

Lil Faider Scholar-in-Residence

Sensei Ken Madden

Hello!

I deeply appreciate the chance to build a bridge of understanding and to meet Mrs. Lil Faider who lends her name and sponsorship to this program. My first session outlined Buddhist worldview and why it is as it is. Among the points I conveyed was that “Buddha” is not a proper name and does not mean “God.” It is a title that means “Awakened One” in Pali, an ancient language co-existing with Sanskrit from what is now known as northern India or Tibet.

The man who is referred to as the Buddha lived about 2500 years ago and acquired special Insight into the nature of human life and the universe. He taught this Insight for 44 years and these teachings were committed to memory soon after his death. Eventually, a few hundred years later, they were written down. His real name is said to be Siddhartha Guatama and he is considered to be a historical person, and not a deity or spiritual being or a legend.

All stories say that he grew up as a Prince but left the Palace to search for more knowledge about the world. He encountered sickness, old age, and death which greatly distressed him and prompted him to take a spiritual path. After denying himself all worldly pleasures for 7 years, he concluded that denial of his needs was as unlikely to result in his Enlightenment as was giving in to his desires. Instead, one night while sitting under a Bodhi Tree he chose the Middle Path and his Insight came to him.

Siddhartha Guatama did not teach “Buddhism” but rather the “Buddha Dharma”, or “Way of the Buddha”. The word “Buddhism” was applied to the teachings of the Buddha only about 150 years ago when the colonial British encountered this way of life and needed a name for it. Thinking it a religion like any other, it became known in the West as “Buddhism.”



So, there are many “Buddha’s”: you and I are of the same human nature as the historical Buddha (known as Shakyamuni Buddha). He lived and died and said that he wasn’t a Spiritual Being, and that is our nature also. As the Teachings spread throughout Asia, they encountered new societies and incorporated many of the local teachings. For example, in Tibet, a pre-Buddhist spiritual tradition known as Bon gave Tibetan Buddhism an emphasis on Reincarnation. In Japan, there are elements of Ancestor reverence, which the Shinto Tradition shares.

When the Buddha was alive, he gave different teachings to different groups: this is known as teaching according to “Skillful means” or “Upaya” in the Pali language. He also taught that those following his teachings should test every teaching for their truthfulness and to not accept or choose teachings based on an expert’s opinion or authority. Since much of the story of the historical Buddha has become mythical, the truth of the facts of his life are not considered in Buddhist circles to be as important as his Teachings, and our own practical use of those teachings.

This is a different perspective than found in most Spiritual Traditions. Usually a book of revelation is only subject to interpretation but not wholesale rejection or gradual adoption of new understandings. This worldview of self-determination and responsibility permeates what the Buddha Dharma ought to be.

In my next session, it is my intent to talk about the **actual** Insight that the Buddha taught which were never meant to be philosophy alone. They are meant to be practical and applicable to our lives. The Buddha taught, and his life demonstrated, that understanding human difficulty required Awareness.

Here is a familiar example of Awareness: You are driving on the Deerfoot Highway at 4pm on a Thursday afternoon. The highway is congested and it is snowing with reduced visibility. Suddenly, a Big Black Pick-Up Truck is riding your rear bumper. Much too close!

The driver cuts over a lane, speeds past you, and cuts in front of you! So dangerous! He speeds off into the distance.

What are you to do? Do you make rude gestures? Say nasty things about that driver inside your own car? Speed up to catch him? What is the right way to deal with what just happened?!

From a Buddhist perspective, trying to be Aware means you should look at what just happened. Was this about me? Likely not. Even if it was about me, nothing happened. Although it was dangerous, there was no accident. The truck has now sped off. But, we realize that due to the heavy traffic, we will be late for our appointment.



