



# UU Sangha

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## A Toilet Brush as a Meditation Tool

by Rev. Amy Bowden Freedman

We are all familiar with Buddhist monks, dressed in simple robes, heads shaved, often with the contented half-smile of enlightenment on their faces. However, you may be less familiar with the “Toilet-cleaning monks” of Japan. There is a certain sect of Buddhism whose primary practice is to clean toilets. My husband, Peter lent me the issue of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* that featured the commune near Kyoto, Japan “where toilet-cleaning [is] considered a path to self-knowledge.” (Louise-Rafkin, “A Yen for Cleaning”, *Tricycle*, Spring 1998, p. 51-55.)

As you can imagine with the toilet being a modern convenience, this is a relatively new aspect of the more ancient Buddhist religion. The founder Tenko Nishida lived from 1872-1968. In the late 1880’s, Tenko became disenchanted with capitalism. He refused to compete with others in order to secure his own livelihood. Tenko engaged in three days of meditation and found enlightenment. His spiritual awakening cast off the assumption that we work in order to live. Instead, Tenko held that life is freely given to all beings by what he called “The Light” (what others might call God or the Spirit of Life). Life itself does not need to be worked for; instead, work is a way of offering thanks for life itself.

Like the Buddha, Tenko renounced his family, status and all worldly possessions. As well as practicing meditation, Tenko served other people by chopping wood, cleaning households and scrubbing privies. He lived on the bare necessities and soon attracted followers to his way of life. The donation of a piece of land allowed Tenko to establish a community called Ittoen or “One Light.” At its height in the 1950’s and ‘60’s, the community had hundreds of



followers. Today, there are about 150 members and their spiritual teachings and practice extends far beyond their immediate circle.

Ittoen offers training sessions for business people and factory workers. This is not the typical American business conference. Instead of attending seminars with Power point presentations, the four days of training involves early morning meditation and then going from door-to-door begging to clean toilets. The article showed a photograph of workers from Mr. Donut lined up along a sidewalk with brushes and buckets in hand. Four thousand Mr. Donut workers attend this training annually not to learn how to clean but “to promote humility and facilitate group dynamics.”

As the author of the article points out, imagine if American workers went through the same training. It is difficult to imagine employees of Dunkin’ Donuts or McDonald’s, “jogging door-to-door, heads bowed, begging to clean toilets.” It’s also a stretch to imagine someone knocking on my door offering to clean my toilet as a spiritual practice.

On the Wisdom Tour to Kyoto that I took

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## Notes from the Editor

**G**reetings. I'm the incoming Editor of *UU Sangha*. Our thanks to Gerald Bennett who did most of the work for this issue.

Amy Bowden Freedman, minister of Channing Memorial Church, UU, gives us "A Toilet Brush as a Meditation Tool," an invitation to practice mindfulness.

Doug Kraft continues a series of articles drawn from his sabbatical experiences in India and Thailand and gives us "Mindfulness II: Transformation." Doug is the senior minister of the UU Society of Sacramento ([doug@uuss.org](mailto:doug@uuss.org)). He welcomes you to use material in his article as long as you give credit and don't use it for profit. For other uses, contact the author.

Andy Agacki is a leader in the Buddhist UU Group at First Unitarian Church in Milwaukee. He took Lay Precepts with the Kwan Um School of Zen in 1998, and with Bright Dawn in 2006. He's currently enrolled in Bright Dawn Lay Practitioner program. Andy has given dozens of dharma talks, classes, and sermons at local UU churches and in this issue he gives us his sermon on "An American Buddhism."

I'm here too with "Bearing Witness on the Streets of Annapolis," the progeny of the presentation by Roshi Bernie Glassman and Sensei Eve Myonen Marko, Zen Peacemakers, at our 2007 Convocation. Phyllis Culham, my wife, joins me here with "Another View from the Streets." Our home sangha is the Mindfulness Practice Group of Annapolis at the UU Church of Annapolis. We also sit with the Silver Spring Zendo/One Heart Sangha, in the White Plum line, and at the Mindfulness Practice Center of Fairfax.

Your Editor would like to see the emergence of a UU Buddhist liturgical year. Our MPG at UUCA marks Earth Day and Martin Luther King, Jr., Day with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh. On All Souls' Day we meditate on the dissolution of the body and read aloud Ikkyu's poem "Skeletons." Many UU Buddhist groups are lay led and peer led but still offer authentic Buddhist programs without pretending to authority they do not have. We would like to hear what you do as UU Buddhists. And we would like to have your artwork and poetry.

**Gassho, Robert Ertman, Editor**

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during seminary, we did not visit Ittoen; however, I did witness a reverence and care for the physical world as a reflection of the spiritual. I will never forget visiting one Buddhist Temple where a group of lay people was sweeping the grounds. Each person had a matching bandana around their neck signifying they were lay people of the same community. No one spoke but almost every square foot there was a person working diligently. Heads bent, sweeping with a bamboo broom, calmly ridding the grounds of what seemed like clean gravel of any litter, cigarette butts, and fallen leaves. Raking the leaves is not drudgery but an opportunity to be in touch with the cycles of nature and with the ground of enlightenment.

The first tenet of Zen Buddhism states: “The realities of life are most truly seen in everyday things and actions.” Can spiritual awakening truly be found in mundane tasks like cleaning toilets, raking the yard, and washing the dishes? As Unitarian Universalists, we believe that life is a continual journey of growth and discovery. We build our own theology or beliefs about life through engagement with the world around us. Our spiritual path may inspire us to read scripture, to pray, to meditate, to create rituals, to study or to take a pilgrimage. Each one of those spiritual paths may bring great insight. However, as Zen Buddhist principle #11 states, “One can only live in the present moment.” On our spiritual journeys we may encounter moments of transcendence, but we must also pick up our socks and take out the trash. We do not need to sit in a Buddha Hall or travel to Japan to find these spiritual practices. They are a fundamental part of living.

Buddha means “the awakened one.” When Gautama arose from his meditation under the bodhi tree, he woke up from the dream of being a separate ego in a material universe. Instead of clinging to material attachments, illusions of grandeur and separateness, he taught the release of suffering through mindfulness in the present moment. When we can see ourselves as connected to all of life then tasks that are usually viewed as unpleasant are transformed into an opportunity to be fully awake to the miracle of life itself.

