



UU Sangha

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FROM THE UUBF CONVOCATION: A Dialogue with David Rynick Roshi and James Ford Roshi on UU Ministers and Buddhist Teachers

David: It's wonderful to be here. Just a few words about James and me, that we are friends and colleagues and partners in the dharma. My day job is as a life and leadership coach, working with people around aligning their lives with what is most deeply true. And James' day job is as the minister of the First Unitarian Church in Providence, Rhode Island. And together, James and myself and my wife Melissa— I was about to say our wife Melissa, but no, there are some limits here—are the co-founders of Boundless Way Zen Community, which has a number of sitting groups throughout New England, mostly meeting in Unitarian Churches. Our base of operations is the Boundless Way Temple in Worcester, where my wife and I live and practice. And my wife and I are long time members of the Unitarian Church of Worcester. This is my first UUBF meeting and



David Dae An Rynick Roshi and James Myoun Ford Roshi

at dinner I met some lovely people and got the true pleasure of coming together, which is we can both talk church and Buddhism, you know, so we can talk about dynamics of the church and what's happening and also talk about this other path that we all share.

* * *

Question: David, I heard you say that a Buddhist teacher is not like a Unitarian Universalist minister (James: He knows!) ... but I didn't hear you say anything about the assumption behind that. What is a Unitarian Universalist minister? (James: Yeah, explain that!)

David: What I see as the difference is around the authority that's granted. As I look at coming into the Unitarian worship, there is the freedom of the pulpit; there is the freedom of conscience; and there is the freedom of the pew. And so as a lay person in the Unitarian Universalist tradition I give the minister this gift of "this is not about preaching dogma." You're free to preach what you want, and I'm free; I hear that, and I can take what I want and not take what I don't want. I don't necessarily see my minister as my spiritual guide. She may be a wise person and hopefully is someone I learn from; and I may have a very intimate relationship with the minister, but that's not part of the deal, as I've understood it as a lay person. Whereas in Zen part of the deal is this intimacy, that there is this one on one and that we are talking about your spiritual life and how it's going, and, as James said, that if I am your teacher you have given me permission to push in some ways in this context of the trust and of

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Notes from the Editor

Greetings.

we welcome your letters, articles, stories, and poems.

Gassho, Robert Ertman, Editor

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Treasurer/Publisher

Richard Swanson (Zen)
164 Page Knoll
Lincoln, VT 05443-9582
email: rswansonvt AT gmail.com

Editor

Robert Ertman (Mindfulness, Zen)
c/o UUCA
333 Dubois Rd.
Annapolis, MD 21401
(410) 533-4203 (cell)
email: robertertman AT msn.com

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awakening; but it seems that there is more permission given and more asked for. So sitting as a zen teacher, not as the authority; but we have some real work to do together that's of a certain kind. Where it seems to me in the ministerial role in the UU tradition, it's much more up for grabs; certainly it can be incredibly intimate, but there's a greater range of what it is. And as a member coming into a UU church I don't have to have that relationship with you unless I want to.

And as I look at UU churches (and I do work with different churches) it is that that relationship is a negotiated relationship, and, when it really works, there's a kind of mutuality in it of no one's claiming—well I claim this; well no, no, you can't claim that because we claim this—and there's something quite stunning about it, I think, when it works, because of the clear expectation of equality in UU, and I think that this is part of the wisdom of this tradition. It's anticlerical in some ways—which creates then some problems for the clerics— but it leaves the possibility for an alive spiritual community that has found its way together in its own way, but it's a negotiated thing.

The questioner: When there is trust.

David: Right, yeah.

