

WHAT ARE YOU DOING

And Other Buddha's Dharma Dances



Dick Dorworth

This book is filled with perspectives of what it means to be a modern engaged Buddhist in the 21st century, encouraging and hopefully helping the world to walk the Eightfold Noble Path.

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? And Other Buddha's Dharma Dances

By Dick Dorworth

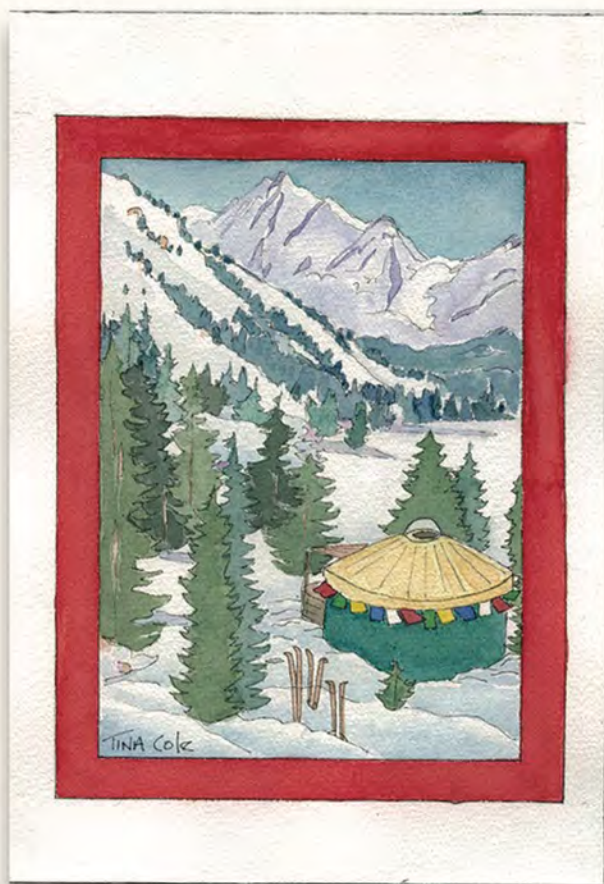
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PRINT ISBN: 978-1-64718-779-8

EPUB ISBN: 978-1-64718-780-4

MOBI ISBN: 978-1-64718-781-1

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Dorworth, Dick

WHAT ARE YOU DOING? And Other Buddha's Dharma Dances by

Dick Dorworth

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020914200

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SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN WHEN YOU LET GO

“You do not have to change to awaken, you need only awaken to change.”

Adyashanti

‘Awaken to change’ is a useful thought to keep in mind as every instant of our lives change appears. We are not always aware of those changes, and, all too often, not being awake to change causes suffering. Expecting things not to change is what Buddhists know as attachment. One way to express the dilemma of our relationship to change is the quip: “Let go or be dragged.”

The dharma is not going to stop because of change. Change is the dharma, and the more awake we can be to change the less suffering there will be. Those who are awake to the change from pleasure to pain, happiness to sadness, health to sickness, youth to old age without trying to hang on to pleasure/happiness/health/youth are awake to changing. From one perspective, our practice began about 2500 years ago when Buddha decided to sit under a bodhi tree until he got it right, whatever ‘it’ was. There have been a lot of changes, suffering and awakening between Buddha’s sitting under the bodhi tree and our most recent sitting, and even that significant event more than 2000 years ago was not the beginning. It was part of the change.

From another, much closer perspective, each of our individual practices, whether began a day or fifty years ago, has been filled with change, both ignored and awakened to. All of it is part of the dharma, part of the awakening. During that time

some people dropped out of the practice, others expanded theirs' both within the sangha and on their own, though, of course, even solitary monks and nuns in the caves of remote mountains are never entirely on their own as they awaken to change.

My old friend Lito Tejada Flores has written a lovely book titled: *Four Noble Truths, Almost Buddhist Poems*, which ends with this:

*Four Noble Truths – OK, I think I get it, but
why noble? Why not four simple truths?
They do seem pretty basic, don't they?
Who can argue with the Buddha? Not me,*

*not you. Buddhism came afterward, didn't it?
Noble came afterward. Four simple truths
that (maybe) add up to one. Pogo said it,
I think the Buddha would have agreed:*

*"We have seen the enemy, and he is us."
We are the source of our own suffering,
our discontent. The harder we cling*

*to what we think we want, the worse
we feel, the harder it is to let go.
Four simple truths in one? Let go?*

END

MY FIRST BUDDHA

I attended high school in Reno, Nevada in the 1950s. My friends (most of them one to three years older) were not exemplars of the professed standards of proper citizens in that time and place. We drank copious amounts of alcohol, usually in the form of beer, years before any of us were legal drinking age (21) and drove cars at high rates of speed (there was no speed limit on much of Nevada highways in the '50s), often at the same time. From our perspective the adult world, which disapproved of such teen-age behavior, appeared laced with phonies who had power over our lives without earning our respect or approval, and we retaliated as best we could without completely destroying their respect and approval of us. We had a fair share of success in keeping the deference and (literal) support of the adult world, in part because there was a great deal of compassion and care mixed in with the phoniness and in part because our adolescent culture had learned about excessive drinking and dangerous driving directly from our parents.

That is, the professed standards of society were professed but not always practiced by the same adults who demanded their children both believe in and practice the unpracticed professed. This basic adult/adolescent relationship, of course, extended far beyond the activities of drinking alcohol and driving automobiles, and more than 60 years later this liaison does not seem to me to have changed in America. I was middle-aged before being able to recognize and name the anger and even rage that ran just under (usually) the surface of our daily lives as teenagers and, it seems to me in retrospect, our parents. I don't

pretend to speak for my buddies, but angst, anger and aggression fueled much of my teen-age social relationships at least as much as good-will, happiness and fulfillment. Fortunately, I had a regular practice of being in the mountains to ski, hike, swim in their lakes and rivers and listen to wind in the pines. Even as a young, irresponsible punk, mountains showed me there was another aspect to life besides anger.