From a Buddhist perspective, what causes us difficulty in life is our desire to have everything the way we want it to be; we want to be on time for our appointment and now we will be late. This causes us stress. But really, what can we do? Just accept that we will be late. Do you see your stress abating because you are aware that you cannot change anything in this situation? Being more Aware while driving the Deerfoot, we might be more aware of other vehicles in our “blind spot.” We might use our turn signal when changing lanes so that we can avoid a potential accident. We also will pay more attention to our speed.

Buddhism is not a religion – there is no deity – but it is a worldview that can help us to lessen the difficulties of this life, through “seeing the world as it really is” (called “Wisdom”), and then reacting to that by being true to our human nature (called “Compassion”).

If you are able to attend my next session, I will teach the basic teachings that encourage us in our lives, as taught by the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.

In Gassho (in peace),

Sensei Ken Madden

Calgary Buddhist Temple, Jodo Shinshu

Lil Faider Scholar-in-Residence

Sensei Ken Madden

Hello! I have been enjoying my time at Beth Tzedec, learning about your own traditions while having an opportunity to speak to you about our Buddhist ‘understandings’. Thank you!

In the previous *Shofar* articles, I attempted to outline the Buddhist worldview of testing everything, that there is a wide variety of understanding within Buddhism because the man who is most often called the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, taught in different ways to different groups even during his own time, so that we might better understand his insights. These different areas of focus within his teachings continue to this day: some Buddhists are concerned with karma, some with meditation, and some with neither.

But there are some basic doctrines that lead to this worldview, something that Buddhists ought to have in common. If you have attended my talk sessions, I have done my best to outline these, but some people may not have been able to attend, or would find value in a refresher, so here is a summation of those basic teachings so far:

4 Noble Truths: Siddhartha’s first teaching can be thought of as the start of Buddhist understanding: That “Life can cause us difficulty” or that “Life is a bumpy road.” Why? Because we want things to go OUR way. When things don’t go OUR way, or if they did but change, this causes us difficulty!

**There
is suffering.**

Say I want to be at an appointment on time but there is traffic. I feel stress about this.

**Suffering has
an origin.**

Or perhaps I want to talk to my grown child who lives in another city but they are too busy to call. I am unhappy with them, even as I love them. Perhaps I seek wealth or fame and it eludes me.

**Suffering can
cease.**

The cause of our difficulty is our want.

**There is a path
out of suffering.**

Now, a certain amount of want is natural. It gets us up in the morning to face our day. But at a certain amount of craving, it becomes controlling. This amount, this ‘too much’ is what causes us difficulty.

But there is a way to lessen our “craving desires.” The Buddha called this Way “The Eightfold Path to Happiness.”

The Eightfold Path to Happiness are eight ways of living your life that help you become aware of and then lessen your difficult desires. They start with “**Seeing** the World in a Correct Way” – that you are NOT the Centre of the World!

To cultivate **thoughts** that are kind and peaceful.

To **speak** words that are helpful, not gossipy or untrue or destructive. That are kind.

To do **acts** in your life that are kind, helpful, peaceful and pure.

To **make a living** in a way that doesn’t harm people of the planet. Or better, to cause helpfulness and peace.

To put forth **effort** to do all of this as much as you can. To apply yourself in all that you do.

To be **aware** when you are doing things. You have to experience this moment anyways, why not be aware of what you are doing also?

To apply **concentration**, will and effort in all.

RIGHT VIEW
RIGHT INTENTION

prajna
wisdom
If you are aware of the things in your life, the people, the places, the animals, your thoughts, your life will be better.

RIGHT SPEECH
RIGHT ACTION
RIGHT LIVELIHOOD

sila
ethics
Siddhartha also taught that the world is Impermanent – everything changes and there is nothing that doesn’t change over time. Are you the same as when you were 12 years old? Will you be the same in 500 years? Look around you now. Is there anything that will be the same in a million years? A thousand even? No. Not one thing.

RIGHT EFFORT
RIGHT MINDFULNESS
RIGHT CONCENTRATION

samadhi
mind

In fact, everything that you see around you is made up of other things. Things that existed before it was what it was. Ingredients.