James: There's also a difference in training and expectation and credentialing. So, for a minister, there are a few gates one must pass through, but you pick the path if you wish to be a minister: you present yourself; you go forward; you undergo a course of training that's primarily academic, though it has a lot of internships and things; you have to pass through a committee that thinks you're not likely to be an axe murderer, and you're a minister. To become a Zen teacher is a different path. You might present yourself in some manner, but that's not generally encouraged and will probably in fact have some negative consequences in your relationship with your community and particularly your teacher. The practice is around the meditation disciplines; the credentialing is because some individual has initiated that approval, said that I think you might be

able to teach, lets you do limited teaching for a while, and then, after that trial period, may endorse an individual. In the west a teacher might produce two, three, five, ten successors in a lifetime, and so the whole thing is intimate from the beginning; it's intimate in the middle; and it's intimate at the end. If somebody can speak before large crowds that's merely an interesting side effect.



A Review of Deborah Schoeberlein and Suki Sheth's *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness: A Guide for Anyone Who Teaches Anything*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2009. 220 pp. \$16.95 (pbk)

by Charles Suhor

Schoeberlein and Sheth's book is one of many that are advancing what has come to be called "secular mindfulness." Briefly, secularization involves omitting identification of sources in spiritual traditions and avoiding exotic terms, even when the ideas are deeply rooted in such traditions. The approach has been used increasingly in recent years by writers as varied as Jon Kabat-Zin, Eckhart Tolle, Daniel Goleman and Sam Harris. It has been adapted in workshops, conferences, and programs in hospitals, prisons, universities, K-12 schools and education associations.

The authors of *Mindful Teaching and Teaching Mindfulness* skillfully adapt Buddhist mindfulness techniques to K-12 education. The word "meditation" is used sparingly, and everyday terms-secular language, if you will--are used to describe asana, metta and other practices. There are practical reasons for this. When read by educators in the public schools, the studiously nonsectarian language might hold at bay critics from the right who see traditional language as insidious new age brainwashing, or from the left who see them as back-door efforts to get prayer into schools.

The authors address teachers' practice of mindfulness before presenting classroom activities. A strong point is a section on mindfulness

and resilience, helpfully elaborated in term of sensitivity, self-calming, managing suffering, and recovering. The suggestions will be welcomed by teachers who face the pressures of classroom management, test-driven curricula, and job insecurity.

The activities for students are more readily adapted to the relatively fluid, open atmosphere of elementary classrooms than subject-specific middle and senior high schools. Creative subject area teachers will see the possibilities for wholesome applications of mindfulness to their disciplines, but many are content-bound due to training, temperament, or administrative fiat. In today's prescriptive, accountability-mad environment, teachers of academic disciplines in grades 7-12 would have to fly under the administrative radar to integrate mindfulness into their instruction.

Even so, it is clear that momentum is growing among educators and more slowly, in the general public, towards translation of understandings from spiritual traditions into everyday use in schools. Mindful Teaching is a worthy contribution to that movement. Schoeberlein and Sheth have given teachers a fine array of awareness techniques for dealing with everyday classroom stress and an abundance of methods for teaching mindfulness directly and without reference to belief.

Charles Suhor is a retired high school teacher and professional association administrator. A Vipassana meditator since 1990, he leads a weekly meditation and discussion group at the UU Fellowship of Montgomery, Alabama. His writings have appeared in Mindfulness Bell, Inquiring Mind, Buddhadharma, Insight, and numerous education journals.



The Dangers of Imperfection or How I learned to love my life and how Sangha plays a part in that path

By Theresa Sise

As a culture we do not have a sense of self-clemency, and both with our private practice and within a Sangha we model organically by example and by gentle

apprenticeship that we are pure; we are "enough"...just the way we are in this moment.

For my own path, as an artistic daughter of a military/establishment family, my struggle of the conceptual has been singularly in regards to communication/expression. I grew up with no sense of being heard or seen truly. I accepted that I was what people thought - wild and selfish and unfeeling yet maudlin. Perhaps because I near the 30 year mark, I have enough strength of spirit to stand on my own now. However I am doing it, I see all the things people interpreted and judged about me were all how they saw me trying to communicate and reach out to others all along.

