

# Buddha's Delight, Part 2

Tue, 4/12 1:02PM 50:30

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

buddhism, monks, buddhists, religion, people, noble truths, nuns, buddhist monks, buddha, buddhist, life, nerds, world religions, novices, called, eightfold path, thailand, nirvana, texts, tom

## SPEAKERS

Dr. Thomas Borchert, Megan Goodwin, Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst

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Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:17

This is Keeping It 101, a killjoy's introduction to religion podcast. For 2021-2022, our work is made possible through a Public Humanities Fellowship from the University of Vermont's Humanities Center. We're grateful to live, teach, and record on the current, ancestral, and unceded lands of the Abenaki, Wabenaki, and Aucocisco peoples. As always, you can find material ways to support indigenous communities on our website.



Megan Goodwin 00:39

What's up nerds? Hi, hello, I'm Megan Goodwin, a scholar of American religions, race, and gender.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:45

Hi, hello, I'm Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst, a historian of religion, Islam, race and racialization, and South Asia. Well, well, well, we meet again, for the first time, for the last time, Megan.



Megan Goodwin 00:56

And still, your Schwartz is as big as mine!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 00:59

Bigger, even, because today, we're ordering Buddha's Delight number two, and I'm just too excited to even.





Megan Goodwin 01:06

Last time, we ordered Buddha's Delight number one and we overwhelmed our nerds with Dr. Yujing Chen, and varieties of Buddhism and how it changes from place to place. AND we talked about the main theological and textual differences, like Mahayana and Theravada.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:21

And THIS time, we promise to add even MORE definitions to the mix, like, for fun! As well as another fantastic guest expert.



Megan Goodwin 01:29

Definitions ARE fun, and who's joining us today?!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 01:32

Well, as you surely know, it is my friend and colleague and current department chair, Dr. Thomas Borchert, who is just the best-- but beyond that, he's also an expert on Theravada Buddhist traditions of mainland Southeast Asia and the minorities of China, nationalism, and monastic orders. He also always has the best anecdotes (and perspective, and, like, advice, but that's neither here nor there).



Megan Goodwin 01:54

\*giggles\* We love a Tom! And we know that you will too, dear listeners. More for him later. But you know what, let's get to that later sooner! That's all we needed. A Druish princess. Funny, she doesn't look like THE LESSON PLAN!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:18

Today, nerds, it's more of the same, but also a lot different! We are still stressing plurality, we are still talking divergences, we are still interrogating how and why Buddhism has a place in the world religions model. This time, we're going to focus on well-known Buddhist ideas and then stress how that actually works (or doesn't) in real life.



Megan Goodwin 02:40

Mm. So today's thesis is par for the course: religion, STILL imperial, still stresses texts, and those facts STILL mean that what people do isn't always visible in the world religions model. Never fear! That's where we-- and Dr. Borchert-- come in.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 02:55

The 101 on today-- \*clicks tongue\* --the section where we do professor work. Megan-- as usual, here we are, trying to show that there is some coherence to religions, while also showing that there is not as much coherence as textbooks, or Wikipedia, or simple words like "Buddhism" or "religion" would have us believe.

M

Megan Goodwin 03:18

Yeah, that-- that definitely sounds like us. \*chuckles\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:20

So, so great. Well, today, it seems like a way to get at all that might be to lean into the so-called common-knowledge about Buddhism. So, I don't know about you, but when I talked about Buddhism in my intro-level comparative or South Asian religions courses, a lot of my groovy-uvie students "know" things about Buddhism. They've seen Buddha--

M

Megan Goodwin 03:46

Possibly at a garden store, like one of those cute downtown Burlington hippie shops. I mean, you know how I love a mess. This sounds delightful, if I don't say so myself! Uhhh, how about we start with the Four Noble Truths?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 03:50

Exactly, exactly! So they've seen a Buddha, or they've heard of Nirvana, and they're babies, so they don't know if that's a religion thing or a band or a t-shirt from Urban Outfitters thing-- but maybe they can recognize phrases like "Four Noble Truths," or "Eight-fold Path" or "monk." Which is to say that I propose we tackle those words that are familiar, but not quite understood, and then mess 'em up with our usual brand of complicating, complexifying facts, figures, and maybe theories. Alright, fine. Do you want to join a jump in?

