Our revolutionary and prophetic practices come from our first principle, *the inherent worth and dignity of every person*, and our seventh, *the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.* These principles derive from older sources like Hinduism and Buddhism and strive to encourage the prophet and visionary in all of us.

Did you know that today's challenges and the rise of Spontaneous compassion (and violence) were predicted in an ancient Buddhist text called "The Dharma Flower Sutra," or as it's commonly known, The Lotus Sutra?

The Lotus Sutra is a recollection of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings on Vulture Peak. Over the years, descriptions, commentary, and multiple translations were added or sometimes revised, organizing the work we study today into about 38 chapters.

Buddha's visions of the future of humanity in this translation remain relatively unchanged. According to the Lotus Sutra, times described as an "evil age" appear after the Buddha's death. What follows, the text goes on to say, is the degradation of education, with spiritual teachings "*going into extinction… an evil world of five pollutions—the pollution of the age, the pollutions from afflictions, the pollution of living beings, the pollution of views, and the pollution of life. When the age is in chaos, the stains run deep, and greedy and jealous living beings*

acquire unhealthy roots. Full of arrogance, not observing their errors, failing to observe their precepts, and carefully defending their faults…"

The sutra also tells us that it is in these future times of chaos and fear, millennia after Buddha's death, "active" buddhas appear, when needed, to present the teachings in creative new ways. They will be seen, felt, and heard with fabulous bodily presence.

Eihei Dōgen, the founder of Zen Buddhism, also refers to social justice voices as "active buddhas." Author and Zen teacher Taigen Dan Leighton, in his book "*Zen Questions: Zazen, Dogen, and the Spirit of Creative Inquiry*," goes on to describe active buddhas as those who bring "awesome presence with their body" by engaging in activities to maintain the well-being of all. These activities create interconnectivity with the world and with "spacetime" (Using Zoom, perhaps?)

Throughout history, many of our ancestors felt like they were living in evil times. We usually turn to spiritual practice during these periods of difficulty. The sutra was fun reading. Passages describe Superbeings flying through the air, eyes blazing with glowing colored light, or valleys filled with precious gems, or pure lands of unpolluted skies.

There are tales of kings and dragons who ruled with righteous morality or intellectual prowess. They had great names, too, like Universal Sage or Medicine

King or Majestic Voice. Folk then I am certain, turned to the Lotus Sutra for both comfort and guidance much like we turn to stories of superheroes today.

Taigen Dan Leighton says: "Everything is being transformed, digested, and spit out in each moment….This transformative function happens because of your dignified presence with all beings together right now, today."

Taigen's words, interpreted from the Lotus Sutra, describes this congregation: taking in all that we experience in this pandemic, digesting it, and coming up with incredible connectivity. This proves that you are making a difference, from the simple act of Small Group Ministry's deep listening to 'zooming in' every Sunday for worship.

These actions are work of "active buddhas", done in both defiance of the isolating nature of the pandemic and hope for the work of Unitarian Universalism to transform today's chaos and fear into love and inclusiveness.

Let us continue to be "working, active Buddhas." Let's explore our core values together and reach out to the greater community. Let us open ourselves to the transformative change that can happen when we start with including ourselves in this expansive new world.

-extracted and adapted from my sermon given on 7/21/2019 at Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

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