



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK

From Baby Boomer Buddhism to Lodro Rinzler's Millennial Hipster Buddhism: Insights for Modern Life

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I first learned about Lodro Rinzler through his *Huffington Post* online Buddhist advice column that at one time was called “What Would Sid Do?” ‘Sid’ is Rinzler’s nickname for Siddhartha Gautama, the name of the historical Buddha. Some classic “What Would Sid Do?” posts include:

- "Buddhism and Dating: Would Sid Join Match.com?"
- "Buddhism and Alcohol: Is There Such a Thing as 'Right Drinking'?"
- "Buddhism and Activism: How Would Sid Produce Social Change?",
- "Buddhist Breakup Advice," and
- "The Four Gates of Speech: Is It Really a Good Idea to Call the Ex?"

Rinzler (1982 -), at thirty-three years-old, is an example of the increasing number of Buddhist teachers from the Millennial generation (born in the early 1980s through the early 2000s). Other fascinating Millennial Buddhist teachers include Vincent and Emily Horn, who are part of the team behind Buddhist Geeks, which explores the “convergence of Buddhism with rapidly evolving technology and an increasingly global culture.”

I don't want to overemphasize Generational Theory, but we do have different concerns at different times in our lives, and the culture in which we are raised does shape us. And before I proceed to focus on how insights from Lodro Rinzler might help us integrate Buddhist practices into our lives in the world of 2015, I would like to invite us to briefly reflect on the range of

Buddhist teachers in the world today — with the caveat that the following is not even close to a comprehensive list.

Some of our most well-known and respected Buddhist teachers for us in the West are from the Silent Generation (born from 1925 - 1942). Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 -) is among the oldest at almost age 90. The Dalai Lama (1935 -), Pema Chödrön (1936 -), and Sylvia Boorstein (1936 -) are all around 80.

And there is a sense in which they have a different style and presence than the more “hippie”-influenced cohort of Baby Boomer Buddhist teachers, born following World War II (1946 - 1964), who are now almost all in their 60s: Jack Kornfield (1945 -), Lama Surya Das (1950 -), Sharon Salzberg (1952 -), Tara Brach (1953 -), and Stephen Batchelor (1953 -).

For quite some time, we have also seen Gen Xers (born from the early 1960s through the early 1980s) coming onto the Buddhist teaching scene, such as Adyashanti (1962 -), Noah Levine (1971 -), who works at the intersection of Buddhism and the punk movement, and Ethan Nichtern, who heads up the [Interdependence Project](#) in New York City.

For those of you drawn to Buddhism, I have traced this generational sketch of Buddhist teachers to invite you to consider which Buddhist teachers you have read most. Are they all of one or two generations? I invite you to consider how your understanding of Buddhism might broaden through dipping into some of the leading voices of other Buddhist generations, as well as the perennial challenge of exploring some of the early and historic Buddhist texts throughout the past 2,500 years since the life of the historical Buddha.

But for now, to turn our attention to the Millennial, hipster Buddhism of Lodro Rinzler, he is quite prolific, managing to publish at the impressive rate of slightly more than one book per year since 2012:

- [The Buddha Walks Into a Bar: A Guide to Life for a New Generation](#) (2012)
- [Walk Like a Buddha: Even If Your Boss Sucks, Your Ex Is Torturing You & You're Hungover Again](#) (2013)
- [The Buddha Walks into the Office: A Guide to Livelihood for a New Generation](#) (2014a)
- [Sit Like a Buddha: A Pocket Guide to Meditation](#) (2014b)

- How to Love Yourself (and Sometimes Other People): Spiritual Advice for Modern Relationships (2015), co-written with Meggan Watterson

Rinzler seeks to write from his own experience about the real-life concerns facing Buddhist practitioners here in the early twenty-first century.

Almost all of the most-famous Baby Boomer Buddhist teachers were adult converts to Buddhism, traveled to the East to learn from the great masters, then came back home to integrate Eastern wisdom with Western lifestyles. In contrast, Rinzler—and quite a few others of the latest generations of Buddhist teachers—are not adult converts to Buddhism. They were instead raised by Western Buddhist parents. Rinzler was born into a Western-style Buddhism that previous generations had to struggle to make possible.

Rinzler is also an interesting case study of one example of what can happen through introducing Buddhism into parenting. His first experience with meditating was at age six, but he writes that he didn't really take meditation seriously until he was a teenager. When he was a junior in high school, his parents said, "You know what would make for a great college essay? Spending your summer at this monastery." They handed him a brochure for Gampo Abbey, a Shambhala monastery in rural Nova Scotia, where Pema Chödrön is the resident teacher. So during the summer before his senior year in high school, Rinzler shaved his head, donned traditional robes, took temporary monastic vows, and entered a silent month-long retreat.

The good news, he writes, is that his parents were right: the experience "did make for a great essay"—he got into Wesleyan. The bad news, depending on your perspective, "is that they had created a monster." Successfully convincing your seventeen-year-old to spend a month meditating seems like a solid parenting win, and it was in many respects. But Rinzler says that:

"it shaped my experience such that all I wanted to do in my four years at college was meditate, study the dharma, and meditate some more. [He] started a meditation group at Wesleyan University, which then became Buddhist House, a communal living and meditation space on campus. [His] first job out of college was running a meditation center in Boston. It's only progressed from there" (2013:4).