M

Megan Goodwin 04:32

Sure! Yeah. Let's swim in truths. Let's just keep swimming. Yes! The Four Noble Truths-- \*Secret Word of the Day!\* are: suffering... is in innate characteristic of existence in the realm of samsara, or rebirth. So, basically, life is suffering and not just life, because we have to keep coming back to it. Suffering comes from craving, or attachment, or desire. You can end suffering by letting go of craving or attachment or desire, and the way that you do that is through the Noble Eightfold Path. So, traditionally and texturally, Buddhists see the Four Noble Truths as the first teachings of the Buddha, capital "B," and are considered the most important teachings.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:24

Okay. I think it's important to say that this is important popularly-- like, the ideas about Four Noble Truths show up in cultural spaces and ideas and media, and they're textual.

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Megan Goodwin 05:38

Mhm, mhm.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 05:38

But as Dr. Chen told us in the last episode, and as Dr. Borchert is going to tell us later on in this episode, Buddhists regularly identify as Buddhists without being rigidly attuned to texts, or even quoting these Four Noble Truths in, like, their daily life.

M

Megan Goodwin 05:53

Mhm. Absolutely! But the thing is, in the world religions model we're stuck with texts. \*sighs\* And one of the most textual things about the world religions model is ALSO to prioritize origins, and early writings, and the so-called "fundamentals" of a religion. Which means that "Four Noble Truths" gets repeated a lot, gets featured heavily in textbooks about Buddhas, the encyclopedia pages. Here's the thing, though, Ilyse. Knowing this textual list of four things doesn't actually tell us how Buddhists make sense of these truths, how they show up in people's lives, how they affect how they live, or, like, why-- beyond labeling the first teachings of the Buddha-- why the Four Noble Truths would, like, matter to Buddhists.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:35

So... so h-h-how do the Four Noble Truths show up? Because they're in... they're in every textbook I've ever perused.

M

Megan Goodwin 06:44

Uh huh, uh huh. Yeah!



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 06:44

They're often, like, on the first page of, like, pop-Buddhism books... \*groans\*

M

Megan Goodwin 06:50

Yep. Yep. Yeah, and like, let's not dismiss the part where the Four Noble Truths are an easy test question. I... So, anyway. I'm gonna cheat and move us to the Eightfold Path, because that sort of answers your question.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:05

I'm sorry. I-I'll allow this... \*blows raspberry\* but that's a double term word score in our audible scrabble game, I just now made up, because \*I\* said, "What are the Four Noble Truths?" and you said, "What about Eightfold Path?"



Megan Goodwin 07:17

Yes, I did.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:17

So, there's like a math, or a factorial, or, like, a square root thing happening here, and I'm gonna give you the leeway, but, girl, you better get back to where we're going!



Megan Goodwin 07:28

It's a classic misdirect, but stick with me. You're not wrong, you're not wrong. Okay. So, I am going to get us back to where we are going! But right there, right in the Four Noble Truths, it says that the way to break suffering and end the cycle of rebirth, samsara, is to follow the Eightfold Path. So, it's not even cheating. So there. While I am no Buddhism expert, it's pretty clear to me that this is one of the places we'll find the "what Buddhists do" stuff you know I'm craving.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:52

Well, if that's not a punt-- alright, I got you.



Megan Goodwin 07:56

Thank you.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 07:56

The Eightfold Path-- \*Secret Word of the Day!\* --is, yes, listed within the Four Noble Truths, and to be really basic, they are the way that you-- a Buddhist, here-- would go from the regular, trapped, endlessly reborn, to freed from samsara, or the cycles of rebirth, to nirvana, or nibbana, the liberation from this cycle. And that's assuming that Buddhists are obsessed with this-- which, as Dr. Borchert will tell us later, that's debatable-- but let's go with the textbook for a second. Usually, this Eightfold Path is described as right view, right resolve, right speech,

right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right union. And you can't tell, but I held up all of my fingers for all eight, and what's funnier there is that I wrote that in the script and didn't read ahead and actually held up all of my fingers.



Megan Goodwin 08:19

Okay! \*laughs\*



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:48

Famously productive for an audio medium.



Megan Goodwin 08:51

Sure it, sure it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 08:52

sure as insurance, but that seems simple. Right? Right View, right. Resolve right speech. Simple enough.



Megan Goodwin 08:57

I like all the alliteration. I like the repetition. This seems easy and straightforward, except what actually is right resolve or right speech. How do I know if I'm doing it? I know, I often do not act right. So I also have several questions. With regard to write conduct. I am wondering if this allegedly simple list is maybe not actually simple at all.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 09:22

Yeah. I also have questions for you about write costs. The thing about simple is that it usually takes a lot of work to make it look so simple, as like a universal truth perhaps. As we've seen it in other religious traditions so far in this mega season. Simple usually means there's a billion ways people make sense of something deceptively easy in their real messy ass life. Yeah, yeah. So So Okay, let's see if we can flesh out what these eight deceptively allegedly proper Really not simple steps on the path might be, which to be clear means making it way more complicated.



Megan Goodwin 10:06

I knew it. I felt this catch in my bones. I knew it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:10

I guess I'm sorry. But I'm not I'm not so Okay. Remember in the last episode, we talked about different kinds of Buddhism, like Zen or puroland or Theravada?



Megan Goodwin 10:19

I do I do. But in case you dear nerds do not remember we basically said that, but as I'm like all other religions is an umbrella term. And there's all sorts of smaller units within that big category, ways that Buddhists organize themselves around teachings around priorities around textual canon, and of course, around Region and Language. Like we might not expect to find certain forms of Chinese Buddhism to be widespread and Oh, Japan. Yeah, the check



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 10:43

the checks out, that's how culture and maps and travel and time work. So Buddhism has all these ways of approaching itself or let's say the eightfold path here was equally complicated histories and internal debates, which means



Megan Goodwin 11:01

no, okay, so you're gonna say that the way you get the Four Noble Truths is dependent upon how you do the eightfold path, which is itself dependent on the ways you might be a Buddhist?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 11:15

Is that a real question? Because I'm not sure how to answer that. It sounds like you're accusing me but also I'm guilty, and I don't know how to proceed. There's a ton to say here. Ah, so adding to our game of misdirection. Let's talk about monks and nuns, what monks and nuns, what, monks and nuns, in part because of our guest experts. Dr. Chen from last episode is a Mahayana Buddhist nun. And Dr. Boucher researches Buddhist monks in Thailand, this formal entering onto the path, the eightfold path with formal training and texts and rule following but also as we'll hear just in a little bit, with so many workarounds and interpretations and things that seem frankly not at all like rule following All right, okay.



Megan Goodwin 12:07

monks and nuns sounds like some Christianity and maybe especially Catholicism and aren't we like violating our let's not use Christian words to explain non Christian traditions thing? Um,



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 12:17

okay, so I'm saying monks and nuns, which are admittedly drawing on Christian and Catholic terms. If my Sanskrit holds, I believe the actual term is big shoe, which refers to folks in the

Sangha, another Sanskrit origin word that itself refers to an assembly in order a community accompany Sangha is one of those words, nerds that shows up across Asia with different meanings. But like literally in India, we use a chocolate the Congress sometimes, like but within Buddhism, it usually refers specifically to an ascetic or a monastic community. It is a formal way the Sangha for an initiate a monk or a nun that is to enter into the path. And that path looks different depending on where you are, when you are, what sort of Buddhism you follow. So even though we're saying, monk and nun, and that sounds like Catholicism, it's super, really super important for you and our nerds to hear that this does not actually look like the church at all, like zero ways, because for starters, there's no central authority. In Buddhism, there is no Pope, there is no church. Which means these monastic orders can and do vary widely and wildly, without being deviant or rogue, or frankly, even all that special, it's just different as like a factual difference.



Megan Goodwin 13:41

All right. All right. Tell me more. I am curious about what monks do since this is, in theory, our whole premise, what do the monks do? And how does that relate to what Buddhists do? Alright, I'm



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 13:53

gonna say out loud, and with feeling that at least 80% of what I know about monks comes directly from years of contact knowledge with today's guest, Dr. Boucher loves him through multiple avenues this time around. What I have learned is that monastic orders serve social roles, maybe even more so than theological ones. Okay. They are meant to be examples to their community about what a Buddhist looks like, like in a physical way, like a performative way, but also in like a ideological way. They're meant to preserve Buddhism and its doctrines which I'm using, but has taken on all sorts of flavor as the world changes even internally and externally and even within the same Sangha or Buddhist order. And the thing I've learned most from Tom is that monks serve as fields of merit, which is to say, they give the laity or non folk not in the monastic orders, opportunities to make merit to earn merit, by the practices of gifts and ALMS Giving. So in return for their material supportive gifts, monks and nuns live austere in the path of the Buddha with study or good behavior and meditation among the usual obligations and expectations of the people in the dynastic



Megan Goodwin 15:15

order. Okay, so my Catholic branches did a thing where like, they're the opposite of an occasion to sin. It's like, here's an occasion to do a good thing. And it's this month, I guess. So



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 15:25

I don't know from Catholicism. That sounds correct. I guess the answer to your question then is, like why any of this matters to mainstream non monastic Buddhists is something like this. It's a place where we see formal initiation after years sometimes, will actually that ranges but after a period of being a novice, it's a pure place where we see formal initiation into the leadership of a



community as well as how monks play around with those boundaries, which is not to call communities liberal or progressive, nor is it to call them conservative or austere necessarily, but how monks go about living within these, like ascetic communities tells us a lot about how these rules and texts can be interpreted, but also messed with, hmm, okay, I'm



Megan Goodwin 16:16

gonna need an example obviously. Alright, so how's



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 16:18

How's this, some monks and nuns have, like a regular family, they're not celibate. They're not like living lives of complete deprivation, they have a family, they have jobs, they work and exist in the world. So like, here's my job, and there's me and my monk clothes. Some initiation periods are long, maybe even lifelong, right? So you spend quite a lot of your life being a novice, then you become inducted. And then that's who you are for the rest of your life. But others are weeks, at most, like I went through the process, I've become, like, ordained. I'm out of here after 14 days. Wow. So the idea here, or what I'm trying to get at is that there's almost an expectation that you'd have lived a life before or that you live a life again, or that you live a life alongside also being a monk, radically depending on where you are, and when you are and custom. So relevant to our interests Meghan and I mean, ours like you and me, because who cares about these nerds listening? That have been a bunch of stories in the last few years about Buddhist monks who are also playing with gender norms. Most notably, Konishi Mora, from Japan, who is a drag queen, a makeup artist and a Buddhist monk, yes, who has been in the public eye for quite some time. So I've seen articles about him from as early as 2017 1617. And there's been quite a lot of features on him more recently, as both drag and Buddhism kind of come more into popular imagination. So I'll link to that in the show notes, obviously. But then similarly, there's also sorry jazz, not these who is a Thai drag queen, as well as a Theravada Buddhist monk. This isn't just like one dude in one place who has this exception. There's a few examples of these and again, they've become popular media touchstones I think because it challenges our assumption of what Buddhists and what Buddhist monks and what monks broadly and although what religious people I'm going to put this in big quotes should look like.



Megan Goodwin 18:37

Okay, like immediately obsessed with this and also remember how I slashed we learned about political unrest in Thailand last summer because we follow queens from jogger silent on Twitter. Truly, what is an internet?



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 18:49

I mean, like unclear what is an internet but think all the gods for vagina heels for real. Okay, so like drag monks chat. There's also my favorite Buddhist nun who appears on Netflix's Chef's Table Zhang Quan, who's a Korean Buddhist nun. Okay. I recommended her episode, like in the first season of the podcast, but let me tell you a little bit about more about her because I'm obsessed. So Korean temple cuisine is a whole ass establish genre of food and Korean cooking.

So I have a bunch of Korean cookbooks and each one is like okay, here's Korean food. Here's street food. Also, here's temple food. Yong Zhang Quan is a renowned chef. Like this Netflix show Chef's Table is a show about famous French Michelin starred chefs. And here they all are in her monastery, watching her shave a lotus root with rapt attention as she explained how food is more than nourishment, and how cooking and gardening and companion composting alike can be and should be meditative. So my favorite part But this whole documentary episode is when she says, I'm going to read the quote, because I'm gonna get it wrong, quote, with food, we can share and communicate our emotions. It's that mindset of sharing that is really what you're eating. There is no difference between cooking and pursuing, but it's way. All of which is to say that monks and nuns are both unique Buddhists. So like, obviously, not all but a sermon. nastic initiates. They're also in relationship to the communities they serve the ear as we find ourselves in and like they can be drag queens and celebrity chefs.

M

Megan Goodwin 20:32

That's our ad. Okay, so what I hear you saying then, is that these monastic orders are a formal way for folks to enter into the Eightfold Path and commit to things like right action, right effort, right mindfulness, so and so on. But even if when we hear monastic order, we hear something like ascetic with no ties to a public life. You're telling us that there are renowned chefs and drag queens among these initiates, which since I know you is a way for you to tell us that a maybe monastic life isn't what we think it is, and be even within the formal, sometimes rigid structure of monastic orders. There are multiple ways for Buddhists to be Buddhist and do Buddhism. Cooking as meditation isn't what I thought we would later on but hey, I learned something. I'm so glad when that happens. I guess that's



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 21:18

as good a place as any to let Dr. Boucher have his say yes, please. Dr. Thomas portrait is Professor and Chair of religion at my home base, the University of Vermont will cite his many articles and books and homework, but his expertise is on religion and politics, monastic education transnational, but it's networks and the legal systems that govern religious actors in Asia, both religious and secular. Hate it Tom.

