

# 2019-05-19 What Is The Buddha

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So the usually the full moon around this time around May that

the Buddhist cultures of Sri Lanka and Thailand and Burma, Cambodia, India celebrate have the major religious Buddhist

holiday of the year. It's named after the ancient Buddhist or maybe I don't know, maybe Indian name for the month these suck

and

corresponds approximately to me, so lunar calendar and

and it's a remarkable holiday in that in all and rolled up in one day. They're celebrating the Buddha's birthday. He is enlightenment and his death. And symbolically I think it's quite powerful to roll

Together, because birth and death represent kind of the big existential issues of human life.

You know, so they're kind of like the umbrella terms for many of those challenges and joys of human life that we go through. And then sitting between birth and death, and this holiday is the Buddha's enlightenment, smack in the middle.

And, and so what is it that enlightenment has to offer? In this existential life of the joys and suffering of life, the challenges we have? I don't think it's easy to live a human life.

Many years ago, I heard about a conference of Buddhist teachers in America.

And somehow the lot of the people talked about enlightenment in different Buddhist traditions have different ideas of what that is. And then a Korean Buddhist teacher

Got up to speak. And, and apparently he's talked in a very moving way that kind of made it kind of shifted the mood for the conference. He said, You know, for the communities of people that I minister and care for, here in the United States,

the idea of enlightenment is not that relevant. I'm working with people who are struggling with gang memberships and violence and domestic abuse, and, you know, unemployment and all these kind of existential challenges. And that's where I'm, I'm interested in, that's where I bring my Buddhists my practice to meet those people.

Ideally, the existential issues, the deep challenges that we have in our lives

are something that enlightenment is relevant for Buddhist teachings is important working for, but I think it's easy sometimes in the idealism and Buddhism to forget, or still stay grounded in the immediacy of our lives.

His life and what's really going on with people and maybe sometimes kind of end up in the clouds with, with,

you know, ideas, lofty ideas.

So we celebrate this the day to celebrate Buddha, so to maybe here at IMC for this day to commemorate the founder of Buddhism, to talk about little bit to remember him, and to talk about the value and the importance of Buddha for our lives.

The

mean certainly, I think many people could easily recognize how important this person is in their lives. I mean, all of all of you here, we wouldn't be together as a group here. Unless it wasn't for this person 2500 years ago.

Probably we'd be organizing our Sunday morning around something different. If the Buddha didn't exist, and maybe some of it would be somewhat similar. Maybe it's other

religious traditions which have meditation or something similar like that, but you know, to actually all of us, you know, we'd all find different things. Now, for some reason this day. And this place, we've all come here, and it represents or it is, in some ways, the continuity, the fulfillment, the fruition of this person's life in the, in the bronze ages, quite a long time ago. And some some momentum that's second motion by this person. And I think for anyone to set in motion, that momentum that could reach us to this modern world, and that spreads around the globe and kind of not only impacted many people, but really shaped many cultures in important ways. That that's a remarkable achievement or remarkable impact that someone has had. And so it's kind of, you know, certainly interesting to commemorate and recognize that kind of impact of any human being.

And so who was the

Buddha. And we know actually very little about who the Buddha was. But logically we can say that there's two Buddhists.

We assume that there was an actual human Buddha, who walked on the earth, who

peed and pooped and probably farted. And

occasionally, and, and he had his own challenges, that the records talk about him having a bad back and becoming injured, being sick.

Having food poisoning, and all kinds of challenges he had that he went through his life. And it's because of his challenges. It said that because of the suffering that he experienced, that motivated him to go out for a quest, and he wasn't alone and going for a spiritual quest for some kind of liberation. It's my impression is reading the ancient texts that there was a some of the best and the brightest people of the times. That's what they did. You know?

