

# 2005-09-25 Buddhism and Service

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## SPEAKERS

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work. And the I think there's a very intimate connection. You know, sometimes if you have a major disruption in your home, maybe you know, you have your neighbor kids come in, have a field day in your house, and everything gets turned upside down. And it's kind of a mess. But in that nest, you suddenly discover long forgotten things that were kind of underneath under the couch or in the cracks of the couch or, you know, in various places. You didn't know where there might be. Some of those things might be family heirlooms, they were lost in the cracks of the couch. And some of them might be the amazing amount of dust. That was under the couch. You thought you were a good housekeeper but underneath that couch, boy, you have no idea where to look like there. So in the same way, the United States has had a series of major disruptions over the last month with the two major hurricanes. And one of the things it's done is it's kind of, you know, disrupted the whole nation, and stirred things up and reveal things that often are hidden or not noticed, kind of things are lost in the cracks. And so certainly, some of the things are quite beautiful. And it's quite amazing. The outpouring of generosity exhibited by many, many people. And if people are going to help in the south and sending money and supplies, it's I think it's really beautiful and very profound to have that connection. Two weeks ago, I think it was I gave a talk after the hurricane Katrina and we donated all the money from all the teacher and, and operations dāna to, to Second Harvest to be able to support their work and New Orleans and I was quite inspired. That just from the Sunday morning crowd, there was raised 40 \$300. And then I learned that that spirit rock, they've been doing the same thing, and a spirit rock, because they have a lot of classes and a lot of people there, they raised 50 \$54,000 Last I heard the numbers. And that money went directly to a group that I never, I didn't even know about, because I'm not connected so widely, but a group that's connected to spirit rock in Louisiana, large sitting group, I guess we're sitting group, and money meant directly to them. And they went and set up tables at the Superdome. And we're had the booth and we're kind of receiving people and checking them out. And if they needed, you know, a bus ticket or something, and they were handing out two \$300 or \$500 at a time, depending on what the need was to get people kind of going and started are

kind of helped them you know, in the immediate immediacy of that situation and so here was a grassroots effort that, you know, directly out of the Buddhist or Buddhist community also was going going in there and helping in a way that sometimes we expect the government to be doing things. And so the disruption of these hurricanes is certainly revealed some really beautiful aspects of the country. And it's also revealed some of the dark sides or difficult sides of our culture. And so we have, and maybe the long term impact of these hurricanes is not the damage they've done, but rather the way in which public consciousness has been awakened to the degree of poverty that exists in this country. It's been said over again and many commentators now that America has been very good at avoiding denying the level of poverty that exists, pushing it aside, and it's kind of a wake up call the degree to which poverty is here. And the figure that I keep reading is 37 million people in this country. living under the poverty line, and under the poverty line is an amazingly low number to begin with. And so if you even go beyond that little bit, you know, you get a lot of people living in poverty 36 million people million less than under the poverty line are set in United States to go hungry at some point during the year, where we're having food as an issue, about the same size as the state of California, that many people, you know, are living clearly in poverty. And so the hope now has been that America will, will remember this and take this into account and somehow respond in a way that's appropriate given this public awakening to the to the level of poverty in this country. People who don't have enough money to get on a bus to leave New Orleans. People don't have enough money to go you don't have enough food in the house to be able to get The next day. So people disrupted you know, had to leave managed to get out somehow or other, but have no bank accounts, no social security numbers, no nothing left with the clothes in their back. And we're so poor that you know, they had a place to live maybe in New Orleans and head away somehow making ends meet, but they lost it all and now are basically without anything in some other place. So how do we respond to that? What's our relationship to the world? What is this world that we live in? How do we understand the world? And how do we understand our relationship to the world that we live in? is a very profound and important question for everybody. So what is the connection of this then to Buddhist practice? How does Buddhist practice inform these kinds of questions about our relationship to the world and the suffering of the world? There is a beautiful story from the time of the Buddha of a monk who had dysentery. And the monk lay there where he had fallen down in his own excrements. He was quite sick. And he was laying there in his own excrement. As the Buddha was walking about, they came to the lodging of that monk, when you saw that monk lying where he had fallen in his own excrements he went over to him and said, Brother, what ails you? I have this entry. But is there anyone taking care of you, brother? No. Why is it that the monks do not take care of you? Why don't your fellow monks take care of you? I am useless to the monks therefore the monks do not take care of me. That's a pretty amazing thing in itself. If you ever Wonder you know but monks. I take it not to be a general statement of monks, but some people are clueless. Some people don't understand what goes on right in front of them. So I'm useless. And the Buddha said to Venerable Ananda his primary attendant, go and up and fetch water, we will wash this brother nunda head fetch to water, the Buddha pointed out and Venerable Ananda wash the brother all over. Then the Buddha, taking him by the head and the Venerable Ananda taking him by the feet. Together, they laid him on a bed. Then the Buddha, in this connection, and on this occasion, gathered the order of monks together and question them saying, monks, is there in such a lodging? A

