



# UU Sangha

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## Cooking A Life A Zen Recipe

By James Ismael Ford

There's an interesting story in the twelfth century anthology, the Gateless Gate. Okay, there are lot of interesting stories in that book. But today I'm thinking of the 13th case in the collection, and really only a fragment of it.

*One day Abbot Deshan walked into the meditation hall, his meal bowls in hand. The cook, seeing him, asks, "Teacher, what are you doing? It is nowhere near meal time." Without a word, Deshan turned around and returned to his room.*

I hazard pretty much all of us have been in this boat. We show up before we're supposed to. Or, we show up late. The variations are infinite. It happens, in ancient China, it happens here, today. And. At that moment a world of possibilities opens, or rather worlds of possibilities open. A moment presents. We are given many doors that we may walk through. The question is which door will we walk through? Most commonly we have some kind of emotional reaction. We blame ourselves or we blame someone else. I'm so stupid. Who

set my alarm clock wrong? Embarrassed. Angry. There are many doors.

But, we can go somewhere else, to a door we don't usually open, but can. This little anecdote is one of Zen's great koan. A koan is like a legal document, a presentation of facts. It is an alternative door that we might walk through. A koan is an invitation into the fundamental places of our human experience, like that place

According to the modern commentator, the great Rinzai master Zenkei Shibuyama, this particular case as we call individual koan belongs to the nanto subset. Nanto translates roughly, as "you've got to kidding!" These are thought to be the thorniest, the most difficult to penetrate of them all. Now, in part this comes from what follows old Deshan's encounter with his cook, which we won't go into here. But, also, very much, all the difficulty, all the possibility of human life is contained in that moment where Deshan walks into the hall with his dinner bowl, is asked why he's there out of time, turns and goes to his room.

Here is our invitation to step away from the traps of our words, from the illusions of our desires, to leap beyond meaning and meaning-

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# Editorial Insights

Zen koans always drive me a little batty. They seem so deep and subtle that either their meaning flies over my head or I wonder if maybe I'm misunderstanding some important word or idiom didn't translate very well into English.

Then I remember when we last had James Ford with us (with David Rynick) at our UUBF Convocation at the Garrison Institute in Garrison, NY during the spring of 2011. I remember Ford telling us a beautiful story from one of the famous koan cases. As he talked about it and did a little interpretation of it, a little light turned on in my head. His words, or tone of voice, or knowing smile or something suddenly helped me see that there was much more going on in the story opening up deeper meanings. While I'm not ready (at least not yet) to begin studying koans, I started to see its value.

We also have a great story from Florence Caplow from her first retreat. She's a little shy about proclaiming what she describes as a lightning bolt of insight, "You don't have to believe everything you think." I love this expression because it could be a bit of a koan all its own. I think most people who sit on a cushion for a significant length of time at a retreat can relate to her insight.

Starting or being part of a new UUBF Sangha is an experience many of our readers have done or are contemplating such a project. Share DeWees of the Still Mountain Rain sangha tells about how theirs got started.

One of the interesting workshops at the Convocation we'll be having at the Menusha Retreat Center outside Portland Oregon March 31 to April 2, 2017 will be a presentation by Nicole Ko'in Newsom. She is a lay member of Dharma Rain Zen Center, and she will be presenting a workshop on Dharma Rain's Dharma School. Dharma School meets on Sunday mornings and they have 60-90 kids in five to seven classes, and all volunteer teachers.

—Sam Trumbore, Transition Editor

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lessness, and instead walk into something new and worthy. Now Deshan, the old abbot, was about eighty when this anecdote takes place. He has seen it all. He had been one of those fierce masters, who started out as a scholar and then turned to the practice of sitting down, shutting up, and paying attention with a ferocity that is hard to describe in a way that fully conveys his commitment to the ways of attending. Now in his old age we see how it distills.

You certainly don't have to be a Zen person to get it. We are talking the great human conundrum of meaning and meaninglessness and there is in fact a human way to deal with it, available in all religions or without any. As the poet Mary Oliver sings to us. The secret ingredient of the secret sauce for humans living into our possibility is simple: "I don't know exactly what a prayer is./I do know how to pay attention, how to stroll through the fields,/which is what I have been doing all day."

That's the secret. Pay attention.

I don't know why this works, what is the mechanism of our brain that allows us to watch ourselves. But it is so magical that we have sung stories about it, and woven tales to explain it throughout all of human history. I suspect somehow in the mesh of neural activity our self-awareness simply emerges. This emergent self-aware mind has a quasi-independence, witnessed practically by both psychosomatic illness and the placebo effect.