The most simple spiritual lessons are often the most difficult to remember. Oftentimes when I am doing the dishes or mopping the floor, I am not fully

present. My mind is frequently rushing ahead to what I have to do next or thinking back to a previous activity. When I am distracted from the task at hand, my work is often sloppy. As the saying goes, “Haste makes waste.”

Earlier this week, I made waffles for breakfast. After quickly mixing and pouring the batter, I checked my voicemail messages. Unbeknownst to me, the batter oozed out of the side of the waffle iron, onto the counter and slowly down the cabinet onto the kitchen floor. I was in the midst of another task when I finally noticed. My first reaction was an exasperated sigh as if the waffle iron was to blame! And then knowing the topic of this article, I chuckled to myself, because I obviously failed at the Zen of Waffles. In my distracted state, I must have poured too much batter into the waffle iron, which was why it was now oozing like slow moving lava from a volcano. I took a deep breath and cleaned up my mess. I slowed down bringing my full attention to making the next waffle. When I performed the same task with greater attention, the waffle was perfect! Instead of being something I needed to get through, I enjoyed the process of cooking and then truly appreciated the good results.

So, I invite you in the week ahead to practice mindfulness. When you are eating, take the time for a sustained, mindful, attentive tasting. Notice the textures and flavors of your food. Pay attention to the source of your nourishment and our intimate connection to the earth. Open your awareness to those who are hungry and let it awaken your gratitude and compassion.

When you are walking outdoors, take the time for a sustained, mindful, attentive step. We are often in such a rush to move from place to place that our minds race ahead of our bodies. Enjoy walking not only as a means to arrive but just for walking. Take your steps in full awareness and invite a sense of balance and harmony as you tread lightly on the earth.

When you are cleaning the toilet, take the time for sustained, mindful, attentive work. Our minds are often focused on other things or judging our present task as “dirty.” What if instead of thinking of the routine parts of our day as “chores,” boring jobs that we have to do before we can go on to something more rewarding, we recognize the sacredness of

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the ordinary? Cleaning the toilet is not dirty but an opportunity to cleanse our environment and ourselves. Housework then becomes not a chore but a spiritual practice as worthy as sitting in the meditation hall.

Much of our unhappiness or tension comes from not being fully present. The most tedious activities are transformed when we become aware of each action. One can only live in the present moment so do not miss it!

May the insights of Buddhism help each one of us truly see the realities of life in everyday things and actions. To do so takes practice and attention. Perhaps when we have more fully awakened to this truth, we can surprise the neighbors by going door-to-door begging to clean their toilets. Maybe we better just begin at home. For in the words of Thich Nhat Hanh, "Any ground we sweep in full awareness is the ground of enlightenment."

## Bearing Witness On the Streets Of Annapolis

by Bob Ertman

In the last issue of the *UU Sangha*, I wrote about the presentation on engaged Buddhism given by Peacemakers Roshi Bernie Glassman and Sensei Eve Myonen Marko at the UUBF Convocation. We left determined to bear witness to life on the streets of our home town, Annapolis, the capitol of Maryland.

We were fortunate in finding Stephen Clark, a Peacemaker and experienced Street Retreat leader who works with Active Compassion in Baltimore. He was our guide and fellow stumbler into not-knowing and experiencing the oneness of life.

Early on the morning of September 22, 2007, a Saturday and the last day of summer, five of us from the Mindfulness Practice Group of Annapolis met Stephen at the City Dock, myself, my wife, Phyllis, our daughter, Hallie, Karen and Jeff. In a sense we had begun the retreat earlier; each of us had raised \$108 for the retreat by panhandling our friends and acquaintances; we would share this among Active Compassion and organizations serving the homeless in Annapolis. We had no money and no possessions besides what we were wearing and an I.D. We were going to be on the streets for 24 hours.

We meditated for a while and talked about

what we were going to do; mostly wandering around aimlessly. We didn't realize it then but that is a practice with some history.

As we wandered not-quite aimlessly toward a church with a soup kitchen, coffee seemed a pressing

Master Jizo asked Hogen, "Where are you going?" Hogen replied, "I am wandering about aimlessly." Jizo asked, "So, what do you think of this wandering about?" Hogen said, "I don't know." Jizo replied, "Not knowing is most intimate."  
Case Twenty, The Book of Serenity

matter. I found an OK looking cup and went into a local shop and asked for a gift of a cup of coffee. They were gracious and even asked me what kind I would like. I was grateful and shared it with my daughter; she was grateful too.

We wandered on and stopped to talk to the first real homeless person we met on the retreat. He spotted us as ringers right off- we were just too clean. We talked for quite a while about life on the streets and learned that it's hard to find a place to wash and even harder to wash your clothes. We invited him to wander on to the soup kitchen but he opted to try to panhandle his way to a deli lunch. He was amused that we really didn't have a dime to help him out.

It was quite a walk but we got to the church early. We didn't know where the entrance for the meal was (it turned out to be the main entrance) so we walked around the block to the back where we met someone else waiting around for lunch. He really struggled to tell us something important, that there was another church close by that gave sack lunches. It wasn't in sight and it took a real effort to explain how to get there. It was really clear that this wasn't the way he usually interacted with white people.

We decided that three of us would check it out. We found the church, a couple blocks away, at the edge of the poorest part of town. We were accepted without question and each given two bag lunches. This would be supper for all of us and we were grateful.

We went back to the first church and were welcomed in, seated and served. A lot of regulars were there and they looked out for us, making sure that we knew that we were really welcome to ask for seconds. And that there was coffee, self-serve. We talked to a lot of people; they were concerned about

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us but didn't pry. We learned that they looked out for their friends and neighbors too, bringing plates to the really elderly and infirm. Most of the people there weren't homeless but were just getting by.

I had been uneasy about accepting the generosity of these Black churches, people who, for the most part, weren't well off. But they were practicing, and we were receiving, the very best of the Christian tradition—just feeding the hungry, without question, without judgment. We were grateful.

