UU Sangha

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From Deficit to Abundance

By Rev. Samuel A. Trumbore

A common concern I've heard expressed by Unitarian Universalists who discover Buddhism and make a commitment to Buddhist practice is wondering how the two religious traditions fit together in a way that is mutually affirming and supporting. That concern can increase by a factor of ten for UU ministers. "Why not just leave one behind and immerse oneself in the other?" is the nagging question.

A compelling response came to me while sitting quietly at the Insight Meditation Society Forest Refuge in Barre, Massachusetts in the first two weeks of January.

After serving as minister of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany, New York for six years, my congregation granted me a six-month sabbatical that began January 1st. Not losing a precious moment of time, I began my sabbatical with a two-week self-guided meditation retreat at the Forest Refuge. The Forest Refuge is a beautiful modern retreat center set back from the road in a grove of trees. It is designed for people to do long and very quiet retreats with the minimum of disruption. Dharma talks are spaced three or four days apart. Visits with a teacher are also infrequent. The halls and grounds are very quiet. The center has been designed to facilitate the development of samadhi and sati, concentration and remembering-mindfulness.

In this quiet, peaceful setting, my concentration strengthened and my awareness sharpened. As I settle into silence at the beginning of a retreat, I often experience discomfort and distress as my mind resists slowing and calming down. Transitioning from the fast pace of the Christmas season to watching the snowflakes forming gentle piles on a statue of the Buddha can cause intense moments of restlessness. And sometimes this agitation manifests as a flood of emotional pain.

The primary emotion that dominated me as I sat motionless wrapped in wool blankets watching my breath come in and go out was not feeling good enough.

The feeling of not being good enough has deep roots for me that seem without beginning in my memory. On my first grade report card, Mrs. Logan wrote with concern how hard I was on myself as I tried to do everything right. My father wrote back that he also observed this in my personality and they were working on it with me at home. Whatever they did, it didn't work. I've been inwardly driven to achieve perfection my whole life. The price of that striving, even when I consciously let myself be more relaxed, has been self-judgment.

I always wanted to be as smart as my parents who seemed absolutely brilliant to my young, impressionable mind. My father taught Physical Chemistry at the University of Delaware where my mother also worked in the reference department of the library. Any possible question I could ask, my mother could find the resources that would supply an answer. At the dinner table, I'd ask a scientific question and a smile would appear on my father's lips. He would bring out a pen from his pocket protector, open up a napkin on the table and begin to reveal the great truths of science to me. I remember looking with awe at the complex formulas of integrals and differential equations he worked with to describe wave patterns generated by ionizing radiation of water and wonder if I could ever be smart enough to comprehend his life work.

Developing a chronic intestinal condition slowed me down in middle school from following my father's example and becoming a scientist. The pain and discomfort disrupted my concentration and clarity of thinking. Not that I didn't do well in high school and college, far from it. The intestinal condition made me feel like I wasn't good enough to achieve the intellectual greatness that I so highly prized.

Great suffering results from a disconnection be-

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Editorial Insights

This issue marks a transition for *UU Sangha* with Jeff Wilson leaving the editor's post to concentrate his writing efforts on completing his dissertation. Made visible by our archive of past issues found at http://www.uua.org/uubf/uusangha.htm, Jeff's leadership for this journal has been vital to our mutual well-being and growth as a fellowship in more ways than we can count. Continuing along the path set by Jeff and others as the new editor for *UU Sangha* is both an honor and a hoped for adventure.

I have been a UU since the 1970s largely due to my gravitation to what Nancy Wilson Ross called "three ways of Asian Wisdom" (Hinduism, Buddhism and Zen). Having reached my mid-fifties, my search for a spiritual home which began with becoming a UU, culminated recently with receiving the precepts as a layperson in the Soto Zen tradition. I am also a nursing professor and researcher with editing experience. It's exciting and deeply fulfilling to share in the worthy endeavor of spreading the Dharma within the context of contemporary Unitarian Universalism.

The three articles featured in this issue point to the transformation that may come when we retreat from our familiar routines and culture. Sam Trumbore shares a major change in self-perception during a two week meditation at the Forest Refuge Center in rural Massachusetts. Next, Wayne Amason describes a sabbatical including encounters with Buddhist and Christian communities. The final article is the first of several sermons by Doug Kraft planned for publication in our journal based on his sabbatical experiences in India and Thailand. Beginning with this issue, the directory of UU Practice Groups will no longer be included in the publication. The Directory of Groups will continue to be posted on our Web site. If you'd like to have yours included there please contact me. I will be updating the list over the next few months.

