Samādhi and Insight

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Kim Allen

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So in the Buddha's journey toward awakening, he had to learn about the distinction between samatha and vipassanā. His quest was to seek the supreme security from bondage, Nibbana, which is a place that's safe for, it's not a place, a state that's safe from aging, illness, death, sorrow, and other kinds of defilements of the mind. And before his awakening, the Bodhisattva's first teachers were masters of Shammata practices. So he learned first from a teacher named Alara Kalama, who taught him the third immaterial absorption, the base of no-thingness. This is a very deep form of Samadhi, nearly the most peaceful form of Shammata meditation possible. And the Buddha learned it, and he was invited to co-teach the Sangha. He learned it so quickly, the teacher was very impressed and said, "Come and teach alongside me, you've learned it just as well." And the Buddha thought, "This Dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to Nibbana, but only to reappearance in the base of no-thingness. Nothingness sometimes said." In other words, it didn't solve the quest that he was on to understand the problem of aging, illness, and death. So he went on to another great teacher of the time, Udaka Ramaputa. And that teacher was a teacher who pointed people toward the fourth immaterial absorption, which is the base of neither perception nor non-perception, which actually only his father had actually attained. Ramaputa means son of Rama. And he said that he was talking about Rama's teaching. Rama had attained this. But he was giving the same instructions that his father had. And the Buddha, then, the Buddha to be, then attained that. He attained the fourth immaterial absorption. And Udaka Ramaputa was so impressed that he offered the Buddha the seed of teacher above him to lead the whole community. But again, this didn't solve the problem of aging, illness, and death. So the Buddha gave up on that also. And he went off to do aesthetic practices. Those didn't do anything either, except to harm his body. So he was exhausted and sitting there wondering, how can I fulfill this quest? I really want to solve the problem of Udaka. He had a sudden vision of a time in his youth when he was sitting peacefully under a rose apple tree. And he slipped into the first jhana, which are deep absorption states of shamatha. And he asked, could this be the way to awakening? And he realized, yes, this is the way. So he understood that Samadhi, shamatha practices had a place. They were part of the path. And so we can turn then to another account of his awakening. I've already given you pieces of two of them. But if we turn to another account of

his awakening, he explicitly describes his attaining of the four material jhanas, such that his mind became purified, bright, unblemished, rate of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability. And then what he did with that mind was apparently novel. He directed that mind to insight knowledge. And the culmination of that was the destruction of the taints, the taint of sensual desire, the taint of becoming, and the taint of ignorance, and the full understanding of the four noble truths. So he took his concentrated mind and he used it to understand how suffering works. Thus have I heard, at least. So we see that both shamatha and vipassana play key roles in Buddha's awakening. But just learning the shamatha first from his first teachers, something was missing. And part of his deepening understanding was to unpack, what is each of these practices doing, and how do I use them to reach full awakening? So I want to talk now actually a bit more about this quality of samadhi. For some reason, it seems to carry some mystery among Dharma students. And I'd like to clear up some of that, maybe, in a way that will help you continue your samadhi practice after this retreat. It is important, would have considered samadhi to be important at some point in our practice. That doesn't mean everyone needs to do it all the time, or everyone needs to start with that. But at some point in your practice, you will do samadhi because it's the eighth step of the eightfold path, samadhi. And we also find it among the factors of awakening, the spiritual faculties, and some of the specific descriptions of the awakening process. Many of those include samadhi, including the gradual training, and another one that I'll quote today. And it comes along, here's the great thing, it comes along with a very wholesome form of pleasure and happiness, which are onward leading for practice. When the mind can soak in samadhi for a while, it actually changes the mind in beneficial ways that further the path. This is starting to be shown in various neuroscience studies also, that samadhi changes the way the brain functions, so that to the degree that that affects the mind, it matters. We'll talk more about some of the benefits later. But let's talk about, you know, this term samadhi. It means gathered or collected or unified or composed. The suttas sometimes say brought to singleness. I would say a good practical translation that really connects to the experience of it is undistractability. So the ability not to be distracted. Wouldn't that be nice? And of course, it's not, you know, there are many shades of that. It's not that it needs to be absolutely perfect or it doesn't count. But if we're just moving toward being less and less distracted, more and more present, more and more able to be with things as they are now. In the end, I mean, I like this experiential translation of undistractability. This doesn't really go with the poly, but it's it's nice experientially. Because in the end, samadhi is an experience. But interestingly, it's not something that we can create directly by an act of will. Rather, our job is to set up the conditions. Once we set up the conditions for samadhi, then samadhi will come about. That's how it works. So there are various conditions that we can put in place. And then the samadhi comes about as a result of those conditions. So it's like rainy weather. You don't have rain right now. I can see the sun has just moved into where it comes in the