We wandered on back toward the center of Annapolis. On the way we met our friend from the morning. He hadn't reached his lunch goal yet so we gave him one of our sandwiches and a blue-flavor drink. He was grateful. And we were grateful for the opportunity to give rather than to receive.

I wanted to write some haiku. I found some paper in a trash bag and Karen and Hallie went over to the Republican Party office and acquired a pencil. It was left over from our former Governor's campaign for re-election and I would not have put it in my hand under other circumstances. But I was grateful, even to the former Governor. Alas, the GOP had no pencil sharpener.

We wandered over to the State House. Water fountains. Restrooms. Perhaps a pencil sharpener. The guards wouldn't let Hallie in because she didn't have an I.D. They weren't happy about the rest of us either and really wanted to know if we had any knives. Inside, a lady seemed grateful to be able to hasten our departure by finding a pencil sharpener. I was all set to write haiku but inspiration would not arrive until the next day.

We wandered around some more, meditated for a while, and talked about the day. We had all figured out that while it may be more blessed to give than to receive, it's also easier. Then Stephen assigned us the task of panhandling.

Panhandling was really hard, much harder than receiving food. We split up for this and, for the first time, didn't have the support of the group. We knew that there would be no breakfast unless we collected some cash, but all of us would rather have just gone hungry. We weren't very good at it either. We spent an hour or so at it and took in a little over seven dollars. We were grateful for every coin and bill, and we were grateful when the hour was up. We came together, pooled the money, talked, meditated, and

then wandered around aimlessly. We bought a family size package of those orange cheese crackers with peanut butter for our breakfast. I found a dime and we were grateful.

Back at City Dock, evening was coming. We shared the bag lunches for dinner and thought about how to spend the evening. And Hallie and I thought about coffee. We knew that there would be a large twelve-step meeting at a downtown church. I was uneasy about intruding, but addiction is behind much homelessness and it seemed a natural place to go. And so we wandered over. Free coffee. Free cookies. Restrooms. We were welcomed without question.

Most of the people there were trying to stay clean or get clean. For some, the meeting was a substitute for the singles bar scene. But we weren't the only ones who came for the free coffee. We saw people we had met at lunch and talked with some street people and others who had been. We learned that the place we had planned to spend the night would be in use by business people, so to speak, but got advice on safe places.

And so, as Sensei Eve put it, we set off to experience the generosity of cardboard cartons, to cover us and to protect us from the dampness of the ground.

It takes a lot of cardboard to sleep six people. We gathered as much as we could and tried to be invisible as we carried it behind a downtown church.

It was a beautiful night, still warm the last hours of summer. We were tired but our sleep was uneasy. It got cold and damp. I woke up when Hallie abandoned her damp cardboard to slugs and lay down next to her mom. Jeff was the beneficiary and pulled the cardboard over himself. I was joined by slugs too but just tried not to roll over. We were awakened well before dawn when cars began to arrive for a 6 a.m. church service. We needed to depart before we were seen.

marking the autumnal equinox  
looking for a place to pee

We made our way to City Dock, grateful for public restrooms and orange cheese crackers. We stopped to see if our last two dollars and change could get us six coffees. Not six but three, so we shared and were grateful. We meditated, talked things over, thanked Stephen, and drifted away.

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I thought of Basho and his haiku about the hardships of travel:

fleas, lice,  
the horse pissing  
near my pillow

And inspiration came.

no pissing horse  
but slugs on my  
cardboard

And more.

no horse pissing  
near my pillow—  
no pillow

But perhaps Basho and I complained too much. I thought of Issa and his acceptance of life, hardships and everything else:

gratitude for gifts,  
even snow on my bedspread  
a gift from the Pure Land

And so, finally, I wrote

sharing  
my cardboard—  
slugs

What do you not-know about life on the streets in your town?

## Another View From the Streets

by Phyllis Culham

Even with a blown knee my time homeless in Annapolis had been pretty mild. We couldn't see in the dark the lovely garden we'd spend the night in, but the full moon was showing through some fast traveling clouds, and I didn't mind initial sleeplessness while I could watch that. Unfortunately, I awoke about 3 AM because I had to pee.

We had selected our sleeping spot largely because it was behind a parking lot adjacent to some school construction, and there were portapotties. So I got up and headed for them. Then I realized that, after I rounded one corner, I'd have to cross a brightly lit parking lot, mega-lights—meant to ensure that no one could drive away with stuff from the construction site, and this was on a highly frequented downtown

street with law offices and expensive houses. It was presumably well patrolled. I really had to pee by that time, but I stopped and carefully planned the route which hit the tiny bits of shadow and spent the least time under the construction lights. I felt like George Costanza playing live Frogger in New York. This was the first thing which had really scared me. I realized that I was afraid of cops for the first time in my life. I thought that they would assume that I was breaking into the school for computers or stealing from the construction site. I was carefully watching for headlights showing ahead of cars coming down the street, thinking that people out that time of night were disproportionately likely to be cops. I realized that, for my entire previous life, it had been great to see cops driving down the street. They were there to protect me and, later, me and my property. The experience really hit me. How did it feel to believe that the cops were not there to help you and were there for the purpose of protecting property from you? I had lost white, female privilege, something some of us (all the white females) had become very conscious of earlier in the day, as we could go some places others couldn't. I felt as though I was on the "wrong side" of law and order and even of civilization itself. I thought about bailing out and peeing there, but then the smell might wake others and keep them restless. I realized that some people were subjected to even worse indignities. I really tried to hustle under the brightest lights, more afraid of the cops than of falling on the knee.



Meditating at City Dock, Annapolis  
Photo courtesy of Wendy Winters

## Mindfulness II: Transformation

by Rev Douglas Kraft

**Y**ou can search long and hard for animals on the African savanna and find few. Naturalist photographers use a more effective strategy. Rather than search for animals, they search for a watering hole, settle in and wait for the animals to come to them. All animals come for water sooner or later.

Gil Fronsedale, a meditation teacher in Palo Alto, suggests that mindfulness works the same way. To untangle your problems or deepen your spirituality, you don't have to search the wilds or your psyche or spirit. Just cultivate mindfulness. Then all that you need will come to you: it will appear and make itself known.

