



UU Sangha

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Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship Spring 2013

“A Brief History of the UU Buddhist Fellowship”

Wayne Arnason and Sam Trumbore

A Chapter from *Buddhist Voices in Unitarian Universalism* (Skinner House Books, May 29, 2013)

The history of the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship is a story about people who need each other. People who need each other to support their dual theological identities and to remind one another that this duality is, at the deepest level, an illusion. If living and dying are the focus of both the UU and the Buddhist traditions, we should be more concerned with the unity than the duality between these traditions.

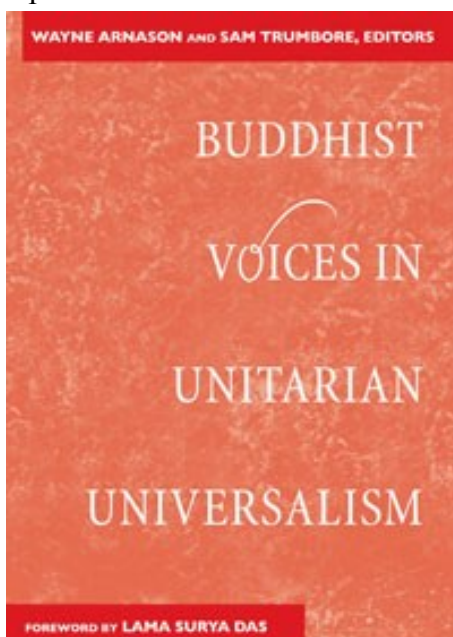
The individualism of Unitarian Universalists who practice Buddhism is often challenged

in the Buddhist *sanghas* (communities) in which they participate. And yet, the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship (UUBF) has been more individualistic than institutional. It has been primarily interested in supporting personal practice rather than evangelizing others to Buddhism or Unitarian Universalism. While persistent in its survival, the UUBF has expanded only modestly. The organization has stuck to a limited agenda of roles and tasks and has largely done those well, believing that the reach of this sangha should not exceed its grasp. In the stories of its individual leaders, in its program offerings, and in the relationships it has cultivated with American Buddhist leaders, the UUBF is a unique reflection of the history and evolution of American Buddhism.

The UUBF began with individual practitioners—two UU ministers and one layperson. Without the efforts of Robert Senghas, James Ishmael Ford, and Henry Finney, there would be no Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship.

Robert Senghas came to formal Soto Zen Buddhist practice in 1983, when he visited Zen Mountain Monastery, in Mount Tremper, New York, in its early years of formation under the leadership of John Daido Looi. Senghas was minister of the First Unitarian Church in Burlington, Vermont. In partnership with Henry Finney, a sociology professor at the University of Vermont and lay member of the Burlington church, Senghas began offering a meditation practice group, or sitting group, at the church. As he received the Buddhist moral and ethical

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Notes from the Editor

Greetings.

As you can see in this issue, we're excited about the publication of *Buddhist Voices in Unitarian Universalism*, just released by Skinner House Books. I had a chance to read an early copy and was asked by the publishers to write a blurb. Clearly, they were under the misimpression that I have some influence. Anyway, this is what I said: "This book is more than a celebration of the diversity of Buddhism within Unitarian Universalism. It celebrates diverse and conflicting views of the roles that Buddhist practices can and should play in congregational life and worship. If you are thinking about where we might go, read this book."

We talked about the book at church and I was asked what it is that keeps me a Unitarian Universalist and not just a Buddhist. Although I have no doubts on this matter (not one, not two), it is hard to explain (although not really harder than explaining why I am a UU!)

Rev. John Crestwell, Associate Minister of the UU Church of Annapolis, in a sermon at GA in Phoenix last year, proclaimed "I am a First and Seventh Principle preacher." And I am a First and Seventh Principle UU and a First and Seventh Principle Zen Buddhist. Not looking away: the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part: the ultimate oneness of the universe. I'd be interested in hearing from you: why are you a UU Buddhist (or Buddhist UU)?