To really to understand something deeply to understand the nature of this life and our experience, that they weren't designing iPhones and apps. And, you know,

and somewhat some of the best and brightest around here had been doing that for some time. There wasn't so much like that to do. But so the best and brightest impression was they engaged in very deep inquiry into the nature of the mind, the nature of the universe, trying to understand this and, and, and, and, you know, it's a way of dealing with their existential situation. And the Buddha was one of those people, he went forth into a life to explore this and he

absorbed a lot of the that familiar the teachings or that middle ear, and then came to his own synthesis of that his own resolution of these issues to into what became Buddhism.

And

so he was definitely a human being a remarkable human being, but we know very little about him.

There is a the Buddha is the Buddha of the tradition, traditions and all the different traditions where he becomes more of a mythic person, more of a he becomes he becomes

and represents ideals that people have, and that people present in stories and in art. And we can see it right here in IMC this side of the Buddha. We have no idea what he look like, you know, no idea whatsoever. And these three statues we have up here are fairly idealized that use

you know, it's kind of like, I think certain kind of idea of human perfection and uprightness and doesn't look like a person with this one here with a bad deck.

And, and this one here, and we, you know, he looks like he had the spa

and

you know, so much you'd be

feeding him grapes.

But

if but if it's a depiction of the Buddha dying

and, and he died when he was at 81 years old, and this one doesn't have any wrinkles, you know, it doesn't look like an 80 year old person, the tendency is to win idealized pictures of the Buddha never show him or rarely show him as an old person, but to kind of show him in the prime of life radiant and, and you know, and it's very idealized and to die this way. Like he looks pretty relaxed that he is and you

know, it's a kind of it's a powerful image in some ways, but it's also idealized, and even more idealized this this that you hear of the Buddha is a picture of the baby Buddha just born.

I mean, this is like minutes from after being birth and being born and hit this point he's standing. So that's pretty easy. You

Pretty a

bit of a prodigy kind of thing. And but the he's actually takes seven steps not just standing he can watch steps but he doesn't just take seven steps he speaks

and he points his finger remember my son when he was really teeny on the changing you know changing diapers table and I was looking at him you know doing things with his fingers and hands this person ever going to be able to use his fingers. I mean there's no dexterity, no coordination, no control whatsoever is this ever going to happen?

Anyway, so this person, you know, they've just put points his finger one finger to the sky and the other finger you can see down here points to the earth. And he says something like

this mission one traditional version, heaven above, earth below. I alone and the World Honored One.

Now, this is a person who's gonna end up teaching no self,

not self.

I alone and the World Honored One. And

but I often tell that story for the kids programs here at IMC and exactly that way. But him saying that, and they all the kids take it just to be in math, they don't think there's a baby, you can walk and speak. So it's kind of a safe thing to say. And then I say to him, it's kind of a, it's a kind of one of those, you know, unusual statements, that it's really what it's saying that each of us is special. And I point each of them and say, you know, you're wonderful, you're wonderful, you're wonderful. And each of us would be able to say that for ourselves. So I don't know if that inculcates you know, even more conceit in an individualistic culture but,

but I think that, you know, Buddhism puts a tremendous emphasis early Buddhism on valuing the individual and the possibility potential, the individual and the dignity of the individual. And this kind of statue of the Buddha here sitting so strong and upright is it is a

exemplification example of a certain kind of human dignity that we can all attain. So there's all these stories and myths. And so there's a Buddha of the traditions. And to say that the Buddha of myths which I tend to come out my mouth fairly easily, could be seen as disrespectful. Because, you know, these are really important stories and models and imagery, that cultures get organized around and to understand different cultures, Buddhist cultures, and to respect them is to understand those stories. Some people say some scholars or religion say that religions are more about stories than they are about belief systems, and that there might be beliefs that are important, but how those beliefs are enacted in life. The examples of how people live them is what sometimes touches the heart to stories that somehow kind of embodying and bring life to the tradition.

And so Buddhists tell a lot of stories. And he's still story.

But the Buddha's life. And those stories are all very important teachings, indicators models for how people live. So for example, I'm quite fond of the story of this one here. You don't see it here because the statue of the Reclining Buddha is in front. But the main image we have at IMC, the Buddha, he's sitting in meditation upright, and his right hand is draped very lightly, gently over his right knee. And it's either reaching down or had just reached down to touch the earth. It's called the earth touching, mudra Earth touching gesture.

