

Essay for The Fredrick P. Lenz Foundation Graduate Merit Scholarship in Religious Studies and Master of Divinity

Essay Guidelines:

Write a 6-8 page essay (double-spaced, 12 point font size). Title your essay with your name, date, and the name of the scholarship for which you are applying.

Essay:

The following questions reflect themes that are important in the work of Frederick P. Lenz as well as being central to the development of Western Buddhism. The questions are stated broadly so that you can draw on your experience and background. You do not necessarily need to answer all facets of the following questions, but you should substantially answer the questions as a whole:

- **How does your personal spiritual practice (contemplation, reflection, meditation) relate with engaging in social activism, service to others, or making contributions to a better world through your livelihood and volunteer activities?**
- **How has engaging the world this way contributed to your personal and spiritual development?**
- **What sorts of obstacles, insights, and growth, or pain and laughter has this brought about?**
- **How do you see this kind of engagement as part of your ongoing personal path?**

Consider the following quote from Fredrick P. Lenz when writing the essay:¹

I'm a teacher of American Buddhism. American Buddhism is a new form of Buddhism. It's a little different from our practice in the Far East. In the Far East, Buddhism is usually practiced in a monastery. You enter a monastery, and you live your life there. And you get up at a certain time, you have meals at a certain time, and you tend the garden or copy manuscripts. You meditate at certain times. You study with the master or the teaching monks. It's a certain type of life. But in the West, while certainly there will be Buddhist monasteries, I'm sure, it seems to me the best form of practice is to live in the world, to have your own home or apartment, condominium, have your own car. It just seems to work better here.

Additional Resources:

In addition to the quote above, you may consult the following selection of Lenz material at your discretion:²

The spirit of the West, of America, is different than the East. The cultural conditioning is very different. And it seems to be harder for people here to work in teams. It seems to be more difficult for people here to live in harmony, in a monastery. Certainly there are monasteries and convents that flourished in the Christian tradition for a long time in Europe and America and other places in the world. But a Buddhist monastery has a certain chemistry. There's a certain laughter, a certain excitement, a certain brightness and ebullience, and it's hard to capture that here. I think that same brightness is captured in another way, and that's by living and working in the world. It's certainly more challenging in certain ways, and certainly about the same in other ways as compared to living in monasteries in the Far East.

So, as a practicing Buddhist in America and the West, or even in the Far East, in Japan and other places, if you don't live in a monastery then you have to have a job. Even in a monastery, of course, you have a job, usually. But here you have to live and work in the world, and most of the time that people spend in their lives is devoted to working, whether it's school or work. School is preparation for work and is a type of work. And then later we finish school and go to work. We get a job.

Working is not a nine-to-five experience. It's a lifetime. Most people get up around six to get ready for work, six-thirty, some even earlier, some a little later. Off they go into traffic. They have to commute for an hour or two sometimes just to get to work, spend the day there, commute back. They have to make sure their clothes are ready for the next day. They might have to do some study for the next day if their job calls for it, particularly if they are in a supervising or managerial position, or an R & D position.

In other words, for most people, a tremendous amount of time goes into their work. It's the main thing that we do in life to sustain ourselves just as bodies. It's a very important thing, and it consumes a great deal of our energy. And energy is the central study or the component theme of Buddhist practice, of yoga. It is the conservation of energy. And that's why people live, or have lived, in monasteries. The idea was the walls of a monastery are not to keep you in, but to keep everybody (Rama laughs), to keep everybody else out because you want to develop a certain type of life and most people in the world, you know, they have other ideas on the subject. So Buddhists have, for a long time, lived in monasteries so that they can spend a certain amount of time working and a certain amount of time meditating. And they don't want to use up all their energy in working. . . .

. . . So in the West, people spend most of their time and energy working, and it would be a difficult thing if we couldn't gain something more than just dollars and cents from working. Because if you meditate for an hour in the morning, you have to get up an hour earlier than everybody else. And if you need to meditate for an hour at night, well, gee, there's not much time but just to meditate and work. And the problem is, of course, you come home and you're so tired from work you don't have much energy to meditate and have a good meditation -- unless you use work in a tantric way, unless you use work as a way of advancing yourself. And that's how I define career success.

Career success is using your daily work, school work, work in the world, work at home, doing the laundry, doing anything, all physical tasks, cleaning the car, any kind of work, and specifically career itself -- using career as a way, and scholastics, of advancing your mental state. Also, obviously, career success means making enough money to lead the kind of life you'd like to lead as a practicing Buddhist, to be able to live in the kind of house in the right energy area, to have the kind of car, or whatever it is that you need to shelter yourself from the abrasive forces of life that would be draining to you and keep you in lower states of mind. So the purpose of work is to make enough money to exclude the abrasiveness, to shelter yourself, to live well, in other words, and happily and successfully in a material sense. Also, with work, you can make money to assist others -- if you enjoy that -- to pay for your own spiritual practice, to advance yourself and just to have fun. But, by and large, I define career success as using your work to advance yourself spiritually.

Now, you can do that with any kind of work. That is to say, if you use work as meditation, if work becomes meditation, then eight hours of work is eight hours of meditation. It's still

important to do a morning and evening silent meditation, meaning a sitting meditation, because it's an entirely different level of experience. And by doing a proper meditation in the morning, a good sitting meditation, you will open yourself up to the planes of light and that will enable you to do a strong work meditation all day, just to be in high states all day. And then, of course, if you do that, when you come home, you'll be able to meditate well again because you won't be as exhausted as everyone else is because you've been gaining a kind of internal chi or power from your work. That's the secret.

So meditation comes in different forms, and the best form of meditation, of course, is the one that makes you smile the most, and that's the sitting meditation. But next is work. Work is a great way to meditate. . .

To learn more about Dr. Lenz, visit <http://fredericklenzfoundation.org>. For a general orientation to Lenz's teachings, you can also consult the following books: Surfing the Himalayas, Snowboarding to Nirvana, or Insights: Tantric Buddhist Reflections on Life. These and his other works are available through the Rama Meditation Society, which can be accessed from the Lenz Foundation website. Please note that you are not required to purchase any materials in order to write your essay, though you may choose to do so if you wish.

1 This is drawn from Frederick P. Lenz's Enlightenment Cycle Tape Series, Career Success.

2 These are drawn from Frederick P. Lenz's Enlightenment Cycle Tape Series, Career Success as well.