

Shrink Rap Radio #74
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Behavioral Medicine, Chinese Medicine and Monastic Psychology

David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Brother Bernard Seif, SMC, EdD, DNM

(Transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Rose Leo Kish)

Excerpt:

A lot of us kind of grew up a little bit bigoted. You know, “Our God’s better than your God” – and all of that -- and what the church teaches very clearly today is that we all share in the truth and we share it in different ways and different degrees and we emphasize different things. So, that has led me in to some of the work that I do with monastic inter-religious dialogue with bridging the gap between East and West spiritually in terms of medicine and meditation and so forth.

Introduction:

That was the voice of my guest Brother Bernard Seif. Brother / Dr. Bernard Seif, SMC, EdD, NMD, is a Catholic monk and a clinical psychologist, board certified in behavioral medicine. He’s also a doctor of natural medicine specializing in Chinese medicine with sub-specialties in medical Qigong and Chinese medicinal herbs. Brother Bernard enjoys doing spiritual direction in giving retreats and workshops in America and abroad.

Here’s the interview:

Dr. Dave: Brother Bernard Seif, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Brother Bernard: Thank you Dr. Dave it’s really a delight to be here and an honor

Dr. Dave: Well I’m really pleased. This is another instance of a listener who is converted to a guest and I’m always excited when that happens. And you are such an interesting blend of backgrounds and trainings and skills and orientations that I hardly know where to start. One of the things is -- probably one of the most salient things to me is -- that you are a Catholic monk and we’ve exchanged some emails back and forth and the question I haven’t asked you is what order?

Brother Bernard: I entered the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales at 17. That’s a large order, international, and was part of that for most of my life. I went in after high school, it was the order that taught me and took vows as a religious brother and so forth and I did a lot of varying ministering including helping other guys who were coming into the community to be priests and brothers in our order and teaching college, teaching high school, teaching retreat work and so forth but I always had a longing to be a monk which is

a little more monastic, more emphasis on silence and meditation and so forth but I loved the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane Frances de Chantal.

So, after Vatican Counsel II, which created a lot of changes in the church and actually it's going to take some generations until the deeper meanings of that major counsel has its impact. Canon law was updated and there was a canon in there that provided for people to live monastic life as a more solitary monk or nun. And I received permission from Rome to transition and then my monastic vows were received by a local bishop. So I still live the spirit of Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Jane Frances de Chantal but live it as a monk now so I'm not part of a large order.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so then you don't live in a monastery, then?

Brother Bernard: I do live in a little monastery, yes. We were about 5 members. I was by myself when I made this transition in the late 80s and was opened to whatever way God wanted to re-fashion things. I knew I had a sense of my calling and had all the appropriate permissions and then various people came along to live in community with us. Some took vows as monasticism -- a nun, another monk and some people were with us for a period of years. Some lived associated with the monastery, their vocation is really to marriage or to single life in another setting but shared in our life so I do live with a -- there's a couple of buildings here, there's a nun on the property, there's myself, there are retreatants who come and go and my clients who are in and out all day so it's a small community compared to the larger communities that I've lived in earlier on, some of which were over a hundred in number.

Dr. Dave: Okay, so would this look like a collection of houses in the country?

Brother Bernard: Yes. We're very much in the country. It's a small property on maybe an acre-and-a-third. There's a regular-looking house, it's kind of big and then there's a little chapel that looks a little bit like a barn. The Amish actually made it and brought it here and set it up for us. And then there is a white mobile home then as we grew, when I was by myself, my office and chapel, everything was in one little house and then as we grew we created the chapel, which in monastic life in the monastery is called an oratory. So the oratory, and then I needed a place to kind of move my office so that we could have more privacy and I bought an old white mobile home and that got put on the property so now we have those three buildings.

Dr. Dave: Thanks. That helps me to have a picture and our listeners to kind of have a picture of your setting because generally when you hear the word monastery, the picture that comes up in my mind is something that looks like an old European castle or something like that.