And the way the story goes, it was a night of the Buddha's awakening. And he had a lot of challenges to it that night that he faced and overcame. But then there was a last challenge. And the last challenge was his doubt whether he was worthy of becoming enlightened. And I've talked to a lot of people who practice and this

issue of somehow sometimes of being, I'm not really worthy, I'm not really capable of becoming free of developing myself in significant spiritual ways. And so sometimes people are undermining themselves with doubt about themselves or being self effacing in some way that's undermining.

And so, the Buddha also seems to have had that and, and then he reaches his hand forward touches the earth, in order to call upon the earth, or the goddess of the earth, as the witness for his right or his capacity or its appropriateness, to become enlightened become free. And when that when that touches the earth, the earth, the earth goddess, creates a little earthquake

that chases the way the last of the hindrances for the Buddha and is in a testament that he Yes, he has the right is this appropriate for him to become awakened? And with that he lets go deeply

He really lets go of the certainly attachment to self, let's go with attachments, you know all those attachments. But this idea of connecting to the earth, for me, is a very powerful image, a very powerful story that inspires me because I feel that if we remove ourselves from the natural world, and live kind of in a certain kind of

anthropocentric kind of focus, we kind of shut off who we are, part of who we are. And that to become whole, to really recognize who we are, is to recognize also ourselves as nature and ourselves as part of nature. And that somehow the movement towards free real freedom and liberation has to somehow recognize that connection. That's the open to that possibility. Whether you agree with me or not, I just wanted to offer that as an example of one person who takes one of the ancient stories and finds it very inspiring and meaningful.

And whether it's true or not, I don't think it was true.

I think it's kind of the story people told. And it's true as a story. It's a true so I think it speaks to the heart and speaks to something that's very important. And so we have these kinds of two sides of the Buddha,

the Buddha, who was a person and the Buddha of the traditions, and both of them have value. For me, I find a lot of value with the idea that the Buddha was a human being, and not any different than any of us. And so whatever he was able to attain is should be available for us whenever he was able to realize is relevant for us as well. And, and that, you know, he wasn't so different when he sat down to close his

eyes and to focus on his breathing. He had probably in the course of his lifetime, almost identical experiences of the body breathing, the chest expanding and contracting the diaphragm moving as you

experience we sit down to meet to meditate. You know, it's kind of I find it I find it kind of inspiring and well, you know, the Buddha felt that, you know, Wow, I didn't I get the feel that too. Yeah, I feel a certain kinship, that you know, some of the basic human experiences are so similar, and when you sit down and feel and sense to them in some way.

And

and what's interesting about who the Buddha was,

is that

in some ways, he didn't

want to be seen as an ordinary human being.

Though he didn't seem to,

you know, create he didn't seem to himself create myths about himself or stories about himself. But

when he people asked him who he was or when he talked about himself,

he didn't want to be defined.

or limited by definition of who he was. But he leave it quite open. And, and so he had this very unusual name for himself. This is the way he when he talked about himself, he didn't call himself the Buddha. He didn't call himself Gautama, which was his family name. And he didn't call himself himself siddhartha because no one called him siddhartha until about 500 years after he lived. That seems to be part of the storytelling tradition to give him that name.

And he called himself tagata. And

kind of the best theory interpretation of what this word means. It means the one the person, the one who is thus,

what does that mean?

The one who is the one who is such and, and so it's kinda like, you know, you

I am what you see or I'm you know, I'm not going to define, there's no need to meet to define who I am. No need to say this is who I am, I can just stand here, upright, tall, free, alive

without apologizing for myself or defending myself or asserting myself, and just I'm so I'm such like this. And so that's not much that you know, that's how I want it to be known, which is not quite in human terms. Also, when, before he died, he refused explicitly refused to appoint anyone to be his successor.

