

"A Day in the Life of a Buddhist Monk"

I decided to write my essay on the day and life of a Buddhist Monk. I had little trouble finding a multitude of information on the different varieties of Buddhist Monks from all different regions. The article that I will be citing is about a gentleman who was blessed with the opportunity to spend a two week journey with Monks from Thailand. He was from New York and a CEO of a large corporation, and had wanted to experience what it would be like to actually be a Buddhist Monk.

His journey began from the moment he arrived in Thailand. He was escorted to the Forest Monastery, Wha Sundandavanaram, and he was guided by a famous but austere monk of Japanese origin known as the Venerable Ajarn Mitsuo. He was instructed on the basic day, and how he would be living and the expectation of how he was to conduct himself for the first week of his journey; which included him taking a vow of silence. I have an immense respect for just the first sacrifice that he underwent; considering it would be virtually impossible for me to even honor that request, because anyone who knows me knows that I could not possibly remain silent for more than a few minutes. I am a very talkative if not the most annoying person who absolutely loves to talk. To me, that would be very painful, I am far too inquisitive for my own good. Anyway I digress, so back to his journey.

He began every morning at 2:00 a.m. after sleeping on a hard wooden floor. The extremely early mornings began with the other Monks learning about the impermanence of life and then practicing mindfulness and his own physical death until around 4:30 a.m.. After that they then practiced mindfulness meditation until around 6:30 a.m.

When that was concluded they would go out for "alms round" which was where they would walk to the village barefoot over rough terrain through neighboring villages. The CEO was fortunate enough to be allowed to wear his sneakers, and was considered an apprentice to the Monks.

The poor villagers would line up on the streets to make food offering for the Monks. They would place their offering into the Monks' bowls, and as their bowl became full the apprentice would empty their bowls into a bag. So they were able to collect more food offerings. The CEO was amazed at the look of reverence on the faces of the villagers as they gave their offerings of their alms to the Monks. The Monks as they received the food would bless the donor with a silent blessing. They returned to the Monastery around 8:00 a.m. They were allowed to eat only one meal a day, and they shared the food that was given to them by the villagers, and ate in complete silence with full mindful awareness. More respect for that - I for one still couldn't do it. The rest of his day was spent in Meditation.

In the evening he would meet with the Venerable Ajarn Mitsuo, who would guide him with more instruction reflecting mindful awareness of his breathing, feeling, emotions, and movement. Finally, he was allowed to go to bed around 10:00 p.m. Then the process began all over again the following morning at 2: a.m. with meditation on impermanence and death.

The way that these very modest Monks lived was very basic, down to the fact that they didn't even have running water. And apparently there were many mosquitoes to have to deal with to boot.

After his first few days of this hardship he was moved to another part of the Forest Monastery, and was introduced to Chiang Khong; where he was to be officially ordained. One of the CEO's brothers' friends decided at the last minute that he too wanted to be ordained with his friend. This second part of the Monastery, which was under the guidance of the Venerable Ajarn Ekachai was a bit more comfortable than the first; it at least had running water. For the ordination ceremony he and his friend were required to memorize some of the teaching of the Buddha and chant them in their original language, Pali. Pali derives from the Sanskrit language and was the language spoken at the time of the Buddha. The CEO stated that he really had no trouble memorizing what he was asked to recite for the ordination. After chanting for a very long time, they received additional instruction from the Venerable Ajaarn Ekachai with another senior Monk about their responsibilities and what they had to do to be an ordained Monk. They were instructed on the five precepts; they must understand the Four Noble Truths, and Eight-Fold Path to Enlightenment. They also had to have their heads and eyebrows shaved. They also had thread tied around their wrist by the villagers which meant that the villagers and the Monks considered them as part of their family. That part of the ceremony lasted about two hours and they sat with their legs crossed on the floor for the entire time. By the time they were finished the CEO stated that he had let go of all of his attachment for the time being, and had surrendered to the whole process. The CEO's son was one of the witnesses and filmed his father as he went through this ceremony. They were then mounted on elephants to go to the Buddhist temple, and as part of a parade there was drumming and chanting, and all the villagers were dressed in colorful clothing to celebrate their success. When they finally reach the Buddhist temple they dismounted from the elephant where the official ordination was to begin. The CEO and his friend were then made to recite the Buddhist chant to prove they had learned it. This part of the ceremony took an additional five hours to complete. They were asked to give up their clothes and were then given monk's robes. When the CEO and his friend walked out of the temple with their begging bowls in hand it was about 5:30 p.m. All of the villagers stood at their feet with reverence. The villagers made offerings and filled their bowls. They were now ordained.

They returned to the Monastery and were instructed by the Venerable Ajarn Ekachai, and were informed of their routine. It was similar to that at the previous monastery. Over the next week they continued to remain silent and followed the routine as told. The only challenge for the CEO was going barefoot through the village. Apparently, the paths were at times rocky and even filled with bristles and thorns, but they walked through the pain.

The Venerable Ajarn Ekachai would meet them every afternoon and evening and go over the practice of mindfulness. There were no mirrors in the Monastery, so he had no idea what he looked like after having his head and eye brows shaved, and he had to wear the Monks' robes, but the villager treated him with respect and reverence. The villagers were generous in the giving of alms. What they received in their beggar's bowls was mainly rice, fruit, boiled eggs, and even a bar of chocolate. He was amazed at the generosity and love in their eyes as they donated food to the monks.

They still only ate once a day. The CEO started to lose the sense of his previous identity. He was without hair, barefoot, and wore the monks' robes. They practiced mindful awareness all day and night, along with meditating on impermanence, as well as his physical death.

The Venerable Ajarin Ekachai said that focusing on the mind state and shedding our previous identity allowed us to focus on the divine qualities that would emerge, such as loving-kindness, compassion to all beings, being able to allow happiness to be appreciated of the happiness of others, not to mention equanimity.

The CEO stated that he did in fact, experience all of these things. The CEO realized holding on to anything was like trying to hold your breath. It will eventually suffocate you. He stated it was freeing to just let go. Before they went to the final closing ceremony they took the hair that had been shaved from them and packed it into palm leaves and went to the Mekong River. They then got on a boat towards a shore along the river banks, where they offered their hair to the river. This was a symbol of letting go of their habitual certainties and attachments, to allow space for new and better spiritual things in their lives. And since the hair that came from their bodies came from the elements, when placed in the river it was returned to the elements.

After the last week was over the CEO and his friend returned to Bangkok wearing their regular clothes. Upon returning into his original environment that contained mirrors he looked at himself and burst out laughing because he didn't even recognize himself. On this trip for enlightenment the CEO learned a great many things - for instance: Letting go of habitual certainties and labels what he found was joy, humbleness, and his conscience was clear. He also felt that the Monks were perfect embodiments of simplicity and were full of compassion and kindness. He was astonished to recall the peasant villagers as they gave them food without thinking of themselves and appeared to be happier than most of the wealthiest people he knew.

Impermanence helps a person appreciate every moment, compassion helps a person go beyond the thought of themselves. When we are grounded we are able to experience innocent joy, understanding impermanence and aware of our own death helps to remind us of what is essential and precious in our lives. We can create our own future, and he recalled the villagers who took them in as family that showed him a life that not even money could buy. He returned to New York and is now back to his routine of writing and public speaking, but he made sure to express his renewed awareness and suggested that if we all took a little time to focus on life and the importance of reflection and meditation on whatever religion we practice we could help to create a better world.

My work cited page (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/deepak-chopra/a-monk_b_651921.html)