

2019-06-09 Touching The Earth

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SPEAKERS

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What I have in mind to talk about today, I also have this idea that would be nice if you followed it with your imagination. Meaning some of the things that I talked about if you don't just kind of listen to it terms of ideas or doctrines or things to just understand in a cognitive level, but maybe you can have a reference point in your imagination. Maybe you can visualize some of the things being talked about or find a reference point in your own experience for them. So I think it'll go along with things but probably more interesting that way. Maybe it will. I don't know if I could talk that way that would evoke that. But that's kind of my wish, partly because what I want to talk about, I think, is deeper than our cognitive have ideas and so, but I want to start with the kind of overarching quote from the Buddha, that we'll come back to near the end. And the quote that I find personally meaningful. And that is, the Buddha said once that, that he taught, what he taught, he summarized what he taught, and I teach suffering, and the end of suffering. I teach about suffering, and how to bring such suffering to an end. And I think that's a very significant statement about the core principle of what he was about. And just in some ways, it's doesn't have to be very complicated, doesn't require a lot of doctrine or a lot of metaphysical ideas or cosmic ideas. It says very simple, ordinary human phenomena of suffering. And then coming to an end of it. So that's kind of in the background. So I gave this talk. Some weeks ago, I gave a talk where I evoked the image of the Buddha we have here in this statue of the Buddha touching the earth. And I'd like to do that again. And it's a very powerful image. And it's evocative or suggestive, it's symbolic. So it can be applied or in many different ways or interpreted or experienced many different ways, what it might be pointing to. And it's been used to down through the ages as a reference point for teachings. Sometimes there's some very florid dramatic Buddhist texts that describes a circumstance for the Buddha touching the earth. It was the supposedly the night of his enlightenment. And there was this semi deity named Mara who Seemingly job description is to prevent people from getting enlightened. And, and when my dog got a sense that the Buddha was, you know, in the brink of enlightenment, Mara came along with his, all his forces, all his armies and attendance and daughters and everything, in order to throw everything you had at the Buddha to prevent him from being enlightened. So he apparently you know, there was this dramatic stories of legions of soldiers of every you know, it's kind of like the Lord of the Rings kind of thing, you know, legions of all kinds of beings coming and attacking the Buddha with spears and arrows and Buddha just sits there peacefully under the Bodhi tree and, and they arrows and spears and discuss anything being thrown to him all turned into flowers and fall around on his feet, and will fall around on the ground around him. And then he sends all the possible forces of temptation that a person could ever struggle with. He offers everything temptation you can imagine. And nothing moves to Buddha he sits there peacefully. And, but then he comes with his his, you know his secret weapon you know the one that really is going to challenge the border, the one that gets the Buddha to kind of Finally I imagined he finally pledged. And he said, You have no right to be enlightened. So doubt, then first many people doubt is often a huge hindrance, you know, who am I and am I up to it? Can I do it? I deserve it. Do I have a right for it?

