

# 2016-05-22 Vesak Day Talk

Fri, 9/25 3:39PM • 46:16

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddha, people, happiness, represents, special, life, suki, called, sitting, ordinary, abbess, felt, welled, compassion, buddhism, hostility, chant, story, world, forces

## SPEAKERS

Gil Fronsda

And but what it means is that no individual known living person is going to be held up in some kind of some kind of divine status or ultimate status. And the ultimate status goes to the Buddha, who, because he's long dead, starts becoming not so human anymore becomes more a myth or more, I like to call it a representative of something. And so the Buddha down through the centuries, has represented many things for many people. And many stories have been told about the Buddha. And one of the ways of understanding what the Buddha represents, is he represents something in you. And that when we see the Buddha and those of people who bow to the Buddha, when we're buying to something in ourselves, a possibility, potential capacity. And I think that's quite inspiring that the Buddha is the image of the Buddha, the idea of the Buddha's kind of mirror. And so the question is, what is it that resonates inside of you, that this image kind of supposed to represent? Do you have something inside of you? Do you have goodness? Do you have freedom? Do you have compassion? What is it that kind of touches you? And down through the centuries, the only reason that Buddhism has continued is because somehow what the Buddha represents, and the teachings that come from him, have really touched people in their hearts in some deep way. And they've been inspired by it. And they've organized their lives around it, they've changed their lives they've practiced, they've been transformed in many ways. And societies have been transformed. Some of them in remarkably beautiful ways, when one of the first kind of societal transformations of Buddhism that the Buddhist teachings brought about, was ancient Indian King, who lived maybe somewhere between 100 and 200 years after the Buddha named a Soca. And he was supposed to been a very violent King conquered much of the known India at the time, in a very violent way. And then he encountered Buddhism. And then, in that encounter, he became devoted to non violence. And he gave up his warring ways, and created hospitals and, and weigh stations and took care of the poor and all kinds of things, supposedly. And so this kind of force of non violence occasionally has been part of the message of the Buddhism. And so what is it? What is the Buddha represent for us? And what are the stories and the myths of the Buddha represent for us in our times, one of the things that was maybe kind of unremarkable at the time of when he lived, was the fact that the Buddha who was born under a tree was enlightened under a tree, first taught under a tree and died under a tree. You know, they didn't have IMCs, back then. They didn't have, you know, the same kind of level of opulence are buildings or activities that we have now. Or they didn't have that kind of disconnect from, from nature, I think much of society back then was much more closely connected to nature than we are now. But for in our day and age, especially where we live in metropolitan areas. The connection, the fact that the Buddha was, had such a connection to nature, can if we want represent something very important for us, that there's something very important in our lives, about our heartfelt connection to the world, the natural world. That may we live under trees, I would love to die under a tree. That'd be nice. The Buddha got to die under under two of them. And that's kind of, you know, there's something very primary and primordial about the human relationship to nature. Because we are nature, we're part of nature we're not we're continuous with nature. And to feel that intimacy in that

connection, is something so important in a society where most people, many people have lost that connection. And with that loss of connection, a loss of being a caretaker, for the natural environment. It's kind of hard to do it now with the, with the, you know, the scale in which there's environmental degradation going on. And so, the Buddha represents this kind of connection to something very basic and our connection to nature.