brother who is sick? There is they said, and what ails that brother He has dysentery. They said, but is there anyone taking care of him? And they said, No, you're supposed to be honest, you're a monk. I hope they gulped. Why not? Why do the monks not take care of them? The brother is useless to the order of monks. That is why the monks do not take care of them. So that's again, it's very strange statement, you know, the useless, you know, is their spiritual life so selfish and self absorbed, you know that they don't see the connection between compassion, compassionate service to someone else and their own practice or not, in the sense is supposed to be the, you know, primarily interested in their in the path of liberation and becoming free. And monastic life is supposed to create the optimal conditions, in theory of engaging in spiritual life. And here people kind of dedicated dislikes, are saying that a sick person is useless. Well, so the Buddha said to them, monks, you have no mother and no father to take care of you, now that you're monks, if you will not take care of each other, who else will? monks, this is a very important statement that I'm about to read. So, for emphasis, I'll mention that ahead of time. Monks, those who would attend to me, let them attend to the sick. Those who attend to me Let them attend to the sick. This is a very powerful statement, especially in Indian religious circles. were attending to the guru. The Buddha wasn't a guru but attending to the spiritual teacher is understood to be a very powerful form of spiritual practice a very powerful form of making merit system spiritual life. And in the Buddhist tradition, no one is more, you know, venerated where they are attending and serving and being part of, than the Buddha. And, and here the Buddha is saying, those who would attend to me, let them attend to the sick. It's a significant I take the sentence to any size significant to attend to the sick, it is tend to the Buddha. And so, if attending to the Buddha is a very central kind of religious practice and much of Buddhism tending to the teacher in some way, well, how is it attending to the sick is as worthy as important. Now, to kind of change directions a little bit and come back to this as I've read teachings of the Buddha and the stories from the Buddha's life. What seems to meet comes across is that compassion, compassionate response is assumed that there is no doctrinal discussion about why you should be compassionate or how it's you know, just the dynamics of it and rationale for it. It just assumed that people are going to be compassionate as you go into my Yana Buddhism, and there starts to becoming a wood ology theology kind of wood ology. darm ology explaining the rationale or the connection or the kind of natural workings of compassion much more not just assume the same way. But for example, they'll say that compassion is is a natural or innate is innate in the experience of emptiness. That emptiness is one of the central features of the Mahayana. The doctrine experienced an insight into emptiness. But that insight into emptiness is not empty of everything. But somehow in some way different people emphasize talk about different ways that emptiness itself contains within it, compassion, the Compassionate response when you get to the modern, Buddhist, but as I say, at this point in modern Buddhism in America, it has a teaching which is shared by other spiritual traditions in America. And that is that they'll say that the open heart will naturally be compassionate, that if your heart is open and clear and sensitive to what goes on around you, that open heart will be compassionate. I think all of these traditions Are all kind of saying that you can assume that in its kind of natural workings, the human heart, the human sensitive mind will respond compassionately when we encounter suffering in the world. And so many people have found that to be the case, people who do mindfulness, something like mindfulness meditation or meditation practice, that as fear falls away, as ambition falls away, as ill will and hate falls away. As the dizziness