Brother Bernard: That's very true and you know sadly many of those are kind of museums today but the real monastic is the life that is lived within the person so it is not about all the arches,... if you want arches, I would say go to McDonald's. [laughter]

We live a very simple life here. It's nicely integrated into the local community. People know when we go out for a run and they'll know us and would wave and say *Hi, Brother*. And you'll notice there's a postoffice, so it's kind of nice --

Dr. Dave: Oh yeah I know that sounds wonderful. Well you've already ... there's a lot of ground I wanted to cover. But you've already said a couple things that make me want to backtrack a little bit and find out a little bit more one is to you made reference to -- did you say the Council. It wasn't the Council of Trent, was it?

Brother Bernard: No, but you're close. [laughter] It was the Vatican Council II.

Dr. Dave: Thank you, that's it.

Brother Bernard: Yes.

Dr. Dave: You said something about the deeper meanings that would take two or three years or more perhaps to unfold. I wonder if you could briefly give us a sense what those deeper meanings are.

Brother Bernard: Sure. Actually two or three generations.

Dr. Dave: Oh, *generations*...ahh... [laughter]

Brother Bernard: When people think of the changes in the church and I'm talking about all the churches, primarily the Roman Catholic tradition -- the thing largely of the liturgy being put into the vernacular and in this country would be English in most places, or Spanish or whatever the local community celebrates in or communicates in, or they'll think of sisters who -- and brothers who -- maybe aren't wearing habits or not wearing habits the way they used to. Maybe they're simplified. Think of those things which are somewhat more surface-y in a sense although they're important and the deeper meanings are things like the universal call to holiness that all people are loved by God and all share in this call, not just clergy and monastics. Which was kind of a distorted theology so that was very much emphasized and that's why you'll see a lot of married people or secular people doing various ministries today that they would not have thought themselves able to do in the past.

Dr. Dave: So it sounds like it's a much broader vision and perhaps that helps to explain why your activities are so much broader -- both spiritually and intellectually -- than would fit in *my* stereotypes of Catholicism.

Brother Bernard: Yes. And I do run across a lot of stereotypical thinking with folks but one of the areas that I think interests me a lot with the changes in the church and Vatican II is the deeper meanings of humanism. A lot of us kind of grew up a little bit bigoted. You know, "*Our God's better than your God*" -- and all of that -- and what the church teaches very clearly today is that we all share in the truth and we share it in different ways and different degrees and we emphasize different things. So that has led me to some of the work that I do with monastic inter-religious dialogue with bridging the gap between East and West spiritually in terms of medicine and meditation and so forth.

Dr. Dave: Yeah, good because it's those differences and religious dogma that are tearing the world apart today so that sort of healing and bridging is needed more than ever before.

Brother Bernard: Yes.

Dr. Dave: Now the other thing that grabbed my interest and it doesn't feel like we're fully into this yet -- is that you entered the order and the age of 17. So what was behind that? You know to me that is a young age and so you must have had some early life experiences or some special orientation that would have given you this passion at such a young age.

Brother Bernard: Yes. Looking back on it I sort of cringe and think *Oh -- 17! How did I do that!* But you know I grew up in Philadelphia in a wonderful neighborhood, kind of tough now, it's a really dangerous neighborhood actually but lots of people, lots of row homes and you'd go out and clean your steps and sweep up and we worked hard. We didn't have much but you kind of made ends meet. And every year *droves* of people went into religious life.

My -- actually one of my sisters is one of six - there were six of us -- one is a Sister -- Sister St. Joseph, so there were two in our family and I think 90 young women entered with her and it was often done right out of high school. Many times you went to a high school that an order ran or a number of different religious orders together and you would wind up going into one of those orders so after high school was not that young in those days. Today, you would certainly not go in that young. The order would want you to have more life experience, or education, something like that. In fact I ran a house of studies for our order for nine years and some of them came in older than I was when I was in charge of them. They would be coming in out of the military or whatever and it was actually like that initially in the history of religious orders and religious life. People were typically older but anyway --

I went in at 17 and I didn't have a clear understanding, I just knew what I had a sense of wanting to focus a little bit more on loving God and loving other people. I think the same part of the --- perhaps the same motivation that called me to psychology, called me to religious life.

