So I've been doing mindfulness of breathing for almost 45 or 45 years. And I continue to find it more and more interesting and engaging. And engaging and interesting for a variety of reasons. Certainly it gets more interesting as we're able to get concentrated on the breath and have greater freedom just being with the breath. And the concentration itself kind of evokes interest or evokes new states that are not directly connected to the breathing in the sense that the breathing itself might not be as interesting sometimes, but the concentration on that uninteresting breathing opens up a whole different vistas of the inner life. But breathing also can be quite interesting in its own right. And I think of the breathing, sometimes functioning as a mirror that helps us to see ourselves. Sometimes the subtlety of what's going on, that sometimes for me is not so easily available in ordinary life.

And so in this regard, you know that I find it interesting that the word psychology, which in a simple conventional way, might be understood as the study of the mind. The word psycho, the Greek word also has the meaning it means mind or spirit or something, but it also means breathing. And it seems like the ancient Greeks saw that we wouldn't in modern English called psychology to function to how the mind works, is closely connected to how the breathing works. And we see in Latin also the word is the Latin word or that's certainly the Italian word for breathing is spirare. And it's, so it gives us the words like respiration, which like to breathe, but it also gives us the word spirit or spiritual, or and also inspiration. And so I delight in the idea that the two words spiritual inspiration has the word breathing in both words. And so you know, this emphasis that somehow what's like the our minds our psychology, our spirit, our what is spiritual, this all kind of comes together with the breathing. There's something about breathing which is as I've said earlier, is kind of the meeting point of so many different aspects of our lives.
So one of the interesting ways of studying this is if you're able to stay intimately, quietly, peacefully, attentive to the full cycle of breathing, which means that you don't do the checklist approach to mindfulness. Like, you know, maybe you've been told that you should be aware of the in breath and the out breath, and be there for it. And then I've done this certainly, so I could just be there for the beginning of the end breath and check it off. I've done that. And then the rest of the outbreath, the mind wonders often thought because I've done the job and the beginning of the exhale or some point, just check out off, exhale, and then not really, you know, there for the whole experience. The idea is to be there for the whole experience. To have a continuity of attention. To flow with the whole cycle of breathing. So from the beginning, middle and end of the inhale, you're experiencing, how the beginning, middle and end changes from each other. How the sensations, the experience at the beginning, unfolds into something else in the middle of that phase and the end of that phase. And for beginners, it might be hard to have that nuance of attention. And it's not, you know, it's fine. That's something we learn over time. But over time, as the breathing slows down, gets more settled, there is a phase breathing in — the beginning, the middle and the end. And if we're really settled in, there might be a clear sense of the transition from breathing into breathing out. And a very clear sense then of the kaleidoscope of sensations that come into play as we breathe out. It's not just one or two sensations, but they're all these subtleties that kind of kind of lit through the experience. And if we're really settled sometimes and there's a gap between the end of the exhale and the inhale, sometimes it can be quite long that gap is, everything becomes peaceful and quiet and there's no tendency to want to breathe and then it starts up again.

So if we're able to follow that whole cycle, then you know, then at some points we can become aware of there's a tendency in certain point of it, a pattern of wandering off into thought. And that moment where we wonder off in thought, is often a very interesting moment. It isn't just a happenstance, just casual happens. Often there’s a number of conditions that come together, that prompt to the wondering off in thought. There might be, for example, the end of the in breath, there might be a little bit of boredom with there’s so little sensation there. And so it's boring. So we start thinking about something more interesting. Or at the end of the outbreath, some people find that their little teeny bit of fear there, because there's a kind of a lock, kind of giving away of control, just because exhaling, especially sometimes at the end is the end of just letting go fully. And the idea of letting go fully is frightening for some people. It may be very, very subtly, but to be able to stay there and watch that and see this subtle fear come up, or the subtle movement to control and quickly get to the in breaths now, so you don't have to deal with the full letting go.

Some people and so start seeing also the psychology, the emotions that come into play in this very, very, very subtle way in the cycle of breathing. And the more attentive and quiet we get, the more we see that subtlety. So for example, some people I've known some people who don't want to let go, don't want to breathe out because they have a disposition to hold on to things and not give things away. And so his idea of giving away the breath is just, you know, it's a breath. It's you know, of course we do it we breathe in and out. But it represents some deeper holding on, hoarding almost, a keeping to
oneself, not giving things away. Or as I said earlier, just now, that the end of the outbreath there's subtle, the subtle lack without wanting to give away control represents some bigger desire to control things in life itself.

Some people will, at the end of the outbreath, in that pause before they breathe in, feel the very subtle reluctance to breathe in. Because it just, it's oppressive. It's just like too much like, where the world is coming in. Like I don't want to take more in and I don't do I don't want to do the work of breathing in. And that also can represent an attitude that we carry with us in life.

So there's all these attitudes that can be come along with our breathing and as we get quieter and quieter, and start staying with a full cycle of it, and noticing where we wander off or noticing, kind of how we get a little bit in the certain emotions get get activated at different points in the cycle. We're actually learning about ourselves in a deeper, deeper way. It's a mirror for ourselves. And it isn't incidental, because as we keep learning to breathe, without interfering with breathing and with a continuity of breathing, the courage to keep breathing through all these things. In a sense, breathing through, these things begin to slowly dissolve or unravel or settle or quiet down and we start coming into a dimension of greater freedom with breathing, where those things don't interfere and those those things are not activated. And slowly over time, just that continuity, just staying with it all staying with all staying with what parts of the breath are tight or constricted, or where these different attitudes or emotions come into play. Breathing through it, breathing through it, letting it settle, not being reactive to it, not being troubled by it, not trying to fix it, but just gently, quietly breathing through it, non interference with how it is, but seeing clearly what's going on. The breathing then comes more than just a mirror for what's going on in our psychology or in our life. It also the breathing then comes with support for learning how to find freedom through it. Freedom on the other side of it, freedom with it.

This is not, doesn't, can't expect this to happen in one sitting or the next time you sit. But you might be able to experiment a little bit or be a little bit more attentive to see if there's some of this what I'm saying today, maybe a little hints of it that you can recognize in yourself as you meditate. And I'd like to suggest that some point in the next 24 hours before we meet again here, tomorrow, that maybe you take another 30 minutes to meditate on your own and see if you can tune into that circle, the cycle of breathing in and out and see if you find any subtle attitudes or subtle ways that of reactivity around the breathing, emotions, or that might actually be very insightful to see and that becomes the vehicle, the door through which, through them, that you find greater freedom.

Finally, I want to say again, in case you weren't here Monday, that this week will do the 7am, the same sitting at this time wherever your timezone is for Saturday and Sunday as well. And the reason I'm doing it sometimes on Saturday and Sunday is I'm starting a retreat this evening. And that retreat goes through Sunday. And so there's a 7am sitting at the retreat as well. So I'm just kind of folding these two together. So there'll be a parallel audience for this from the retreat. And for them, they're watching it on
zoom. And for them also, then that 7am theme will be breathing. And so we'll continue with this theme for an extra couple of days.

So, thank you all very much and I'm looking forward to tomorrow.