We all have an infinite way of expressing ourselves. Joy, sadness, anger, all are communicated in an attempt to not feel completely alone in this world. We feel real, validated, safe when we sense someone has heard us and we find peace in the connection with that human being and a feeling of peace with the world. To expand this concept, we use a spectrum of ways to communicate our story to others and ourselves. We do it every day. Writing, gardening, dancing, cooking, chopping wood, running, meditating, laughing, eating, exploring, sailing, sewing, etc. What makes a good singer? A good runner? A painter? Someone who can authentically express themselves succinctly. Wow. Ok. How do you do that? Well you have to forget what your middle school chorus teacher meant when they told you to not sing, just mouth the words. You have to forgive the soccer coach that used his position of authority to make you feel inferior. You have to embrace the imperfections that are in every single finished work of art. When you hit a wall where you feel frustration because your painting feels childish or your song seems trite or you don't want to look like a fool on the dance floor - really take a look at where these thoughts are coming from. These judgments come from comparing yourself to someone else's journey. Perhaps Penelope's painting skills fit more closely to your idea of excellence -- but you have no idea what she has gone through, how many hours of battling her self judgment, how

she had to fight conceptions of her inner judgment. Do not make the mistake of seeing someone's accomplishments as whimsical. We are all fighting the great battle--each our own -- and to kick ourselves down because of someone else's mode of expression is to negate the great battle of that person and view them as capricious and ignorant. No -- See them as the beautifully battered and scarred warrior that has fought not only the judgment of others but the ultimate opponent -- the judgment of themselves!

You are the only person that can tell your story. You are the only person that can see things your way ,and when you express yourself authentically you are the only person capable of healing the world through compassion and understanding. You may be the only person able to express that song with such heart ache that you melt through hatred and ignorance. Your children's story might teach a valuable lesson that is stored in some kid's subconscious so that when they are pressured to become something they're not that they benefit from your wisdom ... But these are side benefits. Maybe you don't have a burning desire to imprint your story on the world. Why then, pull deep within ourselves to find our authentic voice? Why open that rusty door?

Just as cleaning out your attic can be a wild trip of surprise, so can embracing your authentic voice. We lose so very much of ourselves a little bit every day. It is organic. Plato quotes Heraclitus, saying "You could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you." Think of it - every second we flow and evolve, our experience constantly changing. If we do not have a sense of our authentic voice how can we help but to flow helplessly in the river of our life? The beauty of mindfulness is that we are the sum total of our experiences. We can at any time remember and reclaim who we are, who we have always been. At any moment we can remember what we used to love that got lost somewhere. We can rescue it, embrace it, and bring it into our present.

Start small: If you loved writing - don't write a book. Maybe beginning again for you would be buying fridge poetry magnets. If you love music, start finding times to blast that stereo again - maybe while you clean or garden or cook. Ignore your kid's moans that Hall & Oates is not cool and let your hair out! Take your shoes off and walk in the grass. Try to do a cartwheel when nobody is looking ,then fall laughing in the grass. Watch the clouds change. Spend your Saturday mornings as a ref for that sport you loved. If you just can't think of anything creative to do -- here's my fail safe plan: Buy a \$1 coloring book and a box of crayons. Believe me, it works. There's something about giving yourself the safe space to be creative that helps you remember what creativity really fed your soul so long ago.

I come to Sangha because I feel absolute acceptance of my authentic voice. I sit in silence with my friends and we breathe for the sake of breathing. I let the creaking of the floor boards, the wind outside, the sounds of breathing all around me flow through my soul and I can hear my inner voice just breathing. Whether I am inspired, in the midst of expression or embracing the formed mode of expression, I return to my breath. I am heard within my heart. I am heard within my soul. I breathe in and I am joyful. I am completely present in the here and now. My cup runneth over.

My favorite Gatha is by Thich Nhat Hanh:

WAKING UP

Waking up this morning, I smile.
Twenty four brand new hours are before me.
I vow to live fully in each moment
and to look at all beings with eyes of compassion

But remember. You cannot embrace anything with true compassion without embracing yourself with the same amount of gentleness and love.

