

2010-01-25 Buddhism And Non Violence Part 1

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SPEAKERS

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So, good evening. And what I have in mind to do tonight, as well as the next couple of Monday nights, is to give a series of talks about the Buddhist teachings on peace, non violence and violence. Because those topics peace and non violence and a critique of violence lay really at the center of the heart of Buddhism. So it's a very important part of this tradition. But I think even more important, is, you know, Buddhism itself is really a small thing. not that important in some ways. What's important is, is peace was important is the freedom from conflict firms from What's important is, you know, some profound experience of inner peace, freedom, compassion, love, and, and some experience of external peace. And I think that there's very powerful impulses are motivations in human beings, to move towards peace, to cultivate these to develop these, to work with compassion to work with love. And these are forces which I think are often underrepresented in the popular press, because the movements of non violence of peace, of love and compassion, tend to be movements that are done in small increments small pieces. Whereas some of the big you know, violence is often often enough that mixed news happens in big chunks and You know, big events. And so it's kind of it's, you know, easier to write about it's has a bigger impact. But for every act of violence we read about in the newspaper, there's probably 10,000 acts of simple kindness, simple movements towards making peace, maybe more, maybe 1,000,010 million that go on in our world. You know, a mother that manages to reconcile her two children when they're fighting is a is creating peace. That doesn't make it a newspaper very often. But I think it's a very significant and so there's a lot of movements like that. And I think that there's a, there's a great possibility for peace, a great possibility for the kind of, of compassionate life that isn't limited to Buddhism. Buddhism is really a small thing. In the service, of creating some kind of really lasting or deeper peace and certainly in people's hearts, but also in the world that we live, hopefully. And there are many people in the world, many religions, many different non religious traditions that have the same impulse to somehow find peace, find compassion, act from love. And I think those things are really important. And that's why I say Buddhism is really a small thing. You know, just, it's a little aid and support for this very much more important enterprise that we're about.

One of my heroes, I have a I have a lot of heroes. I like having heroes. The more the better because I'm concerned. But one of my great heroes, this, I think, is Martin Luther King. And he wrote, "darkness cannot drive out darkness, only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate. Violence multiplies violence and toughness multiplies toughness in descending spiral of destruction, the chain reaction of evil, hate, begetting hate. Wars producing more wars, must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the darkness of annihilation." Must be broken, I think.

So. I give you a small example. I've talked to Tom before, about five years ago when my older son was, I suppose he was. He was about seven. I used what are you occasionally used on him, which is I used

my strong voice. And perhaps that was a little bit of a kind euphemism for Using my strong voice, Thou shalt not do that again, or something very strong language gets attention that was hard to get attention sometimes. And, and so it was doing something it just shouldn't happen. And it was very effective to use a strong voice. And because it's kind of like, you know, I'm just big, powerful guy in his eyes, I suppose. And it's kind of certainly intimidating. It's kind of it was, you know, a little bit over the top kind of strength and how good it was. That was good. It worked. He stopped, but he was doing great only to have about some days later, to hear him use the same voice to his younger brother. When I heard that, I said, Oh, what have I done? What are the consequences I could get? What I wanted to have accomplished in the moment was accomplished. But it was accomplished at a great cost. And the cost was a conditioning and example to my younger son of what was allowed, but what can be done? And he then turned around and did it again. Do we do that as as you know, do we do that more outside of our family? Do we do that in nations? War begets more war. There's so much war. They say they claimed in the 20th century that they were fighting wars to end the war. Right? And they knew that there was twice they said that. So I'm afraid what's gonna happen if they say the third time and it's very easy to justify violence. It's too easy. And what's really sad is too many times both parties justify violence. Both parties feel like they're just it's sanctioned. You know, it's certainly a sanctioned to use violence against people who are being violent. unsanctioned violence, right? Those people are unjust. So we're gonna stop those unjust people. But many times they feel they're just and so how do we, you know, how do we make out that easy to easy to get, you know, seemingly easy to get quick results to use your big gun. It's a lot more difficult to approach violence, non violence, or to approach non violence find other alternatives to violence. Because it takes more thought it takes more care it actually I think it takes a lot more a stronger character than the easy use of violence of a gun. As I've said, there was a woman many years ago when they were teaching in Palo Alto, who came to me after one of these Monday night talks, and said that when she parks and downtown Paulo so she doesn't feel safe. And she's thinking of getting a gun. And, and what what did I think of that? And I didn't want to be in a position being in the role of telling her you should or shouldn't have you gone. I thought you shouldn't for sure. But I didn't want to be in the role Exactly. But I told her was, I think it's really sad. That person might go to that quick answer.

