic ability. It had no concern of mine whether I had it or not. And, and so, but she was the authority. So I just assumed, okay, that's, that's the way it is. I have no artistic ability. And I carried that idea with me. It was not a burden at all. It wasn't a concern. Until as I said earlier, I was tricked into doing art by my roommate and fresh freshman roommate in college, who was an artist. He was little bit maybe like a born again artist. And after a few months of living with him, I was starting to draw and he appreciated my drawings and praise me or something. And it was fun and so from there on I then it turned out I had a little bit of ability and more important than ability. I had ability to enjoy it and have fun doing it until I became artists', and that was the end. So, you know, someone said that so I had for a while this identity, this idea that I'm the kind of person who has no artistic ability. That particular one came with no cost. I mean, I didn't get tired or something, I just took it as Matter of fact, but some are really, you know, really much more difficult to have. And the one of them I had when I was also maybe in first years of high school or something was that I, the friends I had back then, whenever I, whenever I had something to say, it seemed like they always interrupted me, never allowed me to say what I wanted to say. And so that, you know, so I guess one of the solutions to that is become a Dharma teacher. And so, you know, people, especially now on this online, who's gonna stop me now. And now I'm just joking, but but it's true back then. And so I developed this idea that I didn't have anything valuable to say. And that became a little bit my identity. And that was kind of a burden and kind of a sore point to kind of bit of a wound for me, that lasted through my teenage years in a way that, you know, was kind of painful. And I assumed it was true, I assumed some way was true. So with mindfulness practice, we begin seeing that some of these beliefs we have some of these identities are not really true. That sometimes we see, this is not who I am. I am not the one who has no artistic ability. I I also could see, I'm not the one who needs to be the hardest. I'm not, you know, maybe I do art but I don't need to be the artist. Or I'm not the one who has nothing important to say. I'm not the one who, you know, it goes on and on and on. I'm not the one who has long hair. When I was young, I'm not the one who essentially who I really am is the one we're short here. That's how luck, I don't have to define myself that way. And so we start seeing that. We don't have to define ourselves by all kinds of things we have been defined by. Because as we do find ourselves by those, it's clear that we're limiting ourselves, that we're becoming less than our fullness in
all the different capacities we have. Also, it can be exhausting to spend a lot of time defending and building these concepts of who we think we need to be.

