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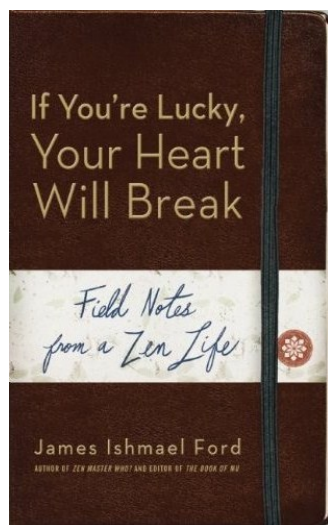
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An Excerpt From James Ford's New Book

If You're Lucky, Your Heart Will Break: Field Notes from a Zen Life

As best anyone knows, the first Zen master to teach in the West was the Japanese abbot Soyen Shaku. He was invited to speak at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago. The roshi spoke little English, so his paper on causality, also known as karma, was translated by his young student D.T. Suzuki, and read by one of the parliament's organizers. The paper received little attention from the press, but it did attract the notice of the writer and publisher Paul Carus.



Carus and the roshi became friends, and through that friendship some five years later the Zen master would return to the United States and spend nine months based in California. While there, he taught the basic practices of Zen to several people; among them was Ida Evelyn Russell, the first Westerner of Eu-

ropean descent I can ascertain to have taken on koan introspection practice. In the little more than a hundred years that have passed since Soyen Shaku's visits laid those first seeds into

our rich Western loam, Zen has taken root, perhaps tentatively and no doubt a little shallowly but also indisputably.

For me there is no tentativeness; the tendrils of this way have wound round and into my being and made me the person I am. What I write in the following pages represents the fruit of my Zen life. This is not an autobiography or memoir, but rather a deeply personal description of Zen teachings and central practices as best I understand them and as best I can present them. Most of all it is written for those who yearn for a way into genuine depth, for a map through the wastelands of the human heart and mind to our true home.

Sadly the Dharma in the West has divided along ethnic lines. Over the years communities of Asian immigrants have established themselves in the West, and while some of these Buddhist communities exist within an ethnic bubble, many do not. Among the most Western Buddhist communities primarily serving people of East Asian descent, I think immediately of the Buddhist Churches of America. The BCA has brought and adapted Pure Land Buddhism, creating a fascinating spiritual institution that can only be described as one of the predominant expressions of our emerging Western Dharma.

And this fact has frequently been missed. The majority of ethnic European descent converts have joined communities that are majority European descent, following trajectories ignorant of the evolution of Western Dharma within those communities established by Asian immi-

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Notes from the Editor

Greetings.

**Gassho,
Robert Ertman,
Editor**



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grants. I'm sure there are good reasons as well as bad for this, but I also believe this divide has been a wound in the Dharma come West.

And these divides continue.

Except for some intensely evangelical Lotus Sutra groups, which have long had African-American membership, Americans of African descent are only now beginning to come to the Dharma in measurable numbers. The same has been true for people of Latino and Native American descent. We're just beginning to see a broadening of the attraction to the Dharma in the West.

My main point in raising all this, however, is that it would be a serious mistake to speak of these communities of European descent only as "Western Buddhism." I think the next generations coming along are more sensitive to these divides and, I think, more open to closing them. What I am seeing, is that whatever is coming as Western Buddhism is rich and getting richer.

As for me, I trained within the European descent bubble, although even there it is impossible to not be affected by, nor terribly grateful for, the influences of East Asian teachers and practitioners who brought the Dharma to us. My teacher's teachers were almost all immigrants from Japan or Japanese nationals who visited and were visited. How can I not have been touched? And as I eat with chopsticks several times a month, depending on what I'm eating, I see the cultural influences of the Buddha's many host cultures, meeting and challenging and melting and recreating, as well.

Today the great mix of American culture, particularly on the Western coast, is increasingly pan-Pacific. As I hope I've adequately said, I've been deeply touched by this. When I think of the African American, Native American and Latino cultural and spiritual perspective entering the conversation, I'm enormously excited, feeling I'm witnessing something very rich happening. Although the contours of what is forming are still unclear.