To be sure, mindfulness will not satisfy all your spiritual curiosity. For example, it won't tell you what is going to happen when you die. Will you reincarnate, go to a heavenly realm, disappear into oblivion or something else? Mindfulness won't tell you because these are speculative questions. No one really knows the answer though some people are very impressed with their opinions. When we die, we'll know. Until then all we can do is guess.

However, if we want to know how to live a happy, fulfilling life we don't need answers to speculative questions. We need answers to the practical ones like, "How do I slow down?" or "How can I improve this relationship?" or "What will help me feel more well-being?" or "What's my next step?"

Mindfulness can help all these. It is a deceptively simple tool.

After meditating in Thailand for nearly two months, I want to distinguish between superficial mindfulness and transformational mindfulness: the one just skims the surface while the other brings forth wisdom. Specifically, I'd like to (1) describe transformational mindfulness, (2) give a few examples and (3) relate these to the purpose of religion and spirituality.

### Transformation

The word "mindfulness" came into popular culture from Buddhism. It is a translation of the Pali word, "sati." In the West we distinguish between mind and heart. Buddhism does not. "Sati" can also

be translated as "heartfulness." To be mindful is to take something to heart. Think of mindfulness as how a mother watches her small child. One teacher translated it as "calm abiding." You look at something with a steady, spacious heart.

Or think of mindfulness as photographing animals in the wild. First you must be patient. You wait quietly to see what comes along. If a wildebeest shows up, you don't say, "Oh, there's a wildebeest," snap a picture and go back to reading a book or listening to your mp3 player. You don't assume that just because you recognize something that you know it deeply. And you don't critique the beast: "It shouldn't hold its head that way." "Why doesn't it move the other foot first?" "It shouldn't be so tense." You curiously watch for nuance and subtlety.

And you keep observing until the animal is one. This is very important. Conceptually we know that everything changes. But for the cultivation of practical wisdom, it's important to observe the disappearance. If you don't, your mindfulness is superficial. By staying with an experience until it fades, impermanence becomes a living, breathing, immediate reality.

Let's look a couple of examples to see how this works.

### Back Pain

I have not fully recovered from my bike accident of two years ago. I'm still in physical therapy for a frozen shoulder and for muscles and tendons in my back that don't work properly.

So, on my seven-week retreat in Thailand, I had back pain. As my back got sore, my first inclination was to ignore it. Who wants to look at something that hurts? If I didn't pay attention to it, maybe I could get through the next sitting or walking period before it became too painful. So I put more energy into watching the breath, daydreaming or anything but the pain.

Sound familiar? How many of us first respond to a problem by pretending it isn't there? "Maybe it'll go away by itself if I just don't give it any attention." As I ignored the pain, the muscles in my back tightened up. This is a biological reflex to pain: it stabilizes and numbs an injured area.

So, in the short run, looking elsewhere – ignoring my back – felt better. You may have noticed

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this in your life. If you ignore a problem, in the short run it does feel better than dwelling on it.

But the long run is different. Those tight back muscles fatigued and started to ache themselves. So now I had the original soreness and the area around it sore as well. The pain spread! If I continued to ignore it, it just got worse and worse until it was unbearable and impossible to ignore.

So, in the short run, inattention felt better. In the long run it felt worse.

On retreat, the only tool I was supposed to use was mindfulness. Soft, receptive attention caused the tightness to relax, the numbness to dissipate and the hurt to intensify. It felt like a knife sticking in me. It took a lot of faith to stay with it.

However, I was not adding tension or fatigue to the pain. As I tolerated it and let the muscles relax anyway, the throbbing gradually dissipated. Sometimes it took five, ten or thirty minutes. But if I stayed with it, eventually it began to subside.

So mindfulness caused more hurt in the short run but less in the long run. What had been intolerable became easier and sometimes even disappeared. Acceptance in and of itself is quite healing. We've all probably experienced that in other areas of our lives. There are limits to the healing power of mindfulness, to be sure. It should be used compassionately and intelligently. There are times when I still had to shift my posture. But when I was mindful, I was able to be more discerning about this as well.

### **Principle: Short and Long Run**

The basic principle is: lack of mindfulness feels better in the short run and worse in the long run. Mindfulness feels worse in the short run and better in the long run.

If this principle applies only to back pain, it wouldn't be worth spending time on it. But it is a metaphor.

For example, if we listen closely to many people's speech, we can hear a sub-text, "Do you like me? Do you like me?" Maybe you notice it quietly in yourself. We are social creatures and like to be liked.

In order to be liked more, we can modify our behavior and present ourselves as smart or clever or caring or attentive or tough or whatever we think gets appreciation. If it works, it feels good in the short run. We get positive regard and emotional strokes. But, like fighting back pain, in the long run it's tiring.

It's self-defeating. In the long run we don't know if people like us for who we are or for who we're pretending to be. People might like an image we project but we don't know if the real us is likable. This leaves us secretly lonelier. It intensifies drive to get people to like us.

On the other hand, if rather than act in what we think are pleasing ways, we just become more mindful, then what?

Beneath wanting to be liked is loneliness or isolation or sadness. We had numbed that feeling in an effort to get people to like us. As we relax, we become aware of the underlying sadness. As with back pain, mindfulness at first feels worse.

Mindfulness of feelings takes some finesse. It's important to feel the feelings on their own terms. If we just think about being lonely or sad, we translate the feelings into thoughts. Our minds might produce thousands of lonely, sad scenarios. "I'm going to be alone for ever." "I'm completely unacceptable." Etc. These are just speculations. Delusions. They don't help.

So it is important to know feelings where they live. They live in the body. All feelings have a body component. There are sensations somewhere. If we aren't used to attending to these, it may take a little time and patience to find them. But they are there.

Maybe we notice tightness in the chest, a slight burning around the eyes or a constriction of the breathing.

As we bring mindfulness to these sensations, the mental stories, fantasies and images slack off. The sensations of sadness, grief or loneliness grow. They are not comfortable. But usually, they are manageable. It's okay to be with them. They aren't completely overwhelming. We can be with them.

And then, after a while, the sensations begin to shift. Our thoughts about loneliness can go unchanged forever. But the actual experience is alive and evolves with attention. With time and loving attention, it begins to dissipate. Like the animals by the pond, eventually they leave.

