

Remembering Ed Garwin



The dharma talk on Wednesday was led by Jennifer Block, Chaplain at the SF Zen Hospice Project (<http://www.zenhospice.org/>). This talk was offered in remembrance of Ed Garwin, a member of the Sangha, who died November 11th, 2008. (http://today.slac.stanford.edu/today_detail.asp?id=9382). We were joined by friends of Ed, his daughter Laurel, and his life-time partner and Sangha member, Zora.

Jennifer opened with a poem:

*It is love that fashions us
into the fullness of our being-
not our looks, not our work,
not our wants, not our achievements,
not our parents, not our status,
not our dreams.*

*These all are the fodder and the filler,
the navigating fuels of our lives;
but it is love: who we love, how we love,
why we love, and that we love
which ultimately shapes us.*

*It is love, before all and after all
in the beginning and in the end,
that creates us.*

*Today, remembering this,
let yourself acknowledge and remember
the moments, events, and people
who bring you, even momentarily,
into a true experience of love,*

*and allow the rest,
the inescapable mundanities of life,
like a cloud, to very quietly drift away.*

-Daphne Rose Kingma

From "A Grateful Heart: Daily Blessings for the
Evening Meal from the Buddha to the Beatles", ed. M. J.
Ryan

People often ask after the cause of someone's death: was it cancer, was it AIDS, was it this, or was it that? The Buddha taught us that the cause of death is birth.

(<http://www.sacred-texts.com/bud/btg/btg85.htm>)

THE MUSTARD SEED

There was a rich man who found his gold suddenly transformed into ashes; and he took to his bed and refused all food. A friend, hearing of his sickness, visited the rich man and learned the cause of his grief. And the friend said: "Thou didst not make good use of thy wealth. When thou didst hoard it up it was not better than ashes. Now heed my advice. Spread mats in the bazaar; pile up these ashes, and pretend to trade with them." The rich man did as his friend had told him, and when his neighbors asked him, "Why sellest thou ashes?" he said: "I offer my goods for sale."

After some time a young girl, named Kisa Gotami, an orphan and very poor, passed by, and seeing the rich man in the bazaar, said: "My lord, why pilest thou thus up gold and silver for sale?" And the rich man said: "Wilt thou please hand me that gold and silver?" And Kisa Gotami took up a handful of ashes, and lo! they changed back into gold. Considering that Kisa Gotami had the mental eye of spiritual knowledge and saw the real worth of things, the rich man gave her in marriage to his son, and he said: "With many, gold is no better than ