

## Awakening and Personal Transformation: Legacy Upgrade ft. Genpo Roshi Episode #1052

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Dave:

I've reached into the thousand Legacy episodes of the podcast to bring you this incredible conversation because it's changed so many lives. You're going to get a lot of value from the ideas in this episode, and if you're hearing it for the second time, you're going to get more than you did the first time. And frankly, a lot of people don't hear every episode. This is one of the greats.

If you like the show, I'd like your advice. Go to [daveasprey.com/podcasts](http://daveasprey.com/podcasts) and let me know what's working. And I'm sending a quick note of gratitude to you for being a Human Upgrade listener. Thanks for spending your time and your energy here with me, expanding your knowledge, exploring your performance, and figuring out what you're actually capable of. I think we're all nicer when we do that. Stay connected with the podcast and with me on Instagram or Facebook. The handle is @thehumanupgradepodcast. Thank you.

Today's guest is a well-known guy and a spiritual leader. His name is Genpo Roshi. And Genpo, welcome to the show.

Genpo:

Well, thank you and thank you for having me here. I'm honored.

Dave:

How did you get started as someone who's done this much longer than almost any westerner?

Genpo:

Well, it actually started back in 1971. I was having difficulty in a relationship and I decided to take some time off from work, and I went out to the desert, Mojave Desert, and I went out there with a couple friends, one of them, very old friend and his girlfriend. And while I was out there, they took a hike, went off on their own. And so I climbed this mountain and I went up to the top of the mountain and I was just sitting there and contemplating how could I miss up my life so much at such a young age. I was just 26 at that point. And I mean, I had a very nice childhood. There was nothing, no problems. I was into competitive swimming and water polo, and we won some titles and it was quite a wonderful childhood.

And then by 26, I am divorced already. I am unhappy. In fact, I'm feeling quite stuck. And so I went out there to find some space and I started contemplating my life. And as I was sitting there, something happened to me. I began to ask, where's home? I could see my VW camper parked out there. And oh, I knew that was home temporarily for the few days we were there. And then home back in Long Beach, actually one block from where I'm living now after 45 years of leaving it, I'm leaving on Monday though,

and it hit me. It was almost like the universe just came in with vengeance and I became one with the cosmos.

I've realized I'm always home. I never been any place but home and everything made sense. Everything became quite clear and simple, and I became what you could say, one with the consciousness, one with the cosmos, one with light, one with God, one with the creator, one with all beings, one with all things.

There was just absolutely no separation or distinction between me and everything else, and was so profound. It actually changed my life forever. I realized that everything is already inherent within all of us. So the highest state of enlightenment is already there, but we don't know how to tap into it. We don't know how to get to that place, that deep place within us that allows us to manifest that kind of enlightened state or enlightened presence. And I was training in Voice Dialogue work, and I started that in 1984, '83, '84 with Hal Stone, the founder of Voice Dialogue. And I trained with him until June, twice a week, and he became one of my mentors and teachers. And I realized that there was something to be, let's say, integrated into Zen practice, that a way to do it was asked to speak to that part of the brain that's already awakened.

And I called that big mind. So most of us are operating from a place where our mind is contracted and we call it ego centered or self-centered. And we're coming from a place of dualism where we see ourself separate from the world, separate from others. So you and I are seen as separate. I'm not Dave, Dave's not me. What I realized was that we could tap in not just to emotions and feelings, but altered states of consciousness just by asking to speak to it.

So I was working with a young gentleman who had just graduated from the university, and I was with a group of 80 people I was teaching, and he was just one participant. And I said to him, may I speak to Big Mind, please? And the moment he said, okay, you're now speaking to Big Mind. I said, look in and just see how big you are. See if you can find any limit, any borders, any parameters.

Now the key here is if I'm speaking as the self and I look into the mind, it's kind of, you see thoughts, you see things, but you don't have that experience. But the moment I said, let me speak to big mind now from that place, and our listeners can just do that right here, right now. Just say, okay, I'm big mind now look in and see just how big you are. And immediately, you can't find a size, you can't find a shape, you can't find a color, you can't find a parameter, you can't find a limit. You're limitless, you're boundless, you're eternal, you're infinite. You don't find anything called mind. That is the zen experience. Now, that's just part of the journey because we have then the experience that I am unborn and I am undying, but we don't live that way.

