

Life on Wall Street

Sermon by

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A good part of my time off during the past three weeks was spent at the Sivananda Ashram in the Bahamas. When I tell people I was in the *Bahamas* tongue in cheek, they say “that had to be tough.” In fact, life at the Ashram is quite rigorous... the 5:30AM gong isn’t about centering oneself, it’s the warning that by 5:45AM you best be on your way to temple (and did I say no COFFEE at the Ashram?)

Two hours of temple includes 30 minutes of silent meditation, 30 minutes of chanting, a 45 minute lesson and 15-30 minutes of closing prayer. This followed by 2 hours of yoga. YES yoga-where you touch your toes, balance on one foot, stand on your head, stand on your shoulders, kiss your knees, OR if your like me, while everyone else is doing all these other things your just trying to get up enough rocking momentum to get your butt up in the air.

And the gastronomical reward for all these efforts? Our first of only two meals is at 10AM-lentil soup, shredded beets, lettuce, oatmeal, tofu, bread, granola and soupy yogurt and cucumbers in soupy yogurt.

The routine starts all over again at 4PM, 2 hours of yoga, dinner and 2 hours of temple and lights out at 10:30PM. This is what **I** call vacation. Not for everyone, but I do return to you with my soul nourished and my being at rest.

One thing about the Ashram I really love - it’s a great place to find instant community. Typically the questions include “where are you from and what do you do”? I took great pleasure in answering “I have an office on Wall Street” “Ohhh how’s that working for you?” “ I LOVE it. I open the big heavy wooden door on Tuesday morning and there are 100 kids, laughing and singing, talking ,reading and learning.” People looked “confused.” “Then I go up the stairs and there at the end of the hall is a group of 8 or so 5 years olds, speaking Spanish, crying, laughing, being instructed to “stand still and straighten out the line!” In my office the light from the 4 stained glass windows is reflecting sunlight on my conference table where there’s a stack of books- a pictorial history of 60 years of being. I love going to work. My “Wall Street Office” is connected to the Unitarian Universals Church of the Lehigh Valley.

It was like talking about an incredible restaurant, people wanted to know more. “What do you believe? What are the sermons like-do you call them sermons? What kind of people go there? Why haven’t I ever head of this religion? Tell us more! My excitement about UUCLV was unconcealed and it proved to be contagious. We are like the partnership between the fox and the boy in today’s reading. I bragged we are a living tradition, a church that can both *be* and *do*. We are seekers-inclusive, exploring, embracing of the traditional and the non-traditional, comfortable with uncertainty but certain of our commitment to live our values-our principles. We are

like the Hindu Deity Ganasha, the elephant head with many arms. The mythological icon is the Lord of Beginnings and the Remover of Obstacles. UUism offers new beginnings...new beginnings to those estranged from their religious roots or to those who have no roots and are not captured by doctrines. We are also the remover of obstacles embracing science, psychology, reason, mysticism, humanism, paganism, monotheism, polytheism and atheism and many other philosophies. We are removers of the obstacles that separate us from nature and our many arms reach out to invite dialogue and promote understanding and reverence with all that is known and unknown. "This is the life on Wall Street" it is my entry way to daily blessings. This sacred place opens its doors and arms To high risk children. To special needs teens. To homeschoolers. To BGLT youth. To the visually impaired. To environmentalist. To community developers. To the homeless. To the hungry. To community intellectuals,. To political controversies. To the seekers of peace. To the lovers of faith.

We are a congregation of young families who arrive with their 100 children trusting us to empower them to discover their inner source and their sense of the world. Parents; single, partnered, divorced, married, gay, they are here to find support, acceptance and encouragement. Our congregation also has many active long term members. These are the folks at the heart of our journey; persistent, independent seniors who sculpted a liberal church in the Lehigh Valley. I pointed to our 2000 year history of affirming and fighting for the marginalized, the oppressed, for unconditional human dignity, for the holiness of all that is, in the year 100AD and in the year 2009 and thereafter.

My Wall Street is not the center of competition, greed, fear, distrust. It is not a place where we look out for number one first and toss a few crumbs to our fellow human being. My Wall Street is the home of hospitality, of generosity and compassion.

Are those just hollow words? Where is the evidence? Well let's examine how the children respond to this mornings call to share. YOU are their role models...YOU are who they watch to see how priorities are set, how money is spent, what receives the larger part of the pie...or in this case the cookie! YOU teach them the importance and value of this community.

Now I'm not in denial or living in a bubble. I'm aware that we are not immune from the declining stability of America's financial center, the *other* Wall Street. Our community has suffered the pain; underemployment, unemployment, layoffs, financial pressures, family stress, changing retirement plans and fragile and changing life styles. Some of you have told me you've set aside your dreams. I pray that none of you who have given up your dreams.

So how I can stand here today and in good faith ask you to be more generous, more generous then you were last year when we had to come back several times to ask for more? How can I stand here knowing that each of us is holding our breath, a little (if not a lot) fearful, uncertain, wanting to clutch at what we have and worried about "what if?"

It's because have not given up on dreaming and believing. I believe as much today as I did in the height of more lucrative times that each of us will step forward to support this religious community at a time when the solace of Sunday morning may be the only peace. I respect and understand there may be hesitancy, but I have

faith that in the end you will see UUCLV as an investment that does not lose its value, it is does not call for sacrifice, it calls for trust.

Two weeks from today, March 22nd, there will be a celebration of our history. We will honor those who have held our future in their hands. We will unveil the historical exhibit revealing our rich past and we will give thanks to Rev.'s Stephanie Barnett and Sue Volmer. Please plan to attend this important celebration, it will surely convince you, if I have failed to do so, that financial support of our church is a gift we give to ourselves, our children, our community, our future.

Vincent B. Stillman, was serving the church in Yarmouth Maine preparing for his retirement when he died unexpectedly. He did not realize his deserved rest but he left a legacy of words about UU's, "Let religion be to us security and serenity because of its truth and beauty, and because of the enduring worth and power of the loyalties which it engenders; let it be to us hope and purpose...uniting us...and holding before our eyes the prospect of the better life for humankind...Now that's a great reason to invest in UUCLV.

May it be, Shalom, Om Namah Shivia, Amen

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