

2013-07-08 Buddhist Holy Sites

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SPEAKERS

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For the Dharma talk today, I'm going to pick up on another piece of violence that happened yesterday that has some impact on Buddhists. And that is yesterday, probably the most sacred spot for Buddhists in the world is the Mahabodhi temple in Bodh Gaya, in India, is a site where the Buddha was enlightened, and the most holiest place on this temple grounds is the Bodhi tree, which is a descendant of the tree under which the Buddha attained his awakening. It was said is that that cuttings from the tree were taken to Sri Lanka. And then some hundreds of years later, someone took cuttings from that tree and replanted it in the place where the original tree stood. So this tree is considered the most sacred, you know, so it's kind of like the Mecca or Jerusalem or something for Buddhists.

And Sunday morning, there was nine bombs were exploded at in Bodh Gaya Mahabodhi temple, a terrorist attack there. And they were kind of low impact bombs or low intensity bombs with two monks were injured, and not a lot of damage was done. And people are speculating why it might have happened. One idea is that it's retaliation for what's happening in Burma, where some of the Buddhist, the Buddhist monks even are involved in violence against the Muslims. And there's other theories, no one is taking a responsibility for it. So what do we do as good Buddhists take up arms get angry, the upset. What is when What's our role in what do we, you know, our most sacred site. So that's what I'd like to talk about today. And I read somewhere in the paper today that Dyer Lama expressed his sadness about the event. It seems like it was mostly Talking about the sadness about these monks who were injured. But he talked about the sadness is a sad event to have this happen. There are traditionally considered before pilgrimage sites that Buddhists will go to for holy sites. There's a place where Buddha was enlightened, where he was born, where he was enlightened, where he first taught and where he died. And from the most ancient texts, they were just attributed to the Buddha. There were instructions for people to go visit these four places, and there's important places to go. So I'd like to read a story about this kind of pilgrimage.

This is from my book called a monastery within Tales from the Buddhist path. At the beginning of every year, the Abbess would meet with the new monks and nuns who had joined the monastery the preceding year. Pack your bags, she would say I'm taking you on a pilgrimage to the holy sites of Buddhism. Knowing of the pilgrimages to places in India, where the Buddha was born and lightened, first taught and died, the new monastics couldn't believe their good fortune. Especially because after the first few months in the monastery, some of the new residents were bored, some are restless, and some are unsure unsure why they were there. On the day, on the day of the departure, all the older monks and nuns in the monastery stood by the gate to send off the Abbess and the new monastics leading the group. The Airbus first took them to the took them to a hospital. There they visited the sick. Then the Airbus took the group to an old age home. The new monastics many who are quite young, were amazed at the ravages of old age. The Urbis then took them to a hospice and the hours there

they spend time with people all stages of dying. The last few hours were spent in silent vigil with someone who had just died. The Abbess then led the group back to the monastery. There they visited a nun sick in the infirmary. The new monastics were struck by the sparkle of joy, which radiated through the tired eyes of the patient. Then they went to visit the oldest resident of the monastery, a 96 year old monk. The group was odd by the love and acceptance that shone forth from the toothless, frail and soup stooped man. Next, the Abbess took them to the hospice wing of the monastery. Here they were introduced to a nun, who only days away from her death, radiated a palpable peace that lingered within them for hours after. Finally, the Abbess took the monastics to the meditation hall. When they receded, she said, You've seen the holy sites These are the sights that motivated the Buddha to awaken. Once you are awakened, you will no longer be troubled when you encounter old age, sickness and death. So the story riff reframes or redefines what the holy sites of Buddhism are, rather than being in locations in India. It has to do with the encounter we have our relationship we have with sickness, old age and death, and these we can encounter, you know, we don't have to go to India to encounter these. They're part and parcel of our life. It has to do with how we relate to it. And how we relate to the experience of our life is the essence of Buddhist practice. Buddhist practice is not found in India, it's not found in bodhgaya not found at the mahabodhi temple. It just kind of let it's kind of like the Bodhi tree and the mahabodhi temple. It is kind of like nice reminders of what's important and what's important is for us to be able to find our own awakening to change the way that we relate to our world so we ourselves can live in this world peaceful way and awakened way. So if you you know you see me holding the striker here and the striker might be I might think this is a very important striker and it's very attached to it because if I if I hit the striker against the bell just right, it's just the right striker to make the perfect sound would make me that make you think that I'm a perfect bell ringer. And so I have to hack here. This is really important. So I'm not gonna let anybody take it. So I'm going to hold it really tight and keep it here to myself. No one's gonna because it's so important. And I can be so focused on the striker because it's so important, right? That's why One way I could relate to it. The other way I can relate to this whole event is I can focus on what it's like to be grasping the striker. And if I look at that part of the equation, I look at the important striker, then I'm blinded to the pain and my knuckles getting white and sore holding tight to this for 15 out there. But if I, if I feel my hand grasping tight, pretty soon and this hurts, I don't know if I want to do this anymore. This is tiring. The whole relationship to this changes if I switched from the striker to how I'm relating to the striker, how I hold the striker.