So it takes years to integrate and live that, live our talk, walk the talk, be able to manifest living in a place of complete happiness, complete freedom, complete peace. So it does take time, but the experience of state experience is immediate. It takes no time. It's outside the parameters of space and time. It's outside time and space. But to actually manifest and live that, of course takes time. And that took me many years.

It's only in the last, let's say five, six years, I could truly say I'm happy. It wasn't something I even searched for because I was taught and what my teacher used to say, happiness is transient. It's impermanent. Happiness comes and goes, and there's true, there is a condition, happiness that we all

experience from time to time when conditions are right, we feel really happy and the conditions change and we're no longer happy.

But there is an unconditional state of happiness that's not based conditions where we are just basically sustainably happy. We just come from a place of happiness. This place is not based on conditions, it's not based on that somebody may die and you feel maybe not so happy about that. You feel a lot of empathy, a lot of sympathy, a lot of compassion for their loved ones and for them and so on. But you're coming from a place of happiness. That's your basic foundation, and then you experience happiness. And that on a conditional level can be more or less depending on. Now, the conditional I've found, there's a few things that seem to be required and why it took me so long to really be able to say, I'm truly happy. I wouldn't have said this five years ago.

Dave:

And would a traditional zen master say they're happy. And if they're-

Genpo:

Not my own, not years, not my own. Tibetans will say that. I met Tibetan llamas who will say I'm happy. But in Zen, my teacher said, happiness is not our goal. Okay? Understanding and realization is so realization's important because one of the things that keeps us from being happy is that we're constantly seeking something other than the way it is, something greater, better, happier, stronger, whatever. And so when we're seeking, we can't be that happy. There's a certain happiness from seeking that comes. We identify as a seeker and we have a purpose. We have a mission in life, and that gives us direction, and we're quite happy with that. But there's still a gap. There's one who seeks, and there's one who finds, and the seeker never finds. The seeker is always a seeker.

So if we're identified with the part of ourself that's continuously seeking, we are never there. It's always just a carrot stick away, the carrot at the end of the stick away in front of the horse. And so we're always seeking, when we see seeking or access that part of our brain that is not a seeker, not seeking, it's already there. Then there's happiness on a conditional level. And I can honestly say it wasn't until just a few years ago that I really can say I'm happy. So that's a lot of time in between.

Dave:

A few big things happened in that time. You want to kind of briefly talk about that.

Genpo:

We say you have to ascend the mountain and then you have to descend the mountain. So I had ascended it, and then in 1994 was my first descent where you let go of the enlightened experience and you see yourself as an ordinary human being, no longer as just a Buddha, but now is also an ordinary human being. That was very profound, and it changed my way of teaching. It changed everything about our zen center, which was at that point located in Salt Lake City. In that I felt like it was no longer a monastic practice. We changed it into more where it was accessible for people in the world, ordinary

people, and became less monastic. At that point we had 50 monks training there in Salt Lake with me, and then we opened it up to more to the public, and I started sending the monks out and go share whatever you've learned, go out and share it.

In 2011 was another descent. We say that there's five stages in towards enlightenment. The first is a glimpse or an enlightened experience. The second is all about devotion and surrender, letting go, letting go, letting go, because of course, almost all our problems are caused by clinging, by holding on. That's the cause of suffering. So we hold on to things. So the process of letting go, letting go, letting go.

The third stage is great enlightenment. That's what happened in '86, and that is a complete loss of ego. And ego drops away, and that's great. Enlightenment of great death in '94 was the first descent. That's the fourth stage where you let go of whatever that is, that enlightenment, and you realize again, there's a greater loss. The ego comes back, it always comes back. It always comes back. And then that we've talked about that. But the second one, it was a more complete, almost to the point, I felt like a puddle lying on the floor in two consecutive nights where basically you were so gone that I was dysfunctional and I still had to teach.

I was teaching all day long, so I had to pull myself together by 5:00 AM and go out and teach all day. And then the next night, again, the same thing. But that allowed me to see that we need to embrace the ego. We need to love our ego and appreciate our ego and validate it for what it does for us, which takes care of us, but we're not run by it. So that became a very important point in 1994.