The secret is, in being mindful of loneliness or sadness, we are with ourselves in a heartfelt way. Leaving aloneness alone makes us feel more alone. Ignoring our sadness makes us sadder. We become alienated from ourselves. But with mindfulness, at

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least we have our own good attention, our own company. We've got at least one person's kindness. And the person whose love we need the most is our own. And since we are letting ourselves be ourselves, we start to relax. We don't get so worn out.

Mindfulness can be uncomfortable in the short run, but in the long run it helps us relax and be ourselves. If we happen to connect with another person, it is authentic. And if we don't connect with someone, we still have a much greater sense of inner freedom. How we act is less driven by fear of what others may think and more by what emerges from us.

### Summary

Again, the principle is: turning away from what is uncomfortable feels good in the short run but makes life more painful, complex, stressful and unmanageable in the long run.

Being heartfully aware of what is uncomfortable feels worse in the short run. But in the long run, it brings the possibility of deep healing and a greater sense of freedom. It lets us relax and get to know who we are a little better. Physical pain or getting people to like you may not be concerns that that gets to you? Where do you get thrown off balance: work related issues; family or friendship issues; stress; addictive habits? We've all got something.

I invite you to take whatever gets to you and bring more mindfulness to it. I'm not talking about a superficial, glance-as-you-go, "yeh, I got it" mindfulness. I'm advocating transformational mindfulness. Profound mindfulness takes some time. It is patient, steady, calm, kind and curious. And it doesn't try to change anything. If you stay mindful of difficulty long enough, it will change organically on its own. If it doesn't, you aren't seeing deeply enough. So open up more, be curious, receptive and heartfelt.

With patience, transformational mindfulness can help untangle seemingly impossible situations.

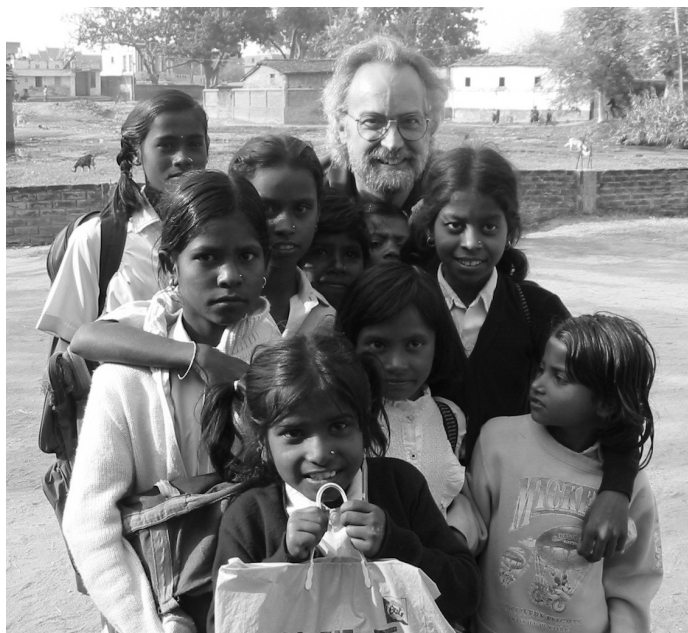
### Eccentric

Why is this such a big deal? If we experience God as an active force in our life, how do we know the divine guidance that is available to us? If we don't think in terms of God, the basic question is still, how do we know the fullness of our being? Mindfulness goes to the core purpose of religion and spirituality of any persuasion. That purpose is not to make us into a better Christian or Jew or Muslim or Buddhist or humanist or pagan or atheist or Unitarian Universalist.

About thirty years ago Sheldon Kopp wrote a book called *If You Meet Buddha on the Road, Kill Him*. This is an old Zen saying: if you see some image of perfection to emulate, get rid of it. In other words, if we think the purpose of religion or spirituality is to tell us who we should be, then religion and spirituality have failed us miserably. And they may make us miserable as well.

The purpose of religion, spirituality, discourses and my own sermons (if they are successful) is to inspire to us look more deeply for divinity within; to look with greater curiosity to discover who we *really* are, both within ourselves and within the social-political community of which we are a living part.

The Buddhist suttas contain a story about an arahant, a fully enlightened monk. A group of monks came to a river one day. This arahant lifted up his robes and pranced on his toes across the water. The other monks thought this was undignified for an exalted being. So complained to the Buddha. The Buddha said, "Oh don't worry about it. In many previous lives he was a monkey. It is in his nature to be like that." A friend of mine once drove the Korean Zen master, Seung Sahn, from Logan airport north of



Doug Kraft is the senior minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, California.

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Boston down to a Zen center in Providence, Rhode Island. As they drove through downtown Boston, every time she stopped at a stoplight he hopped out of the car, ran around it and hopped back in. He was a character. In my interviews with him he was remarkably clear. And he was totally eccentric.

There is no mold that fits all evolved beings. As they get clearer and clearer, they become more and more who they are in their own unique ways.

The same holds for us. Mindfulness is the most powerful tool we have for transformation. It allows the divine to manifest more clearly in us. It doesn't get us out of this world or out of ourselves. It pulls us more fully into both. It doesn't transform us into a Christ or a Mother Theresa or a Gandhi or a Buddha on the road. It transforms us into something closer to our true nature. It only transforms us into who we really are. And that is unique for each of us.

Religion, spirituality and our life are so much more interesting if we aren't trying to make ourselves into someone we aren't. It is so much more interesting if we assume we don't really know who we are in all facets and develop a tender, kind, loving and fierce curiosity about who we are.

### **An American Buddhism A Summer Sermon, August 2007**

By Andrew S. Agacki

I have been fortunate, over this past year-and-a-half, to participate in the first two year program with the Rev. Koyo Kubose that will result in my being inducted a Buddhist Lay Minister on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The intent of this program, through the auspices of the Bright Dawn Institute in Chicago, is to carry on the work of Koyo Sensei's father, the late Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose, whom I quoted earlier. And what will I be able to once I'm inducted as a Lay Minister? Anything Craig or Drew can do ... except for two things:

- I can't be paid for my Services
- I can't start my own congregation, appoint new Lay Ministers, or start my own lineage.