The myths of the Buddha, included in how he became enlightened sitting underneath the Bodhi tree and in these myths, He was sitting there, intent, resolute steady, focused on his awakening. And it's a challenging thing to sit and deal with all the inner forces of distraction and desire and regret and aversion and hostility that we have inside confusion, our busy minds, it's an amazing thing to kind of sit down and really face. Some people, some people, when they sit to meditate, maybe the first time they really ever met themselves met, what goes on in their minds met what goes on in their hearts, all the unresolved issues, and just sit there, and to stay still, and keep opening to it, to keep opening to it. And not to attack anything and not to get angry not to get afraid, not to run away, not to get distracted by all the things we can get distracted by. And so the way this the myth works, then this is represented by the forces of Mara. Mara was kind of like a devil figure in ancient India, among the Buddhists, more of it, it's usually called a tempter. Kind of deity of sorts, who seems like the Mario's job description was to keep people from getting enlightened. And so keep them caught in the world of distraction, keeping caught in the world of their desires and their fears, their confusions are still at ease. It's kind of complicated world that we get caught in. And I think this idea that we get, you know, Mara, trying to distract us with all those forces is familiar with all of us, because the authority and the temptation to get involved in all these inner forces, can can override our ability to stay peaceful and still, and not be caught. And so then, so it says in this myth said, Mara comes with his battalions, armies, of supporters of fighters and everything he tries, everything you can eat, he brings the most beautiful, beautiful, seductive people who promise every type of sensual pleasure imaginable, and try to get the Buddha kind of, you know, to get office out of his meditation, and the Buddha just sits there, and doesn't budge, doesn't get tempted by it, or the remarkable thing in the age of the internet. And then he and then Mara came with huge armies of people with swords and arrows and javelins, and, you know, and, and ferocious faces and controlling teeth and, you know, flying through the air and coming from all directions it was and, and they shot all their weapons at the Buddha. And as the as the as this weapons shot through the air, the Buddha sat there peacefully, and, and the force of his compassion and love those arrows turned into flowers. That's a nice story. And in fact, one of the primary teachings ethical teachings of the Buddha has, is the teachings on Ahimsa. Indian word made famous by Gandhi, is non violence, but means non violence or non harm. And this is an ancient Indian tradition that the Buddha was part of the lineage of people devoted to non harming, and in a world of harm and hate and infighting and war and hostility. Now, you know, it's quite remarkable this year, the amount of hostility that happens at political conventions, you know, it's seen this for decades, this level of rising hostility, something very powerful is happening in our society, that people are so anxious and so on the edge. So we'll see where it goes not only America, but in Europe and all kinds all over the world, there's something something happening that's stirring people up to, to a fair degree of hostility. And so to have someone whose represents the forces of peace and harmony and non harming love, compassion, who shows a different way. And, you know, the, the Buddha represents, some people have complained that the what the Buddha represents in modern America sometimes is a garden statue.

You know, sitting there peacefully, but I think, what a great thing, you know, back in nature back in the garden, you know, to get people in their gardens more out of the out of their meetings, maybe or, you know, they, their garden represents something quite beautiful and, and, you know, maybe we should have had This today's meeting, not here, but local park in the Delta is felt to me very differently. So the Buddha represents much. And Buddhists have used myths for many years to tell stories about the

Buddha, and we know that they're myths, and we don't shouldn't get too caught up in them, looking for the True Buddha. In fact, it's actually turns out to be extremely hard to discover who the Buddha actually was. And I've done a fair amount of poking around and reading scholarship on this topic, and, and the person has historical Buddha kind of receipts, because the more you're lucky, kind of the more, you know, scholars are pretty confident there was a Buddha. And there's lots of stories, but but when were those stories written, who did them, and then some of the stories but the Buddha depict him not really presenting themselves as a human being, not that telling a story in the usual way of his life is we would, you know, hey, I, you know, when I was born there, I went to school there, and, you know, and, you know, I broke my arm playing soccer, and whatever you know, and the story, the story of kind of things we'd recognize in an ordinary biography, the Buddha kind of was reluctant to define himself in the usual personal terms. And he called himself when he hurt himself, he did so with a remarkable title. That was a target. And the target means, literally seems to mean something like the one who is with us. The one who is less? I mean, what happens if someone comes up to you and say, you know, who are you? And you say, I'm the mean, you know, that doesn't tell them much. It's kind of frustrating, perhaps. And so it's kind of not what you what people want, when they're asking a question of who you're who you, are you. But at the same time, someone should say that, because there's something very profound about not defining oneself, not telling a story to other people, oh, I have a PhD, I went to school there, these are my friends. Let me tell you my size, my bank account, you know, and no, wait, wait, I'll tell you, I'll tell you in 10 minutes, I'm gonna go home and change and put on different clothes, you really know who I am? You know, we have all these ways we define ourselves when we want to represent ourselves, for a good effect, to prove ourselves to be some way the eyes of others to count. And some of it's quite reasonable. But what about not needing to define ourselves? What about just allowing ourselves to exist and to be alive, free and open, loving, without needing to define ourselves for anyone, but just to meet reality, and respond and engage with the world around us as it is. So someone should get away with saying, I'm thus someone. And so, you know, we allow this person, you know, to do it for us, you know, so it's a kind of, hopefully inspiring, at least he gets away with it. And with the idea that we too, can say that. But you know, it's kind of difficult for our friends to do that. So we don't do it very often. But when we can do it for ourselves, who are you?

Justice. That's it, nothing more. To prove ourselves, we don't have to apologize for ourselves. We don't have to be something for someone. We're allowed to just sit here breathing, open, relaxed, present, content happy. One of the earliest stories is told of the Buddha didn't actually exist in ancient texts, he tells us of himself, that probably has some, possibly some truth to it. And that is that after his, he had left his ordinary life to try and discover answers to his spiritual or existential problems and issues that he was addressing. He practiced for about six years, the ascetic practices of his time. And he found that those practices weren't a solution to his issues of suffering and freedom from suffering. And then, he was wondering what you know how to go forward from there, and he kind of used it done, done, what the different religious teachers of his time said said to do. So he was on his own at some point. And not knowing what to do or sitting there kind of wondering what to do. He remember he had a memory of when he was about six years old. And sometimes occasionally, people have these memories of when to start practicing meditation. Feelings of well being of happiness that they had when they were quite young. And partly it's because as we sit and meditate, it kind of relaxes some of the outer crust, the outer anxiety concerns agitation we have, and we settled in, and we get settled and grounded ourselves. Sometimes there's touched back into places of well being, we get hints of it, that maybe we had earlier in life. Anyway, so the Buddha was six. And it was apparently active festival kind of scene out in the fields of furs festival, the first plowing of the year. And so the adults were all out in the fields doing the ceremonial plowing. And as a little kid, he was left in the under the shade of a tree again, the rose apple tree. And apparently he was just sitting there, minding his own business, maybe you're watching the festivities, and nothing to do nothing to be nothing to prove, just sitting there content and

nice weather and the spring and foothills of the Himalayas. And in that sitting there, he dropped into a deep state of well being of happiness, that just a rose welled up inside of him. And I think that expression well up inside is, you know, one of the ways that we talk about the well being that can come from these kinds of states, that it's something that wells up, springs up that rather than something that requires things from the outside isn't like we win the lottery or get a good job or, you know, get good you know, ice cream or something that makes us happy. But rather it's there's some, we have a capacity for happiness that's inside, that in the right conditions of kind of opening up and relaxing, staying present can well up. And so he remembered that that happened when he was six. And he felt that that welling up from the inside was an appropriate kind of happiness was a wonderful kind of happiness. That was very different from what religious seekers of the time were afraid of. They were afraid of the joy, the happiness of sensual pleasures, of status of money of many different kinds of things that people were pursuing their happiness for. But this is something a well up inside out this is great. This may be as a path to awakening. And so the doorway for the Buddha to discover his awakening was a feeling of happiness. And he became known as the happy one. And the teachings he teach our teachings for happiness and well being and joy. And his monastics community were known at the time as being joyful ones. They were not ascetics who were kind of, you know, starving themselves. They were not involved in great philosophical religious debates. They weren't contending with anyone, they weren't fighting about what was the truth, but they had discovered how to be peaceful here. Now. And this is characteristic of happiness is a second primary characteristic of the Dharma. The first one is, there's non harming, and the second is happiness. And the third characteristic that the Buddha taught is that of liberation, freedom. And so