This includes you and me. I am made from my parents. I eat food and breathe air and these things make me what I am today. Same as you. Same as everything. In fact, we are not and cannot be, separate from this world and all that makes it up.

These three things: Impermanence, inter-connectedness, and not being separate from the world, are known as the Three Marks of Existence. Everything that exists is subject to these qualities.

This changes how we view the world. When added to the Eightfold Path, we now have a way to live. Religion speaks of Humankind’s relationship to Deity. Buddhism speaks of Humankind’s relationship with this life.

In Gassho (in peace),

Sensei Ken Madden

Calgary Buddhist Temple, Jodo Shinshu

Lil Faider Scholar-in-Residence

Sensei Ken Madden

Peace be with you. It is my hope that you had a wonderful Passover, full of expression of your relationship to Adonai. And maybe some great food too!

During March, we enjoyed a talk by the Calgary Buddhist Temple's 'Templekeeper' Sensei, my own lead Sensei and both an inspiration and mentor to me, Reverend James Martin. I also hope that you had a great experience at our little Calgary Buddhist Temple on your visit. I felt that the Dharma talk by our Sensei James Martin was excellent, and gave a real 'taste' of what a good dharma talk might sound like. These are meant to help us think in different ways, about our relationships with and in this world; to teach us about our view that the world is both interdependent, and impermanent, and what this means to us in how we live this life.

Tracey Pickup of the Wild Rose Sangha (community) will also have most recently continued the Buddhist speaking series; she has a particular scholarship and understanding of the role of women in Buddhism, historically, currently, and in the future. Tracey holds Ordination in a different Tradition than my own, The Order of Interbeing of the Vietnamese Monk and fruitful author and teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh. His emphasis is on Engaged Buddhism through Mindfulness. She has also been a teacher of mine on my Buddhist Path; I am highly grateful and respectful of her work.

The plan as the program moves into May is to experience Buddhist practices directly, now that the basic doctrinal teachings and mindset have been discussed in the lecture series. We will demonstrate a Buddhist Wedding, a Buddhist Confirmation or Sarana ceremony, Buddhist baby naming, O-Shoko gratitude, and a full session of chanting. Maybe a little more meditation of various kinds and a discussion of what these practices are for in a Buddhist context.

I hope to see you in May for these practices!

I would like to add to Tracey Pickup's talk about the role of women in Buddhism by relating something about their role within my own Japanese sect of Buddhism: Jodo Shinshu. In short, Jodo Shinshu could not exist without the pivotal role of women at the formation of our sect and are considered equal in the sect in current times.

Our sect was founded by a Teacher in Japan in the 12th century called Shinran Shonin. For a time, his teachings, which were aimed at teaching Buddhism to common people, ran something afoul of the religious authorities of his time

(where have we heard this story before?). He was exiled to a far western fishing village in Japan. There, he met a woman named Eshinni whom he married. The wealth of Eshinni's family, and her loving support allowed Shinran to write his teachings and to further develop them while he was in exile. Later, he was able to disseminate his teachings through the writings that he had developed and to prove the correctness of that which he taught in debate with other Buddhist scholars.

He has several sons and daughters from his marriage. At the time, almost all Buddhist teachers were monks: there would be no sons or daughters to continue a Father's teachings. However in the case of Shinran, as he aged, his daughter Kakushinni was able to care for him. At his passing, she donated land that she had in turn inherited from her own marriage to be a place of remembrance for her Father, and which became a central place for the followers of his teachings to gather. She made arrangement for her son to be the caretaker of this mausoleum and who later became the Head Priest of the Temple which emerged there. He is now the Head of our Sect and is known as the Go-Monshu -same. The current officeholder is the 25th direct descendant of Shinran Shonin.