But to allow ourselves just be who we are, and maybe be defined by what we do and, and, but not something that who we are, what we do naturally and what's there naturally, rather than doing this construct that is so common for human beings. So slowly, slowly as mindfulness practice and meditation goes, goes deeper, Fuller, we started realizing how many of the little areas in life we have, where we're defining ourselves by that. We're taking it as me, myself and my me by self in mind, and how we don't need to do it all the time. Even when it's accurate, we don't have to do it. And we started feeling that we're seeing or experiencing ourselves in a freer way that hasn't put on a particular coat of self has taken it off. It's lighter, freer, there's less inhibition, there's more ability just to be as we are. And giving each giving ourselves and also others the gift of allowing them just to be themselves without needing to prove themselves or defend themselves or apologize for themselves, is a great, wonderful gift. And so in this video, with deep vacation we can take. At some point if we're really quiet and peaceful, we might notice a thought arise or a feeling arise, that has the quality of I am that that's who I am, that are that is mine. And that can be as simple as feeling pain in your knee as you meditate. And noticing that when you say, That's my pain, that that actually is more. It might be very subtle but more stressful than simply recognizing it as pain. The difference between my pain and the pain is a little insertion of this self construct of me myself in mind. It can seem innocent, it can seem like it's, of course it's not someone else's needs. So is my knee, it's my pain. But it's not really needed. Maybe it's needed if you're talking to the doctor, you know, have my pain and I want to talk to you about it. But in meditation, you can see there's sometimes a very subtle stress, tightness somewhere when we say it's my pain, rather than pain. And you might feel it even more if it's my anger versus thought, anger, because with anger, some people want to validate it and get involved in it. Some people are horrified at their anger, that they're angry and say, my angry it's really, then it's kind of like you're defined by it. But it's the anger, then you're not defining yourself by it. And so it's much less complicated, easier. And these movements that I'm describing, our movements of, of within Buddhism is called not self The anger is not inherently essentially me. It has to do with me. I'm responsible for it. But I don't have to see the anger as that's me. It's just anger. I don't have to see the pain is that's me. My pain is just pain. When thoughts arise, there's no need to see the thought as my thought. It's just a thought. When I was 14 or so my father told me and it's a little father son talk talk. He said to me, as you grow up and go into your life from time to time, and I got the sense this was, you know, great intervals between he said, you will have some bizarre thoughts. And everyone has bizarre thoughts from time to time, don't worry about it. And I had no context for Understanding what he why he told me that then I kind of just let it go in and go out though I did remember it. And lo and behold, one day, I had a bizarre thought. And I had been forewarned. And I just said, Oh, look at that. That's a bizarre thought. I guess my dad was right. We'll have this as opposed to, oh, my this is horrible. How should I this is terrible that I have this kind of thought and I better do X, Y and Z and certainly not tell anyone or I don't know what it was anymore.
It's just a just a bizarre thought. And what happened was, because I'd be flipping for warned, I actually didn't get involved. I thought I just let it pass through. I thought I was like, amazed. Oh, look at that. And let it pass right through. The my wife many years ago, she had medically temporary, medically induced minute pause for some surgery she was going to do and While she was in this medically induced menopause, she said to me one day, I'm having thoughts but these thoughts are not me. They were kind of strange thoughts and she'd never had those thoughts before and she had enough wisdom, not to identify. Those are me. They should know they're not me there just, you know, some kind of chemicals coursing through my system that somehow dislodging these kinds of thoughts or something. So it's possible to sit back and relax and see a thought just as a thought, and not say that's my thought, that's me. It's possible to have an emotion arise and not identify with the emotion that's my emotion. That's me in that emotion. It's possible to have an intention arise and motivation to do something and see it that's a motivation. That's an intention. But I It's not necessarily me just attend intention, and we'll do it if it's useful or not. And so as the practice gets still learned Stiller through this kind of freedom around the different things that come and go, that there's a less and less tendency to add on top of it, this little extra thing, or big extra thing that add on top of it, me, mine, I, and this movement of no longer defining things. This way is in this Buddhist tradition called anatta, not self. It's not a teaching that there is no self because or not, that is an kind of an adjective, that always characterizes something in particular. It's always the recognition of something is not the self and, and it but it's not as a judgment or idea. Philosophy, that there's no self that exists. But what's kind of fun and challenging and liberating in Buddhism? Well, the Buddha does not posit that there is no self. He does say that anything that you can see and recognize and touch, that that's not really the self. Does that mean there is no self? He doesn't say that he leaves that alone. That's like a hot potato question. So no need to go there. But to sit quietly, with stability, with well being and with confidence, the three categories that Buddhist training is supposed to is developing and cultivating within us to be centered and strong and that stability, to really have a sense of all the different flavors of well being and happiness and ease And contentment in all the different circumstances of life, including those which are quite difficult to really have that become a reference point, balance to support well being, to be happy, maybe more often than not. And to have some inner power, a power of confidence, a power of stability, a power of being able to stay on the course with a practice. It's called perseverance.

A power of mindfulness, a power of confidence, a power strength around the ability to be focused, these kind of all things that can be developed. And with with those strong, then this insight, the third of the three characteristics, three insights is seeing deeply into it this is not self This is not self, this is not self, not this not this out this it can be difficult to see that if the habit the addiction is to self but when these great qualities are present stability, well being and confidence that supports us. That's like this snake that's shedding its its skin. We begin to shed the need to see and define ourselves by anything. We, it's easy and usually it's easier take a vacation for himself. And as that vacation becomes Fuller, a deep letting go can happen. And that's letting go in, in this Buddhist tradition of ours is called Letting go into emptiness, emptiness of self, into a place where we don't need to be constructing a self. We don't need to be thinking about herself. We don't need to be defining ourselves. But this is more than a vacation rather than vacation. It's a liberation, liberation from this self constructing activity that we're all
doing. But it's not necessary to do all the time. And then, from this, letting go of it, then having a sense of the vacation, the liberation from self. Then there's a whole new perspective on the identities we have on the ways we construct the self, the ways these things work, where we hold them a lot lighter. They're softer. They don't have to evolve so much work. They don't have to be a magnet to fears and ambitions, and defensiveness and apology. It's a lot easier to make mistakes, and not be defined by the mistakes, simply apologize and go on and not, you know, but not to have to take it as a way that it's a statement about me myself in mind. It's a lot easier to have successes, because you don't have to define yourself by the success even because people who get defined by their successes too much, it's a fragile self can hold the self likely and easily and pick up selves as needed. Understand when the identities are because of how we behave and how we are more than what we need to construct. What kind of social games we're playing, everything can be held likely, lighter and lighter and lighter. And the advantage of this is not to diminish anything about ourselves. This is not a practice. The Buddhist practice is not about diminishing and becoming less than who you are. If anything, that freedom as you become more of who you are, it's really an enhancement of sorts. But as as the power is there, the freedom is there. It's just seen as a real drag, to have conceit around that, to be arrogant about that, to define oneself by that. And the tendency is that I've seen is that those Buddhist practitioners I've known who are quite mature and you ask them, you know, how liberated are you? They kinda prefer Not to say, because it's not very important for them. Imagine to be liberated. And it's not that important that you define yourself by that. You don't have to prove it or anything for it, because even that is not self. So there are three things to cultivate, to be in this practice.