And I know you sometimes are curious as to how did somebody become a psychologist.

Dr. Dave: Yes... you've been listening! [laughter]

Brother Bernard: Yes I sure have and enjoying every minute of it. And my first memory I think I was about 5 years old is of -- I can see myself standing there in our house and in short pants and the sun's coming in the window and I had an intense moment of wanting to help people stop hurting inside.

Dr. Dave: Mm-hmm.

Brother Bernard: I think that monasticism and psychology, healing arts, were kind of woven together somehow from that point on. I mean I had a youth like everybody else and friends and dating and all of that but there was just a sense this would be the best way I could focus my life and my energies on something worthwhile. And so then I entered the community.

Dr. Dave: Okay. Now you mention dating and so that makes me wonder if part of your practice of being a monk -- it makes me wonder, have you ever been married and have you taken a vow of celibacy?

Brother Bernard: Yes, actually it's a vow of chastity; it's one of the monastic vows.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Brother Bernard: In monastic life a main ingredient is celibacy and chastity. So for a monk, or a nun of any tradition, Hindu, Buddhist, Catholic, a vow of some version of a commitment or vow of chastity is integral to that life. So there will not be a change in church law or something that would allow monks and nuns to marry because it's an essential ingredient. That's not true for the priesthood however.

Dr. Dave: Okay. I wonder if you've think that there is a- if you see a connection - between celibacy and the accumulation of spiritual energy. I'm thinking of *qi*, *kundalini* and various words for that and I think in some of the Eastern monastic traditions that's part of the story. What's been your experience with that?

Brother Bernard: Yes. I didn't think in those terms earlier on in my life but in more recent years as I've grown a little bit in my understanding of Qi and so forth, I do think that this focus, attention on seeking God and the fruit of that being service to others does heighten one's energy or ability to love and to serve. We're all sexual beings -- we need to live it in a way that is appropriate for our life or our commitments so for me it's celibacy. For a married person it would be being faithful to his or her spouse, et cetera, and I think that this kind of focus of life and of energy is for me because I have the sense of vocation, it kind of magnifies my ability to love and to serve. I think if it goes sour, it's just the opposite. A vow of chastity is the way of loving. It's not like an endurance contest. [laughs] I mean when you're younger it might feel more like that but it is actually the healthiest expression, a way to love.

Dr. Dave: That resonates for me. I mean there's -- I've never taken that vow but -- there's an intuitive level that which I kind of feel my way into it and that it makes sense to me. I don't mean to hit you with something tough here but it probably makes sense for me to invite you to comment on those sexual scandals that have plagued the Catholic Church around the whole issue of chastity and celibacy.

Brother Bernard: Certainly.

Dr. Dave: What's your perspective on that?

Brother Bernard: I'd be happy to do so. I think that many people say, *well if a priest would be able to marry than we wouldn't have this pedophilia issue...* I think that's a kind of simplistic approach. I believe that some of it leads -- at least my little understanding -- and I tested a lot of candidates to religious orders, to the holy orders, acolyte priesthood and so forth and consulted numerous religious order and some dioceses and have dealt with many, many clergy and religious over all these years. My sense is that the abuses have to do more with psychological immaturity on the part of the clergy rather than an expression of them being celibate.

Years ago before Vatican [Counsel] II, the seminary training kind of kept the seminary and the student in a very immature status in my view. They were you know, very much molded in a certain way. They had very little authority but they were treated like children and sometimes they're 25, 28, 30 years old. And now this isn't across the board but I made it a kind of general observation you could see, most people would say this is probably how it often went but not always.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Brother Bernard: At any rate, then after that, they're somehow magically ordained and put in a parish and they're supposed to be dealing with literally life and death issues, marriage, family, death, divorce, struggles, depression, all of those kinds of things and I don't know how mature they were themselves.