So in that way, Buddhism asks us to switch our attention from the things some of the things which are very important in our life, not to dismiss them or diminish their value, but to turn from what they are or towards a higher we are in relationship to them. How do we hold them and we would like to do we believe A system that we cling to them, do we hate them? Do we love them? What do we What's our role? What do we do there? And so that's what's important. That's where freedom is found. That's where the practice is found. So, in terms of people who want to attack Buddhism, that open opening discourse, you know, there's no real beginning of the Buddhist Bible like there is for the maybe the Judeo Christian Bibles. But there's, if one way of looking at the beginning would be the first discourse in the first collection. And you look at the very beginning of it. Well, you know, if that's where you'd be, if you had to kind of start at the beginning, that's where you would start, but it's not the you know, so. And in that text, you know, and an English page to, it begins with a story. The story is, the Buddha is traveling around India with a group of monks and some other Wandering ascetic as somehow join, they're wondering, there's kind of, but the other ascetic and his partner are constantly disparaging the Buddha for days going along and criticizing him. And so one evening the Buddha kind of addresses this issue. And he says monks, if anyone should speak in disparagement of me of the Dharma, or the Sangha, you should not be angry, resentful, or upset on that account. If you were to be angry or displeased at such disparagement, that would only be a hindrance to you. For others disparage me, the Dharma or the Sangha, and you were angry and displeased. Can you recognize whether what they say

is right or not? No, they say if I This version made the Dharma or the Sangha, then you must have, you must explain what is incorrect as being incorrect. Saying that is incorrect, that is false. That is not our way that is not found among us. But monks, if others should speak in praise of me of the Dharma or the Sangha, you should not an account of that, be pleased, happy or elated. If you were to be pleased, happy or elated at such praise, that would only be a hindrance to you. If others praise me, the Dharma or the Sangha, you should acknowledge the truth of what is true saying that is correct. That is right. That is our way that is found among us. So it's kind of not I hadn't like I love it that you know, one way of looking at the opening of the Buddhist discourses all teaching is don't be concerned about getting upset or don't get upset or don't get happy. If someone disparate Or praises your religion. You know this, listen to it. And if it seems true, you could acknowledge what's true. If it's not true, you can try to have a conversation say that's not how it is here. But you wouldn't be upset. And the reason for that he gives is that if you get upset or if you get elated, you won't be able to see clearly you won't be able to understand clearly. And so here again, we see the emphasis comes back to ourselves to our ability to relate and how we relate can we relate with clarity can we relate with understanding that is not colored by our likes and dislikes by our upsets in our in our you know, elation. So mindfulness practice is supposed to be a great support for this mindfulness practice has its genesis in ourselves and our ability to sit still be quiet enough to be able to tune in to our part of the equation and how we're holding the striker how we're relating to the world. If we're blinded by the world, the things in the world we want by the people around us by jobs and money and all that, then we don't find the Dharma, the Dharma is found, not by rejecting any of it, but it's found how we relate to it. And it's a very hard lesson for people to learn, to turn their attention away from wanting to fix the world, wanting things to be a certain way, towards a freedom that can be found when we look at the real, how we relate to it. What the relationship is.

