

Buddhist Birthday-2024

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So, good morning. Welcome and can you hear me okay? Great. So welcome to IMC and also to the Buddha's birthday celebration that we're having today. It's the Theravādan Buddhist tradition wherein it tends to do things simply. And so they just roll all the special days of the Buddha's life into the same day. So it's celebrating the Buddha's birth, the Buddha's enlightenment, and then Buddha's passing away.

Each of them that are classically or traditionally depicted as peaceful events. His birth was depicted very peacefully, the mother standing under a tree holding a branch. And the Buddha was born peacefully and immediately took seven steps. He began his walking meditation right away. And his enlightenment, of course, he was presented with lots of challenges. And we're all presented with challenges as we kind of reach the greatest potential all of us have to really discover a non-conflictive peace.

And he found that peace in his awakening. And then his death is depicted as being very peaceful, that he knew he was dying. He knew his time was near. He laid himself down between two sāla trees, beautiful trees in India. And they say that out of season, the sāla trees burst into flowers and they fell around him and all that. And he just, he gave his last teachings to his people who were there.

And he did a very respectful thing. He said, I'm about to die. And do you have any last questions you really want to ask? This is your chance. Make sure that they were settled. And they said, no, we have no questions.

And then he went into deep meditation and went through different kind of cycles of depths in meditation. And at some point going through those cycles, he passed away in a very peaceful way. So we celebrate the Buddha's birthday as a way of, you know, respecting the phenomenal thing this man discovered. And I think of it, I think it was 1950s, I forget whose name,

but it was said earlier than that, that it was impossible for a human being to run a mile in less than a minute. And then in the 1950s there was someone who broke that limit. And then after that, lots of people did.

Because now Spelman showed it was possible. The Buddha showed it was possible to be free, to let go in such a deep profound way that we can experience a profound goodness of our hearts, profound capacity for the heart to be at ease, loving, peaceful, and we don't have to live in the grips of our inner conflicts, our inner fears, our inner ways in which we carry the weight of burden of our society and of our family and of our personal history. It's possible to release the yoke that we carry and to be free. And to do that in a way that keeps us deeply connected to this world of ours. The Buddha, even though he was totally liberated, stayed for 45 years deeply connected to a society of his time, teaching and supporting and guiding and being a counselor for many, many people in their lives.

And so one of the first early teachings I received about the Buddha statue, I heard the story of someone asked Suzuki Roshi, the founder of San Francisco Zen Center, why do we bow to the Buddha? And he said, because then we're bowing to ourselves. That somehow that act is not meant to be a submissive act towards some person who lived long ago. But really honoring and respecting something in ourselves, our potential, our possibility, our, in a sense, capacity for freedom and peace, our inner Buddhahood that's waiting for us. And this idea that the Buddha, for those now 2,500 years later, the Buddha represents, or maybe not as a represent, but is kind of a mirror for us. That when we look at the Buddha, we see ourselves, is the idea.

And I can pretty confidently say that all the depictions we have of the Buddha are someone's fantasy. We don't really know what he looked like. And so, you know, and as Buddhism goes through different cultures, the Buddha kind of has the facial features of that culture. And the earliest Buddha images were made in the Greek colonies, kingdoms of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The legacy of Alexander the Great is conquering that part of the world. And so the earliest depictions, some of the earliest ones, the Buddhist images look very Greek.

And then they came with Indian pictures and Cambodian and Chinese and you know on and on. So I like to believe it's because everyone sees themselves in a very profound way. Our potential, our capacity. And I was recently in Japan and some of the Shinto shrines on their altar didn't have images of any kind of being but had mirrors. And when I asked, why is a mirror there? And they said, oh, so you can see yourself on the altar. Isn't that wonderful?

Some of the teachings of Buddhism, and these teachers like me sometimes overdo certain teachings like letting go, let go, just about letting go. It's all about letting go. Just let go. Or

sometimes if we go a little bit further we might say let go because there's no self. Just like let go of the self, let go of the self. And maybe there's something good about those teachings occasionally or at the right time there might be quite profound.