Here in this book, I need to acknowledge what I bring to the table: I was raised a fundamentalist Christian of a Californian variety. I

embraced a rational and humanist stance in my late adolescence and not much later I found Buddhism as it was presented among the first generation of European descent converts. Whatever its flaws, this presentation was authentic and rich. I was a Zen monk for several years in my young adulthood. For a variety of reasons, some of which I'll touch upon in this book, after that monastic experience I explored a variety of spiritual pathways, including visits with the Episcopal Church, the Gnostic traditions, and the Universalist Sufism taught by Hazrat Inayat Khan and Samuel Lewis and their heirs.

In my late thirties I settled down both physically and spiritually, finding the fullness of my life within Unitarian Universalism and Zen Buddhism. While this book is about Zen, my Zen is also informed by Unitarian Universalism and its institutions. I am a Zen priest, but I am also a UU minister and have spent twenty years serving in UU congregations. Accordingly, I think it important to offer a brief comment here on my perspective regarding Unitarian Universalism.

This emergent Western tradition is probably best called liberal religion. Western liberal religion has two hallmarks. One is a deep respect for reason and rationality. And the second is bringing a broadly humanist perspective to the matters of spirit, acknowledging that whatever else may be true of other worlds or realms, the work of religion is ultimately always here in this world. The great struggle for liberal religion is how best to manifest the broadest individual liberty while knowing that in the last analysis we exist only within relationships. This tradition and its struggles have proven a congenial home for many convert Western Buddhists—particularly, through its comprehensive and open religious education programming, Western Buddhists with children. Though historically rooted in Christianity, Unitarian Universalism is not exactly a form of Christianity. I think that it has, through an independent evolution, come to stand in a place roughly between Taoism and Confucianism.

All this acknowledged I believe my stance can be summarized in calling myself a liberal Zen Buddhist. Today I am the heir to these two great traditions, and more as well. But essentially this means my Zen Buddhism is Western, mostly of the European-descent variety, flavored by my Christian upbringing, touched by the mystical traditions of the West and Near East, and very much informed by the great gift of the Western rational tradition. I've thrown myself into the way body, heart, and mind. I've found myself broken open and found in that opening my fundamental connection to the whole world, how we in our lives truly, truly are one.

As a Westerner of the rational inheritance, as I try to understand what I've experienced, I'm informed by a working assumption that if something is said to happen in the phenomenal world, I think it can be and should be subject to testing; and accordingly, I am eternally grateful for philosophical parsimony, the sharpness of Occam's Razor.

And at the same time I know a method is a method and not the goal of the questing heart. Not mixing these two things up has opened the way for me, and allowed me to reflect on this journey in ways that may be helpful to others who yearn for healing in this world of hurt.

The project of Zen and my engagement with it is about finding who I am, who we are as humans, and what is our true home. And that is what this book is about. Unitarian Universalism and Zen Buddhism have brought me close to the great matter. At first I felt they complemented each other's weaknesses. Zen lacked institutions that made sense to me at the time, while Unitarian Universalism felt light on the spiritual side. Certainly, taken together I found a full life for myself. Today I cannot actually separate the two traditions; they have in a certain sense become one in my heart. There have been a number of consequences to this approach, of course, but on the whole still it has been a rich path to follow.

A great and useful gift I've found has been the ability we all share as human beings, to be able to step back a little, to place just enough

distance between myself and my path, so that I am able to appreciate and sometimes appreciatively criticize this way that means so much to me, and which I think can mean so much for many people. Now, this is an important point. I did not find this gift by avoiding a fullhearted engagement with my path, but rather by using this very gift that we all have as human beings: that astonishing ability to watch ourselves. And, this is equally important; at the same time this way has invited me to let go of that distance at just the right moments.

I believe Zen is so important that it needs within it those who both love it passionately and also can see some of its flaws and shadows. As a human institution presenting a cluster of insights discovered by human beings, and offering a small package of disciplines also cultivated by human beings, of course it is flawed. The only questions are how flawed—and how helpful?

I threw myself into the Zen way to find out the most important things about who I am and what I might be, always looking at the path itself as well as my own heart and mind. What follows is what I have to offer: the results of that life and a description of the way for those who are similarly drawn to a rigorous investigation of the spiritual life, who are seeking nothing watered down, or attenuated. Just honesty. Only the real deal, only the truth—as best I have found it.