it can, it can be held up as kind of very abstract thing, the idea of enlightenment, awakening, and it can be, you know, kind of feel very esoteric or very distant from our lives, and only certain people somehow have it out there. But the primary ways that enlightenment is taught by the Buddha, is something is relatively ordinary. It's just done to an extraordinary degree. And this idea of the ordinary, being willing to be ordinary discover in the ordinariness of our life, freedom, as opposed to doing it in extraordinary ways. And holding it up as something extraordinary, I think is represented for me, in the idea of the Buddha's simple lifestyle as a monastic. For us, it might seem extraordinary, to be renunciant, to be a monk, like the Buddha was, but I think that in the times, he it was the called the middle way. It was not asceticism, it wasn't self denial, and it wasn't self indulging, but it was taking care of yourself just enough for your well being for your physical well being and mental and spiritual well being in an ordinary way. And so there's something about this path of awakening that leaves us ordinary, not extraordinary. Which is very disappointing. You know, especially when you know you've gone off and study Buddhism and your parents are home waiting for you to attain something accomplished something great. And you know, what you're going off all these retreats and going to Asia to practice, only to become ordinary, what's about time. If your parents are alive, it's about time. And so, but it's extraordinary for someone to become ordinary, discover the ordinary capacity, to not live with greed, to not live with fear, to not live with hate, to not live with delusion, when these are rampant in our society, I mean, it's quite phenomenal how much goes on, and to really sit down and free ourselves from this is extra extraordinary thing. And, but to simply, you know, to let go, to not hold on, I think as an ordinary thing is not like a strange, esoteric subject, you have to understand, you know, the advanced calculus of spiritual life. It's, you know, it's not like you have to go and get a PhD in Buddhist studies, which I can assert with confidence. That you know, that only then can you understand what it's all about, it's actually relatively simple. It's as simple as if you take your hand and put a hot piece of coal in it, and grip it tight, it's going to hurt. And if you open your hand and drop it, you're going to stop burning yourself. It's pretty simple. If you're clinging, grasp on to your desires, your fears, your hates, you'll burn yourself. And if you open the mind and heart so you don't grip onto those, you'll become free. So I want to read a modern story about the Buddha. To be Buddha, a nun once at once asked the Abbess who

was the Buddha really smiling and leading leaning forward, mischievously. The Abbess said, don't you already know? confused by this answer to her question, the nun felt overwhelmingly self conscious. She couldn't find the words to even say she didn't know. The Abbess then explained. To know who the Buddha is, you have to start with something simple. Take breathing, for example. Like you right now, the Buddha breathe. When you are aware of your breathing, you're aware of physical experiences the Buddha knew as he breathed, when you see how he breathes it when you see how your breaths arise and pass away, is just as the Buddha saw his breaths, Arise and pass away. Like you right now, the Buddha experienced physical sensations in his body. When you see the many sensations you experienced through the day, Arise, and pass away. It is just as the Buddha saw his sensations arising and passing away.