. We are planning a quarterly publication schedule over the coming year. The Fall 2006 issue will feature an article by Judith Wright entitled "Taking the Kalachakra Initiation". We will also have another one of Doug Kraft's sermons based on his recent sabbatical and an excerpt from James Ford's new book *Zen Master Who? A Guide to the People and Stories of Zen*. If you are interested in writing a review of this book for publication here, please let me know. The *UU Sangha* seeks to include many voices and the editor's mailbox is always open at egsmb@yahoo.com. You may also wish to call me on my cell phone at 706-231-2759. Gerald Bennett, Editor

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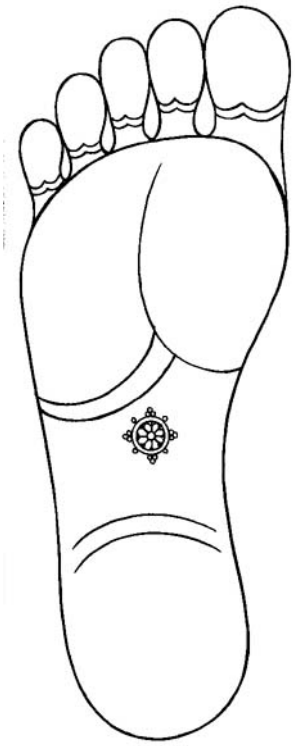
tween our imaginations, abilities and reality. My response to this disconnection was to try harder to compensate for any weakness. If I couldn't be a great scientist, let me graduate from a prestigious university, get a high paying job, climb the ladder of opportunity, make a lot of money and achieve a successful life.

And a good life I have had, I thought, as I brought my attention back to my right foot gently lifting off the ground, ready to move and then place itself in the walking meditation path I was slowly wearing into the floor. Happily married with 13-year-old son, serving a healthy, thriving UU congregation, living in a nice home, and in reasonably good health, I had nothing to complain about. Yet thoughts of sermons that could have gone better, calls that I forgot to make, less than soothing visits with parishioners who were ill tormented me. Would this sabbatical turn me into the excellent minister I wanted to be, the one who could satisfy every member and gradually bring them all to awakening and liberation?

I don't remember the exact moment that the thought arose in my mind but when it did, I felt a tremendous sense of relief and release. The thought arose that I AM good enough already. Nothing has to change, I don't need to learn one more skill or experience anything else – RIGHT NOW I am good enough.

Immediately my mind began leaping to make connections. The first connection was to the first principle of Unitarian Universalism "inherent worth and dignity." I wondered if I had really believed this before this moment about myself. Yes, I could easily see it in the members of my congregation and my family but I knew the contents of my mind too well. I could see the judgment, anger and fear dragging me down into the mud again and again. But though my unenlightened mind could cover and hide it, it could not extinguish the light of love in my heart. That Universalist vision of irresistible salvation, in the words of the Reverend Rob Hardies, would not let me go, let me down, or let me off.

My mind jumped to the connection with Buddhism. We ALL have Buddha nature. Even the murderer who has vowed to kill 1000 people and is about to kill his final victim can awaken to his capacity for wisdom and compassion and find liberation. No matter what we have done or had done to us, nothing can cancel out this life-giving property of existence. Dukkha *can* come to an end in nibbana.



Knowing that I can realize my Buddha nature is a little like learning to juggle eight balls. Yes, I know it is possible because I've seen people do it. I've seen people like the Dalai Lama and recognize their ability to manifest their Buddha nature. But how in the world do I get there? And as a minister, how can I lead others to that state of bliss?

The first three Noble Truths would be incomplete without the fourth. Knowing that liberation is possible is useless without the marvelous eightfold path that prepares the way for awakening. By applying one's energy to developing mental clarity through developing concentration and mindfulness, one cultivates the wisdom to recognize and understand the arising of grasping, aversion and ignorance and to decide what intentions are worthy of translating into speech, action and economic activity.

But how different is the eightfold path, I pondered as I redirected my attention back to the spoon in my hand ready to go down into the bowl for another mouthful of miso soup, from the development of character, the hallmark of early Unitarianism in New England? Isn't the striving for personal moral development central to Unitarian Universalism today? Don't we educate ourselves to use the moral wisdom we develop to guide our public and private lives seeking a better world for all? Isn't there a strong compatibility between these two real world approaches for personal and social improvement?