You know, one of the things that can happen in meditation, or something like meditation, where you sit quietly long enough and stay in touch with yourself and see what's see what's going on, see what's how your hand is grasping. Some of the things that we're constantly doing, don't seem so tenable anymore. It's possible, you know, perhaps to spend all day thinking about your bank account. And you're concerned about your bank account this and that and kind of you know, and then you sit down to meditate and You're still thinking about your bank account. But now there's this heightened awareness that you're doing it. And you feel this is too much. This is a drag, I'm caught. I am a slave to these thoughts. And I am, you know, this is tiring, it's causing headache. This is not where freedom is. in daily life and life is busy, it's easy to just follow along in the stream as our thinking. But it's hard sometimes to follow those streams and perpetuated. We use take time to stop, maybe close your eyes and just be just be with yourself. And maybe the first five minutes or 10 minutes of meditation, you still happily going along. But if you meditate long enough, at some point, there is a wait a minute, this is not what I want to be doing. There's more to life than you know what I'm always thinking about and doing. And so when you sit quiet for a while, it kind of can naturally begin shifting the relationship to something that's more primary more intimate, closer in and so we can Finding where the true refuge is where the true temple is, where the true holy site is, which has to be in ourselves. In our Buddhist tradition, we have the Theravada tradition. When people take refuge in the Buddha, it's really very important religious step that people take taking refuge in the Buddha. It's explicitly said that we people are not taking refuge in the Buddha as a person, but rather taking refuge in the Buddha's awakening. The fact that there is awakening is an example of someone who's freed their mind found a mind which is deeply at peace. We take refuge we were inspired by the fact that this is possible. Not because we just then going to put the Buddha up on a pedestal, but rather the Buddha represents something that we can do for ourselves. We say that when we bow to the Buddha in our tradition, we're really bowing to ourselves because the Buddha just represents a capacity. We all And so the idea is to discover that capacity.

So, in the Dhammapada it says, people threatened by fear, go to many refuges to mountains, forests, parks, trees and shrines. None of these is a secure refuge. None is a supreme refuge. Not by going to such a refuge is when released from all suffering. But when someone going for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha sees this important word sees who's the one who sees the idea? Is that something you do you learn to see. It's not like reading a book and learning teachings, but it is to develop the capacity to see clearly Something yourself. When someone sees with the right insight, the Four Noble Truths, suffering, the arising of suffering, the overcoming of suffering, and the eightfold path leading to the ending of suffering, then this is the secure refuge. This is the supreme refuge by going to such a refuge when it's released from all suffering. So the affordable chews are a way of talking about changing the way we hold on to the striker. We don't cling to it, we see that the clinging to the striker hurts suffering. We see that the clinging is what causes the suffering and we know we can stop the clinging and I can hold the striker very likely not to cling to it at all. Just very light and make a nice sound nice The so and the result of that is that then the mind the heart can be at peace, the heart can be open, available to the world to respond to the world in a very different way than when the heart is closed or tight. And one of the hopes I have in this Dharma practice we have as we become people who were able to meet and respond to the world with open ringing hearts, rather than with the tightly clenched strikers and in terms of religion and religious violence and religious, you know, conflict. Someone came to the Buddha to debate him too critical of him. And the Buddha just wasn't going to debate wasn't gonna get involved in it. It's very good. I said. told us man, what opponent would you get from those who live without opponents? Who don't, who don't counter views with us who don't grasp anything here as ultimate. And that's something so what's interesting about this early Buddhist teachings is that the over and over again they also stress don't hold on to anything as being the ultimate religious teaching. don't grasp at that. Because the teachings are not what the point is. The point is the non grasping and even if you if you grasp the teaching of non grasping, you're in trouble. You've missed the boat and you're holding on to the striker. So there's no arguing with people in your non clinging I mean, they're not clinging what what do you argue about? So if the essence of this teachings of this ancient Tradition is not a teaching, but rather an experience. The essence is not a doctrine, but rather a release. The essence is not really an understanding or understanding as part of it, but rather is this freedom that's possible. So if someone bombs or holy sites I think it's just a wonderful opportunity for us to be free. That's what we want to manifest in the world is not if we met manifest anger, despair. I don't think we're doing the Buddha's work.

I don't want it we don't want to kind of just pretend it's all okay and just go along as if that's okay. You know, but, you know, to hold it lightly to to not be troubled by it, to use it as an encouragement to come back to ourselves. Find our freedom, the holy site of Buddhism, the Buddha, the Mahabodhi temple, is there, again is pointing to the possibility for each of us to be free. That's what it's there for. And people can't take that away from us with a bomb. So generally in Buddhism when people did happen a few times now for the last decade or so that people have destroyed Buddhist statues and temples in different parts of the world. The general generally Buddhists don't go up in alms round that they'd rather they didn't do it. It's kind of sad to lose this is the heritage and but you know, there's there's something much more important going on here. Maybe we don't need any temples. In the end, we just need to have open hearts. So do you have any comments or questions about that? Want to take exceptions? Can you have it?

Gil, do you know if any Buddhist are speaking out regarding the violence that's been happening in Burma, where Buddhists have been attacking Muslims and saying, you know, rethink this. This is you know, this isn't helpful.

I haven't been following the news so closely around this, but I do I have read accounts of Buddhists who have been protesting this writing letters. The in Burma that people who have been upset in Burma there, there have been Buddhists who have been critical of it and try oppose oppose it. And there have been here in California, they've been Buddhist leaders who have been writing letters and they try and make a difference. I don't know what some of the some of the international leaders like Dalai Lama or tick, not Han, I don't know what they've done. You know, it's it's a difficult situation. Thank you.

Thank you for the talk.

You know, it's as tragic as it is that what's happening in Burma. And I don't want to in any way kind of say it's a good thing, but exactly. But occasionally, Buddhists have kind of thought of themselves a little bit holier than everybody else. You know, like, we don't do religious wars. We don't do those things. We don't have terrorists. So, so, now we can't say that. So now we can be open more Less holy. Yes. Comment. in Sri Lanka, there has been a lot of violence also in Sri Lanka has been a lot of violence. Yeah, so Sri Lanka is another country where there's been a lot of violence. I mean, if you don't have to go very far in Buddhist Asia to find variety of different kinds of violence, that Buddhist Buddhists have been involved in Buddhist monks, monks have been involved in the 10s. So I think, generally, the stories are not as dramatic. I think when people say there hasn't sometimes people have said, there's been no war in the name of Buddhism. Generally, I think what they're trying to say is that there's no one has tried to impose Buddhism on other people. But there have been so occasionally, you know, in origin or protecting Buddhism, per se, it's more Buddhists. You know, Buddhist ethnic people are attacking Hindu ethnic people. And so and the Buddhists are involved in it, but it's not necessarily so much a religious war. But you know, it's if you go down through the history of it in Asia, you know, there's been example of soldier monks who've gone to battle and fought a variety of different countries. And so you find it full find the full range, even in modern in modern Asia, like there's, you know, there's just like there would be anywhere in the world, there are liberal, progressive, non violent people, Buddhists, and then there could you know, conservative or right wing people who are interested in violence. And as you find the full range, and so you have to be very careful when you talk about Buddhism, to appreciate that there's a wide range of Buddhist teachings just like there's a wide range of teachings and other religions and different orientations.

Even the Dalai Lama has been involved in I don't think he's been involved in violence, but In Dharma salada different orders of monks at bidding each other with knives. You know that they're not sitting there peacefully or only peacefully meditating. But, you know, there's this is a very intense inter religious rivalry even within Buddhist groups the small percentage of what goes on but there and I would argue that, that that's a misunderstanding of this early teaching. I think that my reading, understanding that really teaching is that if we understand it, well, there would be no violence. Buddhists would not be involved in perpetrating violence will not be responded to and not wouldn't be defending their religion this way. There's nothing to defend. Early Buddhism has anything to defend. Because it because as soon as you defend it, you've destroyed it. yourself. Because it's in you, right. It's how you hold if you hold the sword You've destroyed it. If you hold the flower to offer someone, then you've created it. Yes.

Is it on?

You hold up, hold it horizontally, talk to the top, okay.

I'm the Marshal.

We may not even live unless we expend our energy. Like I've been a mechanic. I have been a welder when the plane crashed

those conjoining Mars

saying is violence and that kind of thing does exist in the world. So Buddhism,

yes.

Yeah, I guess so. The I don't think India being one with the universe is generally not a Buddhist idea. There was supposed to be one of the universe because that's putting it was very interesting phenomenon. But in religion in the West, when Buddhism comes to the west, is that Western religion is so focused on a relationship to something external, like a relationship to God. And it's very hard. And so the whole understanding of religion is one about relatedness. And so the idea of oneness with the world University again has to do with the relationship with the world as being the point. And Buddhism is not about how, what, what we relate to, but what, how we're relating to anything at all. And so rather Then relating to a god or relating to heaven. The focus in Buddhism in a sense is more how do we relate to ourselves what's happened with us? So there's no goal to be one with the universe one with things. The goal is to not cling to anything, and not to perpetuate violence towards anything.

No, I found by not clinging to anything. I still exist in the physical form with muscles and yeah, the ability to use them. Yes, I run into tasks which require force. There are conditions of pests, like rodents and fleas and diseases and things where the world IC is better off if you get rid of the vectors of disease and things.

And it does involve destroying something.

You know what I'm saying?

I understand what you're saying and not not i'm not necessarily going along with you.

Would you do with a with a rat with fleas that are killing people? because of some plague? Do you understand what I'm saying?

The I don't know what I would do. I like I like it. I what I really like is when people run into the middle of the challenge of tests, and are thoughtful about it, consider it and don't come with a automatic first answer is I'm going to kill them. Maybe the other way. So let's let's look at this and see what's really necessary. There's a very strong tendency of some people to go to the killing first. And so what are the other options? And so we've had like, and they were first moving to our house we live in now. We had this ad problem, there was quite something. And it was quite fascinating to try to figure out what it would take to get to keep the ads and we had all these elaborate things going on and you know, and You know, eventually we figured out how to keep the answer without having to spray the house. I have I've gone to the trouble to use my cup tans to catch mosquitoes in my house and then take them out rather than slap them and kill them. So there are alternatives to slap the height there are alternatives I've taken you know, have a heart traps and taking the mice and the rats and captured them and taking them out in the woods. So, there are alternatives there are things that can be done, whether the alternatives are the always going to work the nonviolent alternatives and so it is sometimes appropriate to commit violence towards kill some being. I'd rather not be involved in deciding for anybody, myself, let them decide find their own way with that. But I want to really champion encourage people to take

their time with that and look at the alternatives and they'll As you know also the alternatives also some of that some of the means we use to eradicate pests have secondary effects. And so you know, we're now Now we think we're wise finally after 4050 hundred years of these, but it used to be DDT, right? This grand they're just and sure that sure worked. But then there were the secondary effects that were not so good. And so what are the secondary effects in the Bay Area? We have so much so much use of herbicides and pesticides that you it's phenomenal the amount that people use, and what ends up in the in the runoff water ends up in the day causes damage in the bay and problems there, do we? How are we living with the secondary effects? It's very easy when it when it's the whole idea of me myself in mind, I have a problem to fix it. And I'm going to do it violently and not look at the bigger picture. The causes and consequences of what's really going on. And, and I apologize a little bit to you because I'm about to change the whole analogy to something different. But if I give you an example, in my life so, you know, it was hard for me to learn how to be a parent. I'm still learning. And so we had my older son was sometimes difficult. And, and so I did my best, all kinds of ways. And sometimes just seemed like I have to use what I called my strong voice.