( from: [http://alharakat.blogspot.com/2014/09/blog-post\\_21.html](http://alharakat.blogspot.com/2014/09/blog-post_21.html) )

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Although I'm past confident if one kills the body, that mind goes away, like the light in an electric bulb disappears when the bulb burns out.

The problem for us as human beings happens, in my experience, by my observation, when we make this self-awareness so special that it isn't really part of us in our fleshy existence. The worst of it has us decide, "I am not my body." Like the philosopher in the bar, there's some serious overthinking going on. And, a missing of something that's vastly more important than a date. We need to not slip away into the vagaries of our human longing, and keep our focus on the matter at hand.

Let's not make it special. Let's make this ability to see, to be "present to" ordinary. Ordinary is the other big part of the secret sauce.

Let's watch as an old man, and it should be an old person. Man or woman, that doesn't matter, but old, does. Old as in tired. Old as in seen it all. Old as in doesn't need to prove anything. But, there's one more thing. We also need a dash of foolish. Sort of like an old man climbing on a bus and thinking an attractive young woman looks at him and sees something other than an old man who might need her seat. Not too much of this, but a little. Otherwise we're just bumps on a log. There is life in this. There is joy. And sorrow.

Most of all, there is possibility.

Bring it all, our aged hearts and our dash of hope into the moment. And pay attention. And. Meaning and meaninglessness, all the philosophies of the world fall into the back-

ground. The stars and planets all fall into place. Joy and sorrow are revealed.

And you know what to do. You're told it isn't time to eat. Turn and go to your room. You're offered the seat on the bus. Take it.

Like a box with its lid.

## Showing Up for Your Life

By Rev. Zenshin Florence Caplow

"Mindfulness" has become popularized over the last few years. But I prefer, rather than using the term "mindfulness," which actually has some very specific and technical meanings in Buddhism, to say "Showing Up for Your Life." You know how, if you fill out a raffle ticket, it will sometimes say, "You must be present to win?" Well, to fully live, you have to be present, you have to actually show up.

Now some of you might be thinking, "What is she talking about? Of course I'm present. I'm sitting here, aren't I? Where else could I be?" Your body is here, but where is your mind?

The human mind is a wild thing. This is the first thing a wannabe meditator discovers, generally much to his or her horror. You sit down carefully, in some position someone has recommended, and you do what you think you are supposed to do, let's say, count your breaths from one to ten, and some demon seems to show up and kidnap you at about the third breath. I'm not exaggerating.

I'll give you a sort of running commentary on

an imaginary attempt to count ten breaths.

“Breathing in, breathing out, one, breathing in wow breakfast was good, but tomorrow morning I should have orange juice, instead of coffee, it’s healthier and I love orange juice, oh right, breathing out, two, breathing in, you know, I think I’m getting this meditation thing, maybe someday I’ll be a Zen master. I can just see myself in those black robes. But isn’t Zen kind of strict and fanatical? Maybe it would be better to go into Tibetan Buddhism. They have all those great brightly colored sexy ...what are those called? I can’t remember the name....am I losing my memory? I’m awfully young to be having memory problems. Thankas, that’s it. Whew. I’d love to have a thanka to hang on the wall, above my meditation cushion. I wonder how much they are” .....and you’re gone.

If you’re lucky, maybe five or ten minutes later you realize, “oh right,” and you start over again. Many people have come to me at this stage and said, “You know, I’m no good at meditation. I can’t stop thinking.”

You might think this is something that just happens to meditators, this nonstop commentary, but no, the only difference between someone trying to meditate and the normal human mind is that the meditator is paying attention to what’s going on in there. That craziness is what the mind is doing all the time, if given half a chance. It’s completely normal. There’s a reason it is sometimes called “monkey mind” because that’s what it does, hop from thought to thought to thought like a monkey in the trees, grabbing wildly at some

things, pushing other things away.

Years ago I heard a Tibetan teacher say that it’s as if we are all living in a movie theater, watching a movie and eating popcorn, and we think the movie is real. Meanwhile, outside the theater there is a whole interesting world, but we miss it, because we’re stuck on the story going on in the movie. Enlightenment, he said, is realizing that it’s a movie, standing up, letting go of the story, and walking out into the actual sunlight, feeling it warm on your skin, seeing the clouds going by, noticing the miracle of being alive. It’s funny and tragic, that we are glued to that screen in the movie theater, thinking it’s real, when all along the sunlight is just outside.