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As a birthright Unitarian Universalist, I'd been striving for personal and social improvement my whole life. But at the retreat this January, I felt a change happening in this striving. In the past that striving had always been driven by the goal of some day being good enough. I'd only be acceptable to myself and others if I attained some ever broadening and deepening level of competence. Suddenly I recognized this was an impossible goal. I could not find the self worth I sought through achievement.

I already had what I was looking for. I was already good enough. My mother and father didn't see me for the first time and think, "some day our child will amount to something." They were overwhelmed witnessing the Spirit of Life unfolding before them. But as a new born infant, my capacity to express my Buddha nature was quite limited. Yet as I grew throughout my life, until my last breath, I could get better and better at allowing that Spirit of Life to unfold through my life in ways that benefit myself and others.

I'm good enough and getting better.

That unfolding of the Spirit of Life never stops nor has an end point. Even when I'm oblivious to the grand and mysterious workings of that Spirit, the folding and unfolding continues. The Buddha nature, the Spirit of Life is working through me in each moment. The eightfold path as well as the development of character through seeking truth and meaning, can help us begin to recognize and understand what allows us to manifest our true nature and what can block it.

There is great fullness in the emptiness of the meditation hall at 3:00 am in the morning. Sitting motionless under the unwavering eye of the Buddha, I felt deeply thankful for the abundance of my life and the opportunities I have to share that abundance. I am not some defective, fallen creature pleading for a sign of acceptability and begging for a divine pass to some heaven realm. I am identical with the Spirit of Life exploring the infinite field of possibility for each new moment. There is no separation to be overcome, no barrier to break through, only an abundant living truth to fully embrace and allow to work through me to guide my actions.

This abundant Spirit of Life, beyond reduction or containment or even categorization, is not Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Unitarian Universalist. They can all point to It but never lay claim to It. Perhaps this is the genius and potential of what Unitarian Universalism can be: honoring and appreciating the many different traditions that proclaim the greatness of that which is beyond us. Seeking the widest possible path to truth and meaning may actually enhance our ability to dive deep into the spiritual practices of each tradition without being caught by the limits of overreaching dogma, authoritarian institutionalism and historically bound revelations.

The task for those of us who identify as both Unitarian Universalist and Buddhist is to discover the wealth of understanding and insight each tradition reveals, resisting the temptation to limit our understanding to one or the other. Each enshrines great truths that can shed light on the other. Moving beyond our divisions with a spirit of inquiry and appreciation will help us awaken and live in the presence of the great abundance of being.

I came home from my retreat more fully a Buddhist AND more fully a Unitarian Universalist. I'm richer for their conversation within me. I have a similar inner conversation with Christianity, and with Judaism, and with Islam. The vast abundance of the Spirit of Life is much clearer when seen through multiple lenses.

May moving beyond our divisions with a spirit of inquiry and appreciation be one of the important functions of the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship as we seek truth, meaning and liberation together.

Sleeping with the Christians

By Wayne Amason

Provocative as this title is, it is no surprise to people who know me and also know that I am married to a UU Christian minister, Kathleen Rolenz. Kathleen serves on the board of the UU Christian Fellowship and edits *The Good News,* their version of this newsletter. She has also just edited a new book Skinner House *Christian Voices in Unitarian Universalism.* In the fall of 2005, during some sabbatical time we shared, I attended the UU Christian Fellowship's annual *Revival*, a national conference of worship, practice, fellowship, and programming for UU Christians. Kathleen and I were studying worship during our sabbatical, so we also attended together many Christian worship services of various styles and denominations. So, in many respects, apart from the personal relationship Kathleen and I share, I have been "sleeping with the Christians" this past year in a whole variety of ways.

Kathleen and I talk a lot about what it means to be Unitarian Universalists who have distinct theological identities rooted in the practices of other traditions. We are very clear that it is the experiences of regular spiritual

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practice within the Buddhist and Christian traditions that brought both of us to the point of declaring our respective theological identities, and that have interested us in serving in leadership roles in the UUBF and the UUCF. Institutionally, I find that there is much that we in the UU Buddhist Fellowship have to learn from the UU Christians. They have several more decades of organization, scholarship, and convocations under their belts than we have. There is a depth of insight into the balancing act of daily practice with daily life that I enjoy experiencing in many of my UU Christian colleagues.

