

NEST FOR OUR CREEDS

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I am beyond honored and humbled to have this opportunity to share a few ideas and experiences at one of the greatest, most important, and influential spiritual places in USA, spreading logically by default worldwide.

Let me introduce myself: I was born in so-called “communist” Yugoslavia, which of course had not so much to do with communism as a manifestation of utopian society but was a communist ideology camouflage, used to oppress free and different thinking and lifestyle. I remember like it was yesterday when our kindergarten teacher took us to a Belgrade TV station to visit the studio for us kids to see “how the TV is being made.” After we visited with the famous TV people and observed the working of cameras and lighting, we were taken into the TV station’s small showing room. It was so jam-packed with us curious children I had to sit on the floor way up front. First they showed us a few archival films from Yugoslavian history and then, to show us the world — I still can’t believe how it happened — they showed us an old documentary about Tibet, in which the Dalai Lama as a 4 year old boy in a house procession is entering the holy city of Lhasa. In that moment I told myself, “I will go there! I must go there!” This image stayed with me, and whenever I found something to read about Tibet it was very special. I was 6 at that time, and it took 27 years of ups and down as a problematic teenager, as a student anti-communist journalist wannabe, as a photojournalist in Central American war, and as an American art director and graphic designer in young Silicon Valley, for me to finally get to Lhasa. So, to introduce myself in one short sentence: I am living proof of how spiritual aspiration — oftentimes not even articulated well — can take us closer and closer to the fascinating life of fulfilling our dreams, and even beyond them!

If we just for a moment reflect on your Temple’s more-than-a-century-long rich history, we can easily realize what an amazing treasure this place is and was and will be to so many beings in the future! My sharing what I found on my path with you at this place belongs to my “beyond dreams” part, and I thank you for this opportunity.

So, what makes a vibrant spiritual or religious life practice which will make us better human beings in modern times? This is what I decided to reflect on with you today.

As a student of the Dalai Lama, I love his realistic approach to spiritual growth for the benefit of all beings, and would summarize it like this:

- The fundamental reality of love has not to do with any religion or creed, it's an inborn quality of heart with which human beings have a special relation. It's our natural goodness more or less developed in each of us. However, some religious practices and creeds can help us nurture and enhance our intuitive and wiser aspects and feelings of love even further. Those spiritual and mind-expanding practices have to be tested like gold, by rubbing, biting, and so on before proceeding with actual daily practice.

- We by all means must be assertive regarding the practice of becoming more wise, loving, and kind beings and bring more peace into the big mix at this important time in so many ways ...but keep in mind that not everyone shares your desire to reach the top of liberation at any cost. Therefore, it's good to realistically apply a custom-made respectful coexistence mode, giving love and our mutuality a chance to grow by patience and feeding on similarities — not cultivating differences but searching for common ground we are on.

- And being enthusiastic about it — yes! — since enthusiasm is a powerful elixir — prana! But patience out of compassion is also crucial and now I will share one specific practice from Tibetan Buddhist Nalanda traditional body of wisdom knowledge.

- The realistic Buddha Dharma approach and science of mind Dharma of Truth training have examined this practice since ancient times. If we leave our experience of love in its natural state, our kindness towards others will depend mostly on how they respond to us. However, we can train to meet up front and extend love to those with whom we have no direct connection. Tibetan Buddhist practitioners use this short prayer: "May all sentient beings have happiness and causes of happiness." The Tong Lin practice says: "May my suffering purify suffering of all beings. "These two are a very powerful training for accumulating good heart and good karma.

- The next step in this practice is recognizing how in numerous never-ending circles of life that all beings have been our mothers also. That is part of a mind-training exercise, where we first recognize all beings as having been our mother in the never-ending great circle of life. By remembering mother-love kindness and cultivating gratitude, we desire to repay it in order to be part of that loving-

kindness essence; and finally develop empathy and love for all beings, with great compassion. The wish to free all beings from suffering brings amazing blessings to our mental continuum.

Crowning it is the intention to put this into action. This special resolve brings a light feeling and vigor, as *Bodhichitta*. The wish to attain liberation and enlightenment for the sake of all beings is the Bodhisattva path: in Sanskrit, Bodhi is enlightenment, and Sattva is intention. This way we generate the Buddha mind or mentioned bodhichitta.

- This of course is a mind-training method from the Tibetan Nalanda tradition, which is based on our belief in Great Wheel of Life and rebirth. But even for non-believers, or those who don't believe in rebirth, this practice makes a better, more friendly life anyway. Placing greater emphasis on others' concerns, considering others to be the same as us, is the way to a happy life in this life.

- As we practice this, it is very important not to be hard on ourselves! Sure, engage in a bit of self-criticism to motivate you to do your best, but don't expect too much; sometimes seeing others in terms of 'us' and 'them' is natural. But also natural is that many of these differences are actually caused by superficial differences between us, when you look at it mindfully.

We all want to be happy and so on. The basic source of all happiness is a sense of kindness and warm-heartedness towards others. As human beings, we are all the same. We are born the same way, we die the same way, and we all want to lead happy lives.

The most important point is that if we take similarities for granted and allow differences to create hard divisions between us, it leads to conflict and other problems — therefore, practicing what we briefly touched on here is very important. To cultivate similarities is human; it is our Buddha nature also, and will make us have a heart of gold every day, every morning, if we do the actual practice in this direction. Spirit like that is life affirming and also can be lifesaving; respect it always like that.

