

“My Buddhist Practice”

Reflection by Bruce Deveau

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I was first drawn to Buddhism in my late 20's out of a need for connection. I didn't really know anything about the Buddha's teachings, but I was noticing that many people I admired or respected or read about were practicing the path of the Buddha. It was simply appeal by association. I thought if it was good for them, it might be good for me.

The timing was important. My life was demanding that I face some difficult and painful things. In the first of the Four Noble Truths, The Buddha names the fact that in life there is suffering. That simple directness connected with me. From there, the glimpses of liberation from suffering on the long path toward ultimate enlightenment have kept me going.

I admit that at first it wasn't quite what I expected. To face something is to sit with it, to tolerate it, and consider its reality. The images of Buddhas and monks and nuns sitting in joyful, blissful silence is a bit deceiving...that only comes after sitting with what is difficult—sometimes for years. My practice teaches me the courage to sit with painful things, to tolerate them without pushing away or reacting, and discern what is real and what is true, until my attachment to them shifts and they lose their power.

And so, the need for connection that attracted me to Buddhism has also kept me pursuing it. Along the way sharing a spiritual practice has really mattered. In the late 1990's my husband James and I began sitting in a UU Buddhist fellowship in Portsmouth, NH. For over 30 years, our spiritual practice has been the most important thing we share. We sit together, we read together, we gently argue intellectual distinctions together. We travel to retreats. Through our practice we became close. Through ongoing practice, we've maintained that closeness.

And as life goes on my practice has evolved and shifted. I'm currently not in a practice group and I don't have a regular sitting routine or ritual. But I try to live by Thich Nhat Hanh's admonition to make everything practice, from walking in meditation, to doing housecleaning, to sitting with a friend who is suffering - it's all practice, constantly being reminded to return to the

present moment and be free.

Although my practice has mainly been with the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, I have benefitted from many traditions. Several years ago, I was in a group reflecting on a teaching in the Dzogchen Tradition, and I suddenly felt a profound connection with a limitless universe. Turns out a limitless universe is a very peaceful place. The experience lasted just a moment, but the peace I felt remains. Recently my reflections have been on karma, and the notion that the endless causes and conditions of karma put me here, right now, with you, and you with me. In karma, everyone in my past is off the hook. No one is to blame. I'm released from the idea that things should be different than they are. And I can be free from hurt and anger. In karma, my only responsibility—is to be kind.