

**Jan Willis**

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**SPEAKERS**

Jan – Jan Willis

Sarah – Richardson

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00:00:01:03 - 00:00:07:09

**Jan:** Culturally, I'm African-American, but if I want to solve a problem, Buddhism has a lot of answers.

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**Sarah:** Welcome to this episode of The Circled Square. Today I'm speaking with Professor Jan Willis. Jan is a professor emerita of religion at Wesleyan University, where she taught for 36-some years, and she's currently a visiting professor at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia. She is the editor of and a contributor to *Feminine Ground: Essays on Women and Tibet* and the author of *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition*, as well as many other things. She also famously authored her autobiography, *Dreaming Me*, and I've particularly enjoyed teaching that book with students, reading it with students in a class about Buddhist life writing. So it is a huge honor to be able to speak with Jan today. Hello Jan, how are you?

00:00:57:19 - 00:01:00:03

**Jan:** I'm good. I'm so happy to be here. Thank you.

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**Sarah:** Thank you so much for being here with us. This is really exciting. As you know, our podcast is kind of focused on teaching and pedagogy and what we're doing when we teach about Buddhist studies in the classroom. So I want to begin by asking just kind of if you can tell us a brief version of how and when you became a teacher. How did that happen?

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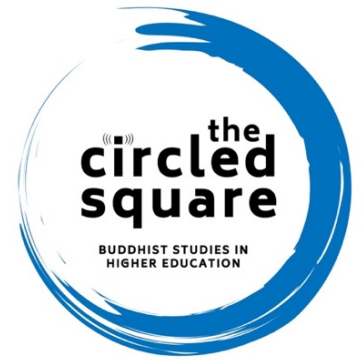
**Jan:** Oh my goodness.

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**Sarah:** Where do you feel like that began?

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**Jan:** Well, I think it began early on. Your audience should know that I was raised in a mining camp outside of Birmingham, a town that was a mining camp that was split down the middle by one street. Blacks on one side, whites on the other. We dare not cross the road. I entered school in 1954. So that was a year of *Brown v. Board of Education*, but that just meant in Alabama that the Supreme Court and the other lawmakers went into overdrive to prevent integration in school. So I graduated from a still all-Black county high school to which I was bused in order to prevent integration, even though there was a perfectly good high school in that camp... But it was for whites only. So I want to give that as context because



somehow in that environment... And I praise all of my strong black women teachers, and this will probably come up again hopefully, somehow, I developed this incredible love for two things, for math and for music. I remember when I was four years old wanting to be a conductor because we had seen Walt Disney Fantasia kinds of things on TV and my mother was good enough to actually give in to my pleas to buy a one of those 78 old vinyls of Rimski-Korsakov, and I would stand in the kitchen and conduct and my mother would just say, "what is with this kid?" So it was because I saw math and music as having universal languages. Here are languages that can be understood by anyone who reads that language.

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**Sarah:** Wow. What an interesting outlook too, math and music together as being universal languages... That's brilliant

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**Jan:** Absolutely. I saw that when I was young. So I studied math and physics and did double time with physics and a student from Harvard came down and took me through the Schrodinger equations, and my teachers just looked on in amazement that I could follow this equation that was going around the room. At any rate... I like these things. So teaching didn't enter until later, the idea of teaching, and there are two stories connected with that.

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**Jan:** We were tracked in our schools, as many of the schools today still do, and so I was in the advanced academic track, there was a vocational track, and in high school one of my teachers, and you remember all their names, Miss Calloway, said to me one day "look, Jane, you're going to get all these academic prizes, but I want you to get the all around prize so I'm going to make you a cheerleader". Oh no, no, no, no, no, please don't, and I said that because I was actually afraid of the other cheerleaders. They were tall, rough, tough, tumble girls.

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**Sarah:** I'm sure. I'm sure they didn't love math quite as much,

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**Jan:** But teaching... Miss Callaway said, "look, you know all the chants, teach those girls those chants". And somehow I came up with with methods, I mean, for cheerleaders, and I won those girls over. So they would say, "did somebody say something to you? We'll go get him!" They became my protectors and I thought, hey, there's something to this.

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**Sarah:** Pretty great, and I feel like you're emphasizing too that like teaching and being a teacher actually starts with natural curiosity and it starts with a connection, like the ability to really connect with people.