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James Ishmael Ford, sometimes known as James Myoun Ford Roshi, sometimes known as James, is the first and only Unitarian Universalist Minister Roshi. Be sure to visit his blog "Monkey Mind" at

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/monkeymind/>



Mappo and the End of Dharma

By Andy Jiyo Agacki

The Treatise on the Lamp for the Latter Day of the Law
[末法燈明記] (Jpn Mappo-tomyo-ki)

A work traditionally attributed to Dengyo(767-822), the founder of the Japanese Tendai school, though his authorship is doubtful. It is dated 801. First it clarifies the three periods of the Former Day, Middle Day, and Latter Day of the Law based on the Wise Kalpa Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, and the Great Collection Sutra. It asserts that, at the time of its composition, the Middle Day is nearing an end. Also, in the ensuing Latter Day, though Shakyamuni's Buddhism will remain, there will be neither practice of its teachings nor proof (enlightenment) accruing from it. Moreover, it states that in the Latter Day no one will observe the precepts. Therefore, even a priest who does not observe precepts should be revered as a teacher of the people. This writing greatly influenced the Japanese Buddhist teachers of the Kamakura period (1185-1333).

http://www.sgilibrary.org/search_dict.php

According to the sutras, the Buddha predicted his teachings would undergo three major phases:

The first 500 years following his Parinirvana is the *Age of the True Dharma* (*shōbo* 正法), when the Dharma is practiced very seriously and accurately, when Enlightenment is often attained.

The next 1,000 years is the *Age of Semblance Dharma* (*zōhō* 像法) when forms and rituals representing the Dharma are embraced more than learning and realizing its essence, leading to less attaining Enlightenment.

The next 10,000 years is the *Age of the End of the Dharma* (*masse* 末世, *mappō* 末法), when the Dharma becomes increasingly diluted and corrupted with non-Dharma elements, leading to rare attaining of Enlightenment, while moral chaos proliferates. In a natural cyclic manner, the True Dharma Age returns, with the "arrival" of the next Buddha.

Belief in the age of the end of the dharma was prevalent in Kamakura Japan (1185-1333), helping to fuel the rise of Pure Land movements which claimed that trying to attain salvation through one's "own efforts" (*jiriki* 自力) was hopeless in this degenerate age and that one should instead rely on the "other power" (*tariki* 他力) of the Buddha Amida.

As of this writing (2012), it has been 2,556 yrs. since the Buddha's Parinirvana, or about 1,056 years into the Dharma-Ending Age. Only a bit less than 9,000 years before it gets better, and *certainly* not a very good prognosis for our *current* Dharma work!

Apocryphal or not, I am paused to consider the prediction. While I was teaching my three-day course on the history of Buddhism (*Buddhism: East, West and Today*) a few months ago, I started to see a rough pattern to the ebb and flow of the Dharma over time. Yes ... it's all but disappeared from the 'old' lands of India, Afghanistan and China, but is it the less if the Dharma now flows into the West? Quantity of followers, or harboring land area aside, the Dharma still thrives. *All* things ebb and flow in existence, and the Dharma is no exception. The oceans shrink and grow, but they are still the oceans. Changing and moving, birthing and dying, the Dharma is still the Dharma.

To my mind though, I *do* see a decline in the Dharma, but it isn't a *deterioration*; it's a *movement*, a *change*: and movement and change are *natural*. *Decline*, used here then, is not a lessening of *quality* or *volume* as precursor to its demise, but as a movement or change away from the limited world-views of preceding generations/cultures. Neither good nor bad, the Buddha's world view did not include equality of the sexes, democracy or an awareness of a worldview beyond the foothills below the Himalayas. Remember: even though he taught that women were perfectly capable of becoming enlightened, he was extremely reluctant to ordain them, and then having done so, announced that the lifespan of the Dharma would be reduced from 1,000 years to 500 because of it. As the Dharma flowed out in time, it de-

clined away from that little stretch of land, 'imploding outward' from a purely *personal* vision into an ever widening *interpersonal communication*.

True then: what the Buddha taught, the 'birthed' Dharma, is not exactly *today's* Dharma. It has grown, has been *allowed* to grow, as a healthy child *should*. The world's religions, in fear of this *natural* process, cage and stultify themselves, keeping a distance from the 'others'. Damming themselves in, thinking thereby to preserve the *pristine* ideas of their origins, they only succeed in stagnating and putrefying them.

And yet ... and yet ...

Shakyamuni Buddha still needs to be present; still needs to be standing there twirling that flower and smiling, calming the mad elephants ... and telling stories ... above all ... telling stories.