We welcome two new members to the UUBF Board. Charity Rowley is a retired UU minister and one of the founders and facilitators of the UU-Buddhist Sangha of Iowa City. Zenshin Florence Caplow is a Soto Zen priest, a seminarian at Starr King, and the co-editor of *The Hidden Lamp: Stories from Twenty-Five Centuries of Awakened Women*, forthcoming in 2013 from Wisdom Publications.

And we congratulate Board member Meredith Garmon, minister-elect to Community Unitarian Church in White Plains, NY, set to begin that call on 2013 August 1.

Gassho,
Robert Ertman,
Editor



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to give the organization more structure by adding Board members who reflected the diversity of Buddhist lineages represented within Unitarian Universalist Buddhist practice groups. Each initial Board member has served as president and helped shape the UUBF's vision and direction.

The UUBF's activities fall into four general areas: publications, electronic communications, UUA General Assembly activities, and odd-year convocations. The earliest and most regular activity has been the publication since 1994 of *UU Sangha*, a newsletter that comes out one to four times a year, depending on the dedication of the editor at the time. Ford was the first editor. Ford persuaded Trumbore to take over the editorship in 1997; Trumbore redesigned and reformatted *UU Sangha*, and the editors who followed—Jeff Wilson, Gerald Bennett, and Robert Ertman—have each innovated and further improved the newsletter. Over the years it has documented the history of people and traditions and the evolution of practice within the UU Buddhist community. *UU Sangha* has given voice to Unitarian Universalists, particularly ministers, as they have explored connections between Unitarian Universalism and Buddhism.

Early on, *UU Sangha* began publishing a list of Unitarian Universalist Buddhist practice groups. The list increasingly filled the back pages of the printed publication as more and more groups asked to be listed. In 2006 the UUBF began posting that list on its website.

The UUBF had established a basic website in the middle 1990s to archive back copies of *UU Sangha* and to provide some introductory information about Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism. The group launched its first email discussion list around the same time. Before the arrival of Facebook, Twitter, and cell phone texting, this list was an important tool for connecting UUs exploring Buddhism. Many fruitful conversations grew out of these email exchanges. Sometimes the list would become quiet and someone would post a question asking if the list was alive. Someone would respond that the stillness of the list is exactly

what you might expect from people who meditated.

Beginning in 1998 the UUBF Board of Trustees decided to build connections among Unitarian Universalists interested in Buddhism at General Assembly. At the time, workshop slots at GA were not hard to get. The Board reserved a 75-minute slot for a public presentation and another slot for an annual meeting. Starting in 1999 the Board invited Buddhist teachers and scholars sympathetic to Unitarian Universalism to present at GA. Sandy Boucher, Doug Phillips, Lama Surya Das, Tara Brach, John Tarrant, Ruben Habito, Barbara Kohn, Melissa Myozen Blacker, and David Dae An Rynick all participated in these workshops. A presentation by Buddhist scholar Rita Gross on women in Buddhism concluded this series in 2007. After 2007, these appearances by Buddhist teachers before national UU audiences ended when General Assembly was restructured to limit the number of workshops available to independent but related organizations outside the UUA. However, the presence of UUBF at General Assembly has been maintained by a booth in the exhibit hall, and in 2012 the UUBF offered a well-received worship service, featuring a guided meditation led by Arvid Straube.

The biggest project taken on by the UUBF has been to organize weekend convocations, inspired by the successful practice of the UU Christian Fellowship. The first UUBF convocation took place in the spring of 2005 at the Garrison Institute, a retreat and events center in Garrison, New York. It began on a Thursday evening and ended Sunday at lunch, and drew about 130 people to hear Jeff Wilson, Zen Roshi John Daido Looi, Tibetan Lama John Makransky, and MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) teacher Beth Roth each give presentations. Between presentations, the participants were assigned to small groups to discuss what they were learning and to explore the connections between Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism. Inspirational opening worship by the Board and closing worship by Kim K. Crawford Harvie framed the retreat. This first

(Continued from page 1)

teachings (the “precepts”), thus publicly affirming his Buddhist identity, Senghas sought to bring together other Buddhist practitioners within Unitarian Universalism for conversation and support. The Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship was thus founded in 1984, when Senghas and Finney began compiling a mailing list—the first step toward making a more vital network possible.

