

Resting in the Dark, Awakened in the Light:
Holiday Evening Vespers Worship Series

Awakening: The Enlightenment of Buddha

December 5th, 2012

7:00pm, Sanctuary

All Souls Church, Unitarian

Led by Abbey Tennis, Intern Minister

Welcome & Chalice Lighting:

In this season of restful dark and awakening light, you are welcome here.

Whoever you are, whomever you love, whatever your hopes, yearnings, and expectations, you welcome here.

Tonight, we enter this Sanctuary in honor of the holiday known to many Buddhists around the world as “Bodhi Day.” Bodhi Day, celebrated by Zen Buddhists on December 8th, commemorates the day when the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, reached enlightenment. According to tradition, after many years of spiritual searching, Siddhartha sat down under the sacred fig tree, the Bodhi tree, and began to meditate. He vowed to meditate until he found the root of suffering and the path to liberation.

Throughout the night, as Siddhartha sunk deeper into his meditation, he discovered the cycle of rebirth, the law of Karma, and the Four Noble Truths. Finally, as the morning star rose in the sky at dawn, Siddhartha reached Enlightenment, and became the Buddha, or the Awakened One. He then spend the remainder of his life helping others to also reach Enlightenment.

This time of year, Buddhists around the world celebrate the Buddha’s attaining Enlightenment through meditation, study, chanting, and performing kind acts towards other beings.

Bodhi Day reminds us all to squarely face the challenges of our lives, and to look within for the source of our liberation. While we look inward, though, we are also reminded to look outward; to perform kind acts towards others; to steep our every action in compassion.

Tonight, may we heed those reminders.

May the darkness recall our minds to contemplation.

May the lit candles recall our hearts to the ever-present awakenings of our lives.

As we join together in singing meditation, may we sink deeply into the core of our being.

May we each face the reality within us.

May we seek liberation in the peace of this space.

And when we go forth from this Sanctuary, may we bring the peace within us out into the world through our kindness towards others.

Our worship service tonight mirrors the prayer services of the Taizé Community in France. Founded in 1940 to promote peace and justice through prayer and meditation, the Taizé Community continues to be a site of spiritual pilgrimage for over a hundred thousand people every year. Taizé music is sung repetitively and meditatively. The singers and musicians up front will begin each song and sing it over and over for a time. You are encouraged to join in singing as you get a feel for the music, and allow the music to sink deeper into your soul with each repetition.

As we prepare to light our chalice, I invite you to settle into your body. Make yourself comfortable. Take a deep breath. [BREATH] Take another. [BREATH] Let yourself arrive, and open your spirit to this sacred time.

Chalice Lighting

Come we now out of the darkness of our unknowing

Annie Foerster

Come we now out of the darkness of our unknowing

and the dusk of our dreaming;

Come we now from far places.

Come we now into the twilight of our awakening

and the reflection of our gathering.

Come we now all together.

We bring, unilluminated, our dark caves of doubting;

We seek, unbedazzled, the clear light of understanding.

May the sparks of our joining kindle our resolve,

brighten our spirits, reflect our love,

and unshadow our days.

Come we now; enter the dawning.

Reading:

Dukkha, they say - Elizabeth Tarbox

"Dukkha," they say. The Buddhists say, "All is dukkha." It is hard to translate, they tell us. It means literally "suffering" but the feeling of dukkha is closer to impermanence. The fact of impermanence is central to the Buddhist path to nirvana, enlightenment.

Dukkha. All is impermanence. Nothing lasts. I thought of that yesterday, watching leaves come down in a shower, and the smell of the rotting ones going back into the earth. Leaf to [HUE-muhs] and back to earth to nourish the roots of the mother tree. The crows crying as the leaves fall and their nests are exposed: dukkha . . . all is impermanence.

And life goes on, and people who were with us last year at this time have died, all souls pass on, all is dukkha, nothing lasts.

The path to enlightenment is understanding, accepting impermanence to the point where we no longer struggle against it. That is the way of the Buddha. But here in the West we search for that which is permanent, even as we live with the death of all things, all people. We search for a sure footing on the path strewn with fallen leaves; we notice the buds of next year's growth tight-curved and waiting; we hold on to the things we can count on -- our church, our community, our memories of those who died before us, our love and hope, and the search for certainty in a world that is dukkha.

God of creation, God of today -- let us find each other in a changing world; let us experience love as something which exists, a possibility which is. Let us know that we are alive and being renewed miraculously each second; that the impermanence gives to life its freshness and surprise; that our memories of yesterday and our expectations of tomorrow make now a cherished, precious, eternal moment.

Silent Meditation:

Following our singing of Spirit of Life, I invite you into an extended period of silent meditation.

(5 Minutes of silence)

Invitation to Candles:

We have come to the time in our service where I invite you into individual spiritual practice. If walking meditation is your practice, you are invited to get up and move about the sanctuary.

If you would like to light candles to represent joys, sorrows, hopes, or intentions tonight, you are invited up to the altar space. There are candles on all three levels of the altar, and chairs and cushions for you to sit on, if you wish to spend some time at the altar in meditation or prayer.

Take your time.

The singing will continue.

Closing Prayer:

At the end of the service, you are all invited to Pierce Hall, out the doors to my left and around the corner, for a time of socializing and light refreshments following the service.

Our Closing Prayer is adapted From: **Night Prayer: A New Zealand Prayer Book; 1989**

It is night.

The night is for stillness.
Let us be still in the presence of Holiness.

It is night after a long day.
What has been done has been done;
what has not be done has not been done;
let it be.

The night is dark.
Let our fears of the darkness of the world and of our own lives
rest in You.

The night is quiet.
Let the quietness of Your peace enfold us,
all dear to us,
and all who have no peace.

The night heralds the dawn.
Let us look expectantly to a new day,
new joys,
new possibilities.

Together, we pray.

Benediction:

Please Rise in Body or Spirit and join hands with those around you -

On the day the Buddha died, he said to his followers:

Be ye lamps unto yourselves
Be your own confidence
Hold to the truth within yourselves
As to the only lamp.

May it be so; go in peace.