

THE SPIRITUAL

by Bob McDiarmid

Ian Lekus asked me recently "Have you ever written a post summarizing your journey into Buddhism?"

I have not. I don't tend to talk out in the open about my spiritual path.. as it remains like a philosophical deck of cards very close to my chest. but - setting things "friends only" here on Facebook, I'll summarize a little bit.

Until 2004 my adult life had no 'spiritual' element - I had gone to church as a teenager (christian church) but mostly for hanging with friends - and i used church in the military as an escape and a way to get out duties on Sunday mornings. I tried the MCC (the gay christian church) when I first came out - but it felt too incestuous and some of the born again gay christians were powerfully judgemental and controlling. so I'd say from 1989 to 2004 I didn't have any spiritual basis in my life.

in 2004 I read two books - START WHERE YOU ARE: A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron and Learn to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Self-Discovery and Fulfillment by David Fontana. Both books created a foundation for the start of my spiritual path.

Meditation was the key to collecting in and controlling all the emotions that erupted out of me when Jon (my partner in Idaho) left me - and immediately met someone new. Meditation and compassion were my only choices - well, that and killing my ex - but I'd already wasted six years of my life right? why waste any more time. (curious that in reading and watching videos later - Pema Chodron's path to becoming a Buddhist monk were the result of her divorce from her husband, and needing to find a way to reign in the anger and negativity it caused in her) (video: "Why I Became A Buddhist" with Pema Chodron: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4slnjvGjP4>)

I had spent nearly 40 years of my life letting things be driven, directed and controlled by the anger and negative emotions in my life - - and well. that HAD to change.

So in the two years I lived in Idaho single I focused and created a personal spiritual path... which included regular retreats into the outdoors - I own a tent for a reason. and listening to rivers and the wind and smelling the earth. Although I'd verbalized it to myself - I started calling myself a Druid. but very much to myself, my spirituality was nobody else's business.

My first clue that Rick was not going to be a match should have been when he wouldn't let me set up my altar and thinking space in "our" home when I moved to San Francisco. it was the first thing I unpacked and needed in my apartment after Rick.

and meditation, silence and my connections with nature were my rock as the whole Rickisode happened and I got my heart set upon the flame. I actually held it to the flame for a while - hurting myself much more than I needed to - but sometimes you only learn by holding your hand in the burning flame right?

At this point I also read Susan Piver's book "HOW NOT TO BE AFRAID OF YOUR LIFE" - which while targeting women coming out painful divorces or breakups - spoke DIRECTLY To me. and recently I did Piver's seven day spiritual meditation retreat from that book. It is less dharma and more everyday-speak about the role of meditation and the ways we can keep fear and negativity from influencing our lives. I really recommend it.

in 2005 - I was working the holiday shift in the local gay bookstore (laugh! I thought I'd make a few extra bucks - but the stress of it all wasn't worth what I was paid. Oh bookstores are NOT romantic places to work. LOL!) anyhow - while working at the bookstore - I found Don Ruiz's The Four Agreements.

the three agreements are:

agreement 1: Be impeccable with your word - Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.

agreement 2: Don't take anything personally - Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.

agreement 3: Don't make assumptions - Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama. With just this one agreement, you can completely transform your life.

agreement 4: Always do your best - Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse and regret.

these became my life for three years - and still are that forefront of my thinking. All the things I thought where people had "wronged" me? I worked and meditation on Agreement #2. Rik's behavior had nothing to do with me. #2 is the hardest for me - being 'immune' to opinions and actions of others is next to impossible. but it was a good thinking spiritual lesson. Buddhist thought is BIG on forgiveness. AS I mention in Susan Piver's book she says (and I quote in the new novel):

“Forgiveness is an act of the imagination. It dares you to imagine a better future, one that is based on the blessed possibility that your hurt will not be the final word on the matter. It challenges you to give up your destructive thoughts about the situation and to believe in the possibility of a better future. It

builds confidence that you can survive the pain and grow from it.”

forgiveness is something I still work on - and I still work on #2.

so enter meeting Dave and spending every other weekend in Palo Alto at the treehouse and out on bike rides and such. I have powerfully reconnected with nature here iwth the San Franciscino Creek and the baylands and the Arastadero Preserve. powerfully. and when we were moving in boxes on moving day (july 15th last year) David suggested two things, that the first two things we unpack and find a location for be my art collection and my alter. This home - our home - was immediately OURS and a safe place for creative and spiritual exploration.

Then comes my mother's visit this last February. (my mom is awesome btw) She leans about all the buddhist studying and reading I'm doing - and my daily offerings (which she has asked me to send her) - and she challenged me to take it to the next level and actually embrace it all and find the real meaning behind all of it. THis is a "blows me away" moment with my MOM - who never talked spirituality with me as a kid. so she's actually pushed me on it.

Part of all spiritual traditions is to find a sangha - or a congregation that it is the third pillar of things. I still consider my spirituality a very private affair and I don't think there is a congregation of buddhist druids out there for me at the moment. I am sure they exist, frankly. but not right now. I am still working on contentment, compassion and peace - and really communing with the nature around me. and for right now in this particular moment that feels like enough.