Without the contribution and foresight of Shinran's partner and daughter, there would be no Jodo Shinshu, a sect of Buddhism that is largest in Japan and for the common people. Today, although Japan can still have elements of patriarchy, the daughters of Jodo Shinshu family Templekeeper priests are completely able to assume that role as they come to the age of majority, taking over from their current family member holding the role for the family. In my own case, of a class of 84 students, 27 were women, or about 1/3.

I look forward to teaching the practices of Buddhism as we continue your exploration of our tradition, a bridge that one can walk in both directions.

In Gassho (in peace),

Sensei Ken

Calgary Buddhist Temple, Jodo Shinshu

Lil Faider Scholar-in-Residence

Sensei Ken Madden

Hello!

It is coming to summer and, as you know if you have been following our Buddhist Teachings, all things are impermanent.



This is the last of my series of writings to introduce you to the Buddhist worldview through the Lil Faider Interfaith Scholar-in-Residence program. I know that it is not the last of my abiding warmth and friendship with Beth Tzedec.

Firstly, let me say that it has been an honour for me to engage with you. You, and in particular your Rabbi Shaul and President Maxine, Cantor Jayne, have made me feel very welcome. In a world where there are so many divisions, to feel this connection is truly appreciated. Someone wrote a nasty word on our Temple in the dust last week. Easily cleaned by the rain before I think it was seen, but not everyone even in 2017 is tolerant. I don't need to tell you I know and I am sorry to know that.

This is, of course, the second and third Buddhist 'Marks of Existence': we are interconnected, and none of us is separate from this interconnection. It doesn't naturally follow that these interconnections, these interactions, are always pleasant, though, and I am deeply grateful for my time at Beth Tzedec.

Our talking to one another pointed out that while the Source of our Compassion and our Wisdoms are thought to be different, they are nonetheless the same in action: we are all trying to do our best to live a life that has meaning and caring and by our lives, love is increased and spread into the world.

Buddhism has no Adonai. The historical Buddha was a Man. But how did he receive his Insight into the nature of human life? He did not answer this, only saying that he was 'Awake'. This is a real model for me and for most Buddhists: we would say that that which cannot be proven can be set aside for now, that *THIS* life is enough for us to have to deal with.

So our basic, foundational question might be: **What do I truly have then?**

And an answer might be: **I have my experience of this present moment only.** And that experience is changed by my senses, which may be different from person to person, that experience is changed by my thoughts and emotions, which also change from moment to moment and can filter the moment. So how do I deal with a life that is interconnected to everything and changes from each moment to each moment? That is the Buddhist worldview.

There is much debate among people whether Buddhism is even a religion. I tend to teach that it is a worldview: there is no Deity in Buddhism.



But Buddhism has spread from its inception 2500 years ago through many countries and cultures, there are many different practices and beliefs and views within Buddhist teachings. Some Buddhists have an understanding of a spiritual hierarchy of beings, especially Chinese Buddhists. They know Guan-yin as the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

What about life after death? It is understood that the Buddha himself did not teach about this. But Buddhism has always tested and incorporated testable truths within its teachings. Tibetan Buddhists have a deep understanding of Reincarnation for example. This is not an understanding held by all Buddhists though.

Most people have heard that the aim of the Buddhist teachings are for people to reach Enlightenment, or Nirvana. This may be so. However the understanding of what this actually means is very much up for debate as very few people have ever realized this.

So, there are a lot of different opinions about what are the true teachings.

But it can also be said that the teachings, while supporting us, are not as important as the actual practice of wisdom and compassion: to try to see things clearly and to act in a caring way. This is the basis of the Buddhist Life.

This is also what I experienced in your own community. There is so much in common. It is my hope that I completed the bridge that you started by inviting me into the Lil Faider Interfaith Scholar-in-Residence Program.

Again, thank you very much for your attention and caring while I have visited you. Your time and attention is the most precious of gifts.

L'Shalom,
In Gassho, with two hands together
—/—

Sensei Ken Madden

Calgary Buddhist Temple, Jodo Shinshu