But what gets lost in that is that the teachings of the Buddha, much of Buddhism has a profound respect for each individual. Each person is a valuable human being and we have a certain dignity, a certain dignity that can grow into a nobility. And it isn't that we're supposed to kind of become Mr. Nobody, the character from the 60s, Mr. Natural, that just sits there and is nobody. But that we're letting go of all the things that diminishes our value, all the things that we deprecate ourselves, or diminish ourselves, or limit ourselves. And one of the ways we do that, of course, is with conceit and thinking we're really special. But we're not supposed to then feel like we're not special.

We are important. We are valuable. So we'll see in a minute, in a few minutes, that the children are going to bring in the pagoda where in which the baby Buddha will be standing. And that's usually the centerpiece of the ceremony here. And if you go up and look closely, you see that the statue is the standing Buddha. And he has one finger pointing to the sky and one finger pointing to the earth.

And that's because after he did his seven steps, he was born and took seven steps, walking meditation or something. And then he stopped and he pointed to the sky and pointed to the earth and he said, because he was kind of a prodigy, I guess, he said, heaven above, earth below, I alone am the honored one. Now, you know, that sounds pretty conceited. But I think it's kind of a myth. It didn't happen that way. But what it represents, I think, and what I teach the children, is that each of us should be able to say that for ourselves.

And each of us can recognize that everyone else can say it for themselves as well. So it isn't like holding ourselves above everybody else. But everyone is the most special one. And so to see each other that way and see ourselves that way, And this heaven above and earth below pointing to, for me, also points to the way in which the Buddha is a bridge. Not the Buddha, but our practice puts us as a bridge between these, a variety of, a middle way between a variety of different places we can go. We can be deeply embodied, grounded here.

And we can soar in vast, ethereal kind of dimensions of the mind in meditation. And if you choose one or the other, you're in trouble. But our practice, our mindfulness is the bridge, is the connection where we can be in both. Standing there, present, within these different dimensions of who we are. Our deep kind of way in which meditation takes us into this very personal world, but also takes us into a phenomenal connection to the people around us. And the mindfulness is that bridge that can do both and hold both and find the middle way

between them all.

So I think it's his ways of interpreting this idea of pointing to the sky, pointing to the earth, pointing to and saying, I alone am the most honored one. That it's saying something profound about each of us. And so the idea is to see ourselves in this. The statue here is, what we have here right now is, on the top is the Buddha in the moment, in his enlightenment, time of his enlightenment. On the, laying down is actually, he's not sleeping, he's dying. It's a statue of his last days.

And the children will bring in the baby Buddha and the Buddha to put it here. And then on the wall is a Thangka, a Tibetan painting of the historical Buddha as he renounces his royalty, renounces the life of privilege and wealth and power for something that's even more wonderful, better than that. And he found in a life of radical simplicity that was not bolstered by wealth and power and status and praise that often comes with that kind of royal life. And so he's renouncing all that. And the little footnote to that, how I have that, is that my wife and I were married at the San Francisco Zen Center at the Green Gulch Gardens and the outdoors there some 40 some, 30 some years ago. And that was the wedding gift from San Francisco Zen Center, getting married.

And the gift was the picture of the Buddha renouncing. And so maybe that's also presenting us with this bridge, this kind of two sides. Remember, the two, both sides are here. Both sides are important. And so that's how I have it. And so the children were told that story about the heaven above, earth below story.

And I alone, the world honored one. Then they made this pagoda that I'll carry in here in a couple of minutes. And we'll do a little bit of a ritual. Today is like high church at IMC. And so we'll do a little bit of, we'll chant the refuges. And those of you who don't know the refuges, just listen and take it in.