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**Jan:** Absolutely. Ok, now here's a heavier story about teaching. So when I graduated, it was 1965, from high school, and that was the year that a lot of Ivy League schools were giving scholarships to black students. But those black students, they were very careful in how they chose them. Those black students came from rural, tiny places throughout the country, so they weren't going to be troublemakers.

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**Sarah:** Oh, why? What was that? So it was not people from cities meaning...

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**Jan:** Not from cities,

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**Sarah:** They weren't like participants yet in those social movements? Is that it?

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**Jan:** Yeah, I think that's what they thought. I made it somehow, I had been in Birmingham, but I was one of those faceless 15 year olds, tenth graders, who marched with King. So in '63 that had happened and that transformed my whole life. But in '65, when I got these scholarships, the Klan marched on our home. This was something that we'd grown up knowing about, the Klan targeted people from time to time. Almost every black man in the camp had been targeted by the Klan. They targeted young kids, I'd gone to a birthday party and the Klan had come and stopped it because blacks shouldn't be having that much fun. This was my experience.

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**Sarah:** Wow.

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**Jan:** So I got these scholarships and notice was put in the black newspaper, four sheets. But as I told you at the beginning, this camp was divided, and one of the area chiefs lived in the white section and they read the newspapers, the black newspapers, and so being conspicuous in that way, having won these scholarships, the Klan marched on my family. So it was very, very dangerous I knew from the beginning, to be conspicuous in the south. It was frightening. So the Klan comes, 10 or 12 cars come... I talk about this in *Dreaming Me*. They slowly stop, everybody knows somebody is being targeted but they don't know who, and then all these cars and trucks stop in front of our house. My dad's at work. My mom has a little .22 caliber pistol, she's telling my sister and me to get down, try to get under the bed, and I'm glued to the window and I can't believe what I'm seeing.

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**Jan:** They set up a cross, 12, 15 foot in front across the street from the house in an alleyway. And they light it. So I'm amazed. I'm awestruck. I'm dumbfounded, gobsmacked. Because first, the robes are not all white. There are red robes and there are purple robes, and the second thing is that they're men and women and children enrobed. So this really strong urge came up in me to go out and talk to them. I mean, I was too frightened to do it and too scared, no doubt about it. But I wanted to teach them that just as they were a family, we were a family inside this house just like them. We were a family and I wanted to teach that. I And felt this really... I mean, I didn't do it, I didn't carry through on it, but that was a really strong urge for the power of just communicating, and showing likeness and connectedness.

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**Sarah:** Wow, Jan. And recognizing their humanity even though they're actually coming to threaten your life, right? That's incredible. You're able to see them as humans. You're able to see children and women as just people who probably...

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**Jan:** In '63 I had marched with King and I had taken those lessons to heart about nonviolence and about the so-called "enemy". So Buddhist, King's teachings, that you don't hate the person, you hate the emotion, that negative emotion, but you don't hate the person. That was something we had to sign onto.

We had to study and train and sign on to as youngsters to be able to march with King in the Children's March in Birmingham.

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**Jan:** I mean, we signed these pledges that we would try our best to not raise up in anger. Nonviolence was a serious thing for King, and you could not march... The women, the matrons of the church, they would test us out. You ready to march? Yes, ma'am. OK, well, take your position over there. "Hey, John, you ready?" "You know, John, I think you better stay and work on your Sunday school lesson" Because if you are going to rear up, raise up, you couldn't march that day. You could not march that day. It had to be a real thing. So all these things came together for me and teaching became something I wanted to do.

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**Sarah:** Building on from that, and you kind of already mentioned like the strong black women in your family who enabled you to see possibilities early and to have experiences early. But who were some of your most inspiring teachers? And I'll leave that really broad. I know there's probably many, many, many, many. But who were one or two of your most inspiring teachers and what did they do to inspire you?

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**Jan:** There were a great many. I mean, like seven or eight as I was growing up and going through school, black women teachers, and then of course there was the Buddha, MLK, Toni Morrison, James Baldwin. Very inspiring teachers. But throughout my young education, before taking the bus to take up one of those Ivy League offers to Cornell, I had these wonderful women teachers. Miss McCall in first grade, Miss Fisher in fifth, Miss Gregg in seven. Miss Hinton, and they were doing something that this young scholar named Jarvis Givens is talking about these days. He has a book coming out soon on Carter G. Woodson, who was the founder of Black History Month in the US.