In the experience of Rinzler and others who have dived deeply into Buddhist practices, the first

stage a meditator moves through is often along the lines of “Where did all these thoughts come from?” After a while, one progresses to the second stage of, “This thing actually helps me a little,” which, Rinzler jokes, can evolve into “Meditation is like crack” in which some practitioners want to commit deeply to meditation because they are experiencing how powerfully transformative it can be (2012:9). A regular meditation routine cannot solve all your problems, but meditation has been proven to transform “your mind and heart, making them more expansive and more able to accommodate the obstacles you face on a daily basis. The more expansive your mind and heart, the more you are able to engage your world without life feeling like a battle” (2012:5).

One of the most frequent misconceptions I hear from beginning meditators is that they experience a constant onslaught of distracting thoughts. Rest assured: that’s normal. It is no more realistic to think that anyone could achieve twenty minutes of uninterrupted concentration on one’s breath the first few times you sit on a meditation cushion any more than thinking you could deadlift two hundred pounds the first time you walk into a gym—or run a marathon the first time you lace up running shoes. It takes time to build up one’s capacity for mindfulness and heartfulness (2012:9).

Over time, meditation practice creates increasing spaciousness around the thoughts and emotions that arise within us. According to Pema Chödrön, the invitation then becomes, “Don’t Bite the Hook.” Just because an impulse toward anger, resentment, or revenge arises doesn’t mean we have to bite the hook and let it drag us through the mud. Meditation is one skillful means of increasing our ability to be *intentional* about our responses to positive and negative stimuli (2012:12). Or to use Rinzler’s analogy, biting the hook is like when some incident would trigger the comic book character Bruce Banner, transforming him through rage into the Incredible Hulk: HULK SMASH! HULK ANGRY (2012:33)! What a revelation to be able to develop the capacity to not bite the hook!

A related misconception is that Buddhist Enlightenment is other-worldly and esoteric. A better translation is “Awakening.” Someone who has become a Buddha (an “Awakened One”) still has all the normal human experiences, but one’s relationship to the stimuli around oneself is different. Anger, resentment, and jealousy will still arise, but they are met, not with habitual

reactivity, but with spaciousness, compassion, and intention (2012:44).

Lodro Rinzler's evident interest in applying Buddhism to all aspects of life emerged out of his college experience of being a practicing Buddhist who was also going to parties, navigating the dating scene, and living as an adult in New York City. What you see in his books is that he does not claim to have The One Universal Right Answer of how to apply Buddhist teachings to the realities of work, sex, and family life in the twenty-first century (2014a:202). Instead, like Sid, the historical Buddha more than 2,500 years ago, he's figuring it out as he goes along in the crucible of his own firsthand experience.

There's a lot more to say, but for now, I'll give you three examples of Rinzler's suggestions for "What Would Sid Do?"— and you can discern or experiment with whether they hold up to your own experience. The first is a way of **setting an intention** for your day. Often it is helpful to pick something simple and straightforward such as "I aspire to be a bit kinder than yesterday," or "My intention is to be a bit more patient." You may want to write down your intention somewhere you will see it throughout the day. When you are ready for bed, pause to reflect on "how you did in manifesting your intention." Importantly, take time to savor your successes. Even more importantly, wherever you fell short, be gentle with yourself: practice offering yourself the same loving-kindness or patience that you are seeking to offer more of to others (2014a:10-11).

The second is a **Buddhist approach to one's "ex,"** which could be an ex that you used to date, were partnered with, or married to:

place a picture of your ex somewhere you will see it often.... Whenever you see the face...you can think to yourself, 'I wish for your deepest well-being.' If that phrase doesn't ring true to you...make one up for yourself. It could be 'I wish that you find happiness' or 'I wish that you will not suffer so much'" (2014a:104).

It's important to pay attention to what feels right to you at this time in your life related to the goal you are seeking to move toward.

The third practice is called "**Six Words of Advice**" because the original Tibetan text is only six words long:

Don't recall.

Don't imagine

Don't think.

Don't examine.

Don't control.

Rest.

There are times when recalling, imagining, thinking, examining, and controlling are all good, positive, and desirable ways of being in the world. But the "Six Words of Advice" practice reminds us that there are also times when we need to let go of concerns about the past and future and open ourselves compassionately to whatever is arising and passing away in each moment.

A more expansive translation is:

Let go of what has passed.

Let go of what may come.

Let go of what is happening now.

Don't try to figure anything out.

Don't try to make anything happen.

Relax, right now, and rest. (2014a:184)

One promise of Buddhism is increasing inner freedom. The first five of the six words encourage us to let go of various aspects of our existence that can bind us, constrict us, or which we can find ourselves grasping out of habit. After we practice letting go, the sixth and final word gives us something to do: nothing. "Simply relax, right now, and rest." Thich Nhat Hanh calls this becoming a "business-less person" with "nothing to do and nowhere to go."

I invite you to experiment with saying the six words for yourself:

Let go of what has passed.

Let go of what may come.

Let go of what is happening now.

Don't try to figure anything out.

Don't try to make anything happen.

Relax, right now, and rest.

Try repeating these words a few times silently. Then allow yourself to rest in the present moment.