But again one of these deeper expressions of Vatican Counsel II was to update seminary training, update the way clergy and religious are formed or encouraged to grow and there's a lot healthier approach to all of this today than there was. And you'll find a lot of these cases of pedophilia and many of them very old often-times the perpetrator is dead or -- I'm 61, so I have to watch how I say this -- they're in their 60s, 70s, 80s sometimes and so a lot of this was happening before the Counsel was implemented I mean it's not a panacea but I do think helping people to grow in a mature way was the major issue and not the fact that there was a church requirement that clergy, and only in the Latin rite of the Roman Church, be celibate. There are certainly many Catholic priests who were married -- Byzantine, Ukrainian... and they're all a part of the universal church with the Pope as their patriarch. It's just the rite of the church we're familiar, with the Latin rite of the Roman Church.

Dr. Dave: ok. Now at some point at your development you were drawn into psychology and you actually went to graduate school and became a psychologist. How did that come about and when was that?

Brother Bernard: I think that was when I was 5 years old. [laughter]

I didn't really know there were such things as psychologists and I mean many people have family certainly all have their struggles and pain and our family had its share of it. We weren't morose or anything but my mother died when I was two. My oldest sibling has cerebral palsy, has been institutionalized all his life but is one of the most joyful spirits you'll ever meet. So I think there was something, I'd never known life without a sense of death and dying, having been in it. It was always part of life and as well as illness. So I think that somehow I intuited that there's a deeper meaning to life, not just playing and that called me to psychology. When I entered my order, you have an initial period called Postulancy -- it's a transitional noviceship where you study the rules and the vows and meditation and it's a very secluded several years and then you take temporary vows and even during those years in those days that was more secluded.

I eventually asked permission to study psychology We had just opened my order, a new college in the 60s, a private Catholic college when a lot of other operations like that were folding. We were doing one, I guess we were sort of foolhardy but -- so a lot of our younger members were encouraged to go there. We didn't have a psychology department so I wound up majoring in English but it was really taking the general courses and then after 2 years of that -- in those days we used to go out and teach at one of our schools since a lot of us did that and it gave you a sense of what that would be like. I did that and before I went back, I got permission to transfer to a college called Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania that had a very nice psych department and I did get that permission and I was the first one to go kind of out our usual places of education and it was absolutely transformative.

Dr. Rick Johnson was the head of the department and that department was pure behaviorism. It was -- anything you couldn't weigh or measure didn't have any place there, whether it was soul or ego or anything like that. It was rats, pigeons, monkeys and all of that but I loved it. And Dr. Johnson just the way he talked to me or treated me I nonverbally knew he had a sense that I could do well in this. And I

did. My grades were OK but when I got to Moravian they just went way up and got on the Dean's list and all that kind of stuff and it just encouraged me to continue on and really help me to see the power of a word or a look or what we reinforce. And I finished that... then what happened... Oh! I was --

Dr. Dave: You went to doctoral school at some point --

Brother Bernard: Yes. Master's degree sometime in the middle there.

Dr. Dave: Okay.

Brother Bernard: As I was finishing at Moravian, a dear friend of mine still -- he and his wife are dear friends -- was applying to grad school and I was thinking *oh no, grad school - that's beyond me. I have to get out and work for the order here*, something like that. But I did fill out some forms to go to grad school and I threw out a form that was to apply for scholarship because it was \$25 more and I didn't want to, you know, take that from the community but they would have given it but at the last minute I pulled it out of the trash can and filled it out and wind up getting the scholarship and wound up going to Catholic University for my masters. I just loved it and sailed through it. And then from there, I went and was psychology teacher and guidance counselor in one of our schools for a few years. Then I always had the feeling I think maybe I can get a doctorate and while I was out doing that, I asked permission and within a few years I wound up at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania for my doctorate.

Dr. Dave: Yeah! What was Lehigh's orientation?

Brother Bernard: Lehigh was very much, I would say humanistic, very person-centered.