And, and the reason i think i think the Buddha flinch with that point is he didn't just know he no longer relied on his own ability to hold Stay calm nonreactive and just not get involved with anything, not buy into it or get. But rather what he did was he leaned forward and touch the earth. And, and the idea of touching the earth was he was calling upon the earth, the earth goddess, to be his witness for his right to be awakened. And at which point the earth shook. And then the earthquake that was formed frightened Morrow and all the soldiers and temptations away, and the Buddha was left alone to then proceed to his enlightenment. And so this idea of touching the earth, touching nature, and then receiving protection from it, receiving support from it, I think is a image which I find very powerful. And this idea that at the end, the Buddha couldn't do it by himself. They couldn't see it. I can do it I can manage everything or whatever. But he had to call him something which was larger than himself. Maybe it was still himself, but certainly larger than his small self. He called upon nature or the earth, to for support for witness to be seen to be recognized for what he could do. And this reaching, opening oneself up to the wider world, to the natural world, as part of who we are as part of what could maybe awaken us, or open the doors for awakening, I think it's a profound metaphor, symbol. That rather than being closed and rather being caught in ourselves, it's all me myself in mind, to open up and to be attentive and aware and connected to the natural world. I met I might have talked about this recently, but there's not a few people now who are big scholars. are beginning to criticize the secular mindfulness movement for which the Buddhist mindfulness movement overlaps with, for being excessively individualistic, reinforcing individualistic values of our culture. And, and so, this idea of, you know, going outside of yourself and calling upon something which is larger than yourself or connection to the natural world that somehow has a role and a place for this movement towards real inner freedom and so the Buddha touched the earth and he touched it with us is very you can see, usually these Sachi these pictures, it's a very soft gentle kind of peaceful kind of reaching his hand forward to touch his hands are open and he's just gently touching it you know, he's not gonna do you don't want to hurt the earth when you touch it. Just gentle and very different. You know, if this if the statues had him having a Fist, you know, and he was reaching down with his fist to touch the earth, you know, I don't think that would be as powerful for us and perhaps coming with, with the fist represents, maybe the Earth would not have protected the Buddha wouldn't offer that support for us. And we know that the way that we live in this world of ours, that we can live in ways that is in harmony with the natural world. And we are tremendously you know, our whole life is dependent on being supported by the natural world. And, and so we can live in harmony with that and continue with that support. And we could also destroy it and history of the globe of humankind is filled with, you know, for thousands of years have been filled with events where civilizations were destroyed from over utilizing the resources of their local area. And I grew up in part of my growing up in, you know, the Dalmatian coast of Yugoslavia, but was Slavia when I was growing up Croatia and, and, and those islands were beautiful, barren rocks. It used to be forested and full of soil. And there was over over farmed for mostly for grapes apparently. And, and so we continue to do it today this overuse of the you know, and we destroy the very thing that is supporting us. So how do we touch it? How do we connect to it? The word for mindfulness in Pali is Sati. And one of the meanings that the Buddha gave to Sati is to remember things that existed long ago. So it's not only about being in the present moment here now. So when we, when it's our turn, to touch the earth.

It's our turn to reach forward and know and call on our planet our global By Earth, our natural world around us, what do we reach forward and touch? And one of the values of Buddhism's always both is remember the past in a sense, but also to touch what's here, and specifically here now. So all of you right now happened to be you have in common that you're right here in this room, and that these two rooms right here, but where are you? What do you touch when you touch the earth here?

Where are we? is an interesting question. And if we simply say we're in the corner of birch at Hopkins, that's okay. Are there other ways of touching and no knowing where we're We are sitting on top of 400 feet of alluvial mud plains 400 feet some bite underneath this clay that has been deposited for the last four to maybe 8 million years of soil coming down from the coastal mountains. And as this trough that makes up the bay area has been sinking. It's been steadily sinking for these for 8 million years. It gets filled in with all this clay and all this beautiful rich soil. There grew wonderful oak trees. I don't know if you've noticed the big oak trees around here. Beautiful oak trees, the valley Oaks, beautiful trees and there's also a nice I don't know if it's original to right immediately right here but close by here. There's beautiful black folks. They're native to just up in the hills here. And coast live an ADC should be plains of oaks here, at growing here, and it probably beautiful in ancient oaks in which there were grizzly bears, elk, and deer and rabbits and all kinds of animals here. And then about five to 10 million years ago, 10,000 years ago, people seemingly came down from further north and Canadian Alaska area and the native native what we call the native indigenous people came down and started to settle here. And we know that in this area here that people have been settled for about 5000 years. And, and one of the very touching places. That's a remnant of that is San Bruno mountain, San Bruno mountain, the least in contemporary Native Americans who come from this area consider it to be a sacred mountain. And one of the biggest, probably villages that existed in the Bay Area was at the foot of San Bruno mountain. And on top of these 5000 year old shell mounds that were kind of sacred special mountains and one of the biggest shell mounds left in the Bay Area is up there on San Bruno mountain, kind of squeezed between highway 101 and the steep slope going up. I know there's a really wonderful, strange kind of, I don't know, it looks like an airplane, airplane wing kind of shaped building and going north, it's on the left of the freeway. I think it's right around there. So we have this wonderful juxtaposition of 5000 year old shell mounds in this modern, tall building there, you drive up there. And so we've had people living here for a long time and but it wasn't a very big population of people. People think that between Cemetery in San Mateo and, and San Francisco, there were about 14,000 Native Americans who lived here, and they lived in apparently 11 different tribes. They were all called all called the Maloney's nowadays, but within the aloneness, they were about 1112 different tribes. And it seems that we're we are here. The tribes were wheat shunned, and lamb chin. The people and they call this land I elabo apparently, we're on the we're on the llama land and they lived here peacefully. At some point, sir. Francis Drake came here and he named this cup this area here, new Albion. And then the 1750s or so the Spanish came and they named it Alta California. And they made mission they made all kinds of missions up and down the coast and the Native Americans moved to the missions were forced to the missions and many of them died from measles and other illnesses that the Europeans brought with them. And ended up in poverty. And the

