

Labor Day Dharma Talk
Sept. 5, 2010

1995 Bumper Sticker:

The Labor Movement: the folks that brought you the weekend

First Labor Day holiday was Sept. 5, 1882 in N.Y. City. Samuel Gompers said, "This holiday is dedicated to no man living or dead, no sect, no race, no nation", a 'workingman's holiday'. I free associated on the "no's" and it sounded like a "Buddhist holiday". As practitioners, we have our work to do! Look, how we came together this morning to practice!

As I pondered "Labor Day" I thought about all the various laborers from factory to office to the fields...really all walks of life, I realized there must be many bodhisattvas in this world, and other world systems. The question arose, "what is the work of the bodhisattva?" As practitioners on the path, as bodhisattvas, we have our work to do. That you, you and you! No one is left out!

So today as a Buddhist celebrating Labor Day, I would like to talk about the work or "labor" of the Bodhisattva.

Earlier when preparing this talk I searched the web for Labor Day poems and quotes to learn what thoughts people had about this day. Here's a quote from a modern day Bodhisattva:

"Strange is our situation here upon earth. Each of us comes for a short visit, not knowing why, yet sometimes seeming to a divine purpose. From the standpoint of daily life, however, there is one thing we do know: That we are here for the sake of others...for the countless unknown souls with whose fate we are connected by a bond of sympathy. Many times a day, I realize how much my outer and inner life is built upon the LABORS of people, both living and dead, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received." Albert Einstein In Taigen Dan Leighton's book Bodhisattva Archetypes he sees Albert Einstein as a classic example of the Bodhisattva Manjushri

archetype for his theory of relativity. The teaching of shunyata, or “emptiness” expounded by Manjushri has also been translated as “relativity”. The emptiness or absence of any isolated, inherent self identity in all things may be expressed in terms of seeing into the fundamental interrelatedness, or relativity, of all things. Additionally, Einstein’s central work showing the interrelation of matter and energy was produced when he was young, further fitting into the model of Manjushri’s youthful insight.

Samantabhadra (Universal Virtue) is the bodhisattva of enlightening activity in the world, representing the shining function of wisdom. He also embodies the luminous web of the interconnectedness of all beings, and radiant visions that express it. In the Flower Ornament Sutra a bodhisattva named Universal Eye engages in practices in order to witness Samantabhadra. He’s told by the Buddha that he must first realize that Samantabhadra is omnipresent in the cosmos, have deep faith, must not have attachments to anything, must enter nondual true reality and perform other practices of Samantabhadra. Universal Eye eventually does see Samantabhadra in a vision accompanied by rain showers of dazzling

Bodhisattvas take vows. If we consider Samantabhadra’s name, Universal Virtue, we can surmise the quality of his bodhsattva activity is beautiful, in accord with enlightened truth. He helps others find the calm, deep radiance within. His helpful work expresses a splendid way of living. He is known for his set of 10 vows: making offerings, praising buddhas, venerating buddhas, confessing one’s own past misdeeds, rejoicing in the happiness of others, requesting buddhas to teach, requesting buddhas not to enter nirvana, studying the Dharma in order to teach it, benefiting all beings and transferring one’s merit to others.

One exemplar of Samantabhadra energy is Martin Luther King who symbolizes and embodies the struggles for social justice. His incredible spirit and willingness to speak for social justice, truth and suffering of many people preserved in the face of numerous arrests, threats and ultimately death. He brought hope encouragement and a voice to oppressed African Americans.

Another example is Mahatma Gandhi who though nonviolent action expressed many aspects of Samantabadhra?”

There are more well known examples, (artists, musicians, poets) and more likely many not so well know examples....people we meet in our daily lives.

So how do we as practitioners fit into this picture? We start where we are, right here, right now.

Today we come together to “sit”. To practice. Just what are we doing, really? We have many teachers, such as Dogen, who have emphasized this sitting practice as essential to transform the mind. In one of his Dharma Hall Discourse Dogen says his late teacher, Tiantong Rujing, instructed the assembly, “Zen study and practice is dropping off body and mind”. Dogen reminds us that the true transmission of the samadhi of wall gazing, is NOT clinging to the forms of upright sitting or the study of Zen, but the crucial activity of dropping off body and mind.”

How does this happen? Most of us are familiar with Dogen’s instructions:

Think of not-thinking. What is not thinking? Non-thinking.

So when we sit, we take the backward step in our mind. Looking inward we observe our thoughts as they arise. Rather than follow the thoughts down the mindstream, we observe them and let them go. Like the image of peeling a post-it note off the pad. We just drop the thought and see it dissolve...then another thought arises and we do the same process again. Observe, drop it, let it go. This repeated process over days, months, years affords us deep insight into the workings of our mind. We see patterns in the content, associated feelings, ideas, the frequency, and intensity.

Then, at times when the spaces between the thoughts increases, we get some relief. Some settling occurs in the mind. The chatter of monkey mind takes to the background and spaciousness comes to the forefront. Peaceful, settled, we are in the state Hui-neng describes as “being detached from [outside] appearances”. When we are no longer disturbed inside, we experience concentration. This is Just sitting.

What happens when we get up off the pillow and return to the marketplace?

Woven throughout this talk have been several references to bodhisattva practices we can take with us into our daily lives.

There's the:

Aspiration for universal enlightenment - to awaken to our true self in this present moment. The beneficial use of daily intention

The need to exert oneself in order to give in return "enthusiastic
"Effort"

To have deep faith (in the practice)

To let go of attachments to all things "Renunciation" 'relinquishment"

To enter nondual true reality "Samadhi" Concentration & Wisdom which can spontaneously occur in any one of the postures: sitting, walking, standing or lying down

Patience – the tolerance for change and the ungraspability of all phenomena; patience with the unborn, unconditioned nature of all things

Ethical discipline

Generosity (giving of one's merit)

What I have just listed are the 6 Paramitas of Perfections, the practices of a Bodhisattva. Please study them and manifest them in your life.

Thank you.

Have the Intent to Reside in Vastness