Kathleen and I feel the most strongly connected spiritually when we share practice time each morning. In many respects, she meets me more than halfway in the ways we practice together. The meditation room in our house is set up for a Buddhist practice. Entering, you would immediately notice the Buddhist altar, two zabutons and zafus, and the Buddhist art and iconography, including an *enzo*, the Ten Oxherding Pictures and a large porcelain Kwan Yin. Looking closer, however, you might see that the Buddhist altar includes a small icon of Jesus and Mary. The room also contains a desk with Bibles, books of reflection on Christian prayer, and journals. The *enzo* belongs to Kathleen and includes calligraphy of a quote from Rilke, rather than from a Buddhist source. She also owns the Kwan Yin, a longstanding image of the feminine principle that she has loved.

Above the two chairs we sit in to drink our morning coffee, there is a photograph of a bridge. That's the image that seems most emblematic of how we practice together.

Many mornings, we both sit in zazen. She has learned the Heart Sutra and the Great Vows that precede and follow my zazen time and chants them with me. For many years, we have also chanted "Be still and know that I am God". Several days a week, Kathleen does a *lectio divina* practice while I sit. This involves focus on a passage of Biblical scripture, and responding to it in art or writing in her journal. She has worked her way through the entire Bible via this practice. I read sometimes as well, before or after sitting. We have both found common ground in working with the "Living By Heart" practice taught by Laurel Hallman.

Lately, we have been preceding our sitting with scripture that we read out loud to each other from a lovely book of words and images entitled *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings (*edited by Marcus Borg, Introduction by Jack Kornfield; Ulysses Press, Berkeley CA 2004). This gift from UUCF member David Keyes has been a wonderful addition to our morning practice. I read aloud the words of Jesus to her and she reads back to me the parallel passage from Buddhist sutras. Some of the parallels stretch the imagination, but we're not reading them together for intellectual or critical engagement, but more because we like to sit with "live words", those words that appear in Buddhist koans that are triggers to enlightenment.

During the last month of sabbatical time we had this year, Kathleen and I each undertook residency periods in Christian and Buddhist monastic teaching communities. During a *mondo* (question and answer session) with my teacher John Daido Loori, Roshi, several people asked detailed questions about the nature of the *samadhi* experience. His answers were fresh in my mind still some weeks later when Kathleen and I compared notes about our monastic experiences. She described a remarkable experience she had while meditating on an icon, an experience that sounded a lot like the ways Daidoshi had talked about the *samadhi* experience.

We have both noted that monastics in both the Buddhist and Christian traditions speak about how they find much more in common with monastics practicing in other traditions than with the theologians of their respective traditions. The latter writings of Thomas Merton, and the conversations between Robert Aitken Roshi and Brother David Steindl Rast, about the common ground between Buddhism and Christianity as experienced by eastern and western monastics have been inspirational to both of us.

At our Ohio Meadville District meeting this spring, Kathleen heard about the plans the Commission on Appraisal has for inviting engagement with a by-laws required denomination-wide conversation about the UU purposes and principles over the next couple of years. We are excited about this conversation, but at the same time as we contemplate its meaning, we realize that what Unitarian Universalism has always lacked for us is not common values, but common practices. In our own ministries, Kathleen and I are striving to find in the practices of engagement with worship, spiritual disciplines, and sacred literature the common ground that UU's have previously sought in conversation about values. The more we have moved from "one-night stand" forays into each other's theological worlds, to steady committed presence and engagement with each others teachers and teachings, the more reasons we find to continue sleeping together.

In the Buddha's Footsteps: Sujata

By Rev. Doug Kraft

Transcendence and transformation are very different spiritual paths. Transcendence is about rising above the pain, suffering and limitations of this world and your life.

Transformation is not about rising above anything. It's about settling into the world and your life as they are. It requires making peace with the pain, suffering and limitations that are unavoidable.

At first glance transcendence is far more attractive. Who wouldn't want to transcend their worldly limits? There is only one problem: it doesn't work. Ultimately transcendence fails.

Transformation is more work. Not only do you have to know suffering and limitations, you have to open your heart to all of it. Keeping your heart open and keeping good boundaries is not easy. But it works. Your sense of who you are gradually evolves.

Transformation through simultaneously opening the heart and keeping good boundaries: I'll explore this practice in two talks. This one introduces this theme with a story about Siddhartha Gautama and a beautiful young woman named Sujata. But first I want to tell you about walking south a few miles from Bodhgaya – the place of Siddhartha's enlightenment – to a banyan tree where Siddhartha met Sujata shortly before his enlightenment.