window. And I don't have very good shading. But we have had rain. In fact, even earlier this day, we had some rain where I live. And so that means, let me make a little rain analogy. So when that happens, there are clouds in the sky. And they start out as moist clouds containing a certain amount of water. And then there are various atmospheric conditions of temperature and pressure and humidity, such that the water comes together into drops in the clouds. And when the drops get big enough, it can't be held in the clouds anymore. And so it falls to the ground as rain. There are several interacting conditions you can see. And if any one of them were outside of a certain range, then the rain wouldn't happen. And it's similar like that with samadhi. There are a variety of conditions that have to be put in place. And wanting concentration without the proper conditions is like wanting rain without any clouds in the sky. It doesn't make any sense. Sometimes people arrive in practice and they say, I'm going to get concentrated. I'm here to, I'm tired of being distracted. I'm tired of the hindrances. I'm going to get concentrated. But it doesn't always work that way. We have to support the proper conditions. Sometimes it's said, create the conditions. But I don't, maybe that's good enough for shorthand, create the conditions. But I think we should also keep in mind that it's not totally in our control, which you may have noticed today. It's a process to support the proper conditions. So we'll talk next about these conditions for samadhi. And there's going to be kind of a list, because everything's in lists in this practice. But I think rather than treating them as kind of a laundry list of things that we have to get or check off somehow, I like to think of it more like a process. You know, we're working things around until we get all of these conditions to be broadly in the right range. So I guess we could say then that the mind becomes gathered in a pretty unmagical, unglamorous way. We just work persistently on various conditions. The ones that we do have a little bit of influence over, let's say, we get them to arise. And then once they've aridism, we have to get them into balance. At the Q&A, we talked a little bit about how some of the conditions, even things that are wholesome, can be out of balance. If wholesome things are out of balance, that matters in our practice. So we have to get them in balance also. So sometimes people who have read a little bit in the teachings, especially in the commentaries or the Vasude Manga, the later teachings, they think that what they're looking for in terms of conditions are this list that goes Vittaka, Vichara, Piti, Suka, and Ekavata. Those are the five Jhana factors that are identified mainly in the later commentary built text called the Vasude Manga. And they're useful, of course, I'm going to talk about some of them. But just aiming for those five, if you want to do concentration practice, I think misses the point to some degree for the quality that's called Samadhi in the early texts. I have found it more useful myself to look at the suttas to gain clarity about what the conditions for Samadhi are. And we can start to get a feeling in a pretty simple way, just by looking at some of the key lists. The lists in Buddhism typically have some ordering to them. I mean, their lists, they have to go from one through five or one through seven, whatever. But it's not that we need to take that literally and say, you know, I