D

Dr. Thomas Borchert 21:44

My name is Thomas portrait, and I'm an expert on religion and politics in Asia, especially about the lives of Buddhist monks in Thailand and China, the way they're educated the institutions they live in, and their space in society. I care that that folks, students, scholars, my mom, know about what I study because the religious lives of people are so much more interesting than the stripped down austere visions of Buddhist monks and novices that we often have. One thing that I wish people knew about Buddhism, people assume that Buddhists are nice people, but really, they're just people who intersect with a particular set of traditions. They don't wake up and think, How do I get to Nirvana, not even most monks or nuns, I mean, some probably do But most folks just live their lives. Being Buddhist is one aspect of people's identities, but it intersects with many more, including nationality, race and or ethnicity, gender, being a Clevelander being a bank, Kochi in etc. This doesn't make Buddhists less devout than other people, it just makes them people. There is so much diversity within Buddhist traditions. People

worship or pay their respects to different Buddhas or bodhisattvas, people view Buddha's very differently. Some of them view the the Buddha sing in a in a singular way as as a human, some of them view them as, as these transcendent beings that go beyond the human. The importance of ordained renunciations that we the folks that we normally call nuns or monks varies across the Buddhist world. In some places, they're central to the to the Buddhist community and other places not so much. The role of Buddhism in in the governance of of countries and in the, you know, in the images of nation states varies. There's just so much diversity. Buddhism has never had a central authority that enforced standards that enforced codes that enforced orthodoxies across time and space. That is a Buddhist version of the Vatican has never existed. And so significant diversity is developed over time. Let me give you an example. In Thailand, Buddhist leaders are primarily men who have, quote unquote, left home, they've gone from home into homelessness, their monks, they shaved their heads, they follow 227 precepts, which restrict their activities in certain ways, talking about when they can eat and what they can eat and how they should dress and who, who they can interact with and so forth. In Japan, but its leaders are women and men whose primary role is taking care of a community, often, but not solely in the performance of funerals, and commemorative rites for the dead. These folks who we normally call an English priests can be married, they can have children and they can drink out Hall. So you've got you've got people who are Buddhist leaders in two different countries who live radically different lives. And you can find this kind of diversity everywhere across the Buddhist world. There's not really any single holiday or ritual that all Buddhists practice or follow. There's there is a holiday called V sock, which it refers to a commemoration of the birth of the historical Buddha, his Nirvana, you know, his attaining awakening and, and also his death, which within the budget within many Buddhist traditions are viewed as having happened on the same day of the year, in the month of V sock. But, but honestly, you know, while while most Buddhist countries celebrate the guy that we call the historical Buddha, they don't do it all in the same way or on the same at the same time, even. What's interesting to me, though, is that V sock has become a much more universal holiday, having become recognized by the United Nations, and, and there are now but it's universities, particularly in Southeast Asia, that organized conferences, or to celebrate this this day. But in some ways, this is more interesting, because it's at least partly about Buddhists becoming, you know, in Thailand or in Vietnam, about about Buddhists becoming aware of how, quote unquote religions or world religions act, that you know, we can, we can see another manifestation of this in Singapore, where the government recognizes different religions as having n different ethnicities is having a holiday that is special to them. So for example, Christians get to celebrate Celebrate Christmas as a national holiday in Singapore. And for Buddhists, V sock is their special holiday. And but again, this is this is about Buddhism becoming kind of framed inside a world religions paradigm. Now, there is one thing that I think is that is interesting. That that is a unique tradition that is distinctive within the part of the Buddhist world that that I study, which is that there is a practice of temporary ordination, men and it's primarily men. In in Tera, Vaada Buddhism, which is normally associated with with mainland Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka will become a monk for a pure a short period of time ranging usually from two weeks, to three months to an entire lifetime. And in that period of time, they take on the full responsibility of being monks, they shave their heads, they were there, they wear robes, they don't eat afternoon, and they are supposed to, you know, follow all of all of those rules. And then when they decide that they're done, and they may decide that they're done for any number of reasons, they simply have to say, I renounce being a monk, essentially, in the presence of another monk. And and they they're disrobed. But this is interesting, because in Thailand and Laos and in southwest China, where I do work, they becoming a monk has become was has become a central part of becoming a proper man in society. So people in southwest China have have told me that it used to be the case that if you wanted to get married, at some point in your life, you had to first become a monk, because that was how you