Rather than doing the more involved answer, which might be revolve kind of approach, which is take some classes in non violent defense. learn the skills of how to handle yourself some greater success, rather than resorting to having a carrying a gun. Both having a gun and having having trained oneself to have other approaches to deal with violence. They all have risks. involved, there's no guarantee that any of them is going to work even having a gun, it's no guarantee it's going to help. And non violent approaches are not going to, you know, no guarantee as well. But what kind of society do we want? And what do we, you know, and what kind of society we want to build? What kind of how do we want to condition our children, the people around us? Do what they're what we want to do, or are we lazy? Or do we feel somehow selfish? There's a lot of narcissism in our society, you know, that it's my way I have to have my way. You know, it's, I can't get this trouble out of my out, get this trouble out of my sight. I'm going to get it out of out of here as quickly as possible. And so some violent approach and get that done. I read some years ago, I read an amazing theory about the American Revolutionary War. I grew up mostly in American schools, where the Revolutionary War was glorified to no end. Great heroes, great, these amazing, wonderful thing not only for the United States but for the world, you know, to cast off the tyranny of England and, and give birth to this great democratic country just like it was when a great, you know, moments in civilization. In some ways it was. But, you know, before the Revolutionary War, the colonists did a lot of non violent protests against the English. So much so that the English Governor of New York, wrote back to England to the crown to say, I have no power outside the fort. I can you know, you You're, you're writing these laws in England, and I'm supposed to implement them here in the colony in New York. No one's gonna listen to me that's quite something the right duck

insane so the question the theory was are there are there are the challenge was if there had if the colonists had not resorted to violence to get rid of the English How long would it have taken for the English for the for the colonists to become free anyway? What did it take in 10 years? 20 years in Canada I got free eventually did they shoot when it Canada, free of England? Who knows? No one knows. What are they free?

Are we free we're still not free of that violence. Oh, yeah, there we go, oh, Canadian.

Many, many years and figure figure.

