

THE WISE MONK MASQUERADING AS A TOY PARROT

I'm going to tell you a true story about a time a toy taught me a lesson. You know how most times when we look in a mirror or see our reflection in a store window as we're walking by, we're pretty happy with what we see, but every once in awhile we say "Oh no! Look at that! There's a booger hanging out of my nose!" or "my hair's sticking out to one side! I look terrible! I don't want to go around looking like *that!*" Well, something like that happened to me, only it wasn't a mirror showing me how bad I looked. It was a toy showing me how bad I sounded.

Last summer, our next door neighbors moved out, which made us really sad, because we really loved them. They had a yard sale before they left, and this parrot was among the things they were trying to get rid of. No one bought the parrot, but when Isaiah saw it, his eyes lit up, and our neighbors, who just adore Isaiah, gave it to him. Now, we're constantly trying to reduce the amount of toys and gadgets and stuff that keeps coming into our lives, so when they gave him this parrot, I thought "Oh no, another toy!" We'd even told Isaiah "no buying new toys for the next three months" but then people kept giving him stuff, like this parrot. But, oh well, it was something to remember our neighbors by, and it turned out to be a really fun toy for Isaiah when we replaced the batteries, because you know what this parrot does? What does a parrot do? It talks! It says whatever *you* say. Like this: (Hello there, boys and girls)

Isaiah and his friends had a blast with this guy, so I decided he wasn't such a bad thing after all. Then one day, Isaiah and his friend Maya were playing in the back yard with squirt bottles and they were squirting the plants and the trees and the swing set, but I'd told them not to squirt each other because, I don't know, I think maybe it wasn't a very warm day and I was afraid they'd get chilled or something. So they'd agreed not to squirt each other, but you know how tempting it is when you've got a squirt bottle to squirt somebody with it. So I came out onto the deck and saw Isaiah squirting Maya and I said "Alright, Isaiah, if anyone gets squirted again, there'll be no screen time." But this guy was perched on the railing, and immediately I heard "Alright, Isaiah, if anyone gets squirted again, there'll be no screen time. Alright, Isaiah, if anyone gets squirted again, there'll be no screen time."

My little spiritual teacher. I didn't want to sound like that. So bitchy and threatening punishment to my kid who was just being a kid. It was an eye-opening moment. I think if I had to hear everything I said parroted back to me

twice, I would quickly lose my marbles, but for that moment, I had the privilege of seeing (or rather, hearing) how I was parenting, and I didn't like what I heard.

I'd like to tell you I've since stopped using that tone of voice and the threat of punishment as a means of getting Isaiah to do what I want, but that would be a lie. I think I'm maybe doing it less. I'm trying to be kinder, and more conscious of how I'm communicating. Isaiah helps me. Often when I'm using a mean tone of voice, he'll say "Mama, you don't have to speak to me like that!" He's my spiritual teacher too. He's helping me learn how to be more loving, which is what I think all of us are on this planet to do. We're here to learn to love better and better. But when impatience grabs me, it's hard to be the kind, loving mama I always pictured I'd be. I have to agree with the writer Harriet Lerner on this topic. She says

Children will teach you about yourself. They'll teach you that you are capable of deep compassion, and also that you are definitely not the nice, calm, competent, clear-thinking, highly evolved person you fancied yourself to be before you became a mother.

On that note, the choir is going to sing for you guys now, and I love this song, but there's one line in it that I wish were different, so listen carefully, and see if you can tell me afterward which line you think I'd change if I could. I'll give you a hint: it's near the beginning. (Choir: "Be Kind to Your Parents")

Did you guess which line I'd change if I could? If you guessed "though they don't deserve it," you were right. Do kids deserve to be treated with kindness? You bet. Do parents deserve to be treated with kindness? Well, yeah. It's part of our UU principles. Our religion is built on the idea that everyone deserves to be treated with kindness. Many of us fall short of that every day, but it's what we aspire to, we UU's, to treat everyone with kindness.

Is that always easy to do? No. And sometimes it's hardest to do with the people we love the most. Isn't that strange?

We called this service "Growing Up – It's a Lifetime Job," because Nanci and I both think we each still have a lot of growing up to do to be the kind of loving, wise, compassionate women we want to be. Our lives are unfinished business. And we also are convinced we have, inside us, a child who will always be a part of us, a child who needs all the things you guys need: a chance to play and

explore, to be heard, to be cared for, to be allowed to make mistakes, to have fun, to learn.

So now we're going to let you go upstairs to do some of that with Laura and Ruth and Sarah, while we grown-ups keep exploring these ideas of growing up and being a child at the same time. Thanks for being such good listeners. We're going to sing you out with the round we like to sing together called "Sing and Rejoice." We'll see you guys again a little later in the cottage for supper.