In the late 1980s, informal sitting groups convened by UU Buddhist practitioners—both lay leaders and ministers—were gathered out of the local interests and needs of people who wanted to meditate together. These groups were inspired by or connected to a variety of Buddhist schools and teaching lineages that were taking root in the United States and Canada. The Community of Mindfulness founded by Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hahn, several other Zen lineages, and some Southeast Asian schools known as *vipassana* were represented among the early sitting groups in UU congregations. Henry Weimhoff in Brooklyn and Marni Harmony, a minister in Orlando, Florida, were among the earliest sitting-group founders. During this period, Buddhist sitting groups in UU churches were rarely in touch with each other to compare notes or share practice.

The first occasion for those wishing to form a Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship to gather face-to-face came at the 1985 UUA General Assembly in Atlanta. George Marshall, senior minister of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, delivered a talk on his book *Buddha: A Biography*, published by the UUA’s Beacon Press in 1978. Although Beacon had also published Thich Nhat Hahn’s first book, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, there was little published by Unitarian Universalist authors about any aspect of Buddhism. Marshall’s speech provided an occasion for Unitarian Universalists interested in or already practicing Buddhism to become aware that a Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship was forming. Senghas was the first president. Ralph Galen was the secretary, responsible for the mailing

list and communication. Dorrie Senghas, Robert’s wife, by now a Buddhist student as well, also served in the initial organizing group.

Initially, the UUBF consisted of only a mailing list. In the days before email, written communications announced events at General Assembly and provided an opportunity for networking among people who had already started or wanted to start sitting groups. Senghas offered a workshop on meditation at the 1986 General Assembly at the University of Rochester, the first presence of a UUBF event at a General Assembly and an important occasion for attracting interest and new leaders.

The group of new leaders included a Buddhist priest, ordained in a Soto Zen lineage, who had found Unitarian Universalism while searching for a spiritual community that could offer family ministry, and religious education for children, which was missing in Zen communities. James Ishmael Ford found Unitarian Universalism to be the only Western tradition where his Buddhist identity was warmly welcomed and where he could pursue a career as a religious leader within both traditions. While completing his Master of Divinity from Pacific School of Religion, Ford met other UUs who were Buddhists or who were discovering Buddhism for the first time. He was ordained as a Unitarian Universalist minister in 1991. During his first settlement in Mequon, Wisconsin, Ford started a sitting group and became interested in expanding the work of the UU Buddhist Fellowship.

In March 1996, Senghas and Ford offered a weekend workshop at Zen Mountain Monastery expressly for Unitarian Universalists—those already practicing Buddhism and those interested in knowing more. That year, Ford published and posted on a UUBF website an essay called “An Invitation to Western Buddhists,” a reflection on the natural affinities and possibilities for mutual enrichment between Buddhists and Unitarian Universalists.

The first leadership team of the UUBF was organized by Senghas and Ford in the 1990s. When ministers Sam Trumbore and Wayne Arnason joined them in 1997, the team worked

convocation powerfully shaped the growth and development of the UUBF.

The second convocation, in 2007, again met at The Garrison Institute. This time Roshi Bernie Glassman and Eve Myonen Marko were the theme presenters. The Faithful Fools Street Ministry from San Francisco also came, to help participants explore the connection between Buddhism and social justice work.

The 2009 convocation took place at the historic Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside, California, organized in part by Board member and minister Arvid Straube. This convocation centered around the teaching of Shinzen Young, a student and practitioner in several Buddhist traditions. This event was more practice oriented and educational than the three previous convocations. It attracted fewer attendees but served as a catalyst for supporting West Coast UUBF practice groups.

