

## “Anything Helps-I Have NOTHING”

This is what the cardboard sign said that a homeless man was holding a couple of weeks ago on Sunday morning. I was on my way to the yoga studio to practice before coming to the temple for service. He was standing on the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Ash and I was stopped at that stoplight. I drive this route almost daily so I'm used to seeing beggars at that location, as well as elsewhere downtown. Sometimes I believe them; sometimes I wonder if it's a scam. We've all heard stories about someone with a sign that says, “Will work for food” and when offered work they say “Can't you just give me the money?” So I don't usually give them money but if they really do look hungry and I happen to have food with me I will offer them the food. Sometimes they seem to appreciate that and sometimes they don't. It doesn't really matter to me. I just drive on when the light changes and go on with my day.

Well I could tell by looking at this man that when his sign said, “I have nothing”, he meant it. I happened to have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that I had packed to have for breakfast after practice and before coming to temple. I quickly dug it out, rolled down my window, and offered it to the man before the light changed. He took it, looked right at me and said, “Thank you, baby”. Just then, the light changed. As I pulled away I looked in my rearview mirror and saw that the man had immediately dropped his sign and was walking away hurriedly unwrapping the sandwich.

In that instant I experienced one of those rare and beautiful moments when we truly connect with humanity, and in that connection open up to something larger than ourselves. Call it experiencing interconnectedness, experiencing Amida's compassion; whatever you call it, it is beyond words. I was suddenly overwhelmed by this feeling of connection. Tears filled my eyes. He truly had nothing, I thought, and I have everything. I like to be frugal, but it was only a minor inconvenience for me to have to stop by a Starbucks and buy an apple bran muffin for my breakfast instead. Giving away my sandwich didn't prevent me from eating. Instead the simple act of giving away my sandwich opened up a glimpse into the reality of our interconnection.

As the day went on, this encounter reminded me of one of my favorite Buddhist stories. It's a story that illustrates our interconnection and it goes something like this: From a Buddhist perspective, hell is a room with a large banquet table full of the most delicious foods. Beings sit around the table with 3 foot long forks and spoons attached to the ends of their hands; so that no matter how hard they try they cannot get the food to their mouths and they starve. On the other hand, heaven is a room with a large banquet table full of the most delicious foods. Beings sit around the table with 3 foot long forks and spoons attached to the ends of their hands, and they are joyously feeding each other across the table.

Anything helps-I have nothing, the sign said. For most of us that statement does not describe our reality as we see it. Yet from the perspective of our spiritual growth and evolution, it describes our current condition pretty well. Most of the time I'm lost in my own petty concerns and my to do lists. Spiritually I have nothing. Anything helps; anything that breaks me out of my daily distractions and brings me into the single present moment.

Anything helps-I have nothing. For the tiny price of a homemade peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a single meal for a homeless man, I received this priceless jewel of momentarily seeing reality as it truly is. I could see in his eyes how grateful he was for the meal, I only wish he could know the larger gift he unknowingly gave to me. I believe that this is the essence of interconnection. When we see it we suddenly remember that in that moment we do have everything. What a gift. Thank you.