Thank you for reading these thoughts. I am honored.

Theresa Sise sits with the Mindfulness Practice Group of Annapolis. She's a jazz singer and a member of the troop leading the mindful singing workshop at the Day of Mindfulness in the Arts at the UU Church of Annapolis next October.

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF ZAZEN

Remarks from the UUBF Convocation

I'd like to speak for just a couple of minutes about my own personal experience.



I'm in my 80's now—this is Bob Senghas, my dharma name is Tokushu—and, I'm as I say, I'm in my 80's now and I remember the Great Depression—not the recent depression, but the great depression. I remember Pearl Harbor. I remember 1942 when we weren't sure we were going to win. I remember our fiascos in Viet Nam. I remember many things. I remember my fifty-year happy marriage which ended eight years

ago with my wife's death. I'm aware of the news we get every day of the misery in the world. And the spiritual practice I have and doing it is what keeps me engaged as a human being. Now let me talk about that just a second. I think that—and I've found this to be true for me—if I meditate alone—and I'm not alone in this experience—my spiritual life begins to dry up.

There is something about the sangha, of being in a sangha, that changes my understanding of what it means to be alive each moment. I think what is happening is, I'm not only aware that I'm breathing the bell again but I'm aware with relatives who were at Gettysburg, Antietam, and Fredericksburg, and the awareness of the misery they must have gone through is alive in me, today, but the way I deal with this is that my spiritual practice is zazen. Because I become aware, I don't ask, why am I here. I am here, I am here this moment and then the next moment and when I am sitting in the sangha I am aware that I am related not only to the sangha but the sangha that's sitting with me reminds me that I am related to all living things, I am related to all non-living things. I am related to everything in the universe ; it is in me and I am

in it each moment as long as I am here. I can say yes to life with open eyes in what Zorba the Greek used to call "the great catastrophe", that my zen teacher the late John Daido Looi used to speak of frequently. It's a great catastrophe but we have to say, I am alive today, I respond to it, I respond to it with wisdom and compassion as well as I am able.

I am here and I am more awake when I sit. I am more awake after I sit because I have sat.

Thank you.

And this response from James Ford: I want to say, if we throw our hearts into this practice, if we allow ourselves to be fully engaged, whether we call it Unitarian Universalist, whether we call it Zen Buddhist, if we really live into it, we might approach Bob's life as our lives. That's what I want to be when I grow up. Thank you, Bob.

Bob Senghas—Rev. Robert Tokushu Senghas—is one of the founders of the UUBF. He is a senior student of the late John Daido Looi, Roshi, founder of the Mountains and Rivers Order.



Building Sangha

By Steve Locher and Charity Rowley

Our UU-Buddhist Sangha of Iowa City began about four years ago with a six week class called a UU-Buddhist Adventure. A number of class participants asked to continue gathering weekly as a community of people who explore contemporary Buddhist practice and teachings in the context of Unitarian Universalist principles. We rely on our collective wisdom and mutual support to promote clarity, compassion, and ethical behavior through the practices of meditation, mindfulness and discussion. We respect and nurture our unique journeys of mind and spirit. We welcome to our gathering people who wish to deepen their connection to Buddhist practice by participating in a sangha.

The members sit in a circle, and use egalitarian democratic principles for discussion and

for making decisions. Meetings typically open with a 30 minute silent meditation, continue with a 45 minute discussion, and conclude with a 10-15 minute silent meditation. One member may act as a facilitator for the meeting, handling meeting notices, announcements and, in some cases, preparing some remarks or excerpts for the discussion portion. The focus of practice and discussion is experiential, empirical, and pragmatic. Emphasis is given to the work of Western Buddhist teachers, to mindfulness-based practice, to a spirit of free and responsible inquiry, and to practical application of the teachings in daily life. Guests are occasionally invited to share teachings, practices, and stories. Diversity of view and practice is welcomed as a foundation for collective wisdom. Members find that participation in the sangha gatherings provides a strong motivation for ongoing personal practice and study.