I wouldn't mind having the Queen as you know, if although all those people hadn't been killed, it's a pretty good exchange. So I don't know. So it's a challenge, you know, how long would have taken? And and, and you know, and if people had been trained in non violent civil disobedience could they have done it quicker than the Canadians did it? The I think that's a very interesting question. And it's kind of, it's a difficult thing to bring up the field because it rubs against what's kind of almost sacred in United States attitude about the revolutionary war and violence and how important that was. But what if it What if it only taken 10 years to do it a different way? I believe that when there's war and violence, everybody loses. The Victor loses. If you look at what goes on now with the American soldiers coming back from Iraq, it's it's a huge tragedy. Even if America should completely win in Iraq or win Afghanistan, everybody Afghanistan lives happily ever after. I mean, this you know, that the, the amount of suffering that's been caused to people who went through that here, the trauma, the suicides, the wounding now and the families that have been affected of the dead soldiers, I mean, all those people have lost. They've lost something very deep. So is there another way or can we entertain Either way, could we study other ways? Could we be interested? Are there other ways? Maybe there are times when violence is justified. But I find that people are much too quick to want to justify it. Justice, I find that people in this circle in the Buddhist kind of circles I teach him, if I give a talk about working with anger, you know, and being wise about anger and, you know, practicing within whatever, inevitably, inevitably, someone stands up and wants to justify anger is a very powerful instinct to justify it. And I don't understand what that instinct is to justify violence or anger. It's okay justified sometimes maybe sometimes it's okay to use. But what about studying, training and other forms of dealing with conflict besides the ones that are violent. When I was, I'm Norwegian. And I went back to live in Norway when I was 20. And so that was Norwegian there was men in Norway, there's mandatory military service. And so I didn't really feel it was a danger of being called in, but they had to, it was still kind of my friends were in the military service, variety of things. And, and I and something like 10% of Norwegians are conscientious objectors. So they don't have to do military service. But what they have to do is a one year military service or two years of civil service if you're a conscientious objector. And so like you work in hospital for two years or something alternative, but some of my friends in Norway didn't like this. They were conscious objector, they didn't want to fight. They wouldn't be in this in the army. But they, they wanted to be able to defend the country if it was ever attacked. And you know, just, you know, working in hospitals nice, but they weren't to be actually actively involved in defense. And they wanted they were petitioning the government to set up a non violent boot camp. Because there's a science. Maybe that's a little bit lofty term, but there's a science of civil disobedience of non violent action that's becoming increasingly sophisticated. Their university departments, university professors, scholars, who spend lifetimes studying all the myriad examples of non violence, non violent civil disobedience that have succeeded and not succeeded in the world and studied how they work with these techniques or techniques are like and, and develop them. So that the idea that they can be studied and learned and that's People become more sophisticated and trained in these things, then they can, you know, be much more effective in, in, you know, in dealing with conflict. So I'll give you one little example maybe it's not silly, but maybe it's

I think it was in Czechoslovakia when the Russians invaded. The Russians had a really hard time with in 1968 when they invaded the Russian army to Czechoslovakia. repeatedly, the Russian army lost the battle without a single bullet being fired. And that's because the people of Prague, Czechoslovakia resisted non violently, massively, and they would offer they would get up they'd get up in the tanks as the sole Russian soldier committed big tanks, and the crowds of people would climb on the tanks and offer flowers. And, and what happened was that the soldier the first few waves of Soldiers, Russian soldiers coming back here couldn't fight. They can't do this. And so the Russians had to bring in fresh people from Russia to to, you know, hadn't been already been influenced by all the flowers, all those kind people saying, you know, we don't want you here. But my favorite, sort of a favorite little non violent technique was the jacks would they scrambled the road signs, the street signs, you know, so the Russians would come into town with their maps, they didn't have GPS back then. So these maps, and they said, you know, make a right on, you know, Prague street, and proxied would take you down to the garbage dump. And so the checks knew what you know what the streets were but so it's a small little thing, and, but there's a whole slew of that. It also To study all the successful examples, they don't make big news. But there's been a lot about, some of them do big examples. So of course, Gandhi stands out as a preeminent example of non violent success of nonviolent action. But Gandhi was a student of history. And he had learned how non violence had worked in, in China, in Russia, in England, and also in the colonies in United States. He had lots and lots of examples that he used as kind of inspire him or teach him what was possible. The Chinese in 1900 were boycotting American goods and or to protest the discriminatory immigration policies or attitudes that America had towards the Chinese. I don't know how successful it was, but God is study this or boycott, look at that. And so he was aware of many, many examples. And then Gandhi himself then inspired others. And so I think many of you know, Gandhi inspired was an inspiration from Martin Luther King. The term that Dr. King used sole power was his translation of a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi had the word such graha, which means it's kind of like adhering to the truth. The power sometimes said, power of truth. And so he took those words, such that means truth and graha means that hearing and, and he translated it into soul power, because maybe I've worked well for his mostly Christian kind of people. So here's a great Mahatma Martin Luther King, quote,

This was apparently one of his very first one at an early sermon 1957.