WAAIIITTT ... Craig and Drew can't do that either! ... Maybe the difference is just that *I don't get paid!* Okay; one thing, anyway. Maybe I should be rethinking this thing ... NAH!

Every Sunday evening I have a conference

call with Rev. Koyo, my sensei, including several other students, some as far away as Hawaii and Sao Paulo, Brazil. At the end of each 'section' of study, be it Buddhist History, Sutra Study or Psychology – Sensei has invited the book's authors to join us on the call. They enthusiastically have responded, from as far away as Japan, Hawaii, England and Canada. Did you know, that when it's 7:30 in the evening here, it's 11:30, lunchtime in Tokyo? Midnight here, 5:00 a.m. Greenwich Mean Time. And then there's Sao Paulo, Brazil – they can be anywhere from one to two hours later ... go figure.

Just this last Sunday we finished our section on Naikan. After a month of intensive practice asking the three questions I mentioned in the reading, and keeping a journal, we gave our summary reports to Mr. Krech (my 31<sup>st</sup> report) and then listened, and interacted, to his responses to them.

AND GOSH DARN, AM I EXCITED! I've been 'seriously' into this 'Dharma Thing' for about 20 yrs. now. Hah! I thought I knew a thing or two! Alright; maybe a thing or two ... But when I think of all the things I've been exposed to in this Program, not to mention really talking to so many prominent authors and actually sharing ideas with them ... who am I kidding? This old onion's been peeled down to the core of his being ... to begin again. TO BEGIN AGAIN! How WONDERFUL!

Okay. So I'm supposed to be helping the development of a 'uniquely American Buddhism'.

Tough job.

Probably won't happen in my lifetime.

Been said it takes about 400 years for Buddhism to become established in a country, for it to become 'unique' to that country. It's been on our soil since at least the mid-1800's ... I don't need to do the math to realize it's still just a sapling, and a small one, at that.

But therein lay the opportunity. A lot of work has already been done to nurture Buddhism in America, mostly in the last 3 decades, though. Witness the many, and varied, Buddhist centers in Milwaukee alone. NONE of them were here when I came back to attend college almost 40 yrs. ago (gosh, was it that long ago?)

To interject a little history lesson here – Up until the British started to colonize the Far East, if

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you had asked what the people were doing while they were chanting, meditating, or 'doing' as monks, they would have said that they were following the Dharma, the Teachings of the Buddha. Being fond of '-isms', the British then said, 'Oh, you must believe in, uh, BUDDH-ISM, then'! It all worked out in the end, though. You won't offend anyone if you use the term, might get a smirk ... but it's okay.

I mentioned that Buddhism arrived on our shores by at least the mid-1800's (Asian immigrants were a source of cheap labor then, just as the Mexican/South American issue is playing out today), and it was prominent during the Parliament of the World's Religions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition of the Chicago World's Fair. But there it stayed. Why? Two things: The so-called 'Yellow Peril' that still lurks in the shadows, even today, and the reticence of the Issei (the first generation immigrants) and the Japanese religious hierarchy, to proselytize. It didn't help, as time went on, that the second generation, the Nisei, only wanted to Americanize, and throw off their socially low status as immigrants.

Unusual? No. I only need to compare my family history. My Buscia and Dziadzia (first generation Polish immigrant grandparents [Issei – remember?]) spoke Polish and observed Polish customs, belonging to a Roman Catholic church, the Butter Lambs for blessing at Easter, czarnina, kielbasa, pierogi were regularly made (and eaten by me). My father (second generation Nisei) also spoke Polish, but only with his parents and older brother. They all refused to teach me, the third generation, a Sansei, Polish. I was an 'American' they said, not Polish. Well dzienkuje for THAT Dziadzia! I think you'll find the pattern quite common among the first generations of almost all immigrants.

So, what with the decided disinterest, even distaste, of the Nisei [second generation], Buddhism died out in America. Ah ... NO ... it didn't. Why not? Lots of reasons I won't go into here. Even with the debacle of WWII and the Asian Internment Camps! Leave it to say that something at the edges kept attracting the eyes of the spiritually disenfranchised: Poets like Ezra Pound, Carl Sandburg; the Beats in Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, the theatrical Alan Watts and his radio broadcasts.

Through the grinding digestion of *HOWL* and scenic motoring of *On the Road*, Buddhism was

slowly woven, ever so lightly, onto the American tapestry.

But not without some jet-lag from its long, slow journey. Over the past 50 years, rumors of sexual abuse, financial mismanagement, have proved true. Recently, it has been revealed that prominent Zen Masters voluntarily distributed harshly anti-Semitic literature during WWII. Many passed their lineage on to Americans, leaders in their own right. Do these new revelations make their Master status meaningless ... let alone their heirs? Serious questions; VERY serious, indeed.

But push through these stinging webs and you'll see American women as Zen Masters. WOMEN! Imagine that! And at the FOREFRONT! We probably have more female lineage holders living today than in all the 2500 yrs. since Shaky Buddha's (reluctant) acceptance of women as Buddhist monks. When his own aunt and foster-mother, Maha Pajapati Gotami, begged, three times no less, to be ordained into the Sangha, Buddha only relented after his confidant and cousin Ananda intervened on the women's behalf. He did say, though, that the essence of his Dharma would die out after 500 yrs. because of it. Tough nut, that old man! Didn't like music or dance, either. Said they were distractions from the Path of his Dharma. Hmmm. Not much of a party goer either. Oh well! That was HIS time ... AND THIS IS OURS!

When else but today could you have walked down a street and stepped into a Tibetan Buddhist center here, A Japanese one there, a Korean over there ... and more? Coexisting peacefully, no less? Sorry that monks of the Chogye Order still bop each other over the head in Korea when 'deciding' who will be the next supreme head master, or that women in Asian countries are still fighting for equal rights in the Sangha. Oh well. But, again, THAT IS THERE AND NOT HERE! Western groups, by the way, are exerting some pretty persuasive pressure to change women's status, quite successfully, anyway.

Walk into any bookstore or library and you will be literally overwhelmed by the amount of books and periodicals; many never before published for any but the specially initiated.