and they had a language that is known as the rhamé touche Rami touche. So this is you know, touching the earth here. This is part of what we're touching this history. The last person who was fluent in rhamé was a woman named Isabel Meadows who died in 1939. She died in Washington DC, where she was living for five years at this kind of helping the Smithsonian Institute to learn all about her people and her language and her stories. And in 1792, after the Spanish it's built their missions here. George Vancouver, came here to San Francisco. He was a Spanish, the English explorer who came on a ship called discovery, HMS discovery. And he then went horseback riding from San Francisco down to San Jose to visit the way the account is given. He was just basically kind of a tourist guest of the local Spanish governor And we were part of Spain here. And, and this is this is my probably the first account in English language of Redwood City, or what became Redwood City, this land that we're touching that we're on top of here. And people think that the creek or the river that he talks about in this little passage is cordilleras Creek. cordilleras Creek is the border between Redwood City and San Carlos. So it's you know, as but you know, you wouldn't know it was there anymore, unless you go up into the hills and you can see some of it. So he wrote this in 1792. He was then about 34 years old captain of British explorer

trip about at noon, we arrived at a very pleasant and enchanting lawn. At noon we arrived at a very pleasant and enchanting lawn, situated amidst a grove of trees at the foot of a small hill by which float a very fine stream of excellent water. We had not proceeded far from the delightful spot when we entered a country I little expected in these regions for about 20 miles it could be it could only be can only be compared to a park, which had originally been closely planted with true English oak. The undergrowth had been cleared away and had left the state the Lords of the forest in complete possession of the soil. So the first account of this area Redwood City was it was like an English park with these huge stately oak trees that kind of spotted the area, probably the Native Americans burned regularly to keep the undergrowth low. And that part of the reason that he came in, he made this trip in middle of November. So probably the first race of the year it happened. Things are trying to get green and it was probably beautiful. A nice, wonderful time to see. And so we're on top of aluminum fluvial soil, deposited over a few million years. place that had no buildings like we have now and no freeways and no roads, no sewage things and huge open plains of oak books. And there was one big piece of property here tonight pop out about 1795. The governor, the Spanish governor of California was given 35,000 acres of land between San Mateo County and Palo Alto. To be his property, and that property was called Rancho de las pulgas. flea ranch. And, and then when in 1820s or so when the California became part of Mexico, the title of that passed on to his family. And then in 1848, when, through circumstances California became part of the United States. Then there was a rumor that was spread around that.