He was quoting from the Gospel of Matthew, which says, apparently You have heard that it has been said that was shall love thy neighbor and hate an enemy. So I really say that Matthew really says that. It doesn't say that. She says it does not have people don't hear you. It says that you're She's pretty. I know that love thy neighbor part. I hear that a lot. Oh, you know, he was in seminary. Right? It's just that I saw that and I was kind of amazed. Anyway, amazed by many things easily, I guess. So it says, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. Here's what Martin Luther King, that's what it says in his Bible. And this is what he said. And after reading that, to his to his concrete good. Oh, is it? Oh, I'm so sorry. I couldn't I couldn't understand the text here. But thank you, that's great that you could correct me so quickly. Okay. So thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate that enemy. So it looks like the quotation ends there. But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you. do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that this spitefully use you. So good. I guess that's the quote. Great, very great, that's inspiring. Let us again, Dr. King says, Let us deal with this practical question. How do you go about loving your enemies? I guess the first thing is this in order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing self. And I'm sure that that seems strange to you that I started out telling you this morning, that you love your enemies by beginning with a look at self. Not great, apparently. And so, you know, I think that's certainly my belief that if we're going to have any hope in the world to MIT to change the world to become a more peaceful place. We can't ignore ourselves. We can't be looking out there

that they have to do it. It's up to them. But rather we have to look and see how do you treat your children or your neighbors or your colleagues? How do you treat yourself? What's the impulses that drive your heart? Is it love? Is it hate? Do you have and not not to simply to have Answer. It's kind of Yes, what you hope it is. But to train the heart to train yourself your mind to be able to respond with love with kindness in a way that reduces conflict, rather than increase it. And I think it takes a lot of skill to do that. And it's not something that people are trained very well in our society, I believe, for the most part to do. I read some inspiring schools where they have a variety of training for their, their students. So do we get a gun? Or do we train ourselves in non violent defense? Do we build a bigger military or do we train people in mediation. I mean, there's a you know what, there's a wonderful professor at Stanford who's a specialist in international conflict mediation. And that was a specialty. And but so he's been invited all over the world to mediate conflict. Isn't that great? So he's been trained, and he's trained and studied and all this stuff and develop skills. Now he goes into just does this stuff around the country around the world. Can we do it in our neighborhood? Can we do it? You know, there's people I know here who's trained themselves in restorative justice, restorative justice as a movement, where rather than punishing a criminal, you figure out some way how to restore justice with whole community that there is that when something a crime has been committed, it everyone a lot of people have been at lost a lot of people disrupted the community fabric has disrupted and to the variety of ways of how to restore a whole community, not just get the person in jail, because what's more important, what's more important is rather the restoration of the community

than it is to punish someone. And so in order the story of justice requires the criminal if the criminals willing, instead of going to jail, to come forth and meet sometimes with the community with victims, the victims family, their own family, their own gonna be there, everybody's been affected. And sometimes when they see as the whole community, the fabric of who has been affected by their crime, it's very hard to want to do it again. So work sometimes I probably doesn't work all the time. And to hold up one anecdote and said, Look, we had this wonderful program and someone messed up afterwards. Therefore the program is wrong is I think is really sad. All Programs are not going to work hundred percent of the time. But what is the overall flavor? What's the overall values? What's the overall kind of ethos that we're trying to form in our society. And I think the overall kind of attitude that hopefully we're going to create is an attitude that we're all in it together. And that we're all kind of family. We're all kind of collaborators can spirit co conspirators in creating a peaceful world for each other. And not to feel that there's someone out there is them out there, and I can ignore them and push them away so I can preserve my peace. And what I found through Buddhist practice, is that it's very hard as you mature In Buddhism, or as mindfulness becomes stronger, to maintain the illusion that there's someone out there and it's very hard to maintain the defensiveness or the contraction that keeps me myself in mind here, and a wall between me and what's out there. Because it's exhausting to do that. It's actually a kind of violence to ourselves to keep that kind of wall up. If you if they have the wall up very strongly and create your own kind of Kingdom and protect it and push everything else away. It can seem satisfying in his with his own reference points, but once you start relaxing, once you start experiencing a deeper capacity for peace, you see what cost, violin cost? It's been to maintain that kind of sharp separation. So to live a life where to live To live a life where we're all in it together, and be interested in training, and learning and changing, developing ourselves so that we can be more helpful in this world. I think that what's important is peace. Not Buddhism. And in fact, there's been an ancient slogan in Buddhism, that the characteristic of the Dharma, what characterizes the Dharma? is non violence. Isn't that interesting? What's this Dharma about Dharma is like Buddhism, right? So what's what's the what's the characteristic of Buddhism is non violence. It doesn't say peace. there anything very interesting doesn't say peace. Nirvana, and wakening is characterized by peace, but the Dharma, the teachings and the practices that lead to that these are characterized by non violence. So how do we train ourselves? And I think this is one of the one of the contributions Buddhism has to make, you know, the small thing that