And so that also left no one else after him as the as the exempt color of what the whole tradition is all about as a leader for it, as all of you know, all the Buddhism innocence, and so that left him as the founder as the person for whom

was still remained kind of the exemplary leadership. And so that also may be contributed to it was so important for the traditions down through the centuries, to keep focusing on him and have stories of him and statues of him in order to,

you know, being spoken for their inspiration for their teaching.

And so the Buddha

is certainly someone to feel grateful for. Because of, you know, what he's contributed to us, someone for and for some people, the sense of gratitude towards the Buddha is quite profound, and it really can be transformative.

For some people, the Buddha is something someone very inspiring the teachings are inspiring his examples and inspiring his being the whole thing is inspiring, whether it's the human person or the traditional stories of it, or people are quite inspired.

The Buddha is an exemplar and he wanted to be an exemplary. He said such

He said if sometimes that he lived in such a way, for compassion for future generations. And one example where he did this, he said, I go and meditate in the woods. By myself, sometimes I go meditate in the woods under trees, out of compassion for future generations as an exemplar. I think he had the idea of going to meditate Outdoors is really good. There's something about the nature and connecting maybe or certainly meditating that he really wanted to exemplify. This is important, this is valuable. So the Buddha was an exemplar.

But there's another thing that the Buddha functions for many people and certainly for me, and this is represented by something that Zen master Suzuki Roshi, who was the founder of San Francisco Zen Center said

in the 1960s, when he was teaching there, there were plenty of Westerners coming to learn Buddhism encountered Buddhism through Zen and through him and there

A lot of bowing in the Zen Zen center. And so it's not uncommon for Westerners who don't grew up with bowing to have some trouble with that and challenged about this bowing stuff.

And so they'd asked him, What about the belly? What do you balance? So someone asked, What are you bowing to when you're about to the Buddha.

And he said, I'm bowing to myself.

So there's a way in which the Buddha becomes a mirror for ourselves. So a way of way of looking at these things not to see this person far in the past, but to see ourselves and the more idealized these images are, the more they function as as kind of a mirror within which to see oneself to see a potential

possibility in oneself. And, and one of the places where I've seen it most powerfully, is sitting in meditation,

that

there's something that happens in strong meditation.

And we're really embodied and centered on ourselves, that

that the North ordinary

concepts we have of ourselves, that ordinary stories we tell ourselves about ourselves, some of them which are undermining us are quite painful and difficult, temporarily fall away. There's something about sitting in strong meditation, and there's a meditative energy uprightness and clarity and strength that arises, that creates a very different sense of being alive, of being in a body that kind of breaks out of the shackles of the conditionings that we have.

And in that state where we're kind of broken free from those shackles or those limitations, when we can be just thus here in an upright, dignified way. That the feeling of that has the radiance, the goodness, the warmth, the way that feels

Sometimes it's best exemplified

in art

you know rep in a symbolically almost in one Meditation Center website that they had a very large tank, a very large painting of, of a Buddha on the wall that had a series of auras around it painted, you know, halos and stuff. And the body was different colors and was very, very idealized to a point of, you know, almost looking like a cartoon, but it's a beautiful, beautiful, and I looked at that for a long time, and kind of didn't speak to me. Until one day I said, Wait a minute.

There's a way in which that's depicting how I feel when I meditate.

I don't have an aura isn't that but there's a feeling of Radiance and warmth, and the rich colors that have that painting, kind of spoke to the richness and the energy and the lightness and

Light and the, and the clarity and the goodness, that is felt experientially here. Oh, that's what's and so that then became a mirror for something inside.

And so, to see these, the Buddha as a mirror for oneself, certainly a mirror for what's possible, our potential, but maybe also for mirror for what we begin to experience for ourselves through meditation or through other things.

I think one of the first experiences I had in my life that really spoke to me really was got my attention in a serious way and maybe even set a direction for my life.