Bodhgaya to Sujata

After breakfast we went out the back door of the hotel, around the watchmen, passed two Tibetan monks washing their robes, through the tiny door in the back gate and up a steep incline. To the right, the road led south to the center of Bodhgaya and the Bodhi tree. We turned left.

That Bodhi tree is a direct descendent of the tree under which the Buddha was enlightened. The tree is surrounded by a park that vibrates with spiritual energy. The park is surrounded by tiny shops, vendors, dogs, hawkers, beggars, con men, food stalls, rickshaws, vegetable markets, cripples, tourists, monks, pilgrims, tailors, internet cafés … It hums with entrepreneurial zeal and hustler charm. No doubt, the hustlers who had marked us were now waiting for us there or in front of the hotel.

Crossing the Naranjana River between Sujata and Bodhgaya. Doug Kraft (carrying the zafu) talks with Baliji. Behind him, Ashok (in the white shirt) tries to hustle another pilgrim as an old man walks with his hand out. In the distance are the hills of Rajagaha. (Photo by John Travis.)

So we turned left, taking a circuitous course around the hubbub and then south to the Sujata grove.

As we walked, we found the back streets far from empty: A dalit ("untouchable") woman boiled rice over a tiny fire on the sidewalk. A water buffalo chewed its cud in the middle of the road as traffic swerved around it. Four tiny kid goats slept in a peaceful heap on a huge pile of trash. A nanny goat grazed on garbage nearby. A rickshaw carrying about thirty chickens in tiny cages stopped in front of us. A man hopped down, grabbed three chickens by the feet and carried them across the street to a tiny plastic covered eating establishment. Barefoot men in turbans piled mud bricks into walls and lashed bamboo into building frames.

On the far side of Bodhgaya, the streets were even more congested until we ducked into an alley heading due south. The alley opened into a wide, high-walled street with a half dozen people: abandoned by Indian standards. A dilapidated building at the end displayed a fresh sign: "Get your X-rays here."

I stopped beneath the sign. To the west, an old twelve foot wooden gate stood half open. Dingy, stained and cracked columns and arches surrounded it. "This is the entry way to an ancient palace!" I realized. Sure enough, in the other direction was a large courtyard. A

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few cows, ducks, chickens and dogs wandered amongst thousand year old statues and ancient rubble. A small woman balanced a woven basket on her head. Two men lifted water from an ancient well and dumped it on themselves. Clearly people lived here. It could have been a scene in a Mad Max movie as people scrabbled amongst remains of a fallen civilization.

Half a dozen barefoot children hopped over to us. Their clothes were dusty and the wrong size. One had an eye infection. "Rupees, rupees," they said.

"Hello," I smiled. "Namasté." I shook my head, "No rupees." Giving money to street kids trained them to be beggars for the rest of their lives.

They held up their hands insistently and whined, "Rupees, rupees, rupees."

I was tempted to either give them money or turn away. Instead I asked, "What are your names?"

"I'm Balaji," a boy said.

"Let me show you something, Balaji." I took a picture and showed them the image on the back of my digital camera. Suddenly, I was not a walking bag of rupees. "Take a picture of me!"

The kids laughed, chatted, and held our hands as they showed us the huge organic garden outside the palace gate and the poor ashram inside the crumbling inner palace. They showed us through another massive gate that opened south on the banks of the Niranjana River. In the Buddha's time, the water ran clear and blue. That day, the river was a three quarter mile wide strip of sand.

As we started across Balaji announced, "I have two brothers and a sister."

"You have good English," I said.

He smiled.

"Where do you live?"

"Ishlim."

"Where's that?"

He pointed across the river in the direction we were walking.

"Sounds like a nice family," I said.

"I had four brothers. Two died. My mother died too."

"I'm sorry," I said.

He shrugged. Then he put his hands on the shoulders of a boy next to him, "This is my brother, Mihir."

Other kids joined in the conversation as we walked past bristly pigs rooting in the sand, knots of teenagers huddled around gambling games, women carrying baskets or babies and children playing. By now, we had over a dozen in our traveling retinue.

We climbed the far embankment, walked single file through the narrow streets of Ishlim and ventured out into the fields to the south.

I pointed to some trees in the distance and asked the kids, "Sujata?"

They all pointed to the grove: "Sujata!"

Three gleaming white SUVs packed with Japanese tourists rumbled toward us in a cloud of dust. And in the front seat of each, a man with a camcorder filmed us as they drove by.

"I just made it into a Japanese home movie," I thought.