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**Jan:** First it was Black History Week and they had to fight to get it extended, of course. He was a historian, he founded the Journal of African American history, well, Negro history I guess it was in his day. Well, Jarvis Givens, in writing about Carter G. Woodson, pin points this idea of "fugitive pedagogy" and crowns Carter G. Woodson as being the inspiration of this or the key symbol of it. Now what Jarvis Givens is saying is that it was always illegal in the United States to teach a slave to read and write. Why? It made them dangerous, right? If they couldn't read or write, couldn't even read the Bible which was foisted upon us. So that was always a danger. But these teachers, I look back at my education and I write about this too, I call it a "dual education", our teachers made sure that we not only learned English literature, but we learned black literature. That we not only sang the national anthem, but we sang the negro National anthem as well. That we recited poems... That I can meet people, African-Americans today, a number of times I can meet them if they are my same age we can start reciting the same poem, we'll make the same hand gestures. So there was this dual education going on all the time which said "you are somebody", "You have a tradition", and we celebrated that.

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**Jan:** And those teachers were practicing fugitive pedagogy, what Jarvis Givens calls it, because it's an education that's meant to uplift the spirit as well as to uplift self-esteem. So when I say these black women teachers, each one of them would just take you aside... "I saw your interest in this. Now I want you to read this on the side. I'm going to bring you this tomorrow". That was always going on, and it was lovely.

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**Sarah:** Yeah. Do you think uplifting the spirit is something that professors and teachers can center as a goal?

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**Jan:** I hope so.

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**Sarah:** Me too.

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**Jan:** Their Students are human beings, you know. We teach in religious studies departments and the one thing you don't want to be there is accused of being... "You've got too much affinity for your subject matter", as though you could be totally objective, and some of them, I assume, are. Wink wink. Well, you know, you're supposed to have this distance. We talk about Tantric Buddhism, something esoteric. We talk about Buddhism that privileges experience how can that be something that counts in academia? So already under suspicion, right? I don't want to convert those students, but I want those students to find their true selves, which I think are compassionate and capable. I want to help them discover that. So, yeah, teachers are in a dilemma here and how far can we go? It's transgressive...

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**Sarah:** Well, yeah, I mean, teaching is transgressive, right? It can be. We hope it is.

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**Jan:** *Teaching to Transgress...* good ol' Bell Hooks.

00:17:03:12 - 00:17:51:15

**Sarah:** May she rest in power. So this is such a nice segue to the next kind of question. I'm interested in knowing from you what you think are some of the ways that professors and teachers can work against oppression when oppression has so often been so structurally built into our systems? We are teaching in universities that themselves are hierarchies and we are reminded of it regularly, right? This person's not tenured and this one is and this one's in this stream and that one's not... And that applies both among the faculty, among the students, on all these levels, and then add race, and class, and gender, and all the things. They're all operating all the time. So how can we do it? How can we do that big work?

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**Jan:** It's a big question. I think a lot depends on the individual instructor, what they're willing to bring and share, and also depends on the schools, the places where we teach. I've always thought that I was fortunate not to go on to a big graduate institution because there's more freedom at an undergraduate place to follow more general, shall I say, interest, because you're interested in liberal arts. So the parents of those students didn't send them to vocational schools. They sent them to a liberal arts school to broaden their perspective. So that's already a good thing. Yet what goes on in the classroom... classrooms are structured. Teachers usually sit at the front, there's discipline, the students are supposed to be quiet and listen, top down. So I think when I say it depends on the individual, I think a lot has to do with what that person thinks of themselves and their location and how they can modify that. Here I'm inspired by a teacher who really takes Paulo Freire to heart. If you walk past her classroom, you see these groups of students, nobody sitting in rows, nobody's looking at the front. There are these different discussions going on. I don't do it that way, but I admire that she pulls it off.