That that I kind of associated with that statue or the Buddha and how that was. So it was, again, the Buddhists functioned as a mirror for that experience that I had was not a Buddhist experience. I don't know I just I didn't it happened in a Christian chapel, Catholic chapel.

But I didn't. I'm not Christian. So I didn't really, you know, if I had been it would have been, you know, God had descended or something. It was a powerful experience. But I walked into this little chapel. And if you've ever been to a cathedral, I guess our monastery in France called mon Shah, Miss Sean Monson. Michelle. I was 18. And I spent the night before at PAX Christi Christian hostel, because that was the cheap place to stay and, and had broken bread and morning with the priests because that's what that was. They serve for breakfast. And so it's kind of touching place to be and, and so I walked up in early morning up into the monastery for a tour of the cathedral, the monastery and it's a huge you know, it's like Disneyland kind of huge place

and spires up in the sky and but it was built all around a small stone chapel on top of the hill from 1000 more years.

So, and, and as we walked into the heart of that, monastery into that,

it is like this profound piece descended on me.

And I felt so kind of embodied in my body feeling of peace that I never had before, in my hippie days second language I had was, this was a power center.

You know, I have no idea, you know, why don't you know, you know, and, but, but that sense of, I didn't know of this potential, it is kind of strong, embodied sense of peace, until that time in my life. And, and so that's, I think, that experience that potential knowing that was one of the things that was kind of gave a gravitational force for me, towards what I found originally finally in Buddhism, and then in Buddhism, it was able to tap into that sense of peace, again in a meaningful way. So the Buddha as a as an example of

And exemplaire.

So for me

that you're inspired by that, Buddha's of the tradition, and I'm inspired by the Buddha as a person and I kind of see them as two different domains or places.

And I want to tell you a small story about

this resonance. So this way of seeing oneself in the Buddha or seeing the Buddha and oneself or back and forth.

When I was in practicing for a year in Japan and monasteries near Penn, I,

I went to a small Zen temple where they had a rock garden, and the rock garden wasn't very big it was, you might touch out of this kind of

tatami room sliding glass doors onto a little wouldn't go on little deck

and

And there was a

customer narrow longish rock garden that was probably maybe eight feet wide and maybe

20 feet, maybe 25 feet long, 20 feet long. So it wasn't very big for rock gardens.

And there was a city situated on the on their split, I remember there were maybe two or three large boulders. And then there were it was raked gravel. And it had been created something like in the 1400s or 1300s. So hundreds of years ago, and every day they probably raked it in and it was raked and kind of in circles around those big boulders. And I got it there and I was just kind of immediately silenced. Looking at these rocks at this garden. So I sat down to just be with it and look at it

and I was amazed that some artists

Five 600 years ago, had managed to depict an art, my breathing in meditation. That's what I saw in the rocks. I thought that's kind of strange. Wow, I just kind of feel this residence and immediately connected to my meditation. I just sat there feeling that breathing. And then

I went and looked on the plaque on the wall for the name of the garden, and the name was breathing in breathing out.

And so this resonance that we can feel with things that are that represent something or speak to something that same year that I was in Japan next saw a lot of Buddhists and I would go to a museum sometimes, Japanese museums would have, you know, Buddha statues as part of the museum exhibits.

And I developed a habit or custom of when I looked at Buddha statues, to always look at the chest because

I wanted to see if I could feel the resonance, you know that somehow that the statue had captured something of a deep inner quality or of the artist or the tradition or something that I could then feel myself as a resonance. And, and sometimes they were highly valued and appreciated statues in the art of that country that didn't have the resonance for me. And then every once in a while, come across that statue.

It would be there it's like, and then that would stand there for a long time just watching.

So what is it that speaks to your heart to what is it in the tradition in Buddhism and the teachings? Is there anything that really

doesn't doesn't just keep you in the idea of beliefs, ideas,

of what Buddhism is, teachings, but something that drops you into something that's deeper in yourself.

Your direct experience

and and resonates with something that or have you had any experience in your life of something that might resonate with what Buddhism is pointing towards something in your heart, something in your chest something in your physical embodied beings, something in your mind? Is there anything at all that kind of speaks to it that, that what this whole enterprise is about?

