

Being completely human – secular buddhism, and beyond

An eight-part course using recorded talks by Stephen Batchelor & Roshi Joan Halifax given at Upaya Zen Center, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA, 25 through 29 March 2015

Discussion 6 of 8

Meeting 6: Part 9 (52:21) Stephen Batchelor and Joan Halifax; Q & A & The third great vow

1. In response to the question on ‘original Buddhism’, Batchelor remarks that the *theravada* tradition was founded in the fifth century of the common era by Buddhaghosa and that *theravada* is a reflection of the early teachings filtered through the *Abhidharma*. In a web search, read through at least two genealogies of *theravada*. Do you have any thoughts on the absence of Buddhaghosa’s name as a principal (as opposed to a later commentator) in the sources that you read?
2. In a web search, read through at least two entries on *Abhidharma*. What reason does Batchelor offer for taking the position that he’s ‘not interested in *theravada* buddhism or *mahayana* buddhism as such’.
3. A participant commented that she would like more discussion on meditation in action: how does one engage in a principled non-reactive way in the political world. Batchelor stated that he’s frequently heard like feedback, replying that the notion that there might be a ‘Buddhist political theory that would suddenly sort the problems of the world out – I think that’s wishful thinking’. Why does Batchelor think that a Buddhist political theory is wishful thinking? If you agree and your reasons differ, or you have additional reasons, what are they? If you disagree, why?
4. Roshi Joan, responding to the same topic, remarks that practice, in the absence of direct feedback, can be a place where one can hide out; a place where one can reify delusions. She extrapolates to communities and corporations in which shared views,

values, and activities reify a common delusion. What is the point Roshi makes in her account of how Upaya Zen Center is structured, likening Upaya to a micro university?

5. Roshi Joan points out that engaged buddhism has two forces: one is related to being of service and the second, addresses issues related to structural violence. Give an example from among your own everyday actions that can be characterised as engaged buddhism. In your example, which of the two forces does this everyday action belong to – is it related to service or does it address structural violence or both?
6. What did you take from Roshi Joan's account of her experience just prior to presenting at a conference in Japan at which the Dalai Lama was also a speaker, her topic being a 'heuristic model of compassion'? When you've had a chance to perform on similar stage, what was your experience? How did you profit from your success and/or your failure?
7. Translated literally from Korean, the third vow reads 'dharma gates are without number, I vow to study them'. In what two ways can this vow be understood? Contrast the two understandings.
8. How is it that emptiness, as characterised by Batchelor, is a positive aspect of experience, an aspect of the path?
9. What is the advice Roshi offers participants following on her statement that in zen, every moment is a dharma door, i.e. every moment is a vehicle for awakening?
10. Compare the objectives of the third great vow with that of the third task, noting any correspondences and/or their lack:
 - reality is boundless, I vow to perceive it
 - ceasing is to be experienced