

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

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WILL AMERICA EVER SEE THE MONKEYS FOR THE TREES?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

*our reptilian brains
selves merging with monkey minds
calm our primate souls*

Painting and haiku by Wanda Sue Parrott

UNDERSTANDING America's metaphoric "monkey mind" might help clarify why I feel Homelessness is now Public Enemy Number One.

If Buddha were here, he'd correct my errors, if any, about what I've learned from four years of Dharma talks at weekly Wednesday-night Buddhist Sanghas at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Carmel. Interested in knowing more?

Namaste!

Our Three-Fold Brain

Individually, we have three basic brains acting as one intelligent triplicity; interactions among them is often so fast and even furious we say one thing and do another in the same instant.

So, Karma begins within us: "*For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction.*"

That's also true on the level of national consciousness! Why?

As a start, your primary brain is often referred to as "Reptilian."

It's situated at the back of your skull above your spinal column and controls your survival (fight-or-flight) instincts.

According to Darwin's evolutionary theories, life evolved from water-dwelling creatures to land and air dwellers on the legendary Tree of Life. More-complex brain functions emerged, resulting in the "Mammalian" brain that's the largest part of the gray matter inside our human skulls today.

It runs your body 24/7.

On the collective national level, it runs America for better or for worse.

Our collective awareness of how it's doing is realized through our newest brain, most familiar as the frontal cortex which modern Buddhists call the "Primate" brain, herein metaphorized as "monkey mind."

Does that imply we're monkeys? No.

But our minds chatter metaphorically like monkeys swinging through trees, changing branches, ever moving in different directions, and often suffering from unresolved conflict because we cannot sit still and sort things out.

Buddha learned to sit under the Bodhi Tree, symbolic of the Tree of Life, and he shared the lessons he learned through his time-honored Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path of action, which helped me reconcile the ongoing struggles between action and reaction inside myself.

Centered, I found the peace in which to be still enough to end personal suffering and to try and help resolve homelessness as a public service.

Unless our nation calms its mass primate mind, America won't see the monkeys for the trees until, perhaps, it's too late.

How does homelessness figure in this metaphor?

This example of a Monterey Peninsula misunderstanding illustrates a matter in which the minds of both parties need to meet on common ground.

My Monkey Mind

A few months ago I wrote a column that shared the great news about Monterey's new outreach program that helped its first homeless woman get shelter for herself and her dog. Tara Robinson, whom I'd met at Scholze Community Center in New Monterey, had been excited after someone gave her a used Jaguar. She said to me, "Wanda, you should write my story and call it 'From Rags to Riches.'"

Tara and her dog Shay spent a short time together in the car and she then told me it needed expensive repairs. Before I got her story written, Monterey's new Multidisciplinary Outreach Team (MDOT) had helped Tara get housing.

To publicize the happy event, I included basic facts from the press release, and added a few facts from the story I'd promised to write about Tara's rags-to-riches experience, mentioning the Jaguar as being a "lemon," meaning metaphorically that it needed repairs which I didn't believe she expected when she accepted the gift.

Tara pointed out that the car was not a lemon and I promised to do a retraction story, but wanted her to set the facts straight in her own words in order to assure they were accurate. When I tried to set up an appointment, she was too busy to meet with me. We haven't yet had such a get-together.

If our monkey minds can meet, I'll let Tara tell her own story and set the record straight, and I apologize for any pain or trouble my error cost her.

When minds do not meet, merge and make progress, mayhem often can and does follow.

What can we do in our oft-failed attempts to care for each other?

Monterey's Housing And Homeless Programs

Mayor Clyde Roberson, guest speaker at the Pasta with the Pastors fundraiser for the Interfaith Homeless Emergency Lodging Program (I-HELP) at San Carlos Cathedral on August 29, discussed "Caring for Each Other" and I-HELP as role model of four essential ingredients for success:

- *Seeing a need;*
- *Stepping up to address that need;*
- *Keeping the program going as I-HELP has done by providing meals and shelter to homeless men for 27 years (and women for four years);*
- *Dedicating help from staff, boards, donors, volunteers, congregations, neighbors and friends.*

Minds meeting successfully at the local level resulted in recent affordable housing achievements in Monterey include opening 18 permanently affordable apartments at Monterey Hotel, 18 homes on city-owned Van Buren Senior Housing; and more than 500 below-market, deed restricted rental and ownership housing units in the city.

"My pleasure as Mayor was to sign escrow papers for townhouses in the low \$200,000 (range) for qualified buyers," the mayor said.

He added that the city is studying more opportunities on city-owned property and for potential 400 new housing units on Garden Road, and that 70 percent of Monterey residents are renters.

Mayor Roberson enumerated several homeless partnership programs, including its \$30,000 matching funds grant to I-HELP, the Gathering for Women breakfast, and the MDOT program established by the Monterey Police Department that helped Tara Robinson and her dog Shay get housing after she had been homeless for nearly five years.

My hope is that in the near future Tara and I can meet so we can mindfully retract the errors I made in my initial attempt to help, not harm, her.

Merge Your Minds

In this era of mass monkey-mindedness, salvaging the integrity of America begins at home, whether you're housed, homeless or in transition between the two extremes.

If your mental triplicity is blowing on the wind, you're welcome to try sitting under your own symbolic Bodhi tree just as Buddha did. Belief in evolution and karma aren't required. Free Sangha circles meet on Wednesdays, 7 p.m., Unitarian Universalist Church of the Monterey Peninsula, 490 Aguajto Rd., Carmel. www.uucmp.org. 831-624-7404.

Namaste!

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