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**Sarah:** Those things are hard, though. It's interesting. We here at U of T Mississauga, I teach at University of Toronto, Mississauga in Canada, we designed a couple of years ago these active learning classrooms. So there was money, there was time and money to build the new active learning classrooms which were built with these big round tables for learning pods and lots of screens. And I requested to teach in one once and I immediately regretted it, like week two. I was like, "send me back to a lecture hall please!" I mean, it actually would be wonderful, and I can see that it would be wonderful, but what we would have to do with our lecture material to transfer it effectively into that mode would be huge. So I came back to the idea that I'll do it again sometime, but I'll design a new course for that space and not try to take the old lecture and transplant it into the into the active learning classroom. So what did or what do your classrooms look like? What are the some of the institutions that you remember or at Wesleyan what what was it like? Was it small classes, mostly? How many students? How did you organize?

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**Jan:** So in those early days there was such an interest in Buddhism, I couldn't believe it. I would have 90 students in the class and two or three hundred on a waitlist. I taught the class every year, every spring. But then after that first sort of massive course, and I capped it, I think I capped it at 95 because I just couldn't remember the names, and then it got smaller and smaller, like I couldn't remember more than 60. But then there were these spinoff courses from the intro. If you'd taken the intro then you could take women in Buddhist lit, Tibetan Buddhism, Buddhism in America, socially engaged Buddhism, and those would be seminars capped at 19 because I think Wesleyan marketing wanted to say how many classes were less than 20. So then I had these seminars and they were just lovely. Because one, the students at Wesleyan always read the material, so that was just a lovely environment. I mean, I could go to the library at 2:00 in the morning and people would be reading a text. I didn't know what they'd been doing before that, but they were reading the assigned reading. So that was lovely.

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**Jan:** But then you would have these... They were thoughtful, so my mission turned out to be helping them discover what they knew and helping them find the tools to research it further. So that was just a pleasure of teaching these really bright students. The students here have a longer trajectory and so it's necessary to meet with them more regularly and suggest more things and just get to know them a little bit more and boost them a little. So I get to practice that now. I do think teaching in university settings altogether and teaching at dharma centers is very different.

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**Sarah:** I'm sure. Yeah, what are the big differences for you in those two contexts?

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**Jan:** Well, what I see, I'm freer...

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**Sarah:** In which one are you freer?

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**Jan:** I'm freer in dharma centers because the students come in, they have a certain vocabulary already, we can talk about things easier. I think one of the things that's difficult about our particular interest in Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism as opposed to other kinds of disciplines is that there's a language, there's terminology and language that needs to be mastered in order for you to communicate really well with students. So there's that hurdle to get over. That's one of the reasons at Wesleyan and so forth, I've developed these courses that really privilege narrative, that talk about Tibetan namtar, that talk about stories, which I think are...

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**Sarah:** Like sacred biographies and narrative and narrative-izing lives.

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**Jan:** They convey what you're trying to say. So I pair Milarepa and Naropa. They read both of those, and they seem to be about totally different personalities but the main core is about the most singular self, attachment to self or low self-esteem and exuberant self-esteem. But it's always self-something. So they can get that at that level. So I think stories are really important in the university setting.

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**Sarah:** I saw one assignment we read about actually in preparation for today that was just so incredibly creative. So I want to talk about your assignments

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**Jan:** Imagining a sixth century B.C.E woman?

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**Sarah:** Yes. So you have this assignment where you imagine yourself as a sixth century B.C.E Indian woman, young or old, daughter, wife, widow, etc. Their choice, I guess. "One day a Buddhist nun appears in your village or town teaching the Buddha's doctrine and inviting you to join the order. What would be your response? Why?" It's wonderful. What a wonderful assignment. Then you say "this question is designed to invite your creativity to bring together much of the material we've covered thus far. It's designed, therefore, to have you do the three distinct things. One, to portray and comment upon a given woman's social situation, two, to deftly summarize the Buddha's main teachings, and three, to react to the teachings' attractiveness or unattractiveness given the circumstances you've initially posited. Then make sure your essay addresses all three of the above. Jan, wow, what an incredible assignment.

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**Jan:** I'm glad you like it! The students' love that assignment. They love it. They're thinking about the story before they get out of the classroom. It's an ideal... We've used Basham, we've talked about Indian geography, we've talked about the pre-Buddhist settings and cultural things, and then I introduced the week before... Even in Basham we've gone through Indian society. But women are talked about in sort of two paragraphs at the end of the chapter, and widows, forget 'em. So they're ready, and they have to succinctly... they have to do this in two to three pages. So when they give the Buddha's teaching, they have to think for themselves, of all of that Buddhism we've talked about, what's the kernel teaching? What's a nun going to say? and then depending upon whether they've been a girl or they're a widow... they've situated themselves in Indian, Aryan society, what would be their response? They don't have to choose to join the Buddhist order. Lots of them won't.

