



A Break From Religious Studies Leads “Here”

By Anne Trench



When casting about at a Tuesday sangha for someone willing to be profiled for this piece, I was drawn to a young woman sitting near me who was smiling and chatting animatedly with an older friend. The woman turned out to be Lauren; the older woman, her mom. As a new meditator, Lauren makes the perfect yin for the experienced yang of Carla.

As with Carla, Lauren and I tried to come up with an “oh-she’s-the-one” tagline for the interview. “The one who has blue hair?” Too superficial, we decided. “The one who is curious?” Much better, and an especially apt choice. Over the years, Lauren’s hair color may change many times, but her sense of curiosity stays. It’s what makes Lauren feel quite at home at SIMS even though she’s surely one of the youngest people who attends.

Right now, Lauren is in the midst of a year off from college. She needed to address some health issues and is grateful for the opportunity to refocus her life as well. She’s been doing everything she can think of to take care of herself physically, mentally, and interpersonally. Her self-care has extended to exploring mindfulness, meditation, and Buddhism.

Lauren’s mom, Sarah, began meditating a year or so ago and couldn’t help sharing what she was learning with her daughter. The two of them frequently discussed different aspects of mindfulness. Eventually Lauren decided that just thinking about these concepts was not going to be enough. If she really wanted to find out what it was all about, she was going to have to start sitting.

So Lauren took Rodney’s introductory meditation class this January, then participated in the post-beginning class, and now comes to Tuesday-night sits. As a religious-studies major, Lauren is drawn to Buddhism not only in a personal way but also in a “nerdy, academic way.”

Of her new practice, Lauren says, “I definitely know that there are benefits to mindfulness meditation, but I don’t know exactly what they are yet.” Still, she can tell that “something in here is valuable and worth investigating.” She’s especially intrigued by the concept of no self and is excited about exploring further.

Watching Lauren and her talking at sangha, one gets a clear sense of a shared energy between them. And their shared interests extend beyond Buddhism. To backpacking, for one; the two of them recently went backpacking together in Arizona. Along the way, they made a game of finding Buddhist metaphors wherever they could. (Her favorite—at the sight of a tree growing over a rock—“Ah, there is space for this rock too.”) As with sitting practice, says Lauren, “You don’t bring activities to ‘do’ on a hiking trip; you mostly just walk or sit and marvel how wonderful it all is.”

Lauren won't be with us long. She's returning to school next fall, with a new sense of vitality and ease. This year of exploration and her new practice have given her a deep sense of balance. She's resolved to make sure she that, as she plans for the future, she doesn't "miss out on what's right here."