A crowd of grim, sullen beggars materialized. Giving them rupees could stir up a riot. We smiled, shook our heads and walked around to the far side of the grove with everyone following us like gulls after trawlers.

A small, concrete, open-air temple nestled up against a banyan tree. We took off our shoes and entered.

John Travis, our leader on this pilgrimage, said, "I want to talk about this place but I don't think I can in this noise. Let's meditate and see what that does."

As we closed our eyes, most of the people fell silent. Those who didn't were hushed by others. Spiritual seeking is deeply respected in India, no matter who you are.

Fifteen minutes later, a Japanese tourist arrived, set up a tripod, filmed us meditating and left.

After about twenty-five minutes, John rang a bell. I opened my eyes. The walls and doorway were lined with faces watching us. But the mood was relatively peaceful.

John began to speak.

Sujata

Twenty-five hundred years ago, prince Siddhartha Gautama of the Sakya clan was the heir apparent of the small, prosperous kingdom of Kapilavatthu about fifty miles to the north of where we were sitting. In his late 20s, he realized that money, power, health, comfort and the world itself were all transient. Everything passes. So none could bring lasting happiness.

So he left the palace, gave up his wealth and became a homeless monk. He traveled south to the forested hills around Rajagaha. John pointed to the southeast. We could see the hills. For six and a half years Siddhartha studied there with four spiritual masters.

They taught that transcending the material realm and entering the spiritual was the path to lasting happiness.

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Siddhartha learned two methods of transcendence. One was cultivating deep, yogic trance states called "jhanas."

Through ardent practice, Siddhartha mastered the jhanas. He learned (1) they are profoundly blissful, (2) they don't last and (3) when he inevitably came back to normal consciousness, he saw in himself all the seeds of greed, anger, confusion, hatred, and other forms of unhappiness. The jhanas gave no wisdom for dealing with the world. Transcendence failed.

At the same time, Siddhartha pursued a second set of yogic disciplines: ascetic renunciation. Ascetics believe there is a conflict between he material and the spiritual. Therefore, weakening the material should strengthen the spiritual. They denied themselves contact with women. They renounced wealth, prestige, power and sometimes shelter, clothes and food. At one point Siddhartha ate only one grain of rice a day. When he touched his stomach, he could feel his backbone. He took ascetic denial as far as possible. If he went any further, he would die. In fact, he was starving to death. Yet spiritual fulfillment eluded him.

Siddhartha realized both sets of practices were flawed. Both failed.

So he left the hills of Rajagaha and traveled northwest. He got as far as the tiny farm village of Senani. There he collapsed under a tree. Too weak to move, he awaited death.

Meanwhile there was a beautiful young woman in Senani. Her name was Sujata.

Nature was central to the folk religions of that time. Each town had a central tree that housed a deva or god-spirit that protected the village and its people.

Sujata was overjoyed that she had married a good husband and become pregnant. She wanted to thank the tree with a traditional offering of sweet kir: a mixture of rice, milk, honey and rose that tastes similar to women's breast milk.

As she approached the tree with a bowl of kir, she saw an entity. After years of jhanic practices and near starvation, Siddhartha didn't even look human. He was "out there." She thought the tree spirit had taken material form to accept her offering.

But as she came closer, she realized he was a dying man. Instead of giving the food to the tree, she offered it to him.

Siddhartha Gautama looked at her for a long time. Then he accepted her gift. In that moment, Buddhism was born.

In the 21st century, it may be difficult to appreciate what a radical act it was to accept the food. The spirituality of Siddhartha's time used fierce, male, warrior-like qualities to try to transcend the earth. It rejected the earth, the soft, the feminine and the receptive. Ascetics were not supposed to have contact with women or eat sweet foods.

Sujata was beautiful and in her sexual prime. Accepting rice pudding that tastes like breast milk from a voluptuous young woman was as unacceptable in his time as the Pope visiting a prostitute in our time. When his ascetic buddies found out they were scandalized and disgusted.

His acceptance of Sujata's offering was not the desperate act of a dying man. It was a conscious choice of a different kind of spiritual path: the path of transformation. He no longer tried to transcend this world. He tried to open his heart to all of it and let it transform him. Turning to her was deliberate acceptance of the feminine and the earth. Statues of his enlightenment depict him sitting with one hand on his lap and the other touching the earth as if to say, "We are part of the earth. This is us. This is part of our path."

Sujata brought him food every day. When he was strong enough, he walked north, crossed the Niranjana River, sat down under a pilal tree and vowed not to move until he awakened.