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**Sarah:** Really? Well, I'm so curious. Did some not?

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**Jan:** Yeah, they don't because they like the proposed husband the family's arranged. Or they are not convinced of it, or they will finish what they vow to do and then become nuns later. Stories work. So I come to my classes on philosophy and philology because I loved words and so I think that by the time I have just a few key words with classes at the university setting that I can translate some of what Buddhism's intent is, what its meaning is, what the Buddha actually taught, what the Buddha taught, in

Rahulas kind of thing, by carefully diagnosing the terminology. So I come as a philologist and a philosopher and it's sort of my protection against the academics who say, "you seem just to be in love with this Buddhist stuff". You know, I'm in love with it, it makes sense to me. It makes sense. Culturally, I'm African-American, but if I want to solve a problem, Buddhism has a lot of answers.

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**Sarah:** Yeah, I think it was very freeing. I mean, when I read *Dreaming Me* with undergrad students here in Toronto in two different classes, they always found it really... Like one of the questions was "what does it mean to be black, Baptist and Buddhist?" Why are those all part of this subtitle and like what's important about this statement of identity? And I think it's actually very freeing for them to also see that those things can go beside each other and alongside each other and that's OK. Jan Willis didn't choose to stop being Baptist and become Buddhist, she sees herself in the end as both, and that's hers. That's an amazing and beautiful story to own. We read your article "Teaching Buddhism in the Western Academy" as we were preparing for this podcast, and I so agree with you, and it was articulated so well. One of my concerns... I teach in a historical studies department, but alongside a lot of history of religions kind of faculty, they're all brilliant. But you're totally correct that I've had many conversations in which it's clear that some people still sort of think... You say it better than I will so I'm going to quote you here, "the misguided misperception that scholarly engagement within a religious studies department, if possible at all, necessitates complete objectivity from the subject matter, even downright, though often denied, hostility towards it". You're so right. Like, I honestly have come away from other lectures thinking, "wait, were you trying to teach them that religion is bad?" Like, that's our message? Religion is bad children... Run!

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**Sarah:** Sure, Marx had a point, opiate of the people yada yada, got it. We can teach that, we should talk about it, and yet religion is still fertile ground for many people's self-identity, for uplift, for possibilities. It's been around many, many centuries, after all, and seems to have a lot of...

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**Jan:** Must be doing something. So the other technique... It's not a technique, but I give those assignments about standing in a display. I also give them practicums and there was some frowning about that. You know, I send them out. I said, "ok, go to such and such... This is a methodist church right up there. Go and write about it!", and we do the little anthropological thing, field study. You know you can cop to your position, you're a student, this is an assignment, that's all right. But just go and see what happens! Then they come back all excited. "That was really interesting, and Professor Willis, they fed us afterwards!" I said, "mm hmm good southern food". They feed you at the Black Methodist Church. So that's also... Go and get a little experience before you denounce it out of hand, you know? People get something.

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**Sarah:** Yeah, absolutely. So have you noticed... I mean, we're in this time, of course, we're still in the the pandemic that won't end. So I wonder if you have any thoughts for us, reflections on like what's changing? And I know like a lot of us were kind of abruptly forced into teaching online and many of us, by the way, are hoping to see an end to that soon. So this is not a question about how can we teach online, but I feel like the pandemic is forcing many of us to really reconcile with like what is the point? What is the point here? What is the purpose here? And what can we actually do in university classrooms, right? Because that has to be a fundamental question as we reimagine our classrooms online, like what can we do? What carries forward? How can we design these experiences for students? But what do you think is changing in our approach to teaching? What gives you hope that we might be learning something here?