Dr. Dave: Ah...

Brother Bernard: And yeah it was very nice I actually started out at Lehigh in their what was then called a Doctor of Arts program and it was almost pure research and I didn't realize there was no clinical component at all and Lehigh was very much tied into Bethlehem Steel, the famous Bethlehem Steel that doesn't exist anymore and Billy Joel sings about in a song about Allentown sort of about the demise of all that. So Lehigh is very much an engineering school and very much a nuts-and-bolts and research, so their psychology program was very much like that too. I eventually was able to transfer to the College of Education that had a wonderful counseling program. It was really like a clinical counseling psychology program although it was in the College of Education and I finished there. It only took me five years. [laughs] It was a good experience and out of that came my dissertation which I never wanted to look at again but just recently I dusted it off and gave a whole talk on it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah I noticed that you told me it was on prejudice and religious values and counseling and psychotherapy. What's the "thumbnail sketch" of that?

Brother Bernard: In working with people I was sometimes concerned they would be sent a clergy or religious who maybe were not well-trained or maybe who could make matters worse because I knew bad counseling in therapy hurts people. It's kind of innocuous and so I wanted to look at what effect somebody with religious values would have on the client and in doing that I unearthed material about prejudice and religious values and what I found is that, with some people, that there's a fair amount of prejudice with people with religious values. You don't look like us, you don't pray like us, you don't act

like, that kind of thing but what the data shows is that its more with what we would like call “letter of the law” type people: *I go to church because it looks good or I’m afraid of Hell or what will people think or it’s good for my job* versus people who have internalized whether it’s the words of gospel, it’s the Koran, the Jewish bible, whatever those values are. When they are more internalized its more “spirit of the law,” that group is very free of prejudice. So it’s not the religion you’re in, it’s your internal or external orientation toward it. When people come to you for therapy, the more internally oriented the therapist, his or her religious values is more integrated, and the client can see them better, and gets better and better.

Dr. Dave: Very very interesting this topic we can talk about quite a bit...

Brother Bernard: Hm-hmm.

Dr. Dave: It makes me think of there’s a whole bunch of research and I forget what terminology it was, basically on inner-directedness versus outer -directedness and also research on the authoritarian personality and sounds like both of those you might have reviewed them actually in your research which would have some bearing, I would think.

Brother Bernard: Yes they do and I actually listened to one of your podcasts by -- I think his name was... Dr. Scott Miller?

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Brother Bernard: And he was talking about the (these are my words now) but when push comes to shove the outcome in psychotherapy is primarily dependent on these core qualities of a person and the relationship with the person, the therapeutic alliance.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Brother Bernard: Things like genuineness, respect, warmth, empathy, and that's what study after study shows that those qualities are more important than the type of psychotherapy whether it’s Freudian Jungian, client-centered, et cetera, or whether it’s a nurse practitioner or a counselor or a psychiatrist or clinical psychologist doing it. It keeps coming back to these core conditions and to the degree that the client can see them to that degree, their health, their well-being is facilitated with better outcome and so yes, the more internalized these things, some external religious orientation locks, it appears. This is my research now, appears that the client can’t see those core values as well and therefore doesn’t do as well.

Dr. Dave: Yeah and part of Scott Miller was saying that a major portion of what makes people get better when psychotherapy is successful has to do with *client* strengths and *client* qualities. The resilience is on what the client brings to that relationship and so I’m just speculating here that maybe things like authoritarian personality to the degree you know where a person would fall on that scale, where a person fall in terms of inter-directedness versus outer-directedness... that would be some interesting research to look at in terms of the clients’ side of who’s succeeds in therapy and who doesn’t

Brother Bernard: Yes, that would really be a nice next study to look at. I think it’s called internal and external locus of control.

Dr. Dave: There you go. [laugh]

Brother Bernard: Yeah. That's kind of the research body that I think you're looking at.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Brother Bernard: To see where the client is in that regard as well as a therapist.

Dr. Dave: Yes. I think that would you have doctoral students working under you that you can sick on that?