No.

And, and I very occasionally use a strong voice and I was impressed it was effective. And I said, Oh, I said, Oh, sometimes it's good to do that. Until one day I heard him use that same tone of voice to his younger brother. And I said, Oh, what have I done? And I thought, well, maybe it was effective in the moment. But to measure it as effective in the moment without looking at the consequences were pulled out from it. Maybe it wasn't it was near and near sighted. So I think, you know, if we're involved in violence, we have to look at, really look at the situation carefully and all the different parameters of it all the different things, and from a Buddhist point of view what Buddhists say. What I'd like to say is rather than looking at the mean, one of the really important things is to look in your own heart. And if you have a settled, relaxed heart, and you're tuned into your heart, then how do you respond What is your what is what motivates you then? Because I know in myself that if I'm harried upset, angry, late Saying something. And, you know, I can, I could say something mean just off the cuff very quickly I could certain other, there's a bug in my way. You know, and, you know, I could just be a mean, son or something. But if I'm calm and relaxed and peaceful and have lots of time in the world, then I'm tuned into a different part of myself. And then how I respond to the world is gonna be very different. So from a book, one of the important things from a Buddhist practice point of view is not to answer your question, should we or shouldn't we use violence, but rather, where do we come from in ourselves when we do it? Do we really are we really settled in a deep way? And, and if we are set on a deep way, then what what comes from our heart then? Not rather

than our mind

make some sense

tend to arrive at I always tend to arrive at is I can't solve that problem because it I mean completely. But as the as you say is a practice to make yourself maybe closer to it. Yes. But I can't conceive of ever.

Oh, you know what I'm completely dead Of course.

Yeah. Yeah. So I think it's it's hard to conceive. I find it very interesting that

that I'm not sure you did this today but I find it interesting that sometimes when we talk about non violence, we talk about the anger and working with anger in Buddhism. Often people want to talk about

the insist that there are exceptions. And I've wondered sometimes a very powerful drive to point out exceptions. As they be there are exceptions but why is a strong need to say it All the time. Why defend it? You have any idea why, as opposed to 99% of the time where it's useful to be non violent? Why defend the 1% of the time? It's not? Do you have any idea?

I do. Oh, yeah. I have an opinion called The closer I have an opinion. Yeah, like to hear for like, for instance,

this country came about

through a revolution. It had certain qualities and had certain qualities that could never been instituted. Had there not been people who stood up and instituted something which other people were trying to prevent from happening. The result of it has been a place where things have flourished. There have been hospitals built wouldn't have been built. There'd been a schools and Intelligence and a place where everyone wants to come because it's somewhat of a heaven compared to the rest of the world

with the highest incarceration rate in the world as well, more prisons, what was the highest incarceration rate in the world as well? Yes. But I believe there's a very interesting article. I see I read this a few times now, on the forecast, because it's Fourth of July, there was an article by a Canadian who said the problem, the United States would have been better off if it hadn't had the revolution, that the independence from England would have happened relatively soon anyway. It didn't happen. It didn't have to happen through revolution and would have set a very different set of conditions for this country. If they'd waited a couple of decades, rather than doubted violently. And they said, you know, in America, there's a glorification of the revolution. And, and it's, you know, can be nothing wrong about the revolution, right. But, you know, maybe there was an alternative, back even back then, and Maybe we could have been more like Canada. They have good dead good universities and with less prisons. So anyway, it's interesting. Thank you. I appreciate everything you said. And these are these are issues which are good to air and explore.

Which is I guess finished by doing what I always do when I can't solve a problem. I just breathe. No.

perfect way to end. Thank you. Thank you all