Makes it very personal. Not an impersonal Buddhism out there. But there's me personally in here.

And we find in this ancient tradition in the early teachings, the Buddha put tremendous emphasis that his teachings were about personal direct experience. More so than beliefs. He seems to have had a very strong

reluctance to emphasize beliefs. And when you use the word truths, he seldom use them as

Kind of propositional truths like statements of belief, but rather truths of what we can experience directly for ourselves.

And, and we see this around a particular teaching,

called the four results. And I want to share the end of this talk with the four results. And I would like to do it in a way that hopefully it gets a little bit more experiential. So we'll see if we can pull this off.

And so the four results.

So first things first the word resolve

is the ancient word in Pali is a de tanah which can be translated into English as

a higher stand is what we take a stand on. Which you know, we say that the English took us take a stand on something, and I'm going to so to really found a grounder, so

Have some something to be firm with something to really make something kind of the basis upon which we may be living a life to take a stand as a strong statement, I take a stand on this now.

So but, but the English word resolve, I love as a translation rather than determination.

Because it comes from the English that are that comes from the Latin word for solution like a liquid solution. And, and like dissolve means going back into solution. Resolve means, kind of to kind of to put it back into solution or to untie sometimes they say it means to solve or resolve in my ears has this connotation not of being firm or hard, but actually becoming soft and open and relaxing untimed

and these two meanings, I think, you know, work well together.

Whatever this ID time means it's some wonderful combination of the firmness of taking a stand.

And, and the softness, and the opening up of, of resolve of dissolving somehow. And that combination. So you offered for four things that take a stand on or four things to help us open in

this, you know, into the solution as a solution. And these four things are  
truth,  
wisdom,  
generosity,  
and peace.

These are not beliefs.

You're not supposed to believe in these things. In these things, they're not stupid.

of belief, but rather this is this is a kind of orientation, a sense of purpose, a sense of value, that we can  
organize our life around

the experience the embodied experience of truth. What is that? What does that mean?

What's true right now?

The embodied experience of,  
of wisdom?

Why would we connect wisdom with being embodied isn't wisdom about ideas,  
the embodied experience of generosity.

What happens when generosity embodied, comes out of the body  
and then the embodied experience of peace.

So I'm going to want to I'd like to guide you through a little kind of guided meditation guided exercise  
around these four.

And so you might want to sit in a meditative way upright

And alert.

And if you are going to sit here

as if you are a Buddha,

with no doubts about your worthiness, your right to be awakened, to be free

with no doubts

and no for a few moments, without any concern

with those ideas that diminish you or undermine you or

that you sit here breathing,

upright alert

Having the same maybe experiences the Buddha had

tuning into the body tuning into breathing

in our direct embodied experience, maybe you're not, maybe there's not a big distance between you and the Buddha.

Now I'm going to ask for questions, because questions can be opening

one question for each of the four results.

And rather than answering the questions only from your ideas in mind,

can there also be

a movement and expression

feeling

in your body?

In response to the questions

can the answers be found in your body in your direct experience?

What is true

now

in your direct experience now,

here

what is true

What is preventing

ease

with what is true now?

What gets in the way of being conflict free

with your direct immediate experience now

What is prove that what is preventing ease with what is true now?

And then for generosity

What can I offer

that opens everyone

to truth and he's now

what can I offer

That opens everyone to truth and ease now

And finally,

what piece

is here now?

through which to view what is true,

wise and generous.

What piece

is available now

that can provide

vantage point

for seeing

what's true.

What brings ease

and what is generous?

Is there any peace  
anywhere in your system may be in the corners of it  
a basement or the attic?  
Is there any piece  
that doesn't just exist for its own sake  
but can be a teacher for you  
can be your Buddha  
to help you  
with seeing  
the truth  
how to be at ease  
and how to be generous.  
May the Buddha of Buddhism  
point you to the Buddha that's in you