of the mind falls away. the distractions of the mind fall away. And we start really kind of letting the mind be sensitive to itself are we really kind of see the heart kind of operating without these distractions, that the heart seems to respond to the world around us in very intimate ways. And some of that ways when they're suffering is responsibility. Compassion Do we need to have a rationale for why we should be compassionate? Do we, the Buddha didn't seem to offer a rationale except you know, something like this, you know, if you tend to be tend to the sick, he just assumed there was there. I think that as as the, as a crust on the heart dissolves, then compassion is there, you don't need a rationale for why you should be compassionate. It just kind of right there. But a rationale for compassion is still something people like to have, even if they feel it's a natural part of who they are. This last two days, there have been three kind of me four kind of, you know, currents that come together for me in wanting to give this talk about service. One is certainly the hurricanes and so The second is that I was asked on Friday to come and be part of a panel talking about Buddhism and service and the third is a four. Okay. Well the third and the fourth reason is that both Friday and Saturday, I met here in this room, with people either being trained for on Fridays trained to become in Britain trained in the skills of Buddhist chaplaincy being chaplains and working as Buddhist chaplains in hospitals or prisons or hospices. And then yesterday, being together with people who are doing that work of Buddhist chaplaincy all over this many places in the state and some people from outside the state that came here and had a discussion of the state of Buddhist chaplaincy. And as Buddhist chaplaincy becomes a kind of a field and so on, right, and we need to talk with other people doing Buddhist chaplaincy, there's often a desire to understand what's the rationale for Buddhist compassionate response, just oh just assumed. No, we just do it. This is what we do. You know, we don't think about it, but you know, when your neighbor hurts you go and help your neighbor. And you don't think about you know why you should do it when your child is sick, you know, the night you get up and take care of your child, you know, you know, kind of look up in the book and find out the reasons why he should you know, one of the surprises of me of being a parent, so many surprises. But one of the surprises is what it was like to have my son throw up in my cupped hands even middle and it was sick, you know, and, and, you know, it was either that or over the carpet. And, and I never imagined I'd ever put my hands up like this to receive someone's vomit. And, and it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. You know, it was And little, little bit, my hope is that that his experience of his father kind of receiving him that way, rather than Oh, was important for him and his formation is his development. So, you know, luckily, I didn't have to look up in the book first, you know why I should respond that way? It's just assumed it's their natural almost. But is there a rationale for in Buddhism for compassion in the tera, vaada tradition, in both in all of Buddhism, there's an there's a certain ideal called the bodhisatta. And it's in its most classical and most classical idea, the Bodhisattva is someone endeavoring to become a Buddha. And as this develops, especially in the modern West bodhisatta is anyone whose practice is intimately connected to wanting to help others want to help others, develop the path help others in their direction in their cultivation of liberation and freedom. In a terrible tradition, there is a bodhisattva path and teachings, people often don't know that. And in my studies of Buddhism, I think that the, the corners of the terror volume, they have teachings about the bodhisatta about that. There's a very beautiful articulation of the intimate connection between liberation and compassion, that liberation and compassion are considered to be integrally important and to work entrusted. sit together. So liberation

means your own liberation, your own liberation to free the heart for your mind, from whatever keeps it bound, keeps it constricted, keeps it anxious, keeps it afraid, keeps it somehow split and fractured, somehow to liberate the heart. Compassion has to do with our care and concern for others, our response to the suffering of the world. And so what you find is that the connection between compassion and liberation are like washing your hands when they're dirty. And if you have two hands, then you know, you take the soap and both hands and one hand washes the other. You know, you can also kind of go like this, you know, you know, put some soap on one hand in the water, kind of like, you know, hoping to get clean, but somehow you have the hands work together and both hands are dirty perhaps, but both of them work together to clean each other. And then if they don't count each other, get clean. So in the same way, liberation, the path and motivation, the movement towards our liberation, and the path and movement towards compassion, work together in that same way to purify ourselves and to purify the world to help the world. I said intimate. And the idea here is that we don't see them as being separate, but being mutually reinforcing and mutually supporting. In a sense, maybe the idea is that we are all patients, and we're all healers. We are all sufferers, people who suffer. And we are all people who can help alleviate that suffering, that we're not one or the other. We're not the only people who are out there to be you know, the saviors of the world. Were they To help. But in helping we don't see ourselves as being someone who is not suffering ourselves. But there's this kind of neutrality, where we don't see each other as being so separate from each other. So that when we meet someone else, and we meet someone who's suffering, we don't think of exactly as them as other. But we don't think of them as being the same either. And this is this wonderful paradox or attention or, or that exists within Buddhism, that the whole notion of self and other is a little bit difficult to talk about. And sometimes then they say, it's neither, it's neither really the same or different. Or they talked about the merging of difference and unity. We're not the same as other people. We're not different. Like our hand. Take the famous analogy, that you know, the, the hands are both separate from each other. And they're connected right through our arms and our door. So you can't really say they're separate, but you can't really say that they're the same either. And because they're somehow both separate, and the same, they can watch each other. If they're exactly the same, you know, you wouldn't be able to do that washing, you need to have the other. But if you had, if they were the same, if they didn't have, they were, if they were the same, you couldn't actually wash each other. But if they were radically other, then they wouldn't be the connection to bring them together. So they'd have self and others a little bit problematic. And it points to the idea that, that it's important to see others as others, but not to be lost or caught caught by that otherness of the other. And it's very important to see people's being unique, unique for who they are as individuals or because of their cultural backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, you know, everything about them, that they're unique to really learn how to see that And to learn to see them as being somehow the same, but don't get caught into them being the same either. Don't be caught either. And the healing of self and other is not by having a view of self another, not having an idea of self another, not having an idea of sameness and difference, but rather be able to drop that part of the mind that gets caught in evaluating self another. So that when we encounter and others not exactly we're encountering him is the same as us. Exactly is different. But we're meeting them in a way that's quite intimate. In in the Mahayana, tradition, there's a all these archetypes but he sought to us, who are archetypes, great beings, for different qualities. And other loci