As for me personally, and as you already know, I am originally from the war-torn country of Yugoslavia. It was some 25 years ago when we experienced a brutal 79 days of bombardment with depleted uranium nuclear bombs, and three civil wars raged on with much help from outside. This man-made catastrophe destroyed home, country, and the good life of millions of our people, and hardly

a day has passed since then in my emotional and mental life that I don't reflect on some aspect of it. Everybody forgot about Yugoslavia's wars because of the other constant devastating wars recurring all over the planet, and we are in a revolving door of unresolved and ongoing situations of war — the list of those places would be long here today.

So, all this looks really-really bad!!! But as Buddha's first noble truth says, "All life is suffering." So here — IN REAL TIME — is our opportunity to embrace the not so tasty chance of life as suffering and be heroes despite how hard it is ...to live like heroes of peace! Life is suffering, but to do what we can brings liberation from suffering. Nothing comes out of some silly fake narrative of "we are helpless. "Use creative compassionate and kind mind — not reactive mind — to build peace in any way you feel inspired, and you will live the life of our teachers!

I want to offer a realization for today, for us to agree now, today, this very special day to SIMPLY REALIZE THE POWER OF THIS MOMENT, OF THIS CURRENT SITUATION OF CHOICE...HEART...LOVE is what I urge us to seal today in our approach to management of what is going on in our daily lives, no matter what.

I want to harvest the power for this moment with 3 quotes: #1 Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. "— .Margaret Mead Then #2 the great Tibetan Lama Kalu said: "Looking for peace outside is like looking for a turtle with a mustache: you won't be able to find it. But when your mind is calm inside, peace will come looking for you."

When we are not at peace inside, with mind not in balance, we become defined by whatever is happening around us, and in that way, we get caught up in what is known as "reactive mind." This is a serious nightmare predicament in the current situation, as mentioned.

So, it's about BUILDING PEACE through this kind of daily practice. Peace is not given; we've got to make it like a nest where all human qualities can be safe and grow.

I also wish to point out it is not enough to say we must not wage war. IN THIS NEW TIME OF HEROES, it is necessary to share love and peace, to talk peace, to

promote coexistence and mutuality, and to sacrifice for it when needed.
Remember: sacrifice is good for us.

We must concentrate not on the negative side of war but TO BE the positive and affirmation power of peace at all times. Practice peace, talk peace, make peace in all available steps and don't hunt for big assignments and big ideas in this joint peace venture — but join in right now, naturally.

Also, it's good to be pragmatic and see that peace represents a sweet music of humanity, a cosmic melody, a symphony or bliss that is far superior compared to the suffering and chaos and war. In short, it is quote #3 from MLK Jr., who said: "We must shift the arms race into a peace race."

So, if we have a love and will — the determination (path of Bodhisattva) — to be part of such a peace momentum, we will actually unlock tightly sealed doors of spiritual and creative fulfillment energy flow. As already mentioned, this is known in Buddhism as Bodhichitta.

And — this *is* the time ...not this *might* be the time... BUT this *IS* the time. Feel the **enthusiasm** of this moment our planet's destiny is being computed, not the **dread** of this moment our planet's destiny is being computed!

- One more thing on cultivating inner peace, VERY IMPORTANT. Lack of conflict is not possible in life, but a way of dealing with the inevitable conflicts in life can make life more rich, colorful, and amazing. This approach calls for respect towards another — and that is another of Buddha's Noble Truths: the truth of preciousness of life and human existence.

For all this to happen overnight is not possible. We must practice daily and diligently. Neither a space station nor an enlightened mind can be built or realized in a day.

So dear sisters and brothers, I love your Temple of the People where we gather to practice good heart, cultivate faith, and rely on each other for support when it's tough ...and please don't worry, because... "If we allow worry to fill our hearts, sooner or later we will get sick. — Thich Nhat Hanh.

So DON'T LOSE YOUR SENSE OF WONDER POWER!

Most important is our mindfulness of the situation and in the situation. When the mind is moving, we should be aware that it is moving. When the mind is still, we should notice that too. The more calm the mind stays, the more it supports the attainment of special insight we shared here.

- Your icon and name Halcyon comes from a Greek story about the halcyon bird, which has the power to calm the rough ocean waves so their floating nests host new lives. What a miracle! Like calmed waters in the storm for new life, halcyon is a sense of peace or tranquility within the raging oceans of change of humanity and technology at undefined intersection.

- Bodhichitta, the altruistic intention to help others, is the biggest wealth and protection I found in the crazy-looking world we live in. The information and artificial tech wilderness, which is expanding every second with inventions of unknown consequences, is on the edge of out of hand; but paradoxically, if we look at the Vedic and original Buddha Shakyamuni times, it is actually nothing new. Piecing this fact together into the more human cosmos by using high-tech means is kind of a back-to-the-future experience if we use body-mind trainings from the ancient times and apply them to the current life-on-Earth context. The good old Kumbaya approach will not take us there anymore. We have to lift ourselves up to the complex level of challenges and wisdom — treasure places like this have everything we need. It's up to us to decide and do it...all is here for the taking!

- I wish you all an enthusiastic, inquisitive frame of mind for growing in this way. Test every technique and creed as gold, and you can nest life changes and the heart of gold, turning the wheel anywhere, anytime. Plant the seed of bodhicitta in the well-plowed ground of a mind that has been fertilized with loving-kindness and moistened with compassion!

Spasibo.

— *Vladan Mijatovic Zivojnic*