In 2011, the UUBF convocation returned to the Garrison Institute. This time James Ishmael Ford and David Dae An Rynick, founding teachers of the Boundless Way Zen, were the guest teachers. Ford and Rynick worked together on several traditional *koans* (teaching stories or verses), introducing participants to non-traditional communal koan study. The UUBF held its 2013 convocation at the Pearlstone Retreat Center near Baltimore, featuring Tara Brach as guest teacher. The Fellowship intends to continue to use the convocation as a major biennial gathering of UU Buddhists.

In each *UU Sangha* publication, presentation at GA, and convocation, the interaction among participants has been just as important as the information presented from the authors and speakers. The most stimulating and transformational work of the UUBF happens in the question-and-answer periods, in the hallways, and over the dinner tables. The UUBF is at its best when it serves as the vehicle to connect Unitarian Universalists to Buddhism and Buddhists to Unitarian Universalism. When the two meet, learning, growth, and development spontaneously arise. In that creative interchange, the UUBF fulfills its mission.



You will find *Buddhist Voices in Unitarian Universalism* at the UUA Bookstore in the Exhibit

Hall at General Assembly, or you can order it online by clicking the button or following this link: <http://www.uuabookstore.org/productdetails.cfm?PC=1794> or you can call the UUA Bookstore's order line; 1-800-215-9076. A bargain at \$14!

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Book Review
*Buddhist Voices in
Unitarian Universalism*

By Arvid Straube

Buddhist Voices In Unitarian Universalism is a book that has been needed for some time. Over the past several decades, interest in Buddhism by Unitarian Universalist has grown year by year. And since the relationship between Unitarian Universalism and Buddhism is a relatively new one, there has been a lot of confusion about how these two separate traditions, from the East and from the West, fit together in actual individual practice and congregational life. This volume of carefully chosen essays does just that.

Many of the essays show a deep understanding of both the essentials of Buddhism and of Unitarian Universalism and how the two traditions are compatible. The book contains some of the clearest descriptions of both traditions that I have ever read. Most compelling were the personal stories about the writers spiritual journeys, stories with which the reader interested in UU Buddhism can certainly identify.

Of course, this would not be a UU volume without some corrective voices. Warnings about projecting western values on the Dharma and about cultural appropriation are well heeded. I was especially 'enlightened' by Kat Liu's essay about how the folk Buddhism of her Chinese American upbringing differed from the meditation oriented understandings of Buddhism which dominate UU circles. I also wondered about the inclusion of essays by those who essentially left their UU congregations after being immersed in Buddhist practice. Here Thandeka's essay on the theology of congregation life apart from Buddhist practice was a relief to read.

This book will amply reward any reader who is a UU Buddhist, a UU interested in or curious about Buddhism, and any Buddhist who might be wondering how participation in a Unitarian Universalist congregation might go hand in hand with their Buddhist path of awakening.



Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube is Lead Minister, First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego, and a past-president of the UUBF.

Needing Love

By Reba Montera

Like many UU's I rejected the notions of judgment, sin, and dependence on a savior that were part of my upbringing in a Christian church. I still reject those, but lately I've started wondering if there isn't some kernel of value there that is missing in my current spiritual practice, which is the Buddha way.

This question came up as a result of my hearing an old, familiar hymn sung by Garrison Keillor on his radio program recently. The hymn was "Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be." It's an expression of regret for straying from goodness and vowing to do better. At the end there is a heartfelt vow to be fixed upon the mount of Thy redeeming love." The latter two words touched some deep chord inside me, almost bringing me to tears. "What's going on here?" I wondered. "Doesn't my Buddhist path bring me any redeeming love?"

Of course we are told the Buddha was a man of great compassion who endured tremendous hardship and sacrificed everything to attain enlightenment and show others the way. And we are probably all familiar with his great teaching of metta. But somehow his story pales in comparison with the Jesus story, which posits a man who had such great love for us that he died for us.

The Beatles opined that "All you really need is love." I think love is very important, but it's certainly not all I need. I also need the experience of being present for life and being able to make sense of the universe and myself. And the Buddhist way certainly does help me with that. But how to find the love I seem to need?