The sangha uses a listserv through the Unitarian Universalist Society of Iowa City (UUSIC) to communicate the schedule for meetings, to share the focus topic for the coming meeting, and to share reflections, insights, and ideas during the week. A summary of the meeting is often posted following the gathering. Typical attendance is between 5 and 10 members. A number of new members have joined, bringing varying viewpoints and experiences.

During the past year the Sangha has continued to meet almost every Wednesday evening in the UUSIC library or in members' homes. We have used a wide range of resources for discussion topics, including articles from *Tricycle*, *Shambhala Sun*, texts and downloads from various internet sites, and the writings of contemporary Buddhist teachers such as Pema Chödrön, Thich Nhat Hanh, Rodney Smith, Sharon Salzberg, Ezra Bayda, and others. Individual members have shared responsibility for finding materials for the discussion and take turns facilitating the meditation and conversation. Our listserv currently has 36 subscribers.



A LETTER TO THE EDITOR AND AN OPEN LETTER

Dear Robert—

Enclosed you'll find an open letter to the two prisoners who have exchanged remarks in *UU Sangha*.

The information about the five skandhas and the analysis of the Heart Sutra have been made possible by our recent Buddhist volunteers. They come from a Sangha in Atascadero, California, and meet with the Buddhists on all six yards here at Avenal prison. When they are fully staffed we have weekly meditation meetings during which we experience Dharma talks.

I had been reciting the Heart Sutra during prisoner only meetings for years now but it wasn't until our volunteers brought us a better translation and held a Dharma talk on how the five skandhas work that I truly understood the Sutra's power.

How wonderful it is to have a resource like our volunteers and *UU Sangha* to help stick to the Way.

Namaste—

Christopher John

Dear Chris & John—

Words are powerful symbols that can evoke heart-pounding thoughts and feelings. In fact most of the fights I've seen in prison are ignited through conflagrations of profanity designed to burn another's pride.

This letter intends to address profanity and its grip but first let us consider another form of symbology. The depiction of a swastika may elicit just as emotional a response as severe profanity. Yet like it or not, the experience we form when viewing this symbol is completely determined by what we project into its right-angled arms.

Today in the west, many people associate the four-armed swirl with Hitler's German Nazi Party and for them the image evokes pain and

suffering. Yet it hasn't always been that way. The swastika is germane to many ancient cultures including Native North Americans, the Norse and our very own beloved Buddhist traditions. In these cultures the same symbol enjoys many different interpretations; one common belief is that it represents the four cardinal directions. In fact, some of the famous Giant Buddhas of Bamiyan, Afghanistan, had swastikas lovingly carved into their foreheads before the Taliban destroyed them. Comprehending the vast droves of symbols that surrounds us is understandably overwhelming yet by adopting mindfulness we can approach those who use powerful symbols of any type with loving-kindness.

As prisoners we live in an environment where the truth of suffering is never extinguished. No matter how well we master meditation in the serenity of our own personal space, inevitably distractions will always occur. But instead of fighting those interruptions our goal should be to simply recognize them, and then let them go. If we practice this in our lives rather than just during meditation, soon we will learn to consciously choose to render all distractions as meaningless, or empty.

We understand this concept better as we contemplate the Five Skandhas: form, perception, sensation, memory and consciousness. "Form", which can include the use of symbols, creates a mental concept called "perception". Based on this perception, humans develop an emotional response that is known as "sensation". When we tie morality to these sensations, to judge good versus evil, we attach a "memory" from our past. Finally, the mental formation that results defines our experience as "consciousness".

In a nutshell this means that when someone becomes offended, that person has envisioned a negative experience based on prior memories during which s/he had suffered and now s/he has associated that projection onto a new symbol whenever s/he perceives it. S/he is truly in a state of suffering.