But that is another story. Under the banyan tree with Sujata, at the very spot where we sat, he realized what he had to do to become enlightened. He saw the path of transformation: opening the heart to all this and at the same time keeping wise boundaries.

The Return

When we had finished talking, we left money in the temple donation box and went to get our shoes.

Outside, the crowd had grown three fold. The communication system was very efficient. All the people in Bodhgaya who had marked us "just happened" to be in the Sujata grove that afternoon.

My heart sank when I saw Ashok. He was an 18-year-old young man who had approached me my first day in Bodhgaya. "I just want to practice my

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English," he assured me. "I don't want to bother you."

Ever since, any time I left the hotel night or day he was waiting to talk to me. The second day he spoke about his school. The third he talked about being poor and hinted at how I might help.

On the walk back to town, Ashok casually told me he was studying hard for his up coming exams. But it wasn't easy because he was poor.

"Yeh, right," I thought. "He lurks outside my hotel day and night. All he seems to study is me. And he's good at it."

Out loud I said, "Ashok, we are walking the path of the Buddha from Sujata to the Bodhi tree. I think I'd rather not chat right now."

He walked quietly next to me.

I still felt trapped. I thought about what John had said about keeping the heart open and keeping good boundaries. So I put my hand on Ashok's shoulder. "Ashok," I said. "I just want you to know that I'm not going to give you money for your education."

He flinched. I went on. "You know the Prajnavihara School?" It is a school that educates the poorest of the poor. We had visited the school the day before. The nuns who run it found that education could break the cycle of poverty.

"Yes, I know Prajnavihara," Ashok assured me.

"Do you know Sister Mary Lobo?" Some of you may have seen her in a PBS documentary about micro-financing amongst the dalit ("untouchable") women: the lowest gender of the lowest cast. Her work has been remarkably effective in building self-esteem and confidence, as well as providing very practical help. We had spent the previous evening with her. She is a tiny woman with a huge heart, boundless energy and an unnerving way of cutting through any con.

"Yes, I know Sister Lobo," Ashok said as he stepped back a little.

"We're giving a lot of money to Prajnavihara and Sister Mary Lobo. I think they can put our resources to better use. We aren't going to have any money to give to others. Besides," I took a breath, "we believe that giving money to people we meet on the streets doesn't really help in the long run."

Ashok looked a little unnerved. But he quickly recovered. He looked hurt except for his eyes. They looked calculating as he scanned me.

"I haven't asked you for money," he said.

I felt my heart clench. I looked at his sad face and hard eyes. "Good move, Ashok," I thought

Out loud I said, "I know Ashok. I know you haven't actually asked me for anything. I just didn't want you to get the wrong idea."

He dropped back about fifteen feet. His charm quickly returned as he struck up a cheerful conversation with another member of our group.

I sighed.

Namasté

By this time we were starting through a narrow alley in Ishlim. People were sitting in their doorways.

At the far end of the alley, a man with thinning hair unconsciously stood up. He looked at us with open-eyed amazement and the biggest grin.

I bowed slightly and said, "Namasté."

He looked startled that someone with Barnum and Bailey could speak. Then he put his palms together, bowed respectfully and said, "Namasté."

He spoke Hindi to his five-year-old daughter. She quickly put her palms together and bowed to me. "Namasté." Her eyes sparkled.

I paused and bowed to her.

Namasté is a blessing. It means "I see God in you. I see the light in you. May it bless you."

The exchange took 15 seconds. But they saw God in me. And I saw the light in them. They beamed as if I had made their day. They had made mine.

I can barely imagine what their life is like in that little mudroom in a tiny village beside a dried up river in Bihar Pradesh, the poorest province of a poor country. I can try to imagine but I know as little about their life as they can imagine about mine in Sacramento.

But for moment, on a hot afternoon along the footsteps of the Buddha, we saw each other's essence.

As we approached the Niranjana River I felt slightly euphoric. "I just love this place," I thought. "I don't know how to explain it, but I love this place."

Heart and Boundaries

That's enough of my adventures for now.

(Continued on page 10)

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In order to survive without shutting down or going crazy in India, we had to do two things.

First, we worked constantly to keep our hearts open. The grime, pollution, scams, suffering, and deprivation made it easy to get lost in fear, anger, resentment, overload or numbness. So it was important to feel all of it in the heart. This helped us open to the people around us. And there were many lovely, light spirited folks like the man and his daughter. Without an open heart I would not have even noticed them.