Another piece of good fortune came my way during one of our favorite drinking excursions out of town. We often drove the 26 miles from Reno to Virginia City, the tourist Mecca where a hundred years earlier the Comstock Lode of silver had been discovered. The Comstock financed the last year of the American Civil War and garnered Nevada statehood into the Union and added three members to the House of Representatives which assured Abraham Lincoln the Congressional control he needed to finish the war and end legal slavery. Virginia City had several bars that served beer to anyone with the cash to pay, no matter their age. We loved our party times there and I particularly relished the inebriated high speed drives down the 12 miles of steep, curvy Geiger Grade highway back to Washoe Valley and home.

One sunny Virginia City summer bar hopping afternoon when I was 15 or 16 and strolling along the Main Street boardwalk in front of its saloons, restaurants and a wide range of tourist shops, an 18 inch high ceramic statue of Buddha's head in the window of a 2nd hand store stopped me in my tracks. For reasons I can speculate upon but never understand nor need to, the sight of the calm demeanor in that face riveted me. It seems to me in retrospect that the Buddha head may well have been a relic from one of the Chinese workers who inhabited Virginia City and nearby environs in the 19th century and were the first to bring Buddhism to America. Nearby Dayton was originally referred to as Chinatown because of its large population of

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Chinese who suffered brutal and violent discrimination from the dominant racist culture, and Buddhism helped them cope with such oppression. I don't remember if I knew anything about Buddha or Buddhism (I think not), but that statue spoke to me in a way that nothing and nobody else ever had. It said, "Take me with you." I immediately went into the store, bought the Buddha head for what could not have been much money and took it home. I spray painted it gold for reasons I don't remember and set it on the dresser in my bedroom next to the phonograph player and stacks of records of my favorite music of the time-----Jazz: Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, Dizzy Gillespie, Stan Getz, Nat King Cole, Chet Baker, Lionel Hampton, Billie Holiday and Jazz at the Philharmonic-----and Rock and Roll: Bill Haley, Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Les Paul and Mary Ford, Fats Domino and Little Richard, among others. I often sat on my bed listening to the artistry of those wonderful musicians expressing the angst and anger and heartbreak and joy and complexity of the world we all lived in while looking at the calm, kind, fearless face of Buddha. Even as a teenager I intuited that what I was hearing and seeing were the same, though my thinking brain, moving as fast as Charlie Parker's fingers on his saxophone or Les Paul's along his guitar, could not make the step of intellectual connection to the tranquility of my first Buddha. One of my all time favorite albums was Benny Goodman's Carnegie Hall Concert of January 16, 1938, especially the more than 13 minute version of "Sing Sing Sing, which I likely listened to more than any other single piece of music. One evening while staring at the Buddha head the amazing crescendo climax ending of "Sing Sing Sing" stopped my racing mind with one of those all things are connected thoughts that, unlike most of the others, has never gone away: the certainty or at least concept (sic) that I was conceived in concert (sic) with that crescendo climax ending, as I was born

exactly nine months later on October 16, 1938. There were other Buddha head teachings, but that gives the reader an idea.

After high school I attended one semester at the university before fleeing to the mountains of Colorado to ski (in large part because of skiing it took 7 ½ years for me to finish my undergraduate degree), and my family moved from a house into a smaller, more convenient apartment in Reno. I don't remember what became of the gold painted ceramic statue of Buddha's head, but assume it became a downsizing casualty to the town dump or another 2nd hand store. I hope it found a good home and continued (and continues) its teachings which many years later I realized had never left me, though it would be more than 30 years before I began to study and practice Soto Zen. Ten years after high school the '60s were in full swing orbit and I embraced its sex, drugs and rock and roll ethos, especially the psychedelics, with the same if more refined zeal that we used in high school to rebel against the unpracticed professed. During that era the ideas of Timothy Leary, Ram Dass, Ken Kesey and Meher Baba joined the already familiar Buddhist tinged ones of Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac in re-directing the consciousness of me and a mostly different group of friends to a deeper, more compassionate and nuanced relationship and understanding of dealing with the societal and personal unpracticed professed. This included a bit of Meher Baba inspired meditation followed by a few years of daily Transcendental Meditation into the early 1970s which ended after a divorce from my wife and meditation partner. Though it would have been healthier in the long run to have persevered, sitting without my sitting partner after the divorce filled me with pain, resentment and sadness and I stopped meditating.

In 1987 I quit the use of all the recreational drugs, including alcohol, my reliable and destructive companions for all but the first few years of life. Less than two years later I began a Soto

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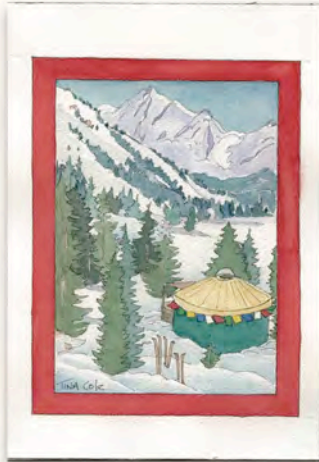
Zen practice that continues to be central to my life.....all because a ceramic Buddha head caught the eye of an inebriated 15 year old boy through the window of a 2nd hand store and said, "Take me with you." Today (right now) a 3 inch tall seated ceramic maroon Buddha sits on my desk as I write these words and listen to the Grateful Dead play "Not Fade Away."

Never.

END

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