

INTERN MINISTER

Greetings from the Twitter-verse!

Kellie Kelly, kkelly@unitytemple.org



As a reminder, I explore each month's Soul Connections theme on my Twitter account (@kellieukelly) using a hashtag (#) and the month's theme (example: "#Identity"). For those of you who aren't interested or able to sign up for a Twitter account, I include some of my favorite tweets here in our newsletter.

This month, we explore #Abundance. What does it mean to be a community of #Abundance?

I experienced an abundance of silence, time, and emptiness last month, while I attended a 3-day spiritual retreat—my first Buddhist retreat. As a huge extrovert, I must admit that I did not see abundance as a positive when I paired it with silence, time (71 hours to be exact), and emptiness.

Beyond my anxiety around sitting in a hall for three hours straight trying to meditate, I became worried about keeping Noble Silence. I was going to need to be silent from 1 p.m. on Thursday until 12 p.m. on Sunday. According to the retreat materials, Noble Silence included more than not talking. In addition to no talking, there would be no eye contact, no body language, no reading, no writing (besides journaling), no music, no Internet, no texting, and no phones. OMSL (Oh My Spirit of Life), how was I going to get through this?!?

The first thing that I had to do was tell myself that I didn't need to attend every meditation session and follow Noble Silence strictly. My one nonnegotiable rule was that I couldn't disturb/disrupt the program or the Noble Silence of others. Once I made this decision, I immediately felt my anxiety loosen and relief wash over my body. Progress, not perfection.

Secondly, I decided to keep my phone with me. However, I put it on airplane mode (no phone reception or Internet connection) for the majority of my day. This stopped the constant stream of social justice text messages, news alerts, Facebook messages, and email alerts (not to mention actual calls and text messages from people that I know in the real world). I allowed myself two or three breaks a day when I checked email and texted my mom and 11-year old son (Grandma was on duty with Matt while I was gone).

Those two changes made all the difference.

I slept in a little every morning. I took a long nap every afternoon. I explored the retreat grounds. I attended two Dharma talks a day. I attended two

small group meetings with the teacher (when we were allowed to ask questions, wheeee!). I reconnected with my Roman Catholic heritage by reading about the saints. I meditated 45 minutes to 90 minutes each day, with my longest "sit" being a full hour (whoo-hoo!). Although I am not a journaler, I journaled a lot—documenting the things I was observing in myself and others—sharing what I hoped were new insights into myself and my ministry. Probably because I didn't have anyone to tell all this to, hehe. And I sat on a comfy couch and watched the trees bend, the leaves blow, the rain fall, the clouds float, and the sun shine for longer than I remember.



Here are some of the things that I learned during this "forced" abundance:

1. I need to be able to smile at people, see them smile at me, and make eye contact.
2. I do not need to talk.
3. I do need to listen.
4. Listening to the retreat teacher discuss the common things our minds do when we try to empty them, the common things our minds do when we come into community together, made me realize that I was just like everyone else in some ways. Which means I wasn't failing.
5. When I make space for silence and emptiness, I discover magical things in myself and my world.
6. I miss nature and having time to literally just be with it in silence. (As a self-declared indoors person this was a pretty big surprise.)
7. My son can be okay without me. (While he has shown this repeatedly since we moved back to Chicago, I need periodic reminders and so does he.)
8. I am not a Buddhist—I am a Unitarian Universalist.
9. I love my job.
10. I never want to see broccoli again.

As we enter this time of traditional abundance, I invite you to allow (or if necessary force) yourself the abundance of silence, time, and emptiness. Even if it is for only 30 minutes. May you be transformed by what you find in the spaciousness of yourself—may we be transformed by who we discover when we make space for others.