As the ebb and flow of the Dharma washes out and returns around us in its ineffable cycle, the Buddha *still* needs to walk out with us on to those shores, holding our hand lightly ... but lightly.

Gassho.

A member of The First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee for 25 yrs., Sensei Jiyo Andy Agacki has been a practicing Buddhist as well for over 16 of those years. Andy has also conducted Adult RE classes in Buddhist Thought and History, and talked to RE Youth about Buddhism, as well as speaking to various churches in Wisconsin and Illinois. Andy was inducted as a Buddhist Minister in 2008, after completing 2 years training under the Rev. Koyo Kubose and the Bright Dawn Institute for American Buddhism (now Bright Dawn Center of Oneness Buddhism). Andy "takes pictures" as part of his practice.



INTRODUCING TARA BRACH

By Mike Harris

Our guest teacher at UUBF's biennial Convocation will be Tara Brach. She is no stranger to Unitarian Universalism. As a youth she attended the Montclair, NJ UU church and was active in LRY and continues to appreciate the UU emphasis on social justice.

Tara Brach has been teaching in the Buddhist tradition at the River Road Unitarian Universalist Congregation on Wednesday evenings since 1992. Beginning with a small group of 40 in the "fireside room," some 300 now gather weekly in the sanctuary.

Initially Tara spoke "out of the book" to more classic Buddhism. Over the years her understandings and teachings have evolved through many paths and streams to her current emphasis on emotional healing and spiritual practice. At the UUBF meeting she intends to co-explore ways of deepening and bringing home clarity to our lives.

Mike Harris is President of the Joseph Priestley District of the UUA and a member of UUBF.



WHO IS TARA BRACH?

Tara Brach is a leading western teacher of Buddhist meditation, emotional healing and spiritual awakening. She has practiced and taught meditation for over 35 years, with an emphasis on vipassana (mindfulness or insight) meditation. Tara is the senior teacher and founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington. A clinical psychologist, Tara is the author of "Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life With the Heart of a Buddha" and the upcoming book, "True Refuge: Finding Peace & Freedom in Your Own Awakened Heart" (Bantam, February 2013).

Tara is nationally known for her skill in weaving western psychological wisdom with a range of meditative practices. Her approach emphasizes compassion for oneself and others, mindful presence, and the direct realization and

embodiment of natural awareness.

Tara Brach's teachings blend Western psychology and Eastern spiritual practices, mindful attention to our inner life, and a full, compassionate engagement with our world. The result is a distinctive voice in Western Buddhism, one that offers a wise and caring approach to freeing Ourselves and society from suffering.

As an undergraduate at Clark University, Tara pursued a double major in psychology and political science. During this time, while working as a grass roots organizer for tenants' rights, she also began attending yoga classes and exploring Eastern approaches to inner transformation. After college, she lived for ten years in an ashram—a spiritual community—where she practiced and taught both yoga and concentrative meditation. When she left the ashram and attended her first Buddhist Insight Meditation retreat, led by Joseph Goldstein, she realized she was home. "I had found wisdom teachings and practices that train the heart and mind in unconditional and loving presence," she explains. "I knew that this was a path of true freedom."

Over the following years, Tara earned a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the Fielding Institute, with a dissertation exploring meditation as a therapeutic modality in treating addiction. She went on to complete a five-year Buddhist teacher training program at the Spirit Rock Meditation Center, under the guidance of Jack Kornfield. Working as both a psychotherapist and a meditation teacher, she found herself naturally blending these two powerful traditions—introducing meditation to her therapy clients and sharing western psychological insights with meditation students. This synthesis has evolved, in more recent years, into Tara's groundbreaking work in training psychotherapists to integrate mindfulness strategies into their clinical work.



Excerpted from the website of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington <http://imcw.org/> and Tara Brach's website <http://www.tarabrach.com/>.



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

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Departure 12:00 Noon Sunday, April 7
Our guest teacher will be Tara Brach, founder of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington.
Insight Meditation and Unitarian Universalist Buddhism

“At the UUBF meeting she intends to co-explore ways of deepening and bringing home clarity to our lives.”



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**Don't forget the UUBF Convocation, April 5-7, 2013,
near Baltimore at the Pearlstone Retreat Center,
Reisterstown, Maryland.**

Our guest teacher will be Tara Brach!