The Zen path I'm currently on can seem a little cold and too cerebral at times, but it does have the Bodhisatva ideal. This, I think, is the key to where love can be found. Not in some ideal, but in real people I encounter, like my teacher and my fellow sangha members who manifest that ideal in the love and service we show to each other and to others.



Reba Montera is a member of the UU Church of Las Cruces and a Dharma Teacher in the local Order of Clear Mind Zen.

Nine Twenty-Four Twelve

By John Sanger

Scooter M^cCool died today. He passed peacefully and painlessly in his caretaker's arms. During Scooter's brief existence, he touched many lives and was the catalyst for much positive karma, most of it flowing to others.

His physical afflictions – nearly constant shaking and lack of muscle control in his legs – would have stopped many, if not most, of us from attempting to do anything. Not Scooter. When he decided to do something, off he'd go, shaking, stumbling, and wobbling, sometimes falling, until he reached his chosen destination. He was strong-willed and stubborn.

He lived two cells down the run and often spent time out of his cell in the common area nearby. I regret not having spent more time with him.

Regret: It's such an unnecessary emotion. It had been within my power *not* to experience it.

When Scooter's condition began to deteriorate further, I took a small handmade card containing the Great Mantra of Tibet and the Wish-granting Wheel Mantra to his caretaker, a Muslim named Tommy, and asked him to hang the card where Scooter would pass under it. That card now rests with Scooter's physical body. The *power* of the mantra continues on with Scooter's energy as it prepares to reincarnate.

Scooter M^cCool, a five-month-old, two-pound, grey tiger-striped tom-kitten was no mere "cat." He was a Dharma teacher of the highest rank.



John is a member of the Church of the Larger Fellowship and the UUBF. He's incarcerated in Oklahoma.

The Buddha, the Flower and the Awakening

By Leon Miller

Once the Buddha, sitting near a lake on Mount Grdhakuta, prepared to teach;
 But realizing that with mere words the true inner nature he'd never reach,
 He simply held up a flower for all to see;
 For the "Jewel in the Lotus" truly expressed what it means to simply be.
 Most on the mount pondered what Buddha was trying to say,
 But the true meaning could not be revealed for their minds got in the way;
 However this sparked the inner light of Mahākāśyapa and it was reflected in his smile,
 For in that moment he realized that the message of the flower mirrored what Buddha was teaching all the while;
 Then Buddha proclaimed, "What can be said is merely a clue,
 And what can be said I've always shared with you;
 What cannot be said is truly nothing less,
 Than the awakening to suchness, oneness and emptiness;"
 For the flower revealed what Buddha long hoped would be understood,
 To perceive beyond form and realize the true essence awakens Buddhahood.



Leon Miller is an Instructor of Comparative Religion at Tallinn University of Technology (TUT) in Estonia and an aspirant to the UU ministry.

UU Buddhist Structures: A Variety of Choices

By Alan Oliver

During my attendance at the UU Buddhist Fellowship convocations in 2011 at Garrison Institute and at the one just completed in Baltimore plus various stray pieces of information in between, I have heard of a great variety of existing UU/Buddhist formats. In addition, I have my own experience leading two existing UU/Buddhist groups at two different UU Congregations which have their similarities and differ-

ences. Some of these groups have a long history, some are just a few years old and others are just beginning or are just being considered. Each choice has implications for the host congregation and for the UU/Buddhist group thus creating its own Karmic dynamic. At this point in the development of these groups, it could be helpful to describe the options so choices can be made with more awareness and intention. Below is an initial attempt to do that based on a continuum from (1) most outside the congregation to (6) most within the congregation.

1. Existing Buddhist group needs space to meet: May or may not have members who are UU. Pays a fee to use space on a regular basis. Has no exact allegiance to the UU, but may exist in a very compatible way with UU members attending at times. May have a specific tradition orientation or be a meditation practice group.

2. UU members are part of an existing Buddhist group: They want the group to meet at the church and have a relationship to the ongoing program. May or may not be in the program and may or may not pay a fee for use. Existing group has a traditional focus (i.e. Zen, Tibetan) or may be a Meditation Practice group. No particular allegiance to UU except members in common but may feel very compatible.

