

SPECIAL SERMON
IN TRIBUTE TO REV. JAMES REEB
AND
IN PROTEST OF SELMA, ALABAMA

By

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Zen Buddhist Temple of Chicago

2230 North Halsted St.

Sunday

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A Memorial Service will be held today on behalf of Rev. James Reeb, of Boston, who died last Thursday as a result of a beating in Selma, Alabama. Rev. Reeb was the White Unitarian minister who went to Selma last week to show his support for the civil rights movement for equal voting rights in that locality. Without warning, he and two other Caucasian clergymen were attacked by four residents of Selma, also White. We can show our sympathy for his family and our respect for his convictions by joining in today's Memorial Service. As Buddhists, we must protest the violence now being used in Alabama.

The tragic death of Rev. Reeb has caused a furor of protest throughout this country. And it is needless to say that the same violence that preceded the beating of Rev. Reeb and the other ministers when civil rights marchers were attacked by state troopers under the order of Alabama Governor Wallace is equally deplorable. It has initiated other waves of protest by the citizens in the United States, whether they live in the North or in the South. Nevertheless, it is true that many people do not think Negroes should have equal civil rights, or that if they should, that changes in the traditional Southern treatment of Negroes, or of other minority groups, must not be forced upon them. These people do not think civil rights can be legislated or forced by law upon a section of the United States which does not want it. They believe that a law cannot change a man's viewpoint toward another man. They believe that any changes which should come about in civil rights must work themselves out, rather than to be changed overnight by decree or law. Persons who believe this way have reasons for their opinions and their right to hold these opinions must be upheld. I once heard a quotation going something like this: "I may not agree with what you say, but I will defend to the death, your right to say it." This is a suitable statement. But, to hold these opinions and then to use force which brings injury to some and death to others, are two different things.

Such force under the order of the governor of a state must be protested. When demonstrators are tear-gassed, whipped, and beaten by state troopers, peace-loving persons throughout the country must rise up in protest. Such legalized use of force is reminiscent of Nazi Germany. We cannot condone such storm trooper antics in the United States. Those who use such extreme means, only show how wrong their basic viewpoint is. Their extreme violence only shows more clearly the depravity and inhumane conditions under which the Negro must have been living in this country. When such force is used in the presence of movie cameras and newspaper and television representatives from every state in the Union, we can only ask what violence is being used under the cover of darkness.

A year and a half ago, on June 16, 1963, I remember giving a sermon on the trouble in Vietnam and in Alabama. At that time, Governor Wallace was the root of the trouble in Birmingham, Alabama, when there was an attempt to integrate schools in that state. Editorials were against Wallace at that time, and one even called him a "dinosaur" because he is so out-of-date. Today, we again see before us a test of American justice. In Selma, Alabama, Negroes are pressing for their right to vote to be observed. But, instead of having their rights respected, they are beat in the streets. Supporting Whites are also assaulted; Rev. Reeb was brutally killed. The thousands of White American clergymen, educators and nuns who have gone to Selma these past few weeks have done so to see that justice is done, and to protest the barbarian actions of the troopers Wallace ordered. These people have not forgotten that the Negro has rights just like the rest of us, and that their rights are not to be observed only when it is to a White man's advantage. We should not forget that a Negro, a Chinese, a Japanese or an Indian is called upon in time of war to give his life for his country. But, when he returns home, he faces discrimination and degradation, even death.

Do you think all those patients in Veterans' Hospitals with permanent injuries from World War II or the Korean Conflict or those now in Vietnam are all White? What would happen if a Negro returning from Vietnam because of a serious wound were to walk down a Selma street?

Governor Wallace ended his last inaugural address with a prayer for White and Negroes alike. What kind of religion does he have? I cannot believe he is a Christian. A Christian does not glory in violence and hate. I ask again: If there is violence in the streets of Selma before the eyes of the Press in bright daylight, what is done by the cover of night? I think we have had an example--the tragic death of Rev. Reeb. Last year, three civil rights workers were killed in Mississippi. Evidence has pointed to the local

Sheriff, some of his deputies, and other townsmen as the ones who committed the crime. The Southern states are the Shame of America. Prejudiced persons like Wallace who live in them, or in the North, should come to Zen to find the Light for Humanity.

Some people say that violence will always be with us, like the poor. We all know that violence has indeed been with us since the dawn of history. But, is this reason for it to continue? It has waxed and waned in different persons throughout history. We all shiver at the brutality of the Roman days and the torturous methods of the Inquisition, and at the horrors of the many wars that have been fought in almost every country in the world. Yet, there have intervals of peace. We should not forget that alongside the horrors that have taken place, there has been a growth of civilization and unity among men. The world has become "smaller", and men have learned much about other men. We cannot excuse our violent methods today by claiming that people of history also used them. Part of being human is to profit from the past and to improve upon it. We know enough today about the nature of man and the society in which he lives to avoid using such brutal methods upon each other, especially within a country that holds democracy and peace as its ideal. What kind of an impression are we giving to the world? In such a country, violence must be a thing of the past.