have to do all of number one, and then I can do number two, and it always goes in this order. It's not quite like that. But at the same time, the order is not arbitrary. So it's the earlier things in the list do kind of come first, before the later things in the list generally. So it's relevant to look at lists that include Samadhi, and consider what becomes, what comes before that in a given list. So that's the method I'm going to offer for your contemplation. Lucky for us, Samadhi appears in a lot of lists, nearly all of the key lists, actually. And so to help us along, I'm actually going to show a slide. Let's see. There. Okay. So, and then I should be able to make this full screen. Okay. Cool. So what are some of the conditions for Samadhi? So first of all, we have the Eightfold Path has Samadhi in it, right? So here we have a set of steps in the middle, which are the Seala steps. That means ethical conduct, right speech, right action, right livelihood. And then we have the Samadhi steps with you can see Samadhi at the end there in red, right? Effort, mindfulness, and Samadhi. So those are the Samadhi steps. So broadly speaking, we can say that the Seala steps support all of the Samadhi steps. So ethical conduct, you can see I've put down at the bottom of the slide is a foundational quality for the arising of Samadhi. If we're not behaving ethically in our life, if we're running around lying and cheating and killing, I don't think you're doing all of those things stealing. It will be very hard to settle the mind when you get onto the cushion. You know, that's just how it is. So there's maybe some sense that we would work on this. This is what we do off the cushion is that we purify our relational life, such that we are behaving well or following the precepts generally, then you're going to find it's much easier to settle the mind when sitting. Now that's not all of it, of course. So let's look at some other lists here. So I'm going to bring in the list of the five spiritual faculties and the seven factors of awakening. And those also have Samadhi in them again in red. And here we can see that mindfulness comes right before Samadhi in two of those lists. And it also appears at the head of the factors of awakening. Don't worry if these are lists are not all totally familiar to you. These are, I'm just telling you, these are some of the key lists in Buddhism. And they're relevant, they'll be relevant during the course of your education and development in Buddhist practice. So mindfulness is kind of the, let's say the immediately perceiving factor, the key link. We need to be practicing mindfulness off the cushion in order to have concentration on the cushion. So if you're running around being completely unmindful, living your life with a lot of distraction and watching movies and trying to do multitask your way through the workday, and then you finally finish all that and you come and sit on the cushion, don't be surprised that it's not easy to settle the mind. So we need to be cultivating a general sense of presence off the cushion in order to be able to settle the mind on the cushion. And then in addition, when you sit down on the cushion, that's one of the first things like in those preliminaries that I did in the step on bringing up effort or determination, I pointed toward deliberately arousing mindfulness. It is a quality that we have some degree of control over, not completely as you've learned, but we can put some effort into arousing mindfulness. And that will be very supportive of samadhi, as you can see from

these lists. And then I don't even have to change the number of lists shown. Look, effort and energy appear in all three of these lists also again, just before. So they're supportive in a couple of them just before for samadhi. So that's why we have this focus on a somewhat small place where the breath is in order to generate more concentration and energy. Samadhi is supposed to be a little bit hard, supposed to take a little bit of effort. It overcomes our usual mode of being distractible. Distraction is actually evolutionarily favorable. So don't feel that there's anything wrong with your mind that you sit down and it's distracted all the time. That's because it's supposed to be if you're an animal living out in the outer world as we were earlier, you need to have a mind that turns toward things that are novel, things that are new, things that are changing, things that are coming into your awareness. The animals that didn't do that and were really focused on what they were doing got eaten. So we are evolutionarily programmed to flip from here to there. Notice that what's that? What about that? Could I eat that? Could I mate with that? Whatever it is that we need to be checking out in our environment. So that's true. But this is meditation. You're sitting on the cushion. You're in a safe place. It's always the conditions have always been set up such that people are able to be alone, secluded. Why is that so that we can let go of this distractibility in the mind and we can bring more of a sense of focus. So we need some effort or some energy, some determination to keep the mind where it is. And that's going to be necessary if we want to cultivate the mind, if we want to advance in practice, or we can just be distracted our whole life. That's how most people do it. But we may have seen the importance of something different. Okay, so is this it? No, we have a little bit more. If I bring in another list, then I get to the highlight a couple of really special qualities. This, the list of the various flavors, let's say, of joy, happiness and tranquility. So we have joy, tranquility and the seven factors of awakening. And then look at this cluster and transcendent dependent arising, delight, joy, tranquility, and happiness right before Samadhi. So this is important. This transcendent dependent arising or liberative dependent arising is a list that points us up. Basically, it's a description of the path. We start from suffering and we go to the end of suffering and the knowledge of the destruction of the saints. So but look at the role four out of the 12 factors are related to delight, joy, tranquility, happiness, beautiful qualities of mind, they come about partly from ethical conduct, as I say in the list below, and setting aside the hindrances. That's how we get to them. But they also are very supportive for concentration. You might have thought you were going to get concentrated in order to get the bliss that comes from Samadhi, which does happen. But no, it's the other way around. You have to be happy before you can get concentrated. So there does have to be some degree of happiness. That's why we point toward the pleasant. Samadhi practice is different from traditional mindfulness practice, sati, where people have been trained, you just sit there with perfect equanimity, and you just note everything that arises, body sensation, hearing, breath, emotion, thought, note, note, note, there it is. Okay, that's a good practice. Actually, if you do that, you will eventually get