became, you know, a full proper civilized adult. But again, that that's primarily associated with Southeast Asia and not with other parts of the Buddhist world. The main way that people view but as I'm with him world religions, I think there are two things that I would that I would point to one, that this is a philosophy and not really a religion, that it's a philosophy based on the reduction of suffering, and that Buddhists are Very, very peaceful people. Part of this comes from the idea, you know, the ideas from from Max Faber, that that Buddhist monks and nuns were people who were focused on other worldly ascetic practices. And so, monks and nuns are primarily focused on attaining Nirvana, you know, which, which means essentially escape from the wheel of samsara, and are not really focused on the contemporary world. The world religions paradigm also emphasizes texts, and you know, the teachings of the Buddha, and ignores what people do, how Buddhists have acted over the years. So you know, in, in classic keeping it 101 paradigms, world religions, notions of Buddhism, are not concerned with what people do. But but this is this is this ends up being really stupid, actually, it because it creates this idea that there are bad monks or bad people or bad nuns who don't do, quote, unquote, what the Buddha taught, when it's people who are just doing things who are who were living their lives, who are following the things that their, that their parents taught them, or they're not. And, you know, as a result, though, the world religions paradigm, this emphasis on Buddhism is a philosophy that's very peaceful, that monks and nuns are always focused on attaining Nirvana. And that and that the, the teachings of the Buddha, are, are the most interesting things and the most important things about Buddhism, this gives us a really crappy lens for understanding how people who understand themselves to be Buddhist, act, live understand themselves in the world, you know, consistent with what I've been saying here, about the diversity of Buddhism and the need to think about Buddhists as as people, as people first and as Buddhists, second, third, fourth, whatever. There are a lot of things that we might think that there are a lot of experiences and anecdotes that I've had while doing research in Thailand, and Singapore and Southeast Asia, even in Japan when I was when I was working there after college. Which essentially, kind of points to the problem of thinking Buddhists do one thing and failing to recognize who they are, that they are people. You know, I have a I have a colleague, who is a Chinese monk and Chinese monks are supposed to be vegetarian, and I was having a meal with him once in Singapore. And we were just chatting about things and I think my, my older son was there and he asked, my son asked him what kind of food he liked to eat. And he said, I like Hawaiian pizza. And he said, Whenever he goes to, to, to talk with a, one of his colleagues, sorry, with one of his followers, he always asks this follower to get him a Hawaiian pizza after he gives them a sermon, which is, you know, funny because he's a vegetarian monk and Hawaiian pizza has ham on it. We might also talk about when, when the same son was was one year old, I was living in China and and doing research on monastic education. And I was always struck by how much fun the the monks and the novices at the temple that I was doing research at, had playing with my my son, they would dress him up as a, as a as a novice monk, when when he got you know, wet or dirty, they would, they would throw him in the air, they would do all sorts of things that indicated that little kids were really important and they, they were people to be played with and to be loved and respected. In other words, monks and nuns and novices are not people who are simply focused on the cessation of suffering and escaping this world. They were, they were, you know, people who liked people. But I think that, that for me, one of the most important kind of moments of this kind of a thing was when I was I was before I started graduate study. I was living in, in Chiang Mai, in Northern Thailand. And I was teaching English at a monastic High School. So all the students were were young men who are novices, who are going to high school in a monastery. And so, part of the day, you know, like three classes out of their day would be focused on science and math and Thai literature and English. And that's what I was teaching. And two or three periods of the day would be focused on them studying the teachings of the Buddha. And I had lived in Japan for two years teaching English, I was teaching English at this monastic High School, in

exchange for living in a temple for free. I had studied Buddhism in college, or, you know, in in a couple of classes, and I thought it was fascinating and, and I was really attracted to the philosophy of it all. And one day after class, these three monks, novices, they were so they were like, 1819, maybe 17, they came up, they came up to me, and they said, Mr. Tom, can we can we talk to you for a minute? And I, I'm like, Sure, of course. And, and I get really excited, because I think that there, we're going to have some kind of really rich conversation about what Buddhism is, and, and what it's like to be a novice and why they are attained and like, what their goals as monks and novices were and stuff like this. And the young man turns to me very seriously. And he says, Do you know the song, I swear by All for one and D. And these three young men break into harmony singing, I swear by the sun and the moon in the sky, or whatever the words are, you know, it was really nice. They sounded great, really good harmonies. And I was gobsmacked because monks and novices don't listen to music, do they? They don't. They don't saying they're not supposed to sing. That's one of the precepts. They're supposed to, like, not attend to things like this. But they were like 1718 year old kids. And this was a really popular song on In fact, I had no idea I'd never heard this song before. Because I was living in a temple in Thailand without access to a radio or TV or anything like this, let alone the internet. And this was really important for me, because this at this moment, I started to really realize that wait, these are kids, young men, they're, they're growing up, they have interests. They are novice monks. But they're also really focused on their lives, whatever their lives, you know, might be whatever their interests might be. And so I was seeing them in the wrong way. I was seeing them primarily as religious actors, rather than seeing them as people who also engaged in religious activities.