And I'll say the precepts in a certain kind of simple way, because the kids are here. And then at some point, there'll be some song that the kids will sing coming in and then also that we'll do here as part of all this. And then when it's over, everyone's invited to come up and wash the baby Buddha. There's two ladles and he's sitting in a bowl with water and you come up and you wash him. And then probably you should consider that you're really washing yourself. And what is it that you could wash away?

Is there anything unusual in you? Some of us have some unusual things, some oddities that maybe it would be kind of nice to wash away, let go of. So that's kind of the idea. So you might need to move a little bit aside just Have compassion, joy, joy, joy. Have a fantasy, have

a nimity. kindness and compassion joy joy joy equanimity equanimity loving kindness and compassion, joy, joy, joy, equanimity, equanimity.

Loving kindness and compassion, joy, joy, joy, equanimity, Equanimity. Yeah. Great. Thank you for bringing the Buddha in. And thank you so much. And we have the ladles in there too? Fantastic. We have both of them there? Great. So this is the baby Buddha has been brought in a certain symbolic way. He just got born. And these wonderful families help bring him to birth. And every day we bring the Buddha to life if we practice and live with loving kindness and compassion and appreciative joy and equanimity. And thank you all for making the pagoda and bringing the Buddha to us. And for the Buddha represents some of the most beautiful things in a human heart. And families have some of that beauty when they love each other.

And I thought maybe I didn't ask her to do it, but you probably could do it without preparation, the Love Makes a Family song. Absolutely. So this is a song that was sung at the Spirit Rock family retreat for years. And there was this wonderfully dignified, I love him, abbot, a Theravādan monastic monk named Ajahn Pasanno, originally from Canada. And he's one of my most inspiring monks that I know in his simplicity and ordinariness and dedication to practice and presence. And that tradition, the monastic tradition he's in, they're supposed to carry themselves with a certain decorum.

And they're not supposed to sing, certainly not dance and do things like that. And so some of the things that happened in the family retreat was not quite what monastics do. But he would sit sometimes in the front of the hall and Betsy Rose would sing these songs. And she sang the song that Carla's about to sing. And he would sit there with complete upright dignity, he looks like, with tears streaming down his eyes, his cheek, unselfconsciously, just like letting them... So let's do it, because the baby Buddha really represents the love and the best qualities that we can have as family, as a human family. Do you want to share with emotions?

So the hand signs mean that this means love. Love makes a family. It's like two little birds making a nest together. So when we go to the chorus, love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family.

I have a neighbor who was born in Peru. Her parents adopted her when she was just two. Each time I see them, their joy shines through. Their house is filled with love. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family.

There is a house across the street from me. Built with generations one, two, and three. Grand-

parents, parents, and a little baby and their house is filled with love. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love make a family.

So the kids down the stream have a poem to mom One's mommy Cecilia, one's mommy Yvonne Their family is happy, their family is strong And their house is filled with love Love makes a family Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family.

This is the place we bring our families. We gather to learn mindful harmony We sing and we play and we sit quietly And we share our family love Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Love makes a family. Thank you.

So that's just the kind of the anthem of the children's program here at Barrett Rock. And my kids went through that. And when my son went off to college, he went and found all of Betsy Rosa's songs to listen to in the dorms. in these songs. So then we'll chant the refuges and I think enough of you know it and if you don't it's just take it in and this is going for refuge is the word in Pāli is to walk literally so one walks Two, what is a refuge? What is a support? What is a protection? What is an inspiration here in the Dharma and the Buddha and the Saṅgha? And this is also meant to be found in yourself. It's not like something outside mystical that's supposed to do it for you. But really something that is generated by our practice and our own goodness that we all have. That's mirrored by the Buddha to us. We have amazing potential. So we'll chant.

So usually you don't have to put your hands together, but that's the tradition. And usually there's a salutation to the Buddha first. So, Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arato Sammā Sambuddhassa buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi Dutiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi Dutiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi Dutiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi Tatiyampi buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi. Tatiyampi saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi.

