

Buddha's Dogs

I'm at a day-long meditation retreat, eight hours of watching
my mind with my mind,
and I already fell asleep twice and nearly fell out of my chair,
and it's not even noon yet.

In the morning session, I learned to count my thoughts, ten in
on minute, and the longest
was to leave and go to San Anselmo and shop, then find an outdoor cafe and order a glass

of Sancerre, smoked trout with roasted potatoes and baby
carrots and a bowl of gazpacho.
But I stayed and learned to name my thoughts, so far they are:
wanting, wanting, wanting,

wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting, wanting, judgment,
sadness. *Don't identify with your
thoughts, the teacher says, you are not your personality, not your
ego-identification,*

then he bangs the gong for lunch. Whoever, whatever I am is
given instruction
in the walking meditation and the eating meditation and walks
outside with the other

meditators, and we wobble across the lake like *The Night of the
Living Dead.*

I meditate slowly, falling over a few times because I kept my
foot in the air too long,

towards a bench, sit slowly down, and slowly eat my sandwich,
noticing the bread,
(sourdough), noticing the taste, (tuna, sourdough), noticing
the smell, (sourdough, tuna),

thanking the sourdough, the tuna, the ocean, the boat, the
fisherman, the field, the grain,
the farmer, the Saran Wrap that kept this food fresh for this
body made of food and desire

and the hope of getting through the rest of this day without
dying of boredom.

Sun then cloud then sun. I notice a maple leaf on my sandwich.
It seems awfully large.

Slowly brushing it away, I feel so sad I can hardly stand it, so I
name my thoughts; they are:
sadness about my mother, judgment about my father, wanting
the child I never had.

I notice I've been chasing the same thoughts like dogs around
the same park most of my life,
notice the leaf tumbling gold to the grass. The gong sounds,
and back in the hall.

I decide to try lying down meditation, and let myself sleep. The
Buddha in my dream is me,
surrounded by dogs wagging their tails, licking my hands.
I wake up

for the forgiveness meditation, the teacher saying, *never put
anyone out of your heart,*
and the heart opens and knows it won't last and will have to
open again and again,

chasing those dogs around and around in the sun then cloud
then sun.

~ Susan Browne ~

(Buddha's Dogs)