M

Megan Goodwin 38:14

Okay, Tom has the best stories. I am so glad you could hold him on to the pod and sang for us. He's I am undone. This is the best? No,



Ilyse Morgenstern Fuerst 38:27

I really lucked out with my brilliant rail comrades at UVM. And while both I and my husband Kevin will listen to Tom doing his rendition of ice wear all day, what I love about this 90s r&b throwback hit, is what it tells us about Buddhism and what Buddhists do. So here is Tom trying to like figure out Buddhism and his younger version of himself. And what his students these novice monks cared about was American pop music, because even monks love a slow jam.

M

Megan Goodwin 38:58

I mean, obviously, just perfection perfection through and through. So I am hearing Dr. Portrait saying, as well, that a lot of what we've been saying, We can't really make sense of Buddhism with only texts, or even primarily text, which is exactly what the world religions model wants us to do and what we have been pushing back against all along. I heard Dr. Portrait saying repeatedly that the nation state one lives in matters for obvious governance and mediation reasons, but also for like norms and social life. I certainly didn't realize that in some places to be a man to be marriageable, becoming a monk like even for a short time would be the way to do it. That's my, my Catholic brain is like that. It's backwards. That's not but clearly my Catholic brain is Imperial. Like, that's wrong because not Catholic, which is funny as someone who's not

Catholic, but that's how they get you. Anyway, thinking about religious initiation as a stepping stone to Civic Engagement like marriage or like being a fully fledged adult within systems that privilege to set marriages is wild beyond what we in the states think religion is or does.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:09

Yeah, ya know, like, as always, the company we keep makes us a little bit smarter. So thanks, Tom.



Megan Goodwin 40:16

Yeah, Pharrell. And now it's time to move on to a little bit, leave it a little bit, leave it a little bit, leave it is a little bit a little bit, where we share a little bit to leave you with. So yeah, once again, I am struck by how my understandings of how non Christian religion works in the world have been shaped by Christian terms and frameworks. So this is a great place to remember that monasticism is so much older, so much more than Christianity and so much different than how I have been trained to think about it, specifically within Catholicism.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 40:51

Yeah, I love that. So I guess I'll leave you with the obvious the world religions, paradigm centers, texts, which means that a lot of what's common knowledge common phrases like four noble truths, or eightfold path or Nirvana, about Buddhism reflects these texts reflects canon, even if those very things frankly vary in importance to the live lives of Buddhists. Buddhism is what Buddhists do, regardless of the connection to what has become popularized, or well known in the western world religions context, and as Dr. Portrait pointed out, there's not that many Buddhists rolling around really like fixated on get achieving nirvana and breaking the pattern of samsara.



Megan Goodwin 41:33

And we learned that some of what Buddhist monks do is slow downs from the 90s and or drag, love it. Well, if you don't know now, you know, you don't know the segment in which we get one factoid each. Okay, so a thing that we have kind of talked around but not really dug into is that lots of folks, particularly in South Asia or Southeast Asia, practice Buddhism alongside other religions and traditions. So Dr. Julian Thomas talked about Buddhism and Shinto being practiced together in Japan, for example, in Episode 402 of this very season, but one of my all time favorite examples of seeing this in practice is the ancestor shrine in my local Vietnamese restaurant, so huge chipper Buddha in the middle, but also pictures and offerings to beloved ancestors. And because it's New England, the offerings usually include Dunkin Donuts, coffee and love it so much



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:24

everybody, including the Buddha runs on Dunkin.



Megan Goodwin 42:27

Yeah, for real bonus factoid. I am pretty sure I learned Buddhism existed because of the King and I very Yul Brenner. Yeah. For Alfredo. Very yo bread are promising Buddha he would build the tiresome English Woman House, a small domicile joining the palace. You are welcome. And factoids. Boy.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:48

I refuse to dance all night.



Megan Goodwin 42:53

Shall we dance dance all night? I'm not even getting into it.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 42:57

No, we're not anyway. Okay, what's my if you don't know now, you know? Alright, so sometimes, all these divisions we've talked about don't hold at all in real life. So in Penang, Malaysia, where I once took a vacation from when I was doing archival work in India has this like Unreal stunning Buddhist temple called Cakewalk see it? Yeah, I think it's the largest Buddhist temple in Malaysia where Buddhism is the second largest religion after Islam. And it is famous for these 10,000 Buddhas. So there's a 10,000 statues of Buddha as well as this huge I mean like massive statue of Guanyin a female Bodhisattva also who is known as the goddess of mercy, I love so like on this hike I'm on because pinnings this like mountainous little island, and at like hiking all the way up and our tour guide and my hilarious field notes like this is a vacation but I still have field notes like that my field notes I looked up for this, which are like whole areas and written in like when my fingers were 10 writing. I wrote my Jana Theravada, and traditional Chinese ritual, but gang's all here. So I guess my factoid is to undo all of the previous minutes of this podcast. Thanks, thanks. My factoid is that kick Loxy is one example of what I'm sure are many were multiple forms of Buddhism as well as other kinds of traditions and influences coexist, even in one place because what is that nerds Say it with me? Context, history, language and region matter.