Buddhism is, what is one of the things that contribute, they can contribute a practices, they can contribute teachings can contribute challenges to us, to, to help us become the kind of people who are don't succumb to the movements of greed and hate delusion, in our own hearts, where there's enough self understanding here, and enough spaciousness or calm, so that we don't get into our impulses. So we begin discovering the precious capacities of our heart, to, to be able to be loving, compassionate, caring, all these things that can exist. Over and over again. The Buddha emphasized that someone who is Going to follow the Buddhist path to some degree of maturity becomes someone who lives non violently. But how do we live non violently and not do it naively not do it passively.

The creditor critique that some people have of adherence of non violence is that there's the passive, it becomes too passive. They become kind of pushovers. They kind of just kind of stand there and watch well, terrible things happen. Mahatma Gandhi, who was such a champion of non violence, had a lot of respect for soldiers. And he said some of his best. His best kind of lieutenants in his movement, had been soldiers before they had renounced violence. And what he respected his soldiers was their discipline. There. Courage, their their strength, their forbearance, that they had to have their loyalty, all these beautiful qualities that they had to have in order to serve. And Mahatma Gandhi, one of those who saved strongest strength of character to be present for the people who weren't passive, but were willing to put themselves out in harm's way to non violently try to resolve or deal with a conflict. My own interest in Buddhism is the beginning. The beginning interest I had in Buddhism Buddhist practice, was because at 1972 I was of draftable age here United States. And the Vietnam War was going on. There was college students who are being shot campuses in this country. And the and it was pretty exciting times for those of you who are in through that time, and the dorms taken by the draft, there was a lot of discussion about what we're going to do if we got drafted, would we go or not go all that. So there's a lot of discussion about war, non violence. And I was always the extreme pacifist in the group among my fellow college students, friends. And so I was always because I was the extreme one, I was always having to defend myself or argue my point, various various ways. And so as I did this, I got to look at myself in some deeper way. And I realized that if I really was going to live my ideals, I would have to be willing to put myself in harm's way to be able to stand in a demonstration and however, you know, rifle pointed at me which was happening to people And, and I looked at that about that possibility. And I saw that I was afraid. And I felt too afraid to really feel I felt like I was probably too afraid to stand there with a rifle pointed at me. And that didn't feel good. This can't be. So I wanted some way to deal with that fear. And as I cast about how can I deal with this fear? What I came to was Buddhist practice. The I don't know, maybe it's coincidence. I don't know, this is what I found. But I identified this kind of Buddhism. As a practice. I wasn't initially interested in Buddhism as a teaching. I was interested in Buddhism as a practice that would help me deal with the attachments, the fears, the senses of self that interfered from being able to live, what I really felt was in my heart And I hope that that's the case for many people that Buddhism offers the kind of training that makes us strong, insightful people who can act with great courage and great compassion when we're called on to do that. And, and none of you know what's coming. None of you know what you're going to be called on to do. And will you have? Will your compassion and your courage be up to the task that you might have to face?

I hope that those of you who are interested in Buddhist practice will find that it helps you to become people who can be compassionate and courageous. Just when it's needed.

So then I'll end with this long introduction to what the Buddha had to say about this topic. quoting the Buddha, better than 1000 meaningless statements is one meaningful word that brings peace. So there I should end Thank you.