In 2011 was the second fall for me, second descent of the mountain. And that one, basically I lost everything, reputation, spouse, students, my children, I mean, everything, money, everything kind of fell away. And that sent me into a kind of real looking again, what's going on? How do I find true peace? Because I was agitated and I was feeling a lot of stress.

So I came up with a whole new way of meditating. So I discovered a way of meditating, and I'm just going to share that if you don't mind, with our listeners, because anybody can do it. And it's simply takes all the kind of, I don't know, judgment, out of meditation, preference out of meditation, I sit in a chair, comfortable chair, sometimes an easy chair, sometimes a chair, just like we're sitting in right now, whatever's available in a hotel room, wherever I am. But I sit in a chair. I don't cross my legs anymore in the lotus style because I find that it creates tension. So I sit with legs about shoulder width apart on the ground, and I put my hands in a comfortable position on my lap or on the arm of the chair or in a mudra, what we call the cosmic or universal mudra. But we don't have a need to go into that.

Dave:

And Audra, just for people listening who don't meditate, this is a finger position that can affect your nervous system

Genpo:

Yeah. And allows the circulation of energy to flow in a closed circuit. So it's not an open circuit. So I'll sit that way, and then I sit leaning back against the chair, which is forbidden in zen tradition, and I really recommend people sitting back against the chair, relaxing the shoulder, relaxing the jaw muscles,

relaxing, relaxing the teeth, relaxing everything in the body, releasing any tension, and just finding space and a release of all tension in the body and just rest the arms and relax.

Then I discovered, I started with a few deep breaths where I was taught, usually three, I went to 10, and I found that 10 was often enough and very often not enough. So I've now increased it, but there's no rule to this, there's no right way of doing it. Of 20 deep breaths, and I'll explain it to you and to our listeners, and that is you take air in through the nose nostrils, breathe in very deeply, and expand the abdomen quite full, fill it up and then breathe out through the mouth as if you're breathing through a very thin straw and very slow and very long with lips, puckered and pull in the abdomen as if you're pulling in the balloon in your abdomen.

And then at the very end, the first time, just kind of cough a little bit, get it all out. Then allow the in breath to come naturally when it comes and breathe in again, very deep and very slow, filling the abdomen completely up, expanding the balloon of the ball of our belly, and then again, through the mouth.

Dave:

When you say long exhale, are we talking 30 seconds long?

Genpo:

At least. Sometimes more like a minute, but don't force it, but as long as you can. And then again, breathe in and just count each time we exhale. The first one, second, two, third three, and count up to 20. If you lose track, just start over. It doesn't matter. It's not an exercise in that way, it's just to get the breathing. So we get all the oxygen out and we start replacing the oxygen and also the diaphragm and the abdomen take over, and the breathing becomes very natural and very organic, where I'm not breathing any longer. Breathing is breathing, so the breath itself is breathing. There's no doer. There's no one there doing it.

Then it takes over and after about 20 breaths, it could be longer, shorter, whatever works. There's no hard core rule to this. Be creative, be inventive. But then after about 20 breaths or when you feel like it, then only breathe through the nose and just allow the breath to take over. So you're not pushing it, you're not forcing it any longer. Now, this is the important thing. Have no preference of how you sit. Don't have a preference for awake over sleep, aware over unaware, conscious over unconscious, attentive over inattentive.

Dave:

So no judgment of any flavor.

Genpo:

No judgment and no preference. And if you have a preference, don't have a preference for having no preference. If you have a judgment, don't judge the fact that you judged your sitting and said, oh, that

was bad, or That was no good, or I prefer this. Don't judge it. Don't have a preference. Allow yourself, if you get sleepy to fall asleep, now, I forgot one thing. Hold your head slightly down. If your chin is too high, you'll get whiplash if you fall asleep.

Dave:

In fact, you can cause serious damage if you have done that. Yeah.

Genpo:

Yeah. So you want to have your head slightly down. So if you fall asleep and you might, and there's nothing wrong with it, your head will just fall deeper down. That's all will happen. It's the secret to sleeping when you meditate. Okay?

Dave:

Did you just piss off half the meditation teachers on the planet with?

Genpo:

Well, probably all. When in 1976, I was opposite four great zen masters, and I was very young, of course, in '76, and there were four great masters opposite me, and they slept the whole time. And I judged them. I thought, what's wrong with these guys, they're sitting so poorly. They're sleeping the whole time. Then I realized, no, they're relaxed. So what I'm teaching is how I call it, the art of relaxation, how to truly relax right down to a cellular level.