test for is the archetype of compassion. In Chinese it's Kuan Yin in Japanese. It's coming Don't quote, you know, the camera canon, anybody have Canon camera? That name canon comes from the Japanese version of a Chinese version of the Sanskrit Have a look at tests for So, and the kind of the connection is, it's the eyes to see the suffering of the world. Right, your camera has a side it can see the suffering of the world. So you probably didn't know your camera was Buddhist. And part of the image of idea the archetype is that I would like to test for a has all these hands 1000 hands sometimes, and each hand, there's an eye and that eye and also in each hand. There's a different tool 1000 different kinds of tools. And the idea is that I'm going to test for is available to manifest in many different forms to respond to All the suffering that he or she can see, through all those hands, all those hands can see your suffering everywhere in all directions. So this can this is some people will need compassion independent metaphysical principle that compassion is always present in the universe is always ready to see us and receive us it's that kind of permeates the University of compassion. The hands of Luca testifiers everywhere. So there are some Zen Khan's Zen teaching stories about about Loki tomorrow. And I don't remember exactly how they go but close enough. One of them says something like, what is it like to be a bloke, or what's it like to be the embodiment personification of compassion? That's pretty great, right? You could be Mother Teresa, you could be diorama you can be great. embodiment of compassionate you just be radiant and shining, you'd be a great helper you know all the right things to say and do at the right time. And, you know, wherever you go there just kind of like you just respond with all your wisdom and compassion and, you know, just be great. It would be great to be, you know, to be that way, wouldn't it? And if only you know, so what does it like to be on like a test for And so, one monk asks the other question, and the monk being asked says, Oh, it's like in the middle of the night in bed and having your hand reach behind your head to bunch up the pillow. Defense story right? I love that story. Because here this idea of you know, just compassionate response you know, we hold it up this high status to speak great thing, noble thing to do. And amongst as you know, it's not such a big deal. Something about Compassion is compassion respond is like, you feel a little bit uncomfortable at night you're asleep or half asleep, and you don't even think about it. But you take your hand kind of back to kind of help out your head a little bit and you punch it up a little bit. It's kind of almost almost thoughtless, almost kind of, you know, just, it's so natural, so simple, so on, contrived, so unselfconscious. So in the same way, when compassion responds in its own natural way, there's something uncontrived and unselfconscious about it. It just what needs to happen is the response. This is this is what you know our heart wants to do. And one of the very interesting practices to do is to pay attention to when you want to practice an act of generosity, or an act of compassion or care for someone be very attentive to the smallest little kind of Inklings you want to do it and then act on it. Or put aside all the reservations that follow in the wake of it, or stop and look at all the reservations, all the things that get in the way. All the things that you know, were fear and greed and all kinds of things stop. What would be your natural inclination? One of the ways of discovering your innate capacity for compassion is to do something like a meditation practice where your mind settles and gets quiet enough. So there's not a lot of obstructions and then walk into the world and encounter something and see what bubbles up inside of you. When there's no obstructions, no busyness in the mind, no fear, they get in the way. And you know, and I suspect that there's a lot of people who have urges towards doing something helping in some way, but then they hold back. What happens with we