That the property is this huge estate huge ranch was the owners no longer had the title because it was a Mexican title. So, people started squatting on the land. By this time, there was a woman named Dinah agrella, who owned it. And if you go down to the train station, you can see A statue of her there, bust. And Donna Arguello then hired a man named Simon myzus in 19 to 1854. In order to contest these squatters and mesas won the lawsuit. So like she got the title, but his payment was he was given what's now Redwood City, east of El Camino. And he named it or was called message message me Z's bill was the original name of this part of the town. And it's there. What's left is there. It's about three blocks. From here there's little park called Macy's Park, named after him. He turned around and sold parts of the property to the squatters. So he made some money, more money and to other people rarely also sold part of it to the Land commissioners who voted in favor of the property rights. And they turned around and sold it and made a profit profit. And so it was divided and, and, and then at some point it was divided to a much smaller property here that went from Whipple purchase one block over all the way south to Woodside from El Camino, all the way up into the mountains. And it was owned by Moses Hopkins. And Moses Hopkins was the brother of Mark Hopkins, who was one of the four Pacific Railroad tycoons who built the Transcontinental Railroad. And, and so I guess that's maybe his I don't know if that's his house next door here. It's called Morgan's Hopkins Manor. Because I read what I read was his house was on where the high school is now. And that the 1906 earthquake that house fell down Maybe he rebuilt it there someone rebuilt it there. And, and it was a cattle. They ran cattle here and, and then and then in 1906 two Japanese brothers started growing chrysanthemums in Redwood City. And by the 1920s Redwood City was the chrysanthemum capital of the world. So this is a long little story does this has to do with freedom and liberation and touching the earth. So that continued to develop and grow, grow, grow, and they were going to build a big Naval Yard in Redwood Shores, but that didn't work out for the Navy and World War Two and some of you hear that window. was a marine world used to be in Redwood Shores. So, you know, that was a big amusement area. And then it became kind of a, you know, we came here in 2001 to was kind of a working class area. And, and we came here to be in this building here, which was built in 1950s, early 50s by a semi mystical Christian church called first Christian assembly. And they sold it to unity and then they bought it back from unity. And most of you still hold it, waiting for someone to come along. And they found us and when we first met them when I first met them, I came here first alone. We they gave me a tour of this building. And you know, it's a small buildings, a tour doesn't take long. And there's all these pews here lined up here

on the stage up there was kind of the main. I don't know what to call it, but that's where the cross was. And, but there was pews. And we sat down here in the pews with the couple who the two ministers and myself and we ended up sitting in silence. And they were Christian tradition that sat in silence. And we sat in silence. And it was quite a beautiful thing to sit here in this shared silence, that were somehow the continuity of they wanted us to be the continuity of what they did.

And and then other people came to, you know, part of IMC, it came to see the church. And so we got up to greet them and I leaned over to the couple and I said, someday we'll have to continue where we left off so I often think about coming sitting here in silence and we're continuing something that started way before us. And so then Redwood City develops and the biggest employer in Redwood City is Oracle, which is a big data processing firm and hospitals are big second or third biggest employees, by players. Electronic Arts. The city keeps growing and developing. It's getting gentrified. I read recently, this weekend that the highest rents for studios and one bedroom apartments in the Bay Area. Maybe the world is Redwood City on 450 alluvial plains where the Grizzlies roamed the Native Americans lived. And wave after wave of different people come to live here. Some people feel that excellent Indians as Native Americans who believe they used to live here. But then the alon came in and push themselves. The Spanish came in and decimated their loanees. And then the S lands were pushed even further south and went up into the mountains where they they survived. And I talked to one of the Icelandic natives last summer, who grew up in the Big Sur mountains he where he lives. And up until when he was when he was still a child or a teen 1960s his father would still go into the mountains to and would do small burns, one or two acre burns and which is what the natives did for generations they kind of keep the vegetation just right for all the things they needed to do. And the Forest Service came along and said you have to stop burning. And then the last couple of years they're coming back to him and say, We need you to tell us how to do this and you know, what did you What did you guys how did you read the terrain how to understand the weather and you know why you did it in the fall and what you know, how did you do it that you knew to do it so you know, well and, and then we have read that the Monterey Bay has a level of one just cooking a part of our wider community and probably true for the day or two. At a certain level, deep down Monterey Bay spa thousand feet. There's as much plastic there as the great plastic Garbage Patch in this specific microplastics micro particles. And George Vancouver talked about the excellent water. Cordillera squeak How many of you would go over there to the creek now and drink it we have a little kind of a well in our property. It's a shaft that just big wide shaft and we had it tested once the water and not to be drunk. So this, the SLA removed the low knees were decimated, the Spanish came. The United States, the end people came. made it hard for the Spanish who were here Mexicans are here. And the waves of people keep coming. coming and coming and growing and developing and that's part of the nature of part of what we're touching here. And some of that should be celebrated and it's wonderful and some of it should be cried over and our hearts broken. The earth here has been changed dramatically from the ancient times. Is it really still a natural world, the earth that supports us that we can touch and feel its protection of us? support of us, sir? What is it? What do we have here? So the Buddha said, I teach one thing, I teach suffering and the end of suffering. He didn't say, I teach personal suffering,