So no judgment for being awake over asleep, for attentive over inattentive, and just allow whatever arises to be there without the judgment, without the evaluation, and you'll relax more and more. And I guarantee anybody can do this. And what's the most difficult is knowing that it is okay to fall asleep because most meditations teach you never fall asleep and everybody's sitting there trying so hard to be awake, then everybody's falling asleep. At this point, I don't even fall asleep anymore. It's rare that I get to fall asleep. Now what I do is I do it when I wake up at night. So it doesn't matter. Last night it was 1 o'clock, sometimes it's 2 o'clock, sometimes 3 o'clock.

Dave:

Do you sit up or you do it lying down?

Genpo:

I put on my sweats, I go to my chair and I sit in a chair. I do not do it lying down. I think it's very important to be upright. You can learn to meditate lying down. It doesn't have the same effect. The Kundalini, the energy doesn't go up the spine as well. So you want to be sitting upright, but not stiff and not erect, but just straight and relaxed. And what I'm saying about this way of meditating is it's getting

down to that cellular level and allowing everything to move. I know you know this, but I'll say this for our listeners that may not know it, when energy is stuck, that's where all our difficulties come. And what acupuncture and acupressure and shiatsu and all that's about is moving that energy. And you can move it actually just putting your hands there or near the person. You can also do it mentally, but it's about a movement of energy that's stuck.

And so what I had to find was a way to unstick myself, and that's what I came up with this meditation. Because when you relax that deeply, it also allows you not only to relax on a cellular level, but facing one's own death is not a scary process anymore. I do it every night. I die every night. So why should I'd be afraid of death. You can actually go to this place where... we have a saying in Buddhism, it's called [foreign language 00:22:55] it's a chance at the end of the Heart Sutra. And [foreign language 00:22:59] means gone, gone [foreign language 00:23:02] means have gone [foreign language 00:23:05] means have already gone. [foreign language 00:23:08] is awakened [foreign language 00:23:09] yippy. So gone gone, have already gone, have already gone awakened. Yippy.

Dave:

Through that practice and through a few other things that you feel like now after a long path, you've cracked the code for what it takes to have happiness at least most of the time. Not the happiness, cause I'm doing something really fun, but the happiness that's omnipresent.

Genpo:

Omnipresent. And I was mentioning that I think there are a few things that seem to have to fall into place or be present. And one of them is freedom, liberation. As long as we're not free, both on a physical and spiritual mental level, I think we can't be really happy, not sustainably happy. So there has to be a freedom of mind and the freedom also physically. In other words, we're not stressed over finances, over where the next meal's going to come from or how we're going to take care of our children and the mortgage or so forth. So there has to be-

Dave:

So money can buy happiness.

Genpo:

I didn't say that. As you know very well it does not.

Dave:

Now you're faced with that other big challenge. What is the fastest or easiest way to at least remove most of the inner conflict for people?

Genpo:

It's a very good question. I know it's a little easy and maybe naive on my part to say you can do it without years of practice. I mean, it has been 46, 47 years of meditating. So I would be, I think doing injustice to say it didn't take time and it doesn't take a lot of meditation because I used to spend as much as 10, 12 hours a day when I was leading these retreats. Meditating one year was as much as nine months of the year. So there's a lot of meditation. There's a lot to be said. I think the big mind process, I now have what I call three legs of the stool that I feel are very important for my students that I tell them are essential.

So one is meditating that you do need to meditate. How much I leave that up to them, I myself will do anywheres from one to about four hours a day generally. One is kind of small, not a day. I rarely do that little, but let's say one to four hours a day of deep relaxed meditation. I think that's pretty crucial. And it's where there's no goal and you don't have an agenda. You don't have any aim in your meditation. So you're meditating in the voice, what I call the apex. It's beyond thinking and non thinking.

So I call it non thinking. So you embrace your thinking mind, because a lot of meditators think they must stop the mind, stop the thoughts, and the more you try to do that. So I try to wash blood off with blood. The more you try to stop thinking, the more you think. So you have to get to this impartial place, this place where there's no preference for thinking over not thinking. And there's no judging your thinking if you're thinking, and there's no judging if you're not thinking, which you rarely do judge your non thinking, but you do judge your thinking.