Like you right now, the Buddha experience pleasant and unpleasant feelings. When you see directly how your experiences of pleasure and pain, Arise, and pass away, it is just how the Buddha saw pleasure and pain, come and go. Like you right now, the Buddha had thoughts. When you see those thoughts come and go, you are experiencing how the Buddha saw thoughts arise and pass away. Like you right now, the Buddha experienced particular states of mind. When you see your state of mind arise and pass, you are experiencing how the Buddha saw his mind states arise and pass. Like you right now, the Buddha was aware of himself. When you see how your ideas of who you are, Arise and pass away. You are experiencing how the Buddha saw his ideas of self arise and pass away. Hearing this, the nun became aware of her experience as it was happening in the present moment. In a way she never imagined possible. She felt physically close to the Buddha rather than someone who lived thousands years ago, she sensed a timelessness, in which no time separated her from the Buddha. I understand that the nun is this all I need to know. In reply, the Abbess said, No, there's one more thing. When you see clearly, that clinging to breathing, sensations, feelings, thoughts, states of mind and self also arises and passes away, then you will know who the Buddha is, then you will be free. So that's where we find the Buddha, we find it in our direct experience, by seeing how it's impermanent and changing. In the changing nature of our lives. There's something there's a gap, there's a space, there's openness, where we can let go of the clinging we have to it. And then in that letting go of clinging. That's where you'll know the Buddha and the Buddha becomes you does. So in a couple of minutes, we're going to bring in the baby Buddha, since he was just been born. And we have here, the statue up there is the Buddha sitting with a moment of his enlightenment story of him touching the earth. And then above that is the Buddha laying down in his moments of his dying and Tonka up above his Buddha, cutting off his here in order to leave the domestic life to become a spiritual seeker in the way that they did in ancient India. And there's some children outside who have decorated the pagoda. And they're going to come in chanting, very simple, forward chant that says, May all beings be happy, and I'm going to teach it to you. So when they come in, you can be chanting it as well. Last year we did it. They just kids were little bit shy. And so this year we'll kind of join in. So it's four words Sabbe, which means all. Satta which means beings. Sukhi, which means happy. And Hontu, may they be. So, Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu. so why don't you repeat one word after me so Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu to repeat after I'll do the whole line and appear to me Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu.

And then together Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu. So let's see how they do first.

So let's join is Sabbe Satta Sukhi Hontu.

So welcome kids. Happy to have you here. You guys decorated a beautiful pagoda for our baby Buddha. Thank you. And so I want to tell everyone a little story about the baby Buddha. It's kind of a special story that probably was made up by someone really wise, a long time ago, once upon a time the Buddha was born. And you can probably say that about yourself too. Right? Once upon a time you



were born? I think so. And but the Buddha when he was born in this story, was did something very unusual. The first thing he did after he was born, was he stood there. Did you guys stand after you're born? Probably not. You remember? Right? He didn't stand. And then he walked seven steps. Do you guys walk seven steps? No. And it took you a while to walk? Right? Yeah. And so then then he stood there again. And then he pointed one finger up in the air, and one finger down to the earth. So what are you doing there? See that? Yep. And he said, sky above as far as the sky can go. And earth below as far as it goes, I alone am the most special one. Whoo. So this is usual. Usually this, you know is considered pretty arrogant and conceited. To say that. However, this is kind of a special kind of story. That's called a myth. That is kind of saying something different than what it really what we hear. And what it's saying is that something very unusual in that is that everyone is the most special one. Now, logically, that doesn't make sense, right? Just logically, one person should be the most special one. But in fact, in truth, every human being is really special. And is the most special one, no matter where they were born or what country they're from, or what gender they are, or what you know, but you know, this city they have, everyone is really, really special. And when we celebrate the birth of the Buddha, we're celebrating the wonderfulness, the specialness of every single human being. So who do you think is really special? Your mom and your dad? Who do you think is really special? Me? Yes. Perfect. You You learned that you learned the lesson quickly of the story. I'd like you who do you think is really special? Your brother, How nice. How about you? People fantastic guide. So sometimes it's really good to say to the people near you, you're really special. And the way that we do that in in Buddhism is we put our hands together like this kind of over our hearts. It's kind of like you know, it's a little bit kind of looks like a heart if you put your hands together. And that's really flat, but a little bit apart. Kind of looks like a heart. It's kind of open on top, like this. And so when you bow like this, all the good stuff in your heart spills out to the other person to go like this. And it's kind of like saying, You're really special. I want to honor and pay respect and celebrate how special you are. So how much of each of you turns to your kids on the stage. You bow and say to each other, you're really special. keep each other Yeah, beautiful. And behind you. She's all on there. Great. Great. So and then the Buddha we can see the statue up there with him sitting meditating, but he has kind of a robe on and the robe is kind of this called originally was kind of discolor kind of red like this. And so what we say is that there's a since the time of the Buddha, he lived long, long ago, that there's a living thread from that robe that goes from him all the way to us today.