some joy starting to arise because of the indestructibility of the mind that comes from that. But in Samadhi practice, we actually lean into it, which is great. So you know, that's why I pointed to find something pleasant. Usually the hands often have a feeling it's nice. I actually get it more in my head and my neck. So I pointed to that also, the slight Buddha smile, you can do that deliberately, and it actually has been shown neurologically to uplift. And then you allow that to grow. You actually lean into that. In Anupannasati practice, MN118, where it combines shamatha and vipassana, you also have P.T. and Sukha, joy and happiness coming into there also. So we want the mind to eventually settle into a state of wholesome, pleasant sensation. And you can't create it. It just comes. But when the mind is less and less distracted, comes more and more able to be with experience. These qualities will start to bubble up. And it's not a mistake. And it's not bad. You don't have to be worried. Oh, no, I feel too good. No, you're supposed to feel good. It's great. These support Samadhi. They support the gathering of the mind. So is that it? Are we done? No, I actually like to put in one more, which is actually already there, but you may not have seen it, which is faith, or confidence, or trust. It appears in two of these lists. And it's also important. Samadhi in general, and especially Jhana, if we're going to go for the really deep form of Samadhi that the Buddha attained before his awakening, we're going to encounter experiences that are very different from consciousness. It's an altered state. It doesn't mean that you completely lose everything and go into mind only kind of states. I don't actually support that kind of Jhana and concentration practice. For the most part, that's what the Visuddhi Moga does, not my path. But you need some confidence to go into those. So if you have all these other wholesome factors in place, you know that you're behaving ethically, you are mindful and aware of the present moment, you have wholesome energy, not forced effort, wholesome energy, you can feel that in the system. And you have a sense of joy, ease, tranquility, happiness, contentment in the mind. If your experience becomes unusual, your body starts to change in how it experiences, you feel mostly like you're in a sense of energy, the energetic body, the subtle body, essentially not the anatomical body, it's fine. It's fine. Allow yourself to go into that. You don't need to be afraid of that. I'll read a quote later where the Buddha said explicitly, this kind of happiness, these kinds of feelings, we're not afraid of, and they're totally worth pursuing. And then another aspect of faith, which I even mentioned earlier in the Q&A is the self-confidence to go ahead with your practice, you know, to have the self-confidence that when these factors are in place, the samadhi will come when the atmospheric conditions for rain are there. Guess what? It rains. You are not the exception to the rule here. So all of these things are natural, let's say, they're natural and will come about. So I guess this is it for this slide here. I'll post that on our, I'll put that onto our shared Google Drive, which you should have gotten an email about also. Okay, so this is samadhi as a process. We assemble these various supportive factors. And then I think no matter what object you choose for samadhi, it could be the breath, that's what we just did earlier today, but it could be a Brahma vihara or even a visual one like a

casino that people do sometimes. I think it'll proceed more smoothly. So the language of the suttas says that we would allow the pleasure and the good qualities of samadhi to, here's the quote, "drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body so that there are no parts unpervaded by the pleasure and good qualities of samadhi." So it's clear, I think, that we're meant to soak, we're meant to soak in these kinds of experiences, maybe like standing in the rain and letting it soak us completely. And one thing we know about rainwater is that it eventually flows to the ocean. So I want to talk also about the benefits and the functions of samadhi on the path to awakening. So the suttas are unambiguous that samadhi is essential at some point. And I think knowing the benefits and functions of it may help in the development of it. And it's also good to know that we can start feeling these right away, we don't have to develop to the point of absorption or jhana for the benefits of samadhi to come. So we'll start with a western one that's not explicitly named in the suttas, which is that samadhi serves a healing function. It smooths out some of the rough spots in the mind, it smooths out some of the rifts that we may have between body and mind from earlier experiences that we've had. It's really healing and beneficial over time to have any degree of collectiveness of mind. You don't have to go really deep with it. But I think this was the Buddha's solution for this. Here in the west, with sort of a psychological focus, we have many, many systems or methods that we can learn for healing some of the troubles that came about for us earlier. I would say in dharma practice samadhi fills that function if we let it, if we trust in it and put together the conditions that were mentioned. And then the second, I would say the healing function that was almost minor compared to what we get to eventually. Secondly, samadhi is essential for insight. So this is from the Angutra and Nikaia. Without the concentration that is peaceful, sublime, gained through tranquilization and attained to unification, that one should enter and abide in liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom. That cannot be. So remember in the very beginning of the retreat, I talked about how samatha practices lead to samadhi and eventually to liberation of mind and the undermining of lust. The pastana practices lead to insight, eventually to wisdom and liberation by wisdom, which is actually freedom from the saints. So we need both of these. So we'll have, we start with the samadhi and that really deepens the insight that we can have. Probably we need, you know, pretty deep samadhi to have the deepest insights. But if we have some degree of samadhi, we can have some degrees of insights. It all goes together. You don't have to have only one and then the other. So then let's go a little bit more into this freedom from the lust or the desire part. One of the great benefits of samadhi practice is reduction of attraction to sense pleasures. Why is that? Because we find a deeper form of pleasure and happiness. You know, we talked about all those happiness and tranquility factors that feed into samadhi. Those are spiritual forms of happiness. They're not the same as happiness that comes from a good meal or listening to nice music. These are our deeper forms of inner, let's say inner happiness that comes about from seclusion or from concentration. So the appeal of worldly pleasures is lessened. Let's say the attachment to