So you have no preference for thinking over not thinking for seeking over not seeking. Because as long as you're seeking, it's kind of what you were talking about earlier, when is enough money, I've just decided it's enough. I don't have that much, but I decide it's enough. And that decision also allowed me peace of mind because I'm no longer seeking to be richer or make bigger income or anything like that. It's enough. I can relax now.

Dave:

What you're saying there about well decide when you have enough. And the reality is that I had more than enough when I was a young man, and so I kept doing things and well, I lost my \$6 million. A little bit of ego going on there. Yeah, so your point there is you may actually already have enough depending on if you want to live a minimal lifestyle. Because one of the conflicts that I've had over the years, there's been times in my life I would love to go off like I did to bed and for a couple months and learn meditation from the masters. But I also have a career and now a family, and there aren't many people listening. I can meditate for 10 hours a day because you get fired if you did that and then you're happy to-

Genpo:

Well, I made a [inaudible 00:28:05]



Dave:

Right. You get paid to meditate. It's different, right?

Genpo:

I got paid to do it. That was smart. Yeah, at some point. And it took me to actually the sale of my house here in Kapalua, I really didn't reach that happiness until that sale went through, because that was costing me a fortune, and it was keeping a stress level on me. Once I sold that, the happiness just came because I did feel that security, it was enough. As long as it's never enough and we're always seeking more, we're never going to be happy. I guarantee that. As long as more is better and always think I need more and more, but we have to get to that place where we can make that decision, okay now is enough. I have enough, and I can stop seeking to become wealthier or more famous or more prosperous or whatever it is. So that seeking keeps us from really being, you see.

Dave:

So you can still achieve more, but not be seeking more.

Genpo:

But not seeking it.

Dave:

It's an interesting thing for people who are looking to be more happy in their life, the idea to stop seeking more happiness or stop seeking more of anything and start allowing, which is very counterintuitive.

Genpo:

But that's the key. Allowing is the key word, allowing it to happen. Allowing yourself to be allowing things to manifest rather than seeking or trying or efforting. I started to talk about the three legs of the stool, I forgot. So one of them is the meditation of not seeking, not striving, and just learning to be, so we call it shikantaza, it means to just sit, to just be, to just be still and relaxed.

The other is the big mind work because I do feel that that is a technology that has allowed people to experience an awakening, to experience insights into the self that would normally take years and years, even decades to have. And they can have that in one hour say, or two hours.

Dave:

I've got to give that a shot.

Genpo:

Yeah. And I do these workshops, which really allow people to experience that very deeply. So that's the second. And then the third, I still have people do Koan practice because Koan practice, and a lot of our listeners may not know what it is, but they could look it up the word. But Koans are, you could say insolvable problems with the rational mind. You have to transcend the dualistic, rational, cognitive mind and go beyond, find a place within you that transcends that dualism where you are one with. And so you have Koans and you become one with the Koans . And then how do you share that? You're sharing your things.

Koans teach you how to share the awakened experience in probably the most precise and alive way that most of the time we depend on some kind of conceptualization. We depend on kind of interpreting. And it's not live. It's like if you shoved me into the water right now, and it's not that cold, but it's cold enough for me, you shoved me into that water and I go in and I get out and I say, wow, Dave, that was really cold. That's dead. You shoved me into that water. And I go that's cold. That's really cold. That's a live way of expressing the enlightenment or the experience, the direct experience.

Whereas the other is dead. You've been there, you get into the water and you start retelling, wow, that was cold. That's probably like 78 or something. And I like it 90, it's dead. So koans, help us express the teachings in a live, vibrant way, a very energetic way that's living versus dead. So with these three legs, I say they all compliment each other. Meditation, the big mind work and the koan work really supplement and augment each other. They really allow the other because they each have a quality to them that is very unique and the others won't quite do.

Dave:

So those are the tools that help to turn off the seeking and the voice-

Genpo:

And the happiness.

Dave:

And the happiness. So that you've got your overall arching happiness strategy, which is have enough to feel safe and that your basic needs are met, have freedom, including that. That's freedom to do the things that are important to you and all. And then the inner peace and the inner peace, three peaces-

Genpo:

Lack of conflict.

Dave:

The lack of conflict come, maybe those last two both come from the things you just mentioned from big mind and meditation.