Brother Bernard: [laughter] Whoa! I'm going to keep that in mind! Every once in a blue moon I'm on somebody's committee. I love it.

Dr. Dave: Yeah. Great. Now I know that one of the things that you wanted to talk about was monastic psychology and I don't know if you've had a chance to say everything you wanted to say about that. So here's an opening.

Brother Bernard: Okay thank you.

I think I have ... it's a shame that so many callings in life are misperceived or stereotyped. Because I do hear it a lot and *oh you're not the stereotypical Catholic*, or monk or whatever – but there are plenty of us around. I think my main point is that when monastic life is lived in a healthy way, it is something that facilitates growth and new life. As I think any life choice we make for any lifestyle is that's the point of it. And so I pretty much said what I need to – just also maybe the idea that in talking about the vow of chastity earlier... Priestly celibacy like parish priests, who are not in religious orders, they're not for instance, Franciscan, Dominican, or Jesuits they're under a bishop, they're celibate because of the church law. I respect all that but it is a promise of celibacy; that's not a vow of chastity. A vow is only made to God, a promise is made to in front of their local bishop and that tradition could be changed as I said earlier. For example let's say an Episcopal-married priest becomes a Catholic and wants to be ordained in the Catholic tradition. Then he of course retains his marriage and so forth so there are certainly married priests around.

But the whole goal of monasticism is to seek God. In like a teaching order, nursing order, the order like I was in originally. They're usually founded to do a certain work, missionary work, or run hospitals, or clinics. In monastic life it's kind of the opposite – the whole goal of monasticism that we really ought to look a little foolish and a little like we don't fit in and it's to spend our lives seeking God. Now that may flow in some ministries -- some orders are more cloistered and you really don't see monks or nuns. There are orders more active and so you will interact with them more. Actually a nice little distinction would be we tend to think of women vowed religious as we call them all nuns but strictly speaking most of the time we're dealing with sisters. Sisters are an active order teaching nurses doing things like that. Nuns are more cloistered, more focused silence on chanting the Divine Office, Liturgy of the Hours, that sort of thing.

Dr. Dave: Okay. That's wonderful background to have. Now one of the things that really struck me about the things that you're involved in was not only are you a Catholic monk and a psychologist, involved in behavioral medicine we haven't talked about yet but also in natural medicine or naturopathy... and Eastern healing... Chinese medicine... Qigong... [laughter]

Dr. Dave: Tell us about this. How did this all of this come about? I find it wonderfully refreshing that you're involved in all of this and it's so stereotype-breaking for me and I need my stereotypes broken. [laughter]

Brother Bernard: Sure. It's as surprising to me as it is to anyone else I think. It's really God (surprise!) who called me into this when I was a postulant and a novice at 17, 18 -- very cloistered, we were only allowed to read certain books, spiritual books, and maybe there were a hundred or so on the shelf and some of the ones who made the cut were written by or by about Thomas Merton.

Dr. Dave: Sure. I've heard of him.

Brother Bernard: Great. Thomas Merton died in the late 60s then he was famous Trappist monk -- kind of a St. Augustine figure, he had kind of a wild youth and when he found God and his life sort of had a different slant or meaning and he entered a very cloistered monastery. When I read those books and Merton drew me to the East he was among the first to bridge the gap between Eastern and Western spirituality to create a whole -- not creating any hybrid religion. He, like I, remained faithful to Jesus as our "Root Guru" as you might say in Eastern parlance and the gospel and so forth but that there was a lot we could share and a lot we could reverence in one another. So reading Merton drew me very much to monasticism, to the East to meditation.

Meditation has been a constant in my life. I just find it so life-giving and empowering and healing. It helps me to live my vows well and all of that drew me to the East. I saw the word "Qigong" somewhere along the line when we were allowed to read broader and broader areas when we were not so restricted and that absolutely captivated me so I read everything I could on it. Then I would practice techniques of Qigong, just little movements of the hand and trying to sense energy.