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**Jan:** Well, I think we have to since it's here, it's a fact, like suffering is a fact. We can use it as an opportunity for being more creative. So if our classrooms taught discipline and subjugation, and power, we can use this as an opportunity to let go of some of those things and to have our students be more creative, which is what we might have hoped would happen in the classroom if it were less structured. So it's less structured now. We can come up with assignments and things that they might do that would actually encourage them... I mean, here we have it. This is a fact. We'd better try to figure out creative ways to use it, you know? So I don't want to say the students are left on their own, I think that we should use it as an occasion to come up with other ways of teaching and learning.

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**Sarah:** Yeah, and how to do it is still the question. Creativity should be in there, right. Like, the handbook isn't going to work anyways, so we might as well throw it out.

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**Jan:** Yeah, I think so.

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**Sarah:** And then how did you teach mandalas? That's just a real interest of mine, but what did you do with mandala teaching and making and such? Can you tell us a bit about that?

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**Jan:** Well, we read, I don't know, two or three things. I have such lovely groups of diverse hands. I say, "this is what's going on". They read the text, they're imagining Mount Meru and the continents and all of this, and this is what they're doing, and then I bring my mandala set to the class and we go around the room and they love it because it's hands on.

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**Jan:** And then I say you can do it without all of this paraphernalia. You can do it with just a rice grain. Take one... And then I teach them how to do it. I've got this lovely black, chocolate, soft brown, worn around hands around the room of mandalas and they have a different sense then of mandalas not only being three dimensional, but of what they mean.

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**Sarah:** That's something if we get back to classrooms I want to teach more with, getting students to make mandala's and play with art making. It's one of my interests.

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**Jan:** And sometimes you can have them draw with colored... Imagine it's a room and a house and you go in this room and you work on this. What color is that? What's your mind like? What color is your mind?

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**Sarah:** Yeah. I mean, you've taught it for a long time. So what are some of the possibilities that you feel haven't been adequately embraced yet? Because I wonder sometimes if we haven't gotten sort of like we're accidentally teaching an old story when it comes to Buddhism that pitches it as more historical than contemporary, more textual than ritual, even though we pretend to say "oh, but ritual matters a lot too, art matters a lot too". We often go back to like "but" textual tradition, monks, nuns, done. And of course there's many scholars who don't do that, but our textbooks still sort of repeat those tropes. So what would be important to carry forward in intro to Buddhism?

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**Jan:** Maybe the person should think about another assignment that I give students... I say we're just talking, it's not an assignment. I say, "10-20 years from now you won't remember all these dates, and this, that, the other. What do you think you'll carry forward as the most important teaching of the Buddha? I think early on they're saying things, they come into the class some of them might say "wisdom", "emptiness", they don't understand any of that, but they've read it somewhere in there. Well, what do you really think is the heart of the teaching? And then later they're saying four noble truths, they'll remember that. So I would have that person think about that. But that clearly seems to be a one way thing. I want them to get "this" about Buddhism. Maybe something that's important to them would be central and interesting to the students... I think that's a really difficult one in terms of planning. I make sure that I do background, I do life, I do central teachings, that's enough for a semester.

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**Sarah:** Oh, that is, that's quite enough. You're right.

00:38:40:04 - 00:39:40:24

**Jan:** One last thing. To make it more current there's a lot of stuff now, there's lots of different ways people are recasting stories of these people in a way that they wish they had. Feminist, put them in [unclear]... She was overlooked. But I sort of think that that rewriting is dangerous. But to answer your question, to make it more relevant, I often pair *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpalo Rahula, at the beginning, I say forget the pali, it's 99 pages you can do this. Then Steve Batchelor is at the end, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*. You'd be surprised at the discussion that comes up with that pairing. Some think "ok, this guy Batchelor said it much better". And some say "this arrogant SOB".

00:39:44:18 - 00:40:41:21

**Sarah:** Yeah, so it gives them a great discussion because they are themselves then really wrestling with matters of interpretation and who has the right to stake those claims too? I wanted to ask a question, and it's something we've already touched on a bit because you brought up kind of your own origin story and how you've become who you are through being uplifted so many times. So pedagogy itself and the structure of a university or college system that many of us are in, learning in, teaching in, how can pedagogy itself, or teaching, how can classrooms be anti-racist? And is that a possibility? Is that a thing? Is that an expectation we can ask from them? And what would be some ideas for making a classroom or a course an anti-racist movement or a possibility?