Genpo:

And then being a loving, supportive relationship is really helpful.

Dave:

Now, some Zen masters are not in relationships at all.

Genpo:

Well then they have to be in a loving, supportive relationship with themselves.

Dave:

Okay.

Genpo:

Yeah. I'm in a very loving, supportive relationship. And I would say that has certainly helped me find my peace and happiness. I would say if I hadn't found that, maybe I still would be happy. But certainly that has really added to be in a relationship where, I mean, it is about love, but it's also about complimenting one another. And I don't mean just being complimentary. I mean complimenting in the sense that you're really working together. And I think the key there is complete honesty and transparency, like in our relationship, we know anything could happen, but at least we don't lie. We're always truthful with one another, and we are transparent and that compliments each other, and we help each other grow and we tell the truth. And if we see something in the other, if she sees me getting inflated again, she'll tell me. If I see her being too frightened or fearful in her life worrying too much, I'll tell her. But we do it in a loving way that we're really learning and growing together and supportive of one another. I think that's also very important.

Dave:

So you would add a good relationship as another probable thing to increase happiness.

Genpo:

If we're in a relationship, yeah. I would.

Dave:

Beautiful. And none of those things we just talked about are super easy to achieve and that it takes some work to have a career or some saving or investing, whatever you decide to do, so that you feel like you have your financial needs met. But it's worth spending time and effort on that if you haven't done it. And if you find that your inner conflict is sabotaging you there, then you got to do your work on that. And that's certainly something that happened to me. I made a lot of money and kept losing it over and over until I dealt with my inner conflict. So there's work there. There's work around dealing with a voice in your head, and there's even work in finding and creating healthy relationships.

But if you boil it down to those three things, those feel more achievable to me than this, oh, I'll be happy someday, or I'm happy right now, but I'm at a rave, so it can be all over the place. So I hope that this podcast is helpful for distilling some knowledge, quite a lot of knowledge actually down into a few areas of focus for you.

What do you think about celibacy? Some practices teach it, some don't.

Genpo:

Okay. I've tried it. I did some years of celibacy. Maybe for some people at some time, if they want to do it might be a good thing. I don't think it really affects or hinders the fact of our energy. I don't think it destroys energy like some say. But I will say this, that sex and sexual relations can be very problematic. And so there may be an appropriate time for celibacy. If we're not married and we're not in a relationship, maybe. There's also appropriate relationships. And I mean, I don't ask anybody to be celibate. I never have. The 45 years of teaching. I've never asked anybody to be celibate. I never will. I've tried it, but I wouldn't ask anybody to do it.

Dave:

If someone came to you tomorrow and they said Genpo, given everything that you've learned, everything you've experienced in and out of your spiritual practice, I want to perform better as a human being at everything I do. What are the three most important pieces of advice you have for me? What would you offer them?

Genpo:

Well, one is to own every voice that we become aware of as much as possible. And it's opposite. So today what we did was we owned the awakened intelligent mind, but we also went to the unawakened stupid mind and own them both because there's a lot of freedom when we own the so-called negative, the ones that we don't like. So that's one. Be kinder, more compassionate, more giving and trusting, and have respect for those that maybe are a little older and a little more mature. And be open and receptive and take care of those that may be a little further behind where one is in their life and their practice and in their evolving or maturity.

And have great respect and faith and come from a place of great faith, but not disowning doubt. Have doubt in your faith and have faith in your doubt, in your questioning, because it's very important to

question everything, to doubt everything. It's also important to come from a place of faith. I think bottom line is great faith.

Dave:

Well, thank you very much. It's been an honor and a pleasure. And where can people find out more about your books Anywhere you'd like to send them to?

Genpo:

Yeah. Well big mind.org. It's Easy, bigmind.org. Everything's there. Also, [Genporoshi@me.com](mailto:Genporoshi@me.com) is my email and people can write me. And we have events. We've got some events in September in Utah. We've got other events later on in the year one in Maui in December. So people can just go to bigmind.org and find out about us. I have a book called Spitting Out the Bones, and it's my 45 year journey where I tried my best to be as honest and straightforward and transparent as I can with my rises and falls and my successes and failures.

Dave:

Beautiful. Well, thanks again.

Genpo:

You're very welcome. And thank you, David.