your own I teach you about your own little personal life and your suffering and how to be free of your suffering. To me, it's very significant said suffering and the end of suffering, because suffering is not only a personal thing. I think that adds We become mindful as we become connected to this world. So we remember remember what this world is about. As we look around and we experience lots of suffering in the world. And the end of suffering is not just the end of our own personal suffering, because suffering doesn't end when our personal suffering ends. We, you know, we live in a ocean of suffering all around us. And so how do we live with how do we touch the earth? How do we connect it remember, I'm very fond of the word remember, because two means to bring the members back

together. So to remember ourselves, That's, you know, to be mindful of ourselves is to, is to recall and remember, bring back together all of who we are. No Park left out, but also to remember to touch the earth and remember, remember, reconnect to reassemble all of what we are. And we are also the natural world. And we are also the suffering of the world around us. And do we have the capacity? Do we have the ability have we developed the inner freedom we develop the care that allows us to sit like the Buddha with an open chest and open heart. With a soft hand, a gentle hand touches the world so gently and caringly that is inclusive of all that's here in this place in this time. That's inclusive of the world that we live in. So that our practice of Buddhism is not insulated from where we are, where we sit. So that when we touch the earth, maybe metaphorically, by really waking up and being connected to this place where we are, we understand where we are. We've learned where we are. We learn the history and where we fit in that history and the momentum that we're in, and that we care about it. We're caretakers of it, but not as a burden. Not as an obligation rather As the lightness of a heart that feels that there's no separation between ourselves and what's around us, that what's around us as much ourselves as our own hands and feet and heart and thoughts. And how do you want to treat yourself? How do you treat the world to treat it with care and love and appreciation and to be an help contribute to creating a relationship to the natural world. So we're in harmony, so the natural world can take care of us. If we don't do that, If we don't care to do that, if we let someone else do that, those people are supposed to do that. Then when it's your turn, to reach forward and to touch the earth, the earth might not be there for you. So, here we sit. This is where we are. And currently, if you're going to give directions to someone, you say that we live on the corner of birch and Hopkins.

But that's pretty. That's just like a teeny, teeny, teeny bit. And to add to teeny teeny bit of that richness when our address used to be 12 25 Hopkins, but we with the entrance over there, we asked the post office I think if we could change her address. And so they said yes. And then they said, here's a range of numbers you could choose. So we choose chose 108 which is a special number in Buddhism. So here we go, here's all this history. It's all here. And you're here. And you're a contributor to that you're part of that. And, and I look forward to our ability as a community as a group of individuals as part of our society, that all of us together, will discover what happens when we touch the earth. This multifaceted, rich world that we're in, feel connected to. I hope that this talk As inspired you to consider that you're part of something much bigger than you ever imagined. And you're part of that flow in history and development and the movement of the natural world. And please live in as well. Live video with mindfulness and with remembering and may are suffering, maybe contribute to the ending of suffering and all directions. So, thank you.