I read the gospels, then I prayed over Jesus' healing and stories where people felt some power where Jesus, like *I felt power going out of me* when a woman touched the tassel of his cloak and so forth and I believe that all healing comes from God. I believe in that we are all channels of it, vehicles of it as the other Franciscan says, Saint Francis of Assisi: *Make me an instrument of your peace*. I believe we are all instruments of that.

So Chinese medicine was the wonderful way to express that.

Dr. Dave: So you somehow went on to do some training then, in natural in Chinese medicine and in natural medicine. I notice one of your degrees as Doctor of Natural Medicine?

Brother Bernard: That's right. After becoming psychologist I was already training kind of informally and reading about Chinese medicines, spirituality, meditation, Qigong... and then after my doctorate and I was practicing I studied a little Qigong and Tai Chi, sometimes with private teachers and would do some reading. Where it really escalated and exploded was in the late 80s when I received this permission to live as a solitary monk and which was very frightening. I was very content staying in my own order but my spiritual director and bishop and the canon lawyers we consulted all had the sense as I did that I was called to live as a monk. Anyway, and my thought was, *What does that mean, that this community will evolve around me?* And to some degree that did but what really took off was Chinese medicine. Opportunities came up, a friend of mine and a dear friend who is a Jesuit, ministers in Asia a lot -- he was there a lot of his life now he's ministering in Chinatown in NYC. He applied for some sort of a grant to

get me to go over to Hong Kong to retreat house he was running and I went over there and I gave some retreats to therapists and workshops and all kinds of things that God immersed in Chinese culture for what was 3 weeks that time but it had been back a number of times since and one of the highlights was there meeting a hermit Qigong master.

Dr. Dave: Mm!

Brother Bernard: Would you like me to tell you about that?

Dr. Dave: Yeah, that sounds deliciously interesting [?]

Brother Bernard: I was longing to meet somebody in Asian tradition in Asia that did Qigong and a friend of my Jesuit friend, this married couple, she said *oh I'm going to find somebody for you*. But anyway I was off to this Chinese Buddhist monastery for a couple of days by myself with these monks and nuns. They were about a hundred in the forest and the guest master said to me that I would be all alone one day when they were having this big meeting and would I be alright. I said certainly I will be fine and I was gazing at the forest in front of the monastery, had just done some Qigong and was sitting there and I heard a little whisper in my ear:

"I want to take you to my hut in the woods!"

And it didn't even startle me and I turned my head and there was this little man with a shaved head he was a hermit from the woods and I have no idea how he knew I was there and I thought well, this will be either fun or he'll kill me but I'm going to go... [laughter]

Then I went with the man into the forest and we walked along for a while and he was telling me all these things about myself. He was reading my Qi, I missed most of it because of his accent and he could have just sort of observed it somehow too but he was talking me being very involved in working with other people in helping them with healing and loving travel and those kinds of things.

We finally got to his hut which was a little cinderblock house maybe two rooms and he did a tea ceremony, covered my legs with a blanket and made the tea and bowed, and we talked about Qigong. It was just marvelous and then we did a little medical Qigong treatment on one another. Then he took me out and -- the day before, an old hermit nun had died in the forest and a helicopter came and then got her out. We're walking by and there were little huts here and there -- and I thought to myself when I passed one of the huts -- I wonder if that's where that hermit nun died -- and he just nodded his head. YES.

It's like he read my mind -- it was just amazing.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Then he took me to a place he used to meditate which was in the cliff and he didn't go there anymore because there were too many ghosts he said. Well, I think they all fell over the cliff that's why there's so many ghosts there! I'm holding on to a bush, I didn't want to be anywhere near the edge and he's dancing right on the tip of it, doing all this Qigong movement and the winds howling and so forth and it was just the highlight of my life. He took me back to a little path and he bowed to me and just kind of disappeared then I walked up the path and I was back to the monastery and that was like a major kind of infusion of Qi

or release of Qi that took all my book-learning and working one-to-one with teachers and so forth and just -- I don't know -- it's like throwing a match onto gasoline.

