

What's a Buddhist to Do?

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What is a Buddhist to do in December?

It is probably difficult for folks to remember in the midst of the commercial Christmas hype, the sales, and songs on the radio and the shows on TV some of which began before Thanksgiving, to remember that we Buddhists have a very important Holiday in December.

On December 8th we celebrate Bodhi Day, the day on which Siddhartha Gautama awakened to Enlightenment and became the Sage of the Shakya Clan or the Shakyamuni Buddha.

After lifetimes of preparation and six years of intensive practice as a monk, he achieved his goal of Enlightenment. He was 35 years old.

Siddhartha's accomplishment was not only significant for him but it was also significant for each of us. Through his teaching activity he let us know the ways for us to lessen or even go beyond the sufferings of this world. He spent the rest of his life, 45 years, up until the moment of his death, teaching us ways in which we too can alleviate our suffering in this human existence and live joyously through his Dharma (teachings). Yes, I said joyously!

We must remember that the Shakyamuni Buddha was not under any obligation to teach. He had reached his goal, he had the answers to his questions. He had moved beyond the world of suffering and sorrow. He now had access to the Infinite Wisdom/Compassion of Enlightenment. This being the case he could have just spent the rest of his physical existence exploring his Enlightenment, however, he also realized that there were those persons that were close to attaining Enlightenment and those who were struggling to alleviate their suffering in both the monastic and lay communities. He could not forget those of us who were still suffering and not even knowing why. The Buddha Dharma (teachings) can afford us the opportunity to understand our own natures and the nature of this life we are living. These understandings, in themselves, can be a source of great hope, joy and gratitude.

Siddhartha's Enlightenment is indeed a reason to celebrate, how you do it though, as an individual or as a family, is up to you. I hope that going to the temple will be part of that celebration.

"But Sensei, what about Christmas"? Well, as you no doubt know, Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth who was the compassionate teacher of the Christian faith. It is celebrated by Christians all over the world. Christmas is also celebrated by folks of other faiths and/or folks who are not particularly religious at all.

I think what attracts people to this holiday is the spirit of the day. It is a family type holiday. Families who follow the Christian faith, and those who do not, seem to make an effort to come together to share this time during which they can acknowledge and

express their love and gratitude to the members of their families, friends, co-workers, business clients and the people who serve us day in and day out.

In other words it is an opportunity to acknowledge the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies in which we live. Whether this is done with a gift, a card, or just a cheerful greeting, such things can make a person's day a little brighter. So you can wish your fellow Buddhists a Happy Bodhi Day, a Merry Christmas, to our Christian friends and everyone, a Happy Hanukkah to our Jewish friends and a Happy Kwanzaa to our African American friends.

Do not be afraid to share the joy of this season with others. We should not ignore or overlook such an opportunity.

As far as Jesus is concerned, one of my sensei's observations was, "There is nothing wrong with observing the birth of a great religious leader". If you wish to celebrate Christmas, do so respectfully and with aloha.

So, Happy Bodhi Day, Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa to all our friends and neighbors and a very Happy New Year to us all.

Namoamidabutsu
Thank you