3. UU members of a Buddhist tradition start a group within the church: This may be an individual or small group often with experience in a definite Buddhist tradition. It could also be for the purpose of meditation and may be limited to that. Definitely part of the ongoing program, perhaps in Adult Education department. May stimulate UU/Buddhist dialogue and give Sunday service at times. There may be a question of primary focus: UU or the Buddhist tradition?

4. UU members interested in meditation and Buddhism start a group: No particular Buddhist tradition defines this group. Some may be influenced by the more modern ap-

proaches of the Insight Meditation Society or Thich Nhat Hannh's Community of Mindful Living. Tend to engage more with UU approaches-more of an on-going dialogue. Not so focused on only one Buddhist tradition. Less ritual present and more open to a Secular Buddhist approach.

5. UU members interested in combining UU approaches with Secular Buddhist philosophy: Interested in the basic Buddhist teachings and how they relate to UU teachings. No particular tradition from Buddhism dominates, but sees them all as sources of insight. Constantly in dialogue with the UU and with sciences such as psychology, medicine and the environment. Very little traditional ritual used and more oriented to Analytic Mental Training, reflection and contemplative experience.

6. Minister initiated Buddhist groups: Some ministers have developed their own practice in Buddhism and may want to expand that personal focus into a group experience with interested members of the congregation. The effort may be sporadic or on-going. Difficult to draw the line between the two spiritual areas. Secular Buddhism offers the most compatibility since it is the most flexible and modern of the approaches to Buddhism. Also least ritualistic.

There are no inflexible boxes around these six approaches. Any one group may mix and match and change over time. Original sponsors may leave and groups can dwindle and disappear. Strong advocates of one tradition or another can create conflict or carry the group with them. It is an open process and one well worth navigating. If one believes in liberation and freedom, the Buddhist teachings are important to include in that search.



Alan Oliver, a retired educator, non-profit manager and community developer, leads Secular Buddhist groups at the UUCSJS near Atlantic City and the UU Church of Princeton.

UU BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP GATHERING

By Lois Fussell

The weekend of April 5 thru April 7, over one hundred people attended the sixth biennial UU Buddhist Fellowship meeting at the Pearlstone Convention Center located in a quiet rural setting near Reisterstown, Maryland. Though the majority of attendees represented East Coast groups, some attendees came from Southern California, New Mexico, Wyoming and Chicago. The experience of the participants varied from long-time to novice.

The three-day program included daily sitting meditation and a day of practice led by Tara Brach, Ph.D., the author of two books and founder and senior teacher of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington D.C. There were discussions of sangha building and workshops on Buddhist Women, Pure Land Buddhism and the most popular, Nonviolent Communication and Prison Dharma, which was led by Karen Holcomb and Barbra Esher.

Tara Brach offered insights into getting in touch with one's own sensations and being aware of the sensations of others. What could have been a dull prescription was interspersed with humor.

The gathering closed with a Sunday, inspiring UU and Buddhist worship service led by Rev. Meg Riley of the Church of the Larger Fellowship at UUA headquarters and Rev. Mary Grigolia, UU minister and composer, whose songs were used in the program.

(Resources: See <http://marygrigolia.com> and click on music to sample her recordings and song books. Learn about the mega-congregation of the Church of the Larger Fellowship at <http://clf.uua.org>. It connects us through Interbeing with nearly 500 prisoners, military personnel around the world, and outreach to the unchurched young.)



Lois is a member of the UU Church of Annapolis and sits with the Mindfulness Practice Group of Annapolis.



Rev. Meg Riley



Tara Brach

A Celebration of Thomas Merton's Epiphany

By Robert Ertman

Stop by the UUBF booth in the Exhibit Hall, near the UUA Bookstore, and join us for an informal celebration of Thomas Merton's epiphany. The Convention Center is just a few blocks from Fourth and Muhammad Ali Blvd. in Louisville. Formerly Forth and Walnut, this may be the most famous corner in America.

