

Practice Note: Plaster Buddha, Gold Buddha

Transcribed and edited from a short talk by Gil Fronsdal on November 9th, 2016

What is relevant today? Fifteen years ago we had 9/11, and today we have 11/9.

I'm not sure exactly when it was, but sometime in the last 100 years or so, there was a very large plaster Buddha in Thailand. It was larger than life-size, and sitting in meditation. The monks were going to move this plaster Buddha from one place to another – maybe within the temple or to a new temple. They got a crane to pick it up, and it turned out that this plaster Buddha was much heavier than they'd anticipated. And as they lifted it, it fell. The crane gave way, and it fell down on a corner. The plaster on that corner broke, and to everyone's surprise, there was something underneath the plaster: gold! Inside, it was a solid gold Buddha. I don't know if it was solid all the way through, but maybe it was cast in solid gold. So they took the plaster off, and there was this beautiful shiny gold Buddha that was extremely valuable.

For a few centuries no-one knew it was there. They

realized that there was a time some centuries ago, when Thailand was being invaded by the Burmese army. So in order to protect their gold Buddha, the monks camouflaged it by putting plaster all over it, to make it look like a plaster Buddha that was not be worth much. And it seems to have worked. The Burmese army didn't take it away and melt it down. However, the people who put the plaster on apparently didn't pass on the knowledge. So for a number of centuries, it was just a plaster Buddha.

Part of the function when we sit and meditate, taking the meditation posture, is to let the old crusty plaster fall off. There are lots of things that can arise: disappointments, discouragements, fears, angers and resentments – all kinds of things that we build up as layers of plaster or crust around us – places where we get stuck or we hold on. One of the functions of sitting in meditation is to sit with all of that crusty stuff, and then allow it to fall off.

Sometimes, the plaster falls off much better when we've been dropped – when we run into something hard and difficult that cracks the heart. And then we sit. If you sit for a long time, and you're with what it is, then that which is not necessary, that which gums up the system, has a chance to fall off, to be shed.

Maybe inside of you, there's a golden Buddha sitting and meditating. This works very well, I think, as an

image when you're meditating.

Or perhaps it's like the skin of a snake that falls off as you get bigger. Maybe when you get up from meditation, you can be a wonderful snake that's bigger and stronger, ready to support and help in this world of ours.

So may today be a day of sitting with what is, and seeing what is not needed as you grow break off.