worldly pleasures is lessened. Actually, we're still fully aware of them, probably more so because our mind is less distracted in our life. But they have less grab on us because we know there's something better. And this was probably important for the Buddha. Remember that he learned some of those deep jhana states first. And then, you know, then eventually he came back and focused more on the first four jhanas. What is important in our path that we undermine the appeal and the grabbing and the compulsion that sense pleasures tend to have for us so that we can let go, let go into something better. So this is from the Majjhima Nikaia. This is the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of peace. I say of this kind of pleasure that it should be pursued, that it should be cultivated and that it should not be feared. So how about that? The Buddha said that there were forms of pleasure that should be pursued. We think this is such a renunciation downer, suffering oriented practice. But no, he wanted us to go toward pleasure, toward bliss. But he meant specifically the bliss of meditation. And then also another benefit of unifying the line, gathering the line, bringing it together is that it fortifies the mind in a certain way. I'm using that word deliberately. It strengthens the mind in a certain way in order to be able to have deeper insights. So until we have strong enough equanimity and non-clinging, it can be unsettling for our ordinary perceptions to give way, let's say, into direct experiences of impermanence, of dukkha, and of not self, which are the three major insights that we, areas where we have insight, let's say, we'll talk about those as we shift more to the second half of the retreat. But Samadhi provides a sure foundation for these experiences that might otherwise be a little bit surprising for us, because they go against our usual way of perceiving things. So that brings us to vipassana, to insight. Like the Buddha, we can direct our unified mind no matter to what large or small degree of unification we have, whatever degree, we can direct that toward understanding how things work, and especially how dukkha works. What is suffering anyway? Do we know exactly? I mean, we think we know what suffering is, because we say, yeah, I know what suffering is, or suffering is the way my knees feel right now after a day of meditation, or illness, or financial difficulties. You just read the newspaper, there's a huge amount of suffering out there going on right now. But do we know really what the source of that is, how it happens? There may be other forms of suffering that we haven't really tuned into as suffering. For example, the building up of a self-identity, and then grasping onto that, trying to hold onto that, we wouldn't all say that that's a form of suffering. And there are ways in which we need to do that skillfully for a while, but eventually we'll see that that too carries, includes grasping in some way. So then interesting questions start to arise when we are willing to turn toward suffering. Instead of run away from it, deny it, try to escape from it, pretend it's not happening, have another chocolate sundae, whatever our strategy is. If we actually turn toward the suffering, then we can ask interesting questions like, could this not happen? How could that not happen? Maybe how could I train so it wouldn't happen anymore? So we're starting to point our line toward the understandings that come from the, you know, the