There is cultivating the family of qualities organized around the word stability, the family of qualities, organized around the word, happiness or well being, and the quality and the family of qualities organized around the name, confidence or strength. As those become stronger, they set the conditions in place for revelation for the minds capacity to, to be mindful, aware, attentive to discover, to have it revealed. To have insight revealed, to really start seeing deeply recognize deeply the inconstant nature of experience. The stressful unsatisfactory nature of all experience and the not self of all the particular experiences that we can have. As we really understand this deeply. Each of these insights is a door to letting go more fully. insight into inconstancy opens the door of no longer projecting our ideas, projecting our concepts on top of things. That deep insight into the unsatisfactory nature of experience teaches us how to have the deep rest and freedom of having no desires, not forever. But in that as a liberating door that opens and deep insight into not itself. Nothing that we can our eyes can land on, is the self opens the door to emptiness. It's a door that opens it's a door that is a barrier between what's here us and the other side of the door. In a sense, the door vanishes and in the vanishing of the doors that keep us separate. Then there's a way in which I becomes a we a way in which we don't really differentiate strongly. There's still a valid differentiation between self and others. But there's a natural sense to empathy of inclusion of that other people's well being, is almost the same as our own well being. And our well being is related to their well being. And there's a sense of mutuality, that we're in this world together, that we're a family of human beings. We're all kin. And we're all here as a we not as an us versus them. And so the final movement of this, you know, these this progression, what we cultivate what we see and how we become free, is a deep understanding

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and participation in this world. As a we more than at more than me, myself and mine. And it's a great thing, really wonderful thing. To be able to have a sense and feeling this liberation itself freedom itself, with no obligation, no sense of duty leads us through our generosity through our kinship through our care through our natural kind of sense of mutuality. Of course, we want to care for others, of course, we care for them as if they're there, ourselves. Of course, we're friendly, of course, we include them in our hearts. No one is left out. So in that sense, one simple formula of the Buddhist path is this little silly little four words that I made up. There's be what you become and cultivate to be. There's seeing, then there's the freeing. And then there's the weeding that we that we do. And for this retreat, we have been a we, we've been in community together. And it's something I profoundly appreciate and value. And I want to express my gratitude that we've been able to have these days together, I don't take it as a incidental thing or a minor thing that we've gathered together to do this practice and share this practice and these teachings for this time. And so I want to offer My profound thanks to all of you for this.

Before I, we take a break now I want to and then come back for a closing circle. I want to say a few things. But I feel like I just talked a lot. So I feel a little bit want to just pause for a moment. And I think the primary thing to keep it simple at this point and maybe some of it I'll save for later is that there's a half an hour break, and you can do what you wish. We do have an evaluation of this retreat that we would ask you to fill out it's You're welcome to do it during this break, because if it Who knows if we'll ever do it afterwards, get busy with life, but you know, and that maybe the managers can say where they can find that evaluation. That you guys. Let's say you have to unmute yourself to. Go ahead.

Great. Hi, this is Heather and I wanted we wanted to mention that there's an evaluation form that is available in the retreat instructions document in the announcements section. on page one at the top, there's a link there and we would be delighted To get your feedback, ideally, today, or sometime tomorrow, the questionnaire probably takes about five minutes. So thank you.

And we had one additional announcement. And I'll turn it over to Yanli.

Hi. I was really mean and thank you for practicing together. Thank you for your generosity. We have received a couple of questions about how to donate and it is in has been in the instruction sheet is not so obvious. So we also made announcement box.

Great. So we'll come back here at quarter two, I guess quarter to something quarter two for 3:45, California time. Thank you.

So those of you in YouTube thank you for joining us and being part of this and I hope that the above some of you, thank you, it seemed like it was very nice for you and, and I'm very I'm just kind of delighted that these retreats can be shared now so widely and it was so easy and felt actually quite supportive to have you come and join and be part of it and be kind of part of the part of the whole We
that's exploring and practicing the Dharma so thank you so much and so until next time, thank you.
Bye bye