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship works to solve the heavy social issues of our day, using Bud-

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dhist awareness to awaken our hearts and minds to the sufferings of others.

Buddhist references, obvious and subliminal, pervade our society. SPEAKING OF ... interesting story. In Spring of this year, Victoria's Secret released a new bikini design – complete with 'strategically placed' Buddha's. Of course, irate Buddhists everywhere protested, and they pulled the design with sincere apologies. Duh.

Such are the numbers of Buddhists in this country, that they are now deemed 'those significant enough not to be offended'. I swear there's a list for marketers like that. SHOULD be, anyway. Long list, though ... since every group would (or should) be on it.

Buddhism has flown to our shores on the wings of dragons, the backs of mythical lions and on the slow moving, muscular ox. Each rich with the textures and colors of many cultures. Sad to say, most of these tapestries have been thinned, washed down, in the rush to appeal to perceived American tastes. Only the Tibetans, it seems to me, carry on their old, colorful traditions; largely unchanged. Tragically, they have no choice. They fight for the very survival of their identity.

But the glorious dragons, phoenixes, lions and tigers are now only two-dimensional curiosities of their formal selves, replaced by a generic something that makes you feel good, it's easy, convenient. Much like the flashy sports car – it gets you there quickly and easily ... and you'll be lookin' good!

True to our culture, Buddhism is fast becoming merely a meditational tool for convenient and immediate gratification:

- Expensive retreats in secluded, exotic locations abound.

- Anyone able to spell Buddhism, or better yet, Zen (easier, only three letters) is writing a book ... the Zen of this, the Zen of that. Lots of charlatans making lots of money.

- Buddhism is being watered down so thinly as a 'cute peculiarity,' a fad, that it risks dripping through the cracks of our awareness, to disappear entirely into that vast sewer we cast our cheap toys and objects of 'planned obsolescence.'

Ready to shop, Grasshopper?

- There's a new programming concept called 'presence awareness' ...

- Zen Marketing applies both ancient and cutting-edge technologies to determine the precise ESSENCE of your brand, packaging, marketing and advertising ...

- Roll your way to enlightenment with Zen castors ...

- The Zen place to find peaceful products for your peace of mind, relaxation and life enjoyment ...

- Small and lightweight, ZEN Nano Plus is a flash MP3 player with sleek looks ...

- Don't go for artificial "recorded gongs," get The Zen Clock's natural ...

Alright, I could go on forever with such marketing quips (direct from ads, I might add), but I don't think I need to. *(Please note that I have **no** opinion, positive or negative, regarding the above mentioned products and services. These quips are merely cited as examples of the use of 'Buddhism' as a marketing tool.)*

Buddhism MUST be saved. Not for its 'peculiarity', its marketing appeal, or merely to 'preserve' it as a treasured 'artifact' of history ... No! We must preserve it because in it lay tools that just may save us; personally ... and culturally. So many ways to see ourselves in a new light and possibly save ourselves and the rest of humanity from insanity and destruction. Sitting meditation, walking meditation, mantras, mandalas, mudras, tantras, chants, koans, kung-ons, gong-ans ... I've talked to you many times over the years about these things. WHAT TO SAVE! THERE IS SO MUCH! And what traditions? In Tibetan, the Gelugpa predominates (the Dalai Lama's sect), then there's Nyingmapa, Kagyupa, Sakyapa, et al. In Japan, the Jodo-Shinshu predominates, with Rinzai-Zen, Soto-Zen, Sokka Gakai. In ... well there's a LOT. Just like Christianity, I might add. Buddhism, like Christianity, has historically seen its sects rise and fall, come and go, so I won't do a triage ... wouldn't want to, or feel qualified, anyway. I'll share some insights on what direction(s) I would like Buddhism to go:

Buddhism is, to my mind, a PHILOSOPHY, A WAY OF APPROACHING THE REALITY OF LIFE. When Shaky Buddha was asked if there was a god, he became silent. A LOT has been written about that silence. I remember one of my first sessions in the Lay Program. We started talking about this inci-

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dent and I offered my understanding. It wasn't as half-baked as I immediately thought after I said it, on reflection, but a few days later I received a photo-copied article from Koyo Sensei. Enough to say that it was 'three-quarters-baked,' anyway (he was too polite to say so). There are some things that cannot be expressed in words. Jews, Muslims and Christians resort to mysticism. I use what I call 'Zen-speech' to try to bring structure, texture, color, some taste to that indescribable. I will readily admit to not being an awakened Buddha, but at least my eyes are half-open and the lights are on, you know? Of course, I've been asked if there is a god a number of times -- from a Buddhist perspective, they'll ask. And how do I respond to a question the greatest minds have pondered since consciousness threw its ugly presence into our brains? As of the writing of this sermon, my answer is:

Almost laughed out loud,  
Didn't though,  
Was listenin' to Sensei talkin' on the phone—  
Woulda' been TOTALLY  
Inappropriate:  
No, would *not* have been good.  
Not good at *all*.

Was lookin' outside  
Outta' the corner o' my eye;  
Through the window,  
*Side-glancin'*  
So to speak.  
Had gotten quiet outside;  
You know the kinda' quiet *I'm* talkin' about:  
Somethin' ain't *right*.

Saw the squirrel –  
Stopped on its branch –  
Flattened down *tight*;  
Stayin' *still*,  
Outta' *sight*.  
Then 'long came this hawk,  
Cooper's hawk,  
All wings and power.  
Came and sat on a branch above her:  
Guess she didn't see her.  
She didn't see that squirrel.

Sure enough –

Hawk bends over –  
Ruffles her feathers –  
And *poops!*  
Phew!  
Shoots right down!  
DZip!  
Huh?  
Lost that trail at the squirrel.

Sure enough!  
Bulls eye!  
Direct hit!  
*Splooch!*  
Squirrel seemed confused –  
Shook her head.  
**DANG!**  
Then she did the *Curly* thing –  
Three Stooges, you know?  
Rapidly wipin' her head.  
**DANG!**  
Starts chatterin' loud;  
Really LOUD.  
Lookin' up all the time.  
Like a bullet she takes off!

