

Ministers Message Aug 2019

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Where do you find the Buddha Dharma?

How would you answer that simple question? Some folks would say, "The sutras." Some would say "The temple." Some would say "The Three Treasures." We love to categorize things don't we and have everything in its proper place? Maybe I should have asked where you find the truth or proof of the Buddha Dharma. I suppose there are as many answers as there are Buddhists, and most likely, they'd all be right in their answers.

When I reflect on such questions I end up with an answer I don't think I expected but it becomes more apparent as I age.

When the Shakyamuni Buddha was challenged by scholars as to what he taught one of his answers was "suffering and the alleviation of suffering." On the face of it, it sounds pretty depressing if you leave it at that. The suffering the Buddha was referring to was the suffering of human beings, us. The word suffering comes with a lot of weight to it. We usually think of it in major terms, such as earthquake, floods, hurricanes or tornadoes and death. To be sure those do produce great suffering. Maybe it is a conditioning of the media who usually looks for weighty stories like that. Some people object to the use of the word for that very reason. If we limit the definition of the work to those events, I could understand their objection. That really would be depressing.

Suffering is a vast topic if you really look at it. Some ministers, when referring to the suffering of human existence, will use words like dissatisfaction or unsatisfactory or unfulfilling or even as a bumpy road (used mostly for children). There are times, usually on my day off, when I misplace my car keys when I want to go someplace. I go through the process of asking the last person who saw them, which is myself. "When did I last see them, what was I doing when I last saw or used them, what was I wearing?" I got in the house so they must be here right? As I do this I am thinking, "Oh no, am I going to have to change my plans?" Now keep in mind, my keys are not lost, they are exactly where I left them. I just don't know where that is. So I walk around the house until I stumble upon them and there they are.

When I was working for BDK Suddhata Hawaii on O'ahu I had a couple of dear friends who came out to Hawaii from Colorado so I took some time to show them around. We went up to the Pali look out which is a pretty spectacular scene. At the time BDK had an old Ford station wagon for deliveries etc. and I had been driving it for a few years so there wasn't anything strange about it. It was an older model but it did the job asked of it. We got up there, got out of the car after which I promptly lock the keys in the car. I could not believe I did that. It was

the first time after years of driving that car. Thanks only to the kindness of others I was able to retrieve my keys, but boy, was I embarrassed.

Fortunately my present car tells me when I leave the keys in the ignition, that is, if I pay attention.

When I was going to Kap'iolani Community College on O'ahu I got a job in the cafeteria so I could get supplies for classes. I was happy to get the job but as it turned out, I had to make sandwiches with the two things I never developed a taste for: tuna fish and egg salad. Ugh, hundreds of tuna fish salad and egg salad sandwiches every day.

I had to take algebra as a core subject and although I never cared for math that much, I thought, as an adult I could do it. I kind of surprised myself because I got pretty good doing the different problems for homework. Problem was, and I have no idea why, I couldn't successfully test in it. Weird huh? It made no sense to me at all and although I tried over and over again I couldn't do it. I finally had to take a logic class in place of it. Frustrating!

Of course, there were other times that were not as easy to deal with. While I was in Viet Nam, my Grandmother died. This was my father's mother. Because I was in a war zone there was nothing I could do to get back there for the funeral. She was very dear to me and I miss her today. I wasn't the only one to receive bad news while I was over there. A young man I met, who hadn't been married too long ago, received what was called a "Dear John" letter from his wife. I think these letters were named in the second world war. It was usually a letter from a wife or girlfriend telling her husband or boyfriend that she had fallen in love with someone new and that their relationship was over. Again, there was nothing he could do to get home to deal with the situation. About the only troops that could go home from a war zone were the ones who were the last surviving son of a family. That person would be taken home and released from service.

When my first wife and I finalized our divorce the end of 1965, there were 2 young children put in the custody of their mother. January of 1966 I was shipped out to Vietnam. During the year of finalization my ex met someone new and ultimately married after our divorce. I don't remember how long I was in country when I got a letter from my ex asking me to allow her new husband to adopt our children. I know she had the welfare of the children in mind but I could have done without her request while I was in Vietnam.

Now, don't think that my life has been all doom and gloom because there have been many good times and people in my life for which I am deeply grateful but when you throw in the

reality of impermanence and change into the mix it kind of puts limitations on things both good and bad. So, what are we to do?

As Buddhists we have a unique advantage in the Dharma which tells us of the reality of this existence. Like it or not, there is suffering of all kinds in this life just as there is happiness, from the miniscule to the gigantic. That's a fact. You can accept this or not, it's up to you. It's not going to change the truth. Knowing and realizing the truth make life a bit easier to deal with. There is a Zen koan that goes, "pain make you think, thinking makes you wise, wisdom..... the student has to find the ending of which there are probably many, but the one I know is "wisdom makes life bearable."

I remember a saying that goes, I think, "life is hard, suffering is optional."

So, where do I find the dharma? Everywhere.

Namoamidabutsu