culminated understanding the Four Noble Truths. What suffering is, what the direct source of it is, how it ends, and you know, what it is when it ends, what it feels like when it ends, and how we can move toward that along path of practice. So one of the key insights that we can direct our line toward is the understanding of impermanence or inconstancy, anitra, and poly. And often people hear that first and they say, "What is so special about that?" Everybody knows that things change. And if you go out on the street in your city, wherever you are, and you were to ask somebody, just grab a random person on the street and say, "Do you think things change? Do they change?" They'd say, "Well, yeah, yeah, things change, of course." But so we might need to look a little bit more carefully in order to understand what's going on there. So the importance of understanding impermanence or looking at impermanence is actually all over the written teachings. Dhammapada 113 says, "Better than 100 years lived without seeing the arising and passing of things is one day lived seeing, arising, and passing." So we don't have to take that to literally about 100 years in one day, but it's a huge difference. So this is really pointing towards just the extreme importance of looking clearly at things arising and passing, seeing change. We also see anitra prominently in meditation instructions, the Satipattana Sutta, Majumini Kaya 10, which is a kind of the foundational text of our tradition, the instructions on cultivating mindfulness. The meditator is instructed to contemplate the nature of arising, of vanishing, and of both arising and vanishing for each of the practices that are offered. And there are 13 practices offered. And for each of them, we do this checking of the arising, the vanishing, both in relation to the four establishments of mindfulness. Also in the more detailed instructions on mindfulness of breathing, found in the Anupanasattisutta, the contemplation of impermanence is the 13th step out of the 16. So we see that again and again, there's some kind of cultivation of the mind that goes on. And then we turn that toward looking at anitra. So it's kind of hard to overstate how important it is to contemplate, consider, and also directly experience anitra. It can transform our meditation and also our life to really open to this changing nature of all of experience. So I want to tell a little story about peace. This is a mythical land that has an emperor, and he's a benign emperor, very supportive of people, a good emperor. And he wants a painting of peace. He likes peace and he wants a painting of it. And so he sends out out into the land to all the artists, anybody who wants to enter the contest, make a painting of peace and bring it to the palace and we'll look at it and we're going to choose the best one. So he sent this word out and after a while, people started showing up, artists started showing up with paintings of peace. And many of them were what you might expect, very traditional paintings of bucolic scenery and mostly nature-oriented, very nice lands, you know, frolicking children, these kinds of things. And he said, "Yeah, okay, you know, these are good. But something, no, I'm not, I'm not quite satisfied yet." And then there came, very late in the contest, because it came from an artist who lived way out in the far reaches of the empire, living by themselves. This person was essentially contemplative, very devoted to meditation practice, and they took a

long time for the word to get to them, but they decided to offer something and finally got to the palace. So they presented their painting and it was a painting of a torrential waterfall that filled almost all of the canvas. And you could, it was so realistically done that you could almost hear it. It was like, "Oh, this waterfall and water splashing everywhere." And it didn't look very peaceful exactly. And the emperor looked at it, it was a compelling picture. We said, "Well, can you explain a little bit more about the piece here?" And the artist said, "Oh, yes, look close, look close here and just near the edge. There's a little gap in the falls." And you could see on the, you know, sure enough, there was sort of ways that the water was falling over rocks and little roots and trees sticking out. And in one of the little gaps, there was a ledge and there was a nest with some birds living peacefully there. And the emperor said, "This is it. This is the one. This is the perfect representation of peace." So it's like the world. The world is like this waterfall. It's ever changing. It's rushing forward. It's sometimes violent even. We can't stop that. That's the understanding of Anicha. Things change and they always will. But there's the possibility of peace within that. It doesn't have to be bucolic and perfect. It doesn't have to be all set up to be nice and just lambs and sunshine. So there's some understanding of dukkha within that. But right there, we can find a peaceful place to sit, tend to our nest, perhaps. So we will continue to rest peacefully in samadhi as the retreat goes on into this evening. But things are changing. The day is, the sun is almost setting here. It will soon get below the window sill. And nothing can be done to stop that. Nothing can be done to stop the changes that are coming in our day. I hope you'll have a peaceful evening if you're now retiring. I'll see some of you back at 8 p.m. Pacific. We'll do some meta at that time. But I hope that this expands maybe your sense of what is samadhi. Maybe allowing our practice to open a little bit. Still staying very connected close to the breath. But allowing a little bit of that broader view, some of the waterfall around us to just be there as a feeling in the background. Allowing it a little bit of change, a little bit of shift, and continuing to rest in samadhi. We'll have one more sitting and then that, a meta practice at the end of the day here. So be well. Thank you.