

Pluralism Project and Andover Newton Theological School Co-Host Interfaith
Leadership Seminar, June 2012 | Site Visits

Student Reflection: Boston Old Path Sangha



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Josh Mugler is a PhD student at the Catholic University of America and a recent Harvard Divinity School graduate. He is studying Christianity in the Middle East and its interactions with Islam.

Reflecting on his visit to Boston Old Path Sangha where he participated in sitting and walking meditation and eating mindfully, Josh finds promise in the community's emphasis on cultivating "nonjudgemental compassionate awareness" as foundation for the work of justice to which he feels a call. Here he considers the role of mindfulness for him as a Christian activist.

After the tea ceremony we read together a passage from *When Things Fall Apart*, by Pema Chödrön. The passage was an exhortation to be satisfied in all things, and to see the good gifts present in suffering. After the reading, we took time for what Matt, the week's leader, called "dharma sharing," when all were invited to share some sort of reflection regarding the reading, based on our own personal experience. Matt shared first, speaking of his discomfiting experiences as he reads his students' evaluations at the end of each semester. His sharing ended with the hope that he will learn to be "comfortable with discomfort," and my jaw dropped. This theme continues to present itself repeatedly throughout my experiences in this seminar; speaking from my Christian tradition, some might say that God wants to drive this point home to me. But at this point, I had to reflect: what is the discomfort with which I need to become comfortable? For me, visiting other traditions' practices is not all that discomfiting. I have some experience with it, and the possibilities of learning through participant observation are exciting to me. On the other hand, conversations with members of my own tradition can sometimes make me extremely uncomfortable, when I have to oppose them in order to stand on the side of justice and inclusion. I worry that I will say too much, or be too harsh (which, I might add, is something I should legitimately watch out for), or that they will think I am a heretic, just another liberal, who has spent too much time in the "godless Northeast." If I am to work for dialogue and justice, I must be willing to face my discomfort and make it comfortable; perhaps the only way to do this is through mindful practice.