Must this be just an ideal? Let us hope not. Yet, the death of Rev. Reeb, the assault upon Selma demonstrators, and its approval by a state governor is only one sign of the growing use of violence in this country. Another sign is the growing crime rate. Most crimes are a form of violence. Walter Lippman, in his Sun Times column on March 11, has pointed out that the crime rate has doubled in the past 25 years in the United States. In the past seven years, the crime rate has increased five times as fast as the population itself. These statistics were released by President Johnson. They only show that our nation is not what it should be, and that it has not kept pace with the level of civilization; that it has not profited from history; that something is wrong. On the national level, we must leave the speculations about the causes for this increase of violence to the social scientists. But on the personal level, we must fight it.

We should not overlook the fact that a nation is made up of individuals. Those social forces in a country which lead some to crime also affect us, and yet, we do not follow criminal or violent ways. Men are not complete automons, following disruptive social forces in their behavior. Many persons from slums, from broken homes, who do not finish school, who do not have

good-paying jobs, or who are unemployed, or who fit into any of the other categories usually called "causes of social problems", do not follow violent ways. They become fine citizens, even though they do not have all of the wonderful material benefits which this country can produce. What makes the difference? It is that within each man, sometimes called "Character", sometimes called "Values", which guides his life and the way he lives within society. As Buddhists, we must promote this individual responsibility and respectability. No one may be able to quickly find the solutions or to quickly implement them to erase the crime and violence which presently is overcoming this country. But, we must begin now to ensure that this tendency does not increase, and do our part to erase it.

Many people say, "What can we do about it? It is beyond us." I wonder how many people said the same thing in Nazi Germany before World War II? We must be realistic and know that there are some things we cannot, or should not, do. Some things in society are left to the police, the courts, and other governmental agencies and to our elected representatives. But, we can support these people in their work, and help pass legislation which will aid them. We can protest the violence in Selma and the death of Rev. Reeb. We need not sit down in the middle of a street to protest--unless we think this is the only way of being effective--but we can send letters to our representatives and ensure upright behavior in our own daily lives. Each one of us probably has something unique he can do to help. We can teach our children and talk with our friends about the human rights of others. We can help bring peace to the country by being peaceful. We can help make all men brothers by being a brother to all men. We may not be able to achieve this immediately, or within our lifetimes, because it is a big problem. It has been with us for ages. And even today, just as centuries ago, many men, out of selfishness, choose this path of violence and greed for themselves. But, the world also continues to change, and we can be optimistic. We must do our part to change it.

Let us think back. The Buddha faced a world similar in some ways to ours. We do not hear much about the social problems of his day, but we can be assured that men were just as greedy and selfish. What did he do? He acted on a personal level. As the Enlightened One, he went about giving others his peace and his example. He taught them the cause of suffering and the way to live in the midst of suffering. He taught his followers an ethical way of living which did not include violence. Let each of us follow his way today, and teach it to others.

Some people think of Buddhism as escapism. They think that Buddhist monks and priests have never taken part in affairs of their country, but have retreated instead to a monastery, away from the problems of life. But, this is not true. This is a superficial viewpoint. Buddhists have done what they felt was appropriate to fight social ills or problems. One way has been the actual teaching of a compassionate way. Another has been the living of the compassionate way. Hakuin cared for the abandoned illegitimate child when it was flung into his arms. Buddhists has established orphanages, nurseries and schools. The monastic life of the monks is a testimonial to the peace that should prevail among men. It is unfortunate that conditions have been so bad that legislation has been necessary to tell men how to treat their fellow humans. The law may not be able to change a man's viewpoint or feeling toward another man, but it should ensure that each man's actions take into account the rights of others. With such a ~~pr~~problem in the United States, we, as Buddhists should try to correct it, as the Buddha and those following after him tried to solve the problems of their day. We should do so by teaching and living the way of Compassion.

Today, let us remember Rev. James Reeb, and what he stood for, during the Memorial Service. Let us dedicate ourselves to doing what we can to erase the social ills and to ease the suffering and to promote the brotherhood of Man.

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ZEN MEDITATION

Meditation is held at the Temple for groups as 10 AM and 2 PM each Sunday. Private Meditation (Dokusan) is by appointment and arranged for with Rev. Matsuoka for any day; morning, afternoon or evening.

ZEN NEWSLETTER

Beginning in April, 1965, the Temple will be printing a monthly newsletter, The Kyosaku.

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