

## The Contemplative Auditor: Norman Steinberg Takes the Stand

L y n H a r t l e y

---



When you think of the profession of auditing, what most likely comes to mind is number crunching and consideration of financial details rather than attention to authentic self. However, with people like Norman Steinberg out in the field, there could be a new holistic approach within the calculated world of accountability.

Norman Steinberg's job is weighty—he works for the Canadian Federal Government as the Director General of Audit and Ethics in Public Works and Government Services Canada. Through his work, Norman is responsible for the independent audit and evaluation for the department as well as ensuring the integrity of the department's strategic goals and management practices. He is the vice-chair of the Ethics Practitioner's Association of Canada and on the Advisory Committee for the Conference Board of Canada's Corporate Responsibility and Ethics Council.

If you had the pleasure of meeting Norman at either of the past two Summer Programs, you would recall that his casual style and unassuming nature gives no hint to his life as a senior bureaucrat.

However, if you've been watching the Canadian news recently, you may have noticed that for an auditor, Norman is getting more than his share of the media spotlight. Over the past several months, Norman has had the daunting task of preparing and testifying for the Gomery Commission—an investigation into a sponsorship scandal within the Canadian government. And for this task, he needs to be fully composed in both body and mind. Not only is he nattily dressed in business attire but mentally fit for the grueling questioning. To prepare himself, he has sunk a lot of time into reviewing documentation—he estimates 20 minutes for every minute in front of the Commission. A big part of this preparation also involves bringing his contemplative approach into practice.

Commenting on the stress of the situation, Norman states, “It is a lot of work and many people are very nervous. Sometimes I tell people to bring their attention to the tip of their nose, as a way to be in the present. In order to succeed [in presenting to the Commission], you need to be in the moment and you need to become the master of your own knowledge. You need to relax and stay in the place that is you.”

He finds that there is a strong connection between this work and the Summer Program: “What happens in Halifax relates to my work. Whenever I'm present, there is flow. I'm not attached to it, but a part of it. If I can be in my consciousness, people know. I've found this to be true when testifying at the parliamentary meetings. If you are really present, energy works through you.”

“I practice taking in energy in exchange for something else, rather than reacting to it.”

Throughout his day, Norman tries to give close attention to his energy as well as the habits of his mind.

“Every day, I wake up and ask myself, “What is the quality of my mind?” and “What is my motivation?” Based on what I answered, I then know the best way I can help others to be present and authentic. This is validated from my experiences with the Institute. It’s all the work of being aware and seeing what is emerging—what is being called for.”

“One of my big take-away lessons is about how to create a safe place and change the dialogue.”

Norman also finds that he has been incorporating the practice of *tonglen* into his work. *Tonglen* is the practice of taking in sorrow on the in-breath and sending out joy in the out-breath. In Tibetan, *tong* means “send out” or “letting go” and *len* means “accepting” or “receiving.”

“I practice taking in energy in exchange for something else, rather than reacting to it. Practically, it means in the face of negativity as an auditor. I can look beyond the obvious. I could say the client broke three rules. Or I can investigate their motivation and try to understand their thinking. A lot of my work is trying to understand what motivates people and their mental map. Part of my job is to keep the compassion.”

When he first came to the Summer Program, Norman recalls, “I didn’t know a soul. However, I quickly found out that we are all a herd—we go to the summer pasture together. It has validated what I’ve known. It also validates me on a personal level and helps me access parts of myself that I didn’t think I had.”

He continues, “Arawana is one of the greatest teachers I’ve encountered. She taught me how to dance and how to be in my body. Through her work, I was exposed to new places. In Halifax, people are accessing another part of themselves and their wisdom.

“It is like we are fellow travelers gathered around the campfire, sharing stories. We all come back to the campfire. It is mystical. We come together, sing songs, and play. I’m closer to me and feel okay to be open and vulnerable. There are not many places that you can feel so safe and vulnerable. We need to be vulnerable and dance like fools!”

Norman is excited about continuing the work of the Shambhala Institute back in the depths of the Ottawa civil service. Along with several other Institute participants, Norman has been instrumental in starting a small self-supporting group in Ottawa.

“When [the Dalai Lama] came to Canada, I was able to spend some personal time with him.”

“When I’m at the Institute, I notice how much joy I feel personally. It is possible to create that place of joy—it doesn’t have to be limited to Halifax. One of my big take-away lessons is about how to create a safe place and change the dialogue. We’ve started with a small nucleus to change the dialogue in Ottawa. Many of the metaphors used in the organizations are power metaphors related to war and sports. Our language limits the way we think. I’m interested in different kinds of metaphor, such as the circle or synchronicity.”

And what does the future hold for Norman? Perhaps a shift of scenery and an opportunity to take his contemplative approach towards government into new lands.

“This past year, I was on the Dalai Lama’s organizing committee. When he came to Canada, I was able to spend some personal time with him. At the end of his visit, I was invited to Dharamsala to help with the Tibetan government in exile.”

Wherever he ends up, Norman will undoubtedly bring his thoughtful nature to his work as an agent of change.

\* \* \*

See also Norman Steinberg in the national media:

<http://www.cbc.ca/stories/2004/03/29/canada/normansteinberg040329>

For more information about the practice of tonglen, see *Start Where You Are* and other books by Pema Chodron. Note that Judy Lief will also lead a pre-program workshop on “Cultivating the Roots of Compassion” at the 2005 Summer Program.