I remind you of this because the Heart Sutra teaches us that the Five Skandhas are

empty of self-existence:

Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness there is no form, no sensation, no perception, no memory, and no consciousness ...

Because they are empty, a person must intentionally move from Skandha to Skandha in order to arrive at a conscious mental formation. Breaking that progression at any point along the way takes mindfulness and enhances our journey toward enlightenment. As Buddhists, we train to release attachment to the Five Skandhas because

Without walls of the mind and thus without fears, they see through delusions and finally Nirvana.

– Heart Sutra

The Heart Sutra teaches us that practicing emptiness means understanding the stimulus we encounter, such as the use of profane words, is meaningless—except when *we* give them the power to hold meaning. Thus Sutra empowers us to let a word simply be a word and divorces it from any perception, emotion, meaning and conscious experience be it positive or negative. Profanity isn't inherently bad—it just is. When we understand that, we realize words can not hurt. Instead it is our projections of what those words mean that cuts.

A wise man once said, "Reality is nothing more than an interpretation of a scheme from which one can never escape." That makes us all prisoners. Some of us live behind walls of razor wire but most of us live behind walls of the mind. It is difficult for us all to suffer without attempting to comfort our inexhaustible desires, whether they are justice or decorum.

Yet if it is suffering that binds us universally, consider practicing Engaged Buddhism, the style taught by Vietnamese zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh. He practices loving-kindness through direct acts of compassion because he seeks to overcome duality, the intellectual separation of one human from another. In this sense he limits cloistered meditation to avoid delu-

sions of serenity and instead practices his faith by engaging people who suffer, a state unity he calls interbeing. Interbeing frees us from the ego by forcing us to consider others as part of ourselves. It could be that the key to Liberation is held in the symbolic power of another word we Buddhists know well: Namaste—the spirit in me sees the spirit in you.

May we walk the path together—

Christopher John
(Yes—how ironic)

Cruse Control Complacency

by Steven

When my own actions led to a long prison sentence, I was ripped from all that is familiar. I could no longer rely on the cozy roles I had spent years to create. The shards of prison life itself continue to act as indelible mirrors, forcing me to confront the remnants of ego and the inescapable truth of impermanence.

I've turned to meditation, studying the Shambhala tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, as my solace and path towards renewed meaning. Yet even in prison, one can be lulled into a comfort zone. It is unfortunate that it took another crisis to startle me, to interrupt my stupor, to awaken me like cold mountain water.

Like I have for several years, last December I participated in a “retreat-from-afar” with a local abbey whose residents conduct a three-month retreat. When I received the printed text of the practice, I started a little early, “warming up” so to speak. Little did I know that old infraction would soon come to light, sending me to segregation — “the hole” — for several weeks.

In my six years here, this was my first time in segregation. After the initial shock, I looked to combat the utter boredom of having my job, my activities, my books, and (gasp) my television taken away. If one feels prison life is akin to a monastic environment, the stark cells in segregation are especially so. My blanket, stav-

ing off the cold, was draped around my shoulders and torso, envisioned as my novice robes.

Thankfully, my week of practice before the hole had solidified most of the text to memory. I chose to practice the retreat ritual in the hole for about one to two hours a day, broken into smaller chunks that my knees and back could withstand.

Upon my release from segregation, I was placed in a different complex where I knew very few people. My job and activities are on restriction for six months, leaving my days and my ego's pedestal on shaky ground.

My ego has always been dependent on that pedestal, supported by the labels I worked so hard to secure, with this being no different in prison. In my time here, I have developed a reputation as a model inmate, an accomplished education tutor, and chapel musician. While I genuinely enjoy the service aspect of these roles, praise and acclaim naturally fed my ego, as well. Letters to my family and friends have always revolved around the latest class I helped with or how the choir I directed was doing. I had attached my sense of worth, my sense of how well I am rebuilding my life on these labels.