Megan Goodwin 44:38

Yes. No, no, no, don't pick up stuff yet. Nerds. It is time for homework. Homework. Why don't work. As always, we've got Citations References other goodies and transcripts. Statue keeping it one on one.com for every single episode, check it out. It's dot com.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 45:00

All right, then, let's let's assign Tom. So you should read Thomas board shirt. He's frankly nearly prolific he produces so much work. And it's always great. I'm going to keep it together

nearly promise, he produces so much work. And it's always great, I'm going to keep it together. But as you can tell, I respect the hell out of him and enjoy him and learn so much from him. So, I am a writer, die friend, yes, and also a Stan. So first and foremost, buy or read or get your hands on his book, educating monks minority Buddhism on China's southwest border. And if you don't have access to that book, which is out with the University of Hawaii press, I will link you to a podcast episode about it read, you can also read his edited volume called Theravada Buddhism in colonial context, which has so many things I love, like colonization, that's gonna say, you just love that. And also, there's the Herculean effort that Tom put in to wrangle scholars from not the United States, with different forms of expertise, right, so PhDs and monks, and like all in one volume, so it's a really great volume if, but a little bit expensive. So ask your university library to pick it up or IOL it from your local library. Love that. Then there's an article called Belt and Road Buddhists religion making and the rebuilding of minority Buddhism in the reform era, which is in the Journal of review of religion and Chinese society. There's one of my favorite things that he's written, which is called Bad gifts, community standards and the disciplining of Theravada monks in the Journal of Contemporary religion, and it's all about like, when is a gift bad? And why do monks still have to accept it? Or alert? It is about drinking, even though one is not supposed to drink. It's fascinating stuff. But an early early version of him playing around with this article showed up on the religion departments blog, so I will also link to that. And then very recently, my last Tom Stan moment, Tom had a piece come out in the conversation, titled Why Buddhist monks collect alms and visit households, even in times of social distancing, which is about COVID religion and what people do. That's interesting. I've got three other racks. So first and foremost is Donald swears becoming the Buddha, the ritual and image consecration in Thailand. It's a great, classic kind of book from an old professor of mine. There's Alexander Sue's work on medieval Chinese text. There's a YouTube clip that I've got, in case all this reading isn't your jam neurons. I've got a really great interview with CO Nishimura by by Tony McNichol, called this monk wears heels and it's all about this Japanese Buddhist monk who is a makeup artist and a drag queen, and it's a great, it's a great read and tricycle.



Megan Goodwin 47:50

Nice. Cool, cool, cool, cool. I do not have nearly so many recommendations today because I don't know that many things about but, but I am sure it is deeply dated. But I still use clips from PBS as the Buddha which is narrated by Richard Gere, which is hilarious to me. And my students don't understand why I think it's funny because they don't know who Richard Gere is, because I am old. I have found the bits about the life of the Buddha and the interviews with Buddhist monks and nuns about the practice of meditation particularly useful in teaching. So I'll pull out those clips. In conversations about Buddhism in my global religions class, we always include kind of a quick background on the Rohingya genocide, which is still happening in Myanmar. We talked about this a bit in our Smart Girls summer episode on religious nationalism. So you can go back and check that out if you want to learn more. But I also have links to helpful explainers on the situation. Mostly I just try to make sure that my students don't leave class thinking Buddhism or any religion for that matter, is only in everywhere a religion of peace, because you know, killjoy. Big thanks to those of you writing reviews on iTunes, Amazon and Google, it really helps. And if you want to be nerd of the week, yeah, right. It's right. Yeah, that's how we can see your silly handle, you sillies.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:07

Join us next time for more history of the world religions part one when we chat more about



join us next time for more history of the world religions part one, when we chat more about Zoroastrianism, as helped out by guest expert chiasm Marya



Megan Goodwin 49:17

shout out to our research assistant Alex Castellano, whose transcription work makes this pod accessible and therefore, awesome. Need more religion? nerdery you know you do and you know where to find us? The answer, as always, is Twitter.



Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst 49:32

You can find Meghan on Twitter basically all day every day at MP je PhD, and you can find me at pr o f IRMF. You can also find the show at keeping it underscore 101 Find the website at keeping it one Oh one.com Check us out on Instagram and with that peace out nerds.



Megan Goodwin 49:52

Do your homework. It's on the syllabus I swear by the moon and the stars and nicely like a shadow of a spy