I had read about Buddhism as a teenager, but it wasn’t until I was in my early twenties that I had a chance to take a class on meditation. Luckily I had a teacher who could tell me that the crazy monkey mind I encountered when I sat down was perfectly natural, so I didn’t give up. And then I had a chance to do my first silent retreat, in the hills of northern California, an eight-day women’s retreat.

The teachers, Christina Feldman and Anna Douglas, were warm and relaxed, and they had a great sense of humor about the whole thing, which really helped me be a little less desperate and frightened about spending eight days with only my mind for company. Sometime about day three I had a revelation. This may not seem like much of a revelation to you, but it hit me like a lightning bolt:

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## YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK.

It's not that I stopped thinking, but the thoughts didn't have the same power; they were just thoughts, and sometimes pretty silly thoughts at that. And in between the thoughts I could see the oaks on the hills, and the beauty and sincerity of my fellow meditators, and the springtime bursting out all over the place, and there was room for joy. And gratitude. I was so intensely grateful for the possibility of just arriving, just seeing what was in front of me in all its splendor.

Needless to say, I was hooked. And every since that time I've been dedicated to showing up for my life, as best I can, and to the path of meditation practice and the commitment to compassion that arises out of direct experience of how hard life can be, for me and for others, and how brief life is.

*Rev. Zenshin Florence Caplow is an ordained Soto Zen priest and UU minister. She is the co-author of *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*. For a video of the full sermon, "Showing Up for Your Life" go to <http://tworiversuu.org/showing-up-for-your-life-florence-caplow/>*



## Small in Numbers, Not Dreams: The Start of a New UU Meditation Group

By Share DeWees

Still Mountain Rain sangha/Peninsula UU Fellowship/ Quimper UU Fellowship

I sat in my small "Emerging Congregation," Peninsula UU Fellowship in Gig Harbor, Washington, wondering if I would ever find a meditation group that did not require crossing a toll bridge or driving two hours each way.

To my delight, one Sunday a friend of our congregation, David Allen, gave a talk on Buddhism and what 35+ years of meditation had done for his life. Little did I know that talk would spark the creation of a "meditation group" in our small 25 member congregation.

*I would suggest that if you're longing for a meditation group that you consider being the one who makes that happen. The size of your congregation should not stop you.*

Later that fateful Sunday I thought, "If not me, then who?"

My first requirement for a group was to find a teacher (formally trained) or leader (a person with good knowledge and experience) since I was new to Buddhism. I had coffee and conversation with David and simply asked him, "Would you be interested in starting a meditation group and would you lead it?"

*You can't find people to join you if you don't ask. Getting one or two others to help you won't hurt either. Please remember, this is going to be "our" group, not "my" group. In your enthusiasm to get a group started, give people a chance to give you a committed answer: it will save stress in the future.*

Dave agreed to be the leader if I would gather the group and do the administrative tasks; logistics, emails, phone calls, book lists and needed notices. We were off and running.

We decided to use the term, "meditation group." Several people (we welcome all, not just UU's) said they did not want to be Buddhist but they would like to do meditation. We put "Are You Interested In" notices in our Order of Service, newsletter and on our website and Meetup group.

*I encourage you to seek out and use the resources in your congregation and if needed, that of your larger community. Talk to everyone. If they are not interested they may know someone who is.*

We gathered 10 people and scheduled an informal meeting at my home. We agreed on a day, time and place to meet. We have a wonderful woman who has graciously offered her home each week and we meet all year.

*Get to know the people who are interested and what their needs are. As much as possible be democratic in what you do. You can start in a home, meeting room or an available space that suits your group.*

We have a core of committed members who rarely miss a meeting and others who come when they can. We don't have many rules, but

we do have these guidelines:

- 1) We welcome all.
- 2) We are confidential about personal things we share.
- 3) We respect each other and our differences.
- 4) If you are late, we ask that you enter in honored silence and join our circle when appropriate.

*I cannot stress enough the importance of doing good ground work and being patient as you evolve. Like all of life, sanghas are in constant change. Don't get discouraged when this happens and I can assure you it will.*

Although we started as a "meditation group" we have grown into a sangha; a loving committed Buddhist family. We share life's joys, sorrows and mundaneness, and we are always there for each other. When we are away from the group we join them in meditation or thought on Wednesdays from 3:30 – 5:00. We all value what being in the group brings to our lives and are grateful for each other's presence. From our small beginnings of five or six we have grown to 16. We have two new teachers and our group is still growing. We are Still Mountain Rain sangha and we will celebrate our second anniversary next month.