don't hold back. Why do we hold back so part of the practice This look at that. So in other Zen story, Zen monk asks, Why what is it like to test for our hat to have all those eyes and hands? All those eyes and hands? No, no, no, no goes I think doesn't matter that much how it goes. So now there's another story Why? Why is what is it like for ugly look at what it's like to be a bloke. And, and the monk answers, it's like having eyes all over my body. So like, you know, all over, you know, that's pretty good. You know, you can see everything like you're so sensitive to the world. But the monkey asked the question says, That's not a good enough answer. I think you might give them a grade like that's only 80% they like to percentages and then sometimes your answer. Remember when Japan is there, they asked me questions. And then Oh, that was 70%. Once they they asked me the strange questions, and very strange question. And the monk just pointed to the door and told me to leave. He told me what he said he was. He told me, he pointed to the door very clear. He wanted me to leave. And he said to me, come back 20 years before well, so they get to the monk says, it's like having eyes compassion. It's like having eyes all over my body. And amongst that, that's only 80%. And so, the second Mark says, Well, how would you answer? And he says it's like having eyes throughout my body. So it's a little more intimate, like not just on your surface, but just throughout, like having a sensitive certain kind of sensitivity. That's everywhere. So in the Theravada, there's this idea that compassion is innate, or assume that it's there. And there's the teaching, that compassion and liberation should be seen as working together, that have that intimate that as we respond as we respond to the world. So they work together, not only they work together, but to maybe the same thing at times. And that's the challenge I think of people in the in the who are engaged in Buddhist social action work. People who are engaged in making their social action, their chaplaincy work or they're engaged Buddhism or whatever, if they're making it a Buddhist path. The challenge is to understand how that very activity not only supports liberation, but actually is a path to liberation. How how maybe the intimacy between liberation and compassion is one. liberation, compassion can occur in the same activity. So our compassionate response to suffering of the world is a form of generosity. So we act with generosity perhaps sometimes we offer our actions or activity generously, sometimes our resources, something many things we offer. But the practice of generosity requires us to let go of if we have it, like over stinginess. margin lightness or fear that the things that hold back from being generous, as we actually generously are able to let go of our stinginess or fear or hate. That is liberating us from stinginess, fear and hate. So the very act of the idea is to help someone else, but you're also helping yourself. When you take this as a Buddhist practice, you find out how is it I can act? How can I act generous, generously here so that I'm also liberating myself at the same time. You don't have to forget about your welfare, in a compassionate response. You know, to be selfless, and not think about yourself. But how is it that you can understand generosity as a way of letting also letting go of self centeredness? The cleaning yourself that might stand in the way so the act of generosity can at the same time, both Be an expression of compassion and a movement towards liberation. And they work together. If we kind of see it that way. Is that intimate? The two then the movement towards liberation. Say you're sitting, you know, sitting quietly with your eyes closed and meditation, and you're being present for yourself. As you stay present for yourself, it's kind of like doing house cleaning after the disruption. And you really see yourself what's going on. We see many aspects of ourselves, but sooner or later you're also see your suffering. And learning to have the

capacity present for your suffering to enter into it to not turn away and not run away, but to enter the world. of our Suffering gives us a kind of inner strength and capacity and to be present for suffering in the world outside of us. As we go inside of ourselves and meditation, and learn to empty ourselves learn not to be limited or constrained by our fear or hate or greed, then we in a sense, become empty, a little bit emptier. So that we can take in others and their situation and then be able to respond in a better way. The three routes of suffering, as taught in the Theravada, Buddhism, the three kind of core roots, they all are different suffering supposed to arise out of. It is said to be greed, hate and delusion and liberation from greed, hate and delusion, at the very kind of foundation of our psyche is what liberation means means. But you turn greed, hate and delusion around. Greed is turned around to generosity. Hate is turned around to love and delusion is turned around to wisdom. At least it's obvious with the first two, that generosity and love have to do with our relationship to the world and to others. And wisdom can be seen more widely, but also has to do with our connection to the world we live in. So the very movement of liberation, of liberating ourselves is also movement of giving freedom or independence or giving birth to or really I guess releasing from us. So we can operate in the world releasing from us our capacity for generosity, our capacity, the capacity for love and our capacity for wisdom. So not to see the compassionate response to suffering as something that takes us away from our practice. But it's possible to see it as the practice, whereas intimately a practice so that we don't live in a bifurcated world of my spiritual practice, I take care of it and kind of tuck it away and kind of protect it and kind of avoid the world, but actually see that we can live right in the middle of the world and have the world itself provide us with a path to both liberation and compassion, by the world itself provides us the path of the spiritual life. When we gave our when we when we collected your video of yours donation a few weeks ago for the people impacted by Katrina, Katrina. The money went to Second Harvest, which is a wonderful organization around the country that helps bring food and a to people. And Second Harvest has been operating in our community, Palo Alto East Palo Alto here in San Mateo, Santa Clara, for many, many years. Thinking harvesting just suddenly appear because of Katrina. You've been right here in our community. They've been operating and helping people who are been desperately poor without enough money. So I hope that as we develop our mindfulness, develop our meditation practice and our spiritual practice, that we also develop the eyes, that we begin seeing what's going on in our own community, let alone what appears to newspapers and television. And they will be sensitive to really what see what's happening here, and where the needs are. And that we've learned the appropriate way to respond to the needs that are close at home, as well as well as those that are far away. Thank you very much. Sorry to give a long talk about something that's obvious