00:40:44:24 - 00:43:00:01

**Jan:** Well, I think from the beginning if we touch each other as human beings, if we have some sense that we all are interconnected, that this becomes sort of a natural outcome. Martin Luther King, famously, "all life is interrelated... caught in an inescapable network"... Alright, there's Buddhism too. I have, at times, for talks on Zoom, gone through King- this, the Buddha- this, King- this, Dhammapada verse five... So I say when I'm asking those students to think about what's important to them, one of the verses that I always hear and that I think it's my favorite, Dhammapada 183. If you were a Christian... I'm jumping about, but Christianity, I think, Matthew, 25... 24 through 29 verses, "thou shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all your mind". OK, and the second is like, "thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself". I think that this is the most concise statement of Christian creed and practice. The creed is love God. The practice is love your neighbor. Loving your neighbor shows the first. Ok, for Buddhism I think that's Dhammapada 183, which says "Do no harm, practice virtue, discipline the mind. This is the teaching of all the buddhas" I think that summarizes the whole thing. If you can get that flavor to students, it's the whole kit and caboodle right there.

00:43:02:17 - 00:44:40:04

**Jan:** And so doing no harm is right there, it's Martin Luther King's nonviolent resistance. It's not passive, I have to tell students it's not p-a-s-s, it's p-a-c-i, pacific, but not passive, right? Because we're all in this together and we'll all go down together unless we can learn to live together. There have been world religions, different teachings on this, but it's very simple. Hatred begets only hatred. Dhammapada five, Martin Luther King, right? Nonviolence is the way to go, do no harm. But practice virtue. I say to students, you can't call up your friends... "what are you doing?" "Oh, I'm over here practicing virtue" by yourself... It involves relationships, people. To practice virtue means you are in action with others. So it's not enough to say, oh, I'm not racist, that doesn't apply to me. You got to practice anti-racism because silence is complicit. So you've got to do something. I encourage people to do their best to do it nonviolently. That's just creative. But you've got to do.

00:44:40:21 - 00:44:53:09

**Jan:** We're all connected. I can't be who I am until you are who you ought to be, and you can't be who you ought to be until I am who I ought to be. It's so clear. It's so clear

00:45:01:15 - 00:45:16:28

**Sarah:** And also, like diagnosing poverty as just an illness is missing something because it's not an illness. It's not an individual illness, it's a societal systemic issue that needs healing.

00:45:17:00 - 00:46:23:17

**Jan:** King used to say there are three evils of society: over consumerism, militarism, and racism. Now in Buddhism, that racism would be the ignorance, the militarism is hatred, and the consumerism is greed, right? But in his last year he changed consumerism to poverty. It's Bryan Stevenson saying... Bryan Stevenson, the lawyer, in the Equal Justice Initiative says "the more I do this work, the more I see that the opposite of wealth is not poverty. The opposite of wealth is justice". So I've had these amazing teachers. In MLK, in the Buddha, in Toni Morrison, in James Baldwin, and all those black women, they've inspired me. There's nothing to do but to keep doing it.

00:46:24:06 - 00:47:10:16

**Sarah:** Yeah. Thank you so much for doing it. Thank you so much for doing that. I mean, for also like teaching in such an open, creative, brave manner for so long. Like thank you, really. I also love how you immersed yourself, I mean, your life has been a story also of immersing yourself in social justice movements and the teachings of Martin Luther King. You were holding a photo that our listeners couldn't see but you were holding a photo of Martin Luther King up, and we've also just seen Thich Nhat Hanh's passage just a few days ago, actually. So we're just in the kind of immediate few days after losing Thich Nhat Hanh from this plane.

00:47:13:26 - 00:47:17:14

**Jan:** Baptist and Buddhist together. They were brothers.

00:47:18:15 - 00:47:55:23

**Sarah:** Amazing. I think also every time I read your work, which, as Janet Gyatso said, it's just some of the clearest and most persuasive writing we get in academia. Like it's clear, accessible, and still all the things. And now hearing you speak, you managed so skillfully to ultimately also make this last century, which could also be a century of pain, into a century of a lot of hope. Because there's actually a lot of beauty in everything you've said. So thank you so much. All right. Well, that's it for this episode of The Circle Square. Thank you so much, Jan, for being here today.

00:47:56:06 - 00:47:58:14

**Jan:** Thank you. Thank you, I've enjoyed this talk.