Second, we worked constantly to keep good boundaries. The heart is potentially infinite. Our love needs no boundaries. But our time, money, resources and emotional energy are limited. They are part of a finite world.

The path of transformation requires that we manage our resources responsibly. It requires that we keep good boundaries. Without good boundaries, India would have sucked us dry.

Keeping good boundaries is not an excuse for closing the heart. The path of transformation is not a balancing act. It is not a little heart and a little boundary. It is all of both. It is doing your best to keep your infinite love flowing and at the same time managing your finite resources wisely: open heart and good boundaries.

In this country, the path may not be as stark. But the issues are the same. How do you encourage your love to open to everyone and concurrently manage skillful limit setting? When you are dealing with family, work, the church, the political scene, how do you stay heartful and within reasonable bounds?

These are the questions we'll reflect on in the next talk. In the meantime, if you like, hold this phrase in your chest, "Open heart and good boundaries." Particularly in difficult times, let it guide and inform you. "Open heart; good boundaries."

May it help us come together, deepen our lives and actively love the world.

Namasté.

Pilgrimage to Sacred Buddhist Sites

Art Hansen, a UUBF member and a leader of the Mindfulness Practice Group of the UU Church of Annapolis will be the teaching leader of a pilgrimage to the sacred sites of the Buddha in India and Nepal from November 6-30, 2006. This pilgrimage will be limited to only 8-10 persons plus Art and Christy Tews, the logistics coordinator. We will visit Bodhgaya, Sarnath, Varanasi, Rajgir, Sravasti, Kushinagar, Lumbini and Kathmandu. We will stay in guest houses and similar lodging quite close to each of the sacred sites, so one can easily walk to temples, stupas, and monastery ruins. There will be dharma talks and meditation in Buddhist temples, under the Bodhi Tree, in a cave and at the Birthplace of the Buddha. All of the Dharma talks and discussions of the life of the Buddha will be from the Pali Cannon. Art practices and teaches from the Theravada tradition and made this pilgrimage in 2002. The cost of land travel, meals, lodging and entrance to the sacred sites in India will be $1895 per person if there are at least 8 pilgrims. For more information, please contact Art at: nandart@comcast.net

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Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship

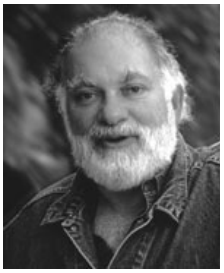
Convocation 2007

Thursday dinner, April 12 through lunch Sunday, April 15, 2007

Garrison Institute, Garrison, New York

Unitarian Universalist Buddhists Bearing Witness

Our exploration for this gathering will be socially engaged Buddhism. What are appropriate and skillful actions for Buddhists who have taken the vow to liberate all beings, and also UU's who affirm a faith in the inherent worth and dignity of every person?



with **Bernie Glassman & Eve Myonen Marko**

Roshi Bernie and Sensei Eve are founders of the Zen Peacemakers order. They collaborated in writing the book ***Bearing Witness: A Zen Master's Instructions on Making Peace***. Glassman is the first western dharma heir of Maezumi Roshi (1976) and a pioneer of the American Zen movement. He has taken the dharma to the marketplace founding the Greyston Mandala, a network of community development organizations based on Buddhist values. He has also organized meditation retreats at Auschwitz and on the streets of New York City.

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UU Minister of Music, Nashville, Tennessee

Registration:

Supersaver: before 7/15/06..... $60
Early bird: before 3/1/07 ..... $80
Regular..... $100

For more details visit: http://www.uua.org/uubf

Accommodations (per person, per night):

Single room ..... $86 /$80 with house job
Double room ..... $71 /$65 with house job
Triple or dorm room ..... $56 /$50 with house job
Commuter ……$44 (no house job option)

Garrison info & directions: http://www.garrisoninstitute.org/

Mail registration to: UUBF Registrar c/o Richard Swanson 823 Main St. Colchester, VT 05446 email: UUBFregistrar@uumin.org

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Address _____

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UUBF group or congregation _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Double or triple occupancy: ___Yes, please assign roommate

or My roommate(s) will be: _____

Note any questions or special needs on reverse or email registrar.

Please circle:

 # attending: 1 2 ____

 # nights : 0 1 2 3

Room size: 1 2 3 w/ job commuter

Deposit enclosed: $_____

(minimum deposit is registration fee for each attendee)

UU Sangha
c/o Richard Swanson
823 Main Street
Colchester, VT 05446-7192

Return Service Requested

UU Sangha Summer 2006

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