

"Getting Back"

Zen master Dogen is always urging us, in his writings, that, as Buddhists, we cannot afford to look at things from the common, ordinary viewpoint of most people.

Last summer I was at the Lytton farmers market and someone we know made a rather sharp bantering remark of some sort. One of the vendors said "now you'll have to find a way to 'get back at him'". I found myself replying that we don't "get back" at people. When the vendor expressed puzzled surprise I said "We aren't allowed to 'get back' at people".

Leaving aside the bantering remark which actually did no harm, the point of my story is the puzzled surprise of the vendor.

There is a verse in the Dhammapada;

"He insulted me, hit me, beat me, robbed me - in those who harbor such thoughts hatred will never end for hatred is not ended by hatred at any time - hatred is only ended by letting go of hatred - that is, by compassion, by love. This is the ancient Truth taught by all the Buddhas."

Whether the Universe began in a Big Bang or has always been so, whether the climate is getting colder or warmer, whether the "state of the world" is getting better or worse it remains an ancient Truth that "getting back" is what fuels the fire of suffering and compassion is what cools and quenches that fire. We may not be able to know the answer to the other questions but we can know this ancient truth for ourselves by practicing meditation and the precepts.

This practice does not lead to the common or ordinary viewpoint but to something entirely different that actually works.