And I got this thread is very special thread from that robe kind of and, and what we're gonna do is we're gonna take and can you take and in somehow more or less, take it all the way around this room, the outside, maybe the people nature that row there can hold on to all the way around and bring it all the way down. back to us, so that we're all kind of connected by the same thread of compassion and love and respect for each other can't do that. Okay. And while she does that, you want to sing your song.

Celebrate the Buddha's birth day today. And the Buddha inspired us with so much beautiful painting. So the song I would like to share with you is about the four divine abodes loving kindness, compassion, appreciative joy and equanimity. Okay.

loving kindness, I am glad to have sweet have is that we have some true compassion. I am glad.

Sweet it is just like me.

true compassion.

Welcome.

joy and happiness. I'm glad to see wishing you the same as well.

There's enough

joy and happiness.

So, why don't you can you kick Can you give it to Melinda Melinda Can you put it up in the Buddha's lap.

But somewhere in between?

is peace. Surrey. last verse

in these four did

that live inside of me. Go for refuge, to be happy to be free.

To take me to the sweet.

Enjoy.

Just

to change mine.

And take me to the sweet.

Enjoy.

Thank you. So, we have one more thing to do, which is the most traditional thing to do when this Buddhist celebration like that, that like this. And that is to recite what's called the triple refuge we first chance something called the homage to the Buddha. And then we chant the triple refuge refuge in the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha. And before we do that, I want to tell all of you remind all of you so like each one of you, I guarantee is really special and wonderful. Each of you kids and But everyone is as wonderful as you are somewhere in their hearts you can find. And so learn how to learn how to love everyone into appreciate everyone and respect everyone is one of the great happiness of our life. Now, I kind of suspect that you kids understand that you understand that kind of, but you know these grownups. Sometimes life gets kind of complicated for grownups. And they forget. So how are you going to? How are you going to tell them that they're special? you have any ideas?

I have a, an idea that I think will help these grown ups a lot. We're going to do this chant. And as we do the chant, how would you feel? Would you like to go up to the walk around the room and just bow to them? It's when you bow kind of say, you know, you don't have to say it out loud. Or you can, you're special and bow to them. Maybe they'll bow back and then they'll then they'll remember how special they are. Would that be okay? So the, okay, So those are your note those of you heard no, this chant can join in. Those of you don't know the chant. It just is wonderful if you just hum along. And it's just as wonderful just use it silently, whatever you'd like. So no, mo to go toe to toe, some, some Buddhists, so the kids who want to go can go but you don't have to go if you don't want in mo go but some some

Buddhists Namō tassa bhagavato some some Buddhists sarana gotcha me. Gotcha me, Seung sarana gotcha mi induce a B budem sarana. Gotcha me do TMT. Saarinen gotcha me do DMP sangham Saarinen gotcha me to be budem Saarinen gotcha me to be there. sarana gotcha me that EMP some GM Saarinen. Gotcha me. Okay. And so then the last day last always last thing. And that is the after a baby gets born. One of the first thing that happens is we wash the baby. And part of the meaning of the Buddha's birthday celebration is that each of us gets born today. And we each of us get to wash away all the confusion, all the attachments and greed and resentments we've had over the year, and we get to kind of cleanse this beautiful heart that we all have symbolically. By taking the ladle, there's two of them and pouring it over the baby Buddha. So you guys want to do that. So you guys carried it in here. And they do is just do it once 1111 ladle full. So as you all can do it. Yeah, very nice.

Did everybody get a chance

Great. And so in the moment we'll stop. And I wonder if we can get to the kids to volunteer to roll this string up again. One can start, you went to your vet end and wonder what can you one person to understand, take this end and just kind of roll it up as best you can. So these people can get out of here. And you want to be, you know, trapped by compassion and love and freedom. And so thank you all for coming. And I hope that it's the idea of the Buddha is a meaningful idea for you in in that it resonates with something very precious in your own hearts. And so those of you who would like to have the feeling need to get a little bit cleanse from all the stuff that built up over the year. You've also welcome to come up in a moment and also pour a ladle full of water over the Buddha. Thank you all for coming.