Dr. Dave: Wow.

Brother Bernard: Yeah! It was pretty spectacular...

Dr. Dave: You encountered your "Yoda"... [laughter]

Brother Bernard: That's right, exactly! Then I was able to do a couple of years of wonderful online study in herbal medicine, Chinese herbal medicine and it was wonderful. I'd listened to these tapes then and emails all over and over and over again so I completed that as my course of training and then I put it all together in a bridge program at which is now Arkansas College of Natural Health, a bridge program and if you're licensed and degreed, then you can go into this program and they'll transfer in everything that will fit that curriculum and then you take whatever courses are remaining and it includes a year of supervised internship and then I got this post-graduate and Doctor of Natural Medicine degree which is interdisciplinary. You can enter it from allopathic medicine or nursing or psychology or Chinese medicine and that's been a blessing as well.

Dr. Dave: How very, very interesting. Well and I see that you also teach workshops. Where are you teaching those and what do they cover?

Brother Bernard: I believe that God speaks to us through many ways some of which is through other people inviting us to things. So if I'm invited to give a workshop or retreat, and it seems compatible or appropriate I will try to respond to that. Twice a year I have a Qigong day -- I must have a couple hundred people on our mailing list -- so 60 people might show up for that. We use this ashram five miles from here. God is so providential, so good. I have a wonderful relationship with this Hindu ashram. I use their facilities and will spend a whole day doing Qigong, meditating, discussing every Fall and Spring we have that -- then I will give more spiritual retreats mainly or done largely in silence for a week or so, maybe do some Qigong in the morning and in the evening with the folks. Perhaps chat with them individually if they wish to come in to meet with me. So there are various retreat houses in Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, wherever people invite me to come and some of this is very ecumenical. Soon to give a Qigong retreat to the women's group from St. Gabriel's Episcopal Church and there's another group that I'm going to give a little workshop with who are divorced-separated-widowed men and women who would like some sort of support.

I was in Punta Cana -- I never thought I could ever pronounce it last year -- Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic and that was in October or November for four to five days. A beautiful setting. I was invited to help a little bit with a workshop conference of about 400 people, it was for working with people of color. They were just so edifying, so life-giving, the woman who invited me is the Dean of Stony Brook University's School of Social Work and she's a kind of Mother Teresa, a Baptist Mother Teresa. She has helped so many people along and a lot of these people were doctors and lawyers and senators and all that stuff. And I was just honored to be there so it's a wide variety of places.

Of Traditional Chinese Medicine [TCM] World Foundation, Dr. Nan Lu is a wonderful man. He has the foundation and offices in NYC. I was helping to present at his annual conference last Fall and I'll be

doing it again next Fall in Virginia. So a wide variety of settings and wherever people call me. Some of it's more focused clearly on the spiritual, some of it's more health-oriented.

Dr. Dave: Well, if you ever do anything here on the West Coast, be sure to let me know. I'd love to come, particularly --

Brother Bernard: Oh!

Dr. Dave: -- particularly something in northern California. Yeah, I would love to have a chance to meet you in person interact with you. I really feel very drawn to you based on our emails and our communication here today.

As we wrap things up here I wonder if you had any word of advice or message for our listeners. Not that there hasn't been a lot already but maybe there is some final thought you'd like to share with people.

Brother Bernard: Yes. What comes to mind is be careful not to mix up the core or the substance of who we are with the accidents or the surface ways in which we have been treated or mistakes we may have made. I believe we were created in God's image and Buddha consciousness is there -- different ways of trying to express this -- and that's who we are, like a diamond and nothing can destroy that. But life slings mud at us or people hurt us or abuse us or we do dumb things and we start to think that's what we are. So I just invite us all to go in more deeply whether it's through meditation or breathing or just being with a good friend and find the core of who we are and try to live out of that.

Dr. Dave: That's a wonderful message to leave us with. Brother Bernard, thanks so much for being my guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Brother Bernard: My pleasure. Thank you, Dr. Dave.