So, one of the, for me, inspiring things I've heard some teachers say, and directly, and it's a common thing for some teachers to say this, so it's not new, but is that someone, a student, someone who's a practitioner, comes to the teacher and says, I'm so grateful, and I want to do something for you. What can I do for you? And the teacher says, practice. That's what you can do. And so practice includes living an ethical life. And so what can you do for the Buddha? If we feel grateful for what the Buddha did, we can live an ethical life.

And it's not just for the Buddha's sake, but there's a Buddha in you. Maybe waiting for you.

Maybe you have a little taste and hints of it at times. And that's, it's an ethical place. It's an ethical quality of what's deep inside, or most integral in who we are. So in a sense, when we do the precepts, it's to celebrate this possibility, or this potential, this truth about who we are. there. Either we know it or it's waiting for us.

So I will lead this chant. And so I'll do it in two parts for each one. And you can repeat after me if you'd like. But it has a little bit more value what we're doing here today than it just doing it for yourself. There's children in our midst. And what a great thing for children to hear. Grown-ups have this kind of inspiration to live by the precepts. This is pretty good.

So, for the sake of our lives together, I commit to not harming. For the sake of our life together, I commit to not stealing. For the sake of our life together, I commit to respecting the body and hearts of others. For the sake of our life together, I commit not to lie for the sake of our life together. I commit to not intoxicating myself so I'm crazy.

So now we have, so Carla's going to teach us one song, the other Brahmavihāra song, and then once we get the hang of it, the song, then the families who are here, can come up and now is the time to wash the baby Buddha. I'll tell you when to start. And you take those two spoons, take one of them. So two people can do it at the same time. Come on either side. And then you pour it over the Buddha three times. And that's a way of cleaning your heart. And so we'll learn the song. And once we've learned it and keep doing it, then we can have people come up.

I'm not sure if we're thinking of the same song. Well, Hilary was the one who told me. The Four Divine Abodes. It's got a lot of words. Well, maybe it doesn't work then. Maybe you should sing. I can play it, but I'm not sure I can teach it. Oh, so maybe just sing it then. And you want to have this on? I don't know. Did you guys hear the singing clearly? So maybe do it at least, so Carla, maybe do a few rounds of it. But tell me when your first round is finished. Is that okay? First verse, yeah. And after you've started, the kids will start to come up. Okay. So, the first verse is, In the house of loving-kindness, and the second verse starts with, In the house of true love. Okay. Okay?

Alright. In the house of loving-kindness I am glad to live How sweet it is to open up my heart and let it give. The windows are all open, there's nothing here to hide. In the house of loving kindness that I have inside. In the house of true compassion I am glad to be Knowing every living thing has feelings just like me All the joys and sorrows, the anger and the fears In the house of true compassion, all are welcome here In the house of joy and happiness, I'm glad to dwell Grateful for my blessings, wishing you the same as well. The world is full of riches, there's enough for you and me. In the house of love and happiness, I'm glad to be. In the

house of balance I am glad to spend my time Coming home from stormy days That shake my heart and mind I can swing so high and low But somewhere in between In the house of balance It is peaceful and serene In these four divine abodes that live inside of me There I go for refuge, to be happy, to be free It only takes a little breath A little change of mind To take me to the sweet abodes Where peace and joy are mine Just a little breath To change my heart and mind And take me to the sweet abodes Where peace and joy are mine Very nice. Thank you. Thank you.

So because we're Meditation Center, did you guys ever do any meditation in the in the family program? So we're going to do a meditation for three breaths. Who knows how to count to three? Yeah. Some of you do. Okay, so when you close your eyes, close your eyes, and then count for three breaths, and then after the third breath, then do that waving of the fingers again. Ready? Let's start. Close your eyes, and three breaths. Great! Thank you, everyone.

So thank you for making the pagoda, because now the pagoda is going to be available to the people here to come and watch the baby Buddha too. So any of you who'd like to do it, in a minute or so you could come up and do that. And now that the kids have showed you how it's done. And so thank you for being here, and may you find the Buddha in your own heart. Thank you.