

Dharma bums



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Dharma Bum One of the most powerful quotes in the entire book that I feel sums up what it is to be a dharma bum, " I felt free and therefore I was free".

This quote from Ray Smith shows that a dharma bum must always believe in oneself and take the journey to becoming a Dharma bum from within.

Although one can learn from fellow dharma bums such as the Saint Teresa bum, Han Shan, and Japhy the ultimate truth of being Dharma bum comes from within.

Saint Teresa Bum is the " first genuine dharma bum" that Ray Smith, the main character in Dharma Bums has ever met. The book starts off with Smith jumping into a box car where he runs into the Saint Teresa bum. The bum found a prayer written by Saint Teresa that he cut out of a reading room magazine in Los Angeles a few years before. He reads this poem to himself every single day as he roams around staying out of everyone else's way. When Smith asked the bum about his religion he was very modest about it.

Smith also noticed that the bum was much more patient than he when it came to the boxcar being so cold. Although Smith never fully reveals why he thinks he is the first true dharma bum he has met, I believe it is because he humbles Smith and teaches him more about being a true dharma bum than he could have ever imagined. Before meeting the bum, Smith felt very secure and sure that he was a true bum. After seeing how loyal this bum was to reading his prayer and staying true to himself he re thinks what it means to be a dharma bum.

The Saint Teresa bum's patience, focus on prayer, and spirit about life make him a dharma bum. Another Dharma Bum that Jack Kerouac learns from is

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Han Shan. From the book we see that, " Han Shan you see was a Chinese scholar who got sick of the big city and the world and took off to hide in the mountains" (14). He wrote " Cold Mountains" a thousand years ago scribbled on the sides of cliffs hundreds of miles away from human beings. He only had one human friend, a " funny Zen lunatic Shin-te" who was a poet but did not write down his poems.

Hand Shan was Japhy Ryder's hero because he was a poet, mountain man, a Buddhist dedicated to the principle of meditation on the essence of all things, vegetation. A man of solitude who could take off by himself and live purely and true to himself. From Han Shan one can take away that a Dharma Bum is one who follows the same life that Han Shan does. A dharma bum must be able to live in solitude and be dedicated to meditation. Both things that all of the dharma bums written about in this novel strive to do.

The truest dharma bum that is written about in the novel Dharma Bums is the one of the main characters, Japhy Ryder. Japhy teaches " Dharma Bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that cramp they didn't really want anyway such as refrigerators, TV sets, cars, at least new fancy cars, certain hair oils and deodorants and general junk you finally always see a week later in the garbage anyway, all of them imprisoned in a system of work, produce, consume, work, produce, consume... (Chapter 13). A dharma bum according to Jack Kerouac is one that does not fall into the traps of society such as those who find happiness in work and worldly possessions. This comes back to the idea that your car is driving you to work. If you did not feel the need to purchase the car then you would not have to work. The

simplicity of life is praised and sought after in the life of a dharma bum. One must be okay with the solidarity and embracing oneself. The dharma bums also tend to follow a buddhist life style.

In chapter 24 the same idea is brought up, " Maybe I'll be rich and work and make a lot of money and live in a big house. " But a minute later: " And who wants to enslave himself to a lot of all that, though? " (Chapter 24). Jack Kerouac's writing about this shows that dharma bums do not need to fit into the mold of working society to be happy. At the same time a dharma bum is not one that sits around doing nothing, but one who constantly searches for oneself in nature and the things around him.

This is shown in another quote from the book, " by God, you're right, all those sedentary bums sitting around on pillows hearing the cry of a triumphant mountain smasher, they don't deserve it" (Chapter 12). Smith discusses what he has learned from Japhy here, " I realized I had indeed learned from Japhy how to cast off the evils for the world and the city and find my true pure soul, just as long as I had a decent pack on my back. I got back to my camp and spread the sleeping bag and thanked the Lord for all He was giving me" (156). Japhy has taught Smith that the Lord gives us all that we need and to look within the find true Dharma Bum peace.

Being a Dharma Bum is not something that can be defined as one particular thing. Following certain procedures such as disposing of worldly possessions to look within and find oneself is a good step, but cannot truly define one's journey. The Dharma Bums that Smith learns from, the Saint Teresa bum, Han Shan, and Japhy are all great examples and can be learned from. Many things can be taken away from their own personal journey such as the focus

on nature and looking inward. Works Cited Kerouac, Jack. *The Dharma Bums*.
New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.