Runs down her branch  
Up the trunk  
Across the branch right to the hawk:  
Hollerin' all the way!  
**Dang!**  
That hawk squawks;  
Where'd she come from?  
(A flutter of wings).

Couple o' days before  
Wife and I saw the hawk  
In a tree across the street.  
Got binoculars  
To see what she was eatin'  
Up there in that tree -  
Across the street:  
A young squirrel.  
Dang.

At least that's my answer for now. Ask me again later, and my answer will probably be different, but I hope you can see the falling feather and wispy fur in that little answer. I can only 'side-glance' to

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give you my answer – but there it is. You won't see it if you look directly at it, anyway.

A Dharma breeze, then, still wafts through the trees around my house, yours, this church, out through the cities and countryside, despite that old Buddha's predictions. But it moves through a shadowy time now, a key time of flux, where the least word or movement could plunge it all into a shadowless Dark Ages so deep we may never recover ... despite, or perhaps because of, our staunchly Christian, Muslim and Jewish beliefs.

We need the stark awareness and spiritual compassion of Buddhism – not to supplant these rich traditions, but to help them in their work to bring us all together despite our differences and imperfections.

But Buddhism needs to change to be effective. The Dharma needs to absorb the best of what Democracy, with a capital 'D', was meant to be.

We have become a country without a truly Democratic Spirit. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free" ... and I will use them for my purpose and cast them out when I am done with them! Sorry for finishing Emma Lazarus's poem so crudely ... I call what I see. It's not about me. It's not about you, or them, or us ... it's all about WE! Look deep with the eyes of Buddhist Compassion and it can be no other way.

- No difference should be made between how 'Enlightened' a man or woman can be.

- No one can seriously be considered Enlightened if they wish to deny the rights or beliefs of others.

How do we, then, know who IS Enlightened? I don't care if they can't balance a checkbook, or if they can even read. In *Zen Master Who?*, my good friend the Rev. James Ishmael Ford, talks about the problem of legitimate lineage. There is a point in a student's training when the Master will 'Transmit' the power of the lineage to the student after he perceives he's 'got it', so that he is now his OWN Master, with all of the rights and privileges therein. He maintains that THAT method must still continue. He is quick to point out, however, that Philip Kapleau (author of the ground-breaking book *The Three Pillars of Zen*) never received Dharma Transmission from his teacher Haku'un Yasutani, though he was a widely respected teacher. It is also to be noted that Kapleau Roshi designated several respected Dharma

Heirs of his own, starting, in effect, his own lineage! Yet he was totally unauthorized to do these things. I submit that Kapleau Roshi, is, by NATURAL right, a legitimate, though irascible, Master. We NATURALLY recognize someone's understanding, as it is tested, again and again. We should do the same with 'legitimate' heirs. Some will fail, many will pass. Many naturally selected Masters will fail, some will pass the test of timelessness.

NEVER follow a Master unquestioningly. If you feel they are asking something wrong of you, then they probably are.

Masters are teachers. They should be role models. But they are not the LAW makers.

Work for Peace with all of your heart. But remember, Peace does not necessarily mean the absence of war.

I don't, Buddhism doesn't, have easy answers. We just ask the hard questions.

A friend once asked me if I really WAS a Buddhist. 'Yeah', I said, 'I really AM' (a UU Buddhist really, but I won't quibble). 'Can't be,' she said, 'Can't be, because every Buddhist I've ever knew was a wimp, and you ain't no wimp.'

I'm on the front lines, here. There's no "wimpin' out" when children are dying in the streets, in the deserts and jungles, and so few seem to care above their own fleeting philosophies and beliefs.

Some time ago a customer told me, once she found out I wasn't 'saved,' that I would be going to Hell. I found it to be 'deja-vu all over again' when Kubose Sensei related an incident with a monk while they were at an inter-religious gathering – Seems an Evangelical Christian was confronting the Buddhist monk and telling him, finally, that if he would not accept Jesus Christ as his personal 'Savior', then he would be condemned to everlasting Hell. The monk replied, 'A lot of people are suffering down there, aren't they,' he asked? 'Yes,' she said firmly. 'Well. I took a vow to alleviate the suffering of all beings, so I guess that's where I belong!' 'Thanks for helping me understand that's where I need to go!'

I am not so zealous or naïve to think that Buddhism is **THE** PANACEA ... but it's a good Way! Thanks for listening.

... Oh, and thanks for helping me to go to Hell!

(Gassho)

## UU BUDDHISTS AT G.A.!

In response to the UUA Board's desire to have General Assembly workshops focus more on congregational life, the UU Buddhist Fellowship's workshop proposal for the 08 GA in Ft. Lauderdale was well-received.

Under the title : "My Minister is a Buddhist?" the workshop will present a panel of Florida UU ministers whose Buddhist identity and practice is well known to their congregations: Marni Harmony, Meredith Garmon, and Sara Zimmerman. Moderated by UU Buddhist Fellowship president Wayne Arnason (who also has been public and active in his Buddhist identity), the ministers will be discussing the impact on their congregations of Buddhist UU spiritual leadership.

Questions to be discussed include: the routine questions the ministers receive, the public perception of their ministries outside the church, the style in which they teach about Buddhism in their role as UU ministers or (if authorized) as Buddhist teachers, and the ways that their identity has had an impact on congregational culture.

The panel will be happening on the first full program day of GA, Thursday, June 26 from 11:00 AM to 12:15 PM in the Convention Center. There are no plans for a business session at this GA since we were only offered one time slot. However, UU Buddhists can congregate, visit, and make connections at the display booth in the Exhibit Area. Once again this year, we're sharing the booth with the UU Mystics. Come see us!



Head of Buddha, Koryo Dynasty (918-1392). 10th-11th c. Iron, h. 14 3/4 inches (37.4 cm). The National Museum of Korea, Seoul. Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/parrhesiastes/430412429/> Author: parrhesiastes. Published under Creative Commons (CC) attribution 2.0.

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## UU Sangha                      Spring 2008

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### **SAVE THESE DATES!**

**The UUBF Convocation will be March 27-29, 2009, at Mission San Luis Rey (north of San Diego) with Shinzen Young on The Science of Enlightenment.**