The stripping of these labels left me foundering with a groundlessness that is still profoundly unsettling in a visceral, physical way. My workaholic manner (and perhaps some small measure of Protestant guilt) was in collusion with my pride to drive me rabidly towards constant activity. Like waking up the next morning after being laid off or standing amid the ruins of a house after a tornado, my heart cried out, “Now what?”

Before my hole shot, I had settled into a cruse-control complacency. Sure, I had practiced my meditation most days, but there was little need for grand introspection. Now I could do little else. In my desire to develop my character through spirituality, karma, burning brightly, was now handing me boundless opportunities with which to focus my practice.

At first, I set my overly analytical mind to getting all my privileges and activities back, to reset my cruse-control. Like the typical male, I

am inclined towards wanting to “fix” a situation and move on, almost as if it had never happened. But that mindset denies the richness and texture of where I am right now. Crisis usually instigates the growth we eagerly seek, though we abhor the process at the time.

Before most inmates’ arrests, the crimes that they committed are often their most closely held secret, sheltered from friends, family, and even spouses. It also follows that most prison friendships are guardedly shallow, following the mantra “I came in alone and I’ll leave alone.” But occasionally, with a select few, one can develop surprisingly deep friendships. When an inmate can discuss his or her crime, and perhaps the history that led to it, with another inmate—everyone’s in prison so it’s easier to broach—a shared intimacy can be established. In the hindsight of my stint in segregation, I found that I had taken some of my “in-house” friendships for granted. Now my relationships have a new closeness even if only through letters, though we’re wistful that it took this separation to awaken ourselves to it.

Mirroring the dedication I had habituated in the hole, I am still practicing my meditation and prayers heartily, especially purification practices from a dharma wisdom book. I find these help me to empathize with others and focus less about my own feelings of persecution or privilege.

Ironically, for a long time, my mini-library of spiritual and self-help books were tucked away under my bunk to be read at some later unspecified date. I am now uncovering troves of material that incisively speak to my situation and how I am dealing with it. The longer I walk this path, the more I’m convinced that we find teachings when we are ready and open to receive them.

And while my tutoring and music are still worthwhile endeavors that I will hopefully return to, I also see service in my practice itself “to destroy this great demon of self-cherishing” as taught by a Tibetan lama. Another teaching says to see how fortunate I am to be taking on this hardship, experiencing it on behalf of all sentient beings. Like so many other Christian teachings, this emphasizes the altruistic nature of our suffering.

So far, I’m not quite to the point of feeling so very “fortunate” for getting in trouble and reaping the consequences, but my spiritual practice has

helped me to subjugate my ego and transform my outlook into something more manageable. Last week, I met with our prison chaplain for our first in-depth discussion about all this since leaving the hole. She said she sensed in me a warm humility and a genuine desire to see my situation as it is; I hope it sticks.

In the meantime, if I start work by serving food in the chow hall, I can offer happiness and its causes to each inmate in line. And if I become a housing unit orderly, I can offer the benefit of sparkling clean showers as my avenue of serving others.

The Biscuit Giver

by Steven

I sat on my front porch,
the concrete cool beneath me.
I curved my shoulders forward
and drew my gaze down
while holding out the biscuit.

After the dog’s incursions
into our yard, my sitting
aroused his curiosity; perhaps
the breeze carried the scent of biscuit.

He approached in stuttered stabs,
taking cautious steps only
to reassess, skitter back
and repeat—ready
for escape at any moment.

For almost an hour I remained, solid
and unwavering. I did not demand
nor insist, but simply unfurled
my heart as a haven from mistrust.

I meditate now on my cushion
feeling more like that timid dog
than the biscuit giver. My silence
and noble pose conceal the chaos within.

So what do I seek amidst
my own stuttered steps—
for the world to comply
with my byzantine rules?

Acclaim or affection
or strawberry ice cream
with other more tawdry and tangled wants?

Perhaps it is merely to find
an outstretched hand that calls
without command to show me
a more sane and gentle way.



(Ad for DVD from the Convocation)

Description & plug

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