

HOMELESS IN PARADISE

January 29, 2016

Column #68



GOOD KARMA/BAD KARMA?

What does Buddha say about the vote in Monterey?

By Wanda Sue Parrott

DIPPING thumb and forefinger into my Bedside Buddha Bowl has been a morning practice since I started meditating in a Buddhist Sangha nine months ago. If I correctly interpret my Daily Dharma Directive, my own Inner Buddha's wisdom should point to Right Action that day.

In other words, the challenge is to curb over-emotional reactivity through Mindfulness that ends suffering.

Gulp! First daily challenge is figuring the meaning on the slip of paper that looks like it's from a Chinese fortune cookie. To better understand, imagine yourself in my situation shortly after dawn on Wed., Jan. 20. You pull this message from the Buddha Bowl:

Welcome This Moment And Whatever Gifts It Brings

A vision of hoary Buddhas, like a line of homeless men in a soup kitchen, pops into your mind. You realize you forgot to attend Monterey City Council's meeting last night.



Two major issues affecting the homeless were on the agenda. You were among advocates for the homeless who had earlier attempted to persuade city council to approve two items on this agenda, both to be located at the Methodist Church, 1 Soledad Dr.

You wonder, "Did council approve the ordinance allowing 25 homeless persons to be sheltered in churches? Did it also approve the One Starfish Safe Parking Program that would allow six homeless women to sleep overnight in their vehicles in the parking lot?"

While your coffee is heating, you turn on the computer and Google "Monterey City Council" news. You draw a blank, not yet realizing it's too early for the press to break the story about the emotionally charged, highly contentious city council meeting that had only ended at 1 a.m.

“Oh-oh,” you think. “So, I missed the meeting. What’s the gift this moment is supposed to bring?”

Inner Buddha flashes a thought, accompanied by a line of five dignified Buddhas seated like a mayor and four imperturbable city councilpersons:

Karma: For Every Action There’s An Equal And Opposite Reaction



Now you begin trolling social media, where gossip abounds, and opinion passes for objectivity. Thankfully you find the former editor of the Monterey County Herald has posted an editorial in the Monterey Bay Partisan (www.montereybaypartisan.com):

JOE LIVERNOIS: Monterey’s Reenactment Of “The Entire American Tragedy”

The caption beside a photo of a homeless person sleeping on a bench says: City Council votes 3-2 not to offend the neighbors. Your heart thuds as you read these excerpts:

“By a 3-2 vote on Tuesday, the Monterey City Council denied a use permit that would have allowed six homeless women to sleep safely in their cars at the Methodist Church on Soledad Street.

“Later in the evening, the council also rejected an ordinance that would give homeless people overnight shelter within the warm and sacred confines of local churches... Before ruling in the Methodist

Church case Tuesday night, the council heard from a long line of neighbors with legitimate complaints caused by encampment of homeless people in and around their neighborhood... many of them make the nearby Union Bank property their toilet.”

Invoking The NIMBY Principle

According to Livernois, each neighbor agreed that One Starfish is righteous, beneficial and deserves support, just “not in my backyard.” The NIMBY neighbors suggested alternatives to unwanted conditions in their areas.

Livernois says, “They pointed out that many other parking lots are better suited for such activity. Indeed, there exists a quiet and functional parking lot, away from the madding crowd, behind City Hall and Colton Hall that might be used. And they do have a valid point. A Capitol Idea, one might say.”

A Monterey Herald story by Carly Mayberry (www.montereyherald.com/government-and-politics/20160120/monterey-city-council). posted later that day states, “City Manager Mike McCarthy brought the issue back to the city with the possibility the council would overturn it. The council voted 3-2 with Mayor Clyde Roberson and council members Libby Downey and Ed Smith voting against the appeal.” Council members Alan Haffa and Timothy Barrett voted for it.

Tia Sukin, founder of One Starfish, said, “It’s just a shame that a church can’t exercise its right to religious freedom to help those in need” and council member Downey said, “I came planning to support this, but after what I’ve heard, I’ve changed my mind.”

Mayor Roberson said he couldn’t support something that the neighbors so vehemently opposed, and council member Smith said he supported the program, but couldn’t support the proposed location.

Council member Alan Haffa said he believes “we should be looking at affordable apartments to benefit our low-income people.”

Social media quickly started to fill with opining protestors and pundits: Don’t vote for Mayor Roberson! Turn school gyms into shelters. Put port-a-potties in public parking lots like they do at sporting events.

Someone is organizing an Occupy Alvarado Street future sleepover with curb-to-curb sleeping bags.

You and I forget about what Buddha might say about Monterey and go back to our normal routines, but I don’t forget that two weeks ago I praised Monterey City Council for conducting good business rather than boondoggling. Was I right or wrong?

Yin And Yang

A week later I watch the Jan. 19 meeting on Channel 25. Monterey City Council member Timothy Barrett is arguing that “it took us four years to get to this point” in what he feels was Monterey’s “one and only” chance” to have safe parking for the homeless women. “I am sorely astounded at council’s vote based on emotional impact,” Timothy says passionately, to which council member Ed Smith replies unemotionally, “Everything can’t be logical.”

Alternate locations for safe parking, such as the police or high school parking lots, or other venues for warming shelters, will next be sought. If anything is found, the process which took two years to be defeated will begin anew.

Meanwhile, I dip into my Buddha Bowl and open a Dharma Directive, read it, then suddenly realize its “gift” is not the words; it’s the realization of their true meaning.

As if affirming my new-found wisdom, The Four Buddhas of Happiness from Stephen Googh on Facebook, which found me while I was searching for the outcome of the Jan. 19 Monterey City Council meeting, pop into momentary sight, their joy so palpable they seem to be chanting a magical mantra:



Peace is this moment without judgment

###

“Homeless Buddhas” (moss-covered statutes) from All That’s Interesting Otagi Nenbutsu-ji;
“Dignified Buddhas” (gold statues) from Free PNG Logos;
“Four Buddhas of Happiness” (terra cotta statues) from Stephen Googh on Facebook;
all images used for educational/illustrative purposes only; no copyright infringement intended.

Contact Wanda Sue Parrott at amykitchenerfdn@hotmail.com or leave a message with
The Yodel Poet at 831-899-5887.