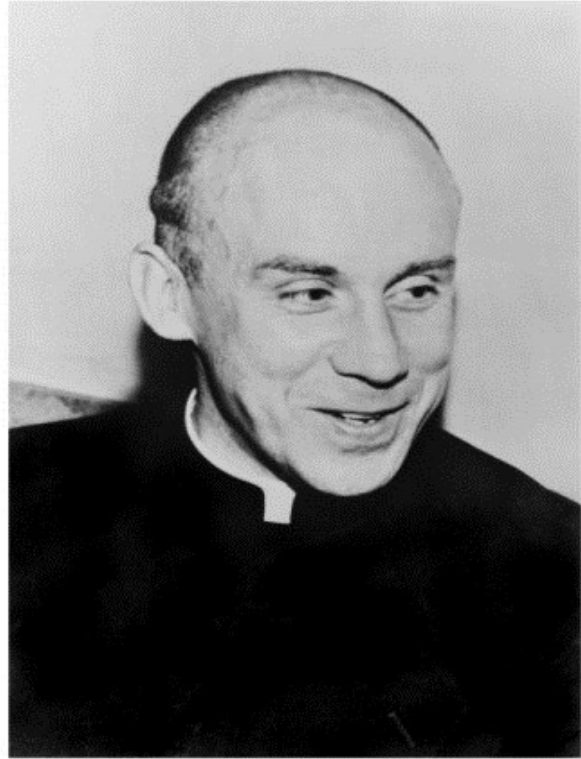
Thomas Merton had an epiphany on March 18, 1958: "In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers." (*Conjectures of A Guilty By-stander*, 1966.)

We intend to organize some small groups at different times (so that we don't need a parade permit), walk to Forth and Muhammad Ali, read Merton's diary entry, and think about it for just a bit.

Roman Catholic priest, Trappist monk, sometime hermit, author, poet, social critic, mystic, and much more, Thomas Merton has much to offer us as Unitarian Universalists, Buddhists, and humans. His great realization came not in the monastery but in the midst of everyday affairs. We might call this "the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." We might also call it "the ultimate oneness of the universe."

Merton didn't view the world differently inside and outside the monastery; his photographs show that he found the universal in ordinary things everywhere. Take time to visit the Thomas Merton Center on the Bellarmine University Campus. *The Paradox of Place: Thomas Merton's Photography*, is a permanent exhibit displayed in the W. L. Lyons Brown Library.

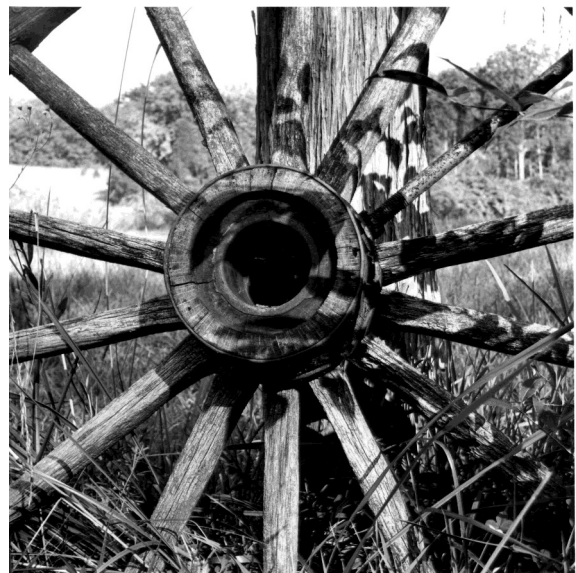
Thomas Merton died while on an Asian pilgrimage "to settle the great affair."



Thomas Merton

January 31, 1915 - December 10, 2008

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division,
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Photograph by Thomas Merton, courtesy of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University



UUBF CONVOCATION 2013

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UU Sangha Spring 2013

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**VISIT THE UUBF BOOTH AT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY!**

(NEAR THE UUA BOOKSTORE)