

Interdependence
August 28, 2016
Carol Valentine

Think of this as a continuation of last week's dharma talk. I spoke about how we need to be careful with our words and our actions with others. I mentioned Interdependence, a main concept in Buddhism; we are never in this all by ourselves, we always are affected by others and have an effect on those around us. This is as true for all of life as it is true for our temple. Dr. Mark Unno, in an article from the Buddhist Study Center newsletter, wrote, "Life is about the journey. It's about how we all live at the intersection of each other's lives and actions and how we must do the best that [we] can."

Life is not a solo adventure, no matter what we think. We are never in this life on our own, unless maybe we are living "off the grid" somewhere, with no electricity, no water service, no grocery store and (oh my goodness!) no internet. But yet, even "off the grid" people still need others . . . the animals they must hunt for food, the maker of the tools they use in their life, even the manufacturers of the clothing they wear. No one survives alone without the help of others, even if we think we do. No matter how much we may say "I'm fine on my own . . . I don't need anyone," It isn't true. We all need each other, whether we are on the giving side of the equation or the receiving side of the equation.

Think about the Olympics, which were just held in Rio. The Olympics are a great example of the interdependence of so many people. Think about these sports, how interdependent they are: soccer, synchronized swimming, relay events, water polo, team rowing. These events are team events so the interdependence is obvious. If the teams don't cooperate and play together they will lose for sure. But what about those events that are individual sports? I checked online and found out that about 80% of the Olympic events are individual sports. Think about individual sports like gymnastics, fencing, archery, judo. Are the participants all on their own, with no assistance from anyone else? Not by a long shot. Think about how many people helped the gold medal gymnast Simon Biles achieve her goal. I can only guess at the number . . . there are obvious ones, like her parents, her coaches and the gyms that she trained in. Think about the costumes, the equipment, the chalk, and so many things I have no clue about. Beyond the obvious, there are many, many people behind each and every Olympic participant, whether they are a gold medal winner or in 30th place.

Even people in sports know how much their success depends on others. Recently there were inductions into the Football Hall of Fame and the Baseball Hall of Fame. In football, Brett Farve was one of the inductees. As he talked, he mentioned all of the people in his life that had helped him, from coaches to teammates to friends and family. Many of the people mentioned were people I had never heard of, just simple people but important ones in Brett Farve's life. In baseball, one of the inductees, Ken Griffey, Jr., displayed the same thoughts. He thanked all of the people who had helped

in his career, some of them far in the past but nevertheless important to him. All of the inductees did the same thing, expressing their thanks for the people in their lives who helped them and who believed in them. These people are the best in their sports yet they are very aware that they did not achieve their fame by themselves. They gratefully acknowledge their need for others in their lives and the important part that interdependence plays in their lives. They know we all need each other to accomplish anything in life. We are all the same. We need each other, we need cooperation, we need to help each other as often as we can.

As we are aware, it seems easier to help those we know or those we can relate to, but oneness in Buddhism is about all of us, regardless of who we are. Diversity may bring struggles and difficulties, but in diversity, we find strength. Diversity is a gift, not a problem. I discovered a video on YouTube called "Love Has No Labels." It talks about diversity in a better way than I can, expressing the idea that we should love and embrace diversity. By the way, the man doing the speaking is John Cena, from the WWE (that stands for the World Wrestling Entertainment). Although he has made part of his living as a pro wrestler, he has also granted over 500 wishes for children through the Make-A-Wish Foundation. How's that for not judging a person by only their appearance? Surprised me!

Check out the YouTube site: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0MdK8hBkR3s>

As I have thought about interdependence I realize that it also contains other significant Buddhist concepts, those of compassion and gratitude. When I think of compassion, I think of Dana (selfless giving), one of the 6 Paramitas. If we are compassionate then we think of others and try to help others, without superficial restrictions. But, look at this another way. If we are compassionate and we reach out to others, there must be someone to receive the compassion. Makes sense, right? But think about the reverse. If someone shows us compassion (offering to help us with packages, offering to give us a ride), what is our usual first reaction? "Oh, no thank you. I can manage." How many of us have done this? I'll admit that I have, thinking about how independent I am. Superwoman! I can do it all! NOT. Seriously, if people are offering help, support and compassion and we reject their efforts, then we are denying their offer of dana, we are denying their compassion. I don't think we actually mean to say that when we turn down an offer, but it can be seen in that way. If someone is giving (dana) then there must be someone receiving or it is useless. Interdependence truly is about being there for each other, creating situations for "win-win" not "win-lose." Let's be sure we are gracious whether we are giving or receiving. The Dalai Lama called this "wise selfish; seeing that our own well-being lies in everybody's welfare, in being compassionate."

One example of interdependence is what has been happening these past two weeks in Louisiana with the floods. People who were not affected helped those who were devastated by the floods. They helped strangers escape their homes in boats, they helped shovel out their homes after the flood waters receded, stepping up to help just because it was the right thing to do. They didn't stop to ask them where they were

from or what church they attended, they just helped in any way they could. The same could be said for the earthquake in Italy or the tornadoes in the Midwest. People help each other because it is the right thing to do.

I want to leave you with two thoughts:

“Be the reason someone smiles today.”

And words from the Buddha:

“Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle, and the life of the candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared.”