*"May the merits of this practice benefit all beings and bring peace."*

# Teaching the Dharma to Children: an Interview with Nicole Ko'in Newsom (Dharma Rain Zen Center)

By Rev. Zenshin Florence Caplow

American convert Buddhism has generally not been known for its child-centered programming. In fact, quite the opposite: most meditation-oriented Buddhists centers have few ways that children can participate. As UU's we are used to excellent religious education programs for our children, and children and families are well-integrated in UU congregations, but as UU Buddhists we may wonder how our children could learn more about the dharma. Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon, has developed one of the most innovative and successful Buddhist children's programs in the country.

Dharma Rain Zen Center is a Soto Zen center in the lineage of Roshi Jiyu-Kennett. Gyokuko and Kyogen Carlson founded Dharma Rain in 1982. In 1984, a member who had two children came to Gyokuko and said she wished there was "something for children." A group of leaders visited children's programs at three locations in Portland: the Oregon Buddhist Church, the Franciscan Montessori Earth School and First Unitarian Church. They took ideas from all three and founded Dharma School, a Sunday morning children's program that now serves 60-90 children from pre-

school through high school.

Nicole Ko'in Newsom is a lay member of Dharma Rain Zen Center, and she will be presenting a workshop on Dharma Rain's Dharma School at the 2017 UUBF convocation at Menucha Retreat Center, Oregon. We are also hoping to offer optional visits to Dharma Rain before or after the convocation. Ko'in has been practicing Zen for 24 years, and her son, now 22, grew up in Dharma School. She is a long time Dharma School teacher, helped start a children's camp called "Mandala on the Mountain", and is on the Dharma Garden Council of Dharma Rain Zen Center.

*Q: What kind of programming do you have for the children in Dharma School?*

*A: Our primary intention is to introduce children to spiritual values and offer examples of respect, kindness, and taking care of the earth, as well as having fun together.*

Dharma School meets on Sunday mornings during our regular Sunday morning program. We have 60-90 kids in five to seven classes, and all volunteer teachers. We have five theme areas, and we explore one of these themes each year: Buddha's Life, Bodhisattvas, Parables from the Lotus Sutra, Paramitas, and the Six Realms.

Music is very important: we have a song book of about 40 songs. We also celebrate major Buddhist holidays: *Wesak* (Buddha's birthday), the Buddha's *Paranirvana*, and *Segaki*, a ceremony for the hungry ghosts around Halloween. There is some medita-



tion in all classes, sometimes just walking meditation or just a few minutes of meditation. We even have a *Shosan* ceremony once a year when all the kids can ask the Co-Abbot a question.

We also have a parents' group that meets at the same time, with about 20 parents

Q: *What is Dharma Camp?*

A: We started Dharma Camp about 22 years ago. This is a week-long camp for nine to eighteen-year-olds, all volunteer run. We have about 60 kids and 20 volunteer staff. We begin the morning with Great Silence: meditation, silence, and chanting until after breakfast. This gives the campers a feeling for what monastic life is like. The rest of the day is quite unstructured\_ we give them lots of time to explore and learn in their own way.

The children are divided into mixed -age groups, either the Five Wisdom Energies, or the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. These groups work together and put together a skit for the whole camp at the end of the week.

Q. *What Is Dharma Garden?*

A. Dharma Garden is the umbrella name for all our children's programs. Our newest program is Frog Song Montessori Pre-school, a preschool we've started on our new campus, integrating Buddhist understandings with Montessori teaching methods.

To learn more about these programs and Dharma Rain Zen Center, visit:

<http://dharma-rain.org/about-us/>

or download the manual on their education program:

<https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/files-for-website/Dharma+School+Manual+2-06+-+MASTER.pdf>

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Roshi James Ishmael Ford



*Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship*  
Convocation 2017  
March 31—April 2  
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Corbett, Oregon

## Learning the Language of Dragons: Zen Meditation and Zen Koans

James Ishmael Ford, Zen teacher and Unitarian Universalist minister says that Zen meditation, both its "just sitting" or "silent illumination" discipline and "koan introspection" are in fact the language of dragons. In our time together we will be introduced to the grammar of dragons, a bit of the vocabulary, and with that to throw ourselves into a little dragon language immersion.

Menucha Lodge overlooks the beautiful Columbia River Gorge, designated as a national scenic area with the greatest concentration of waterfalls in North America.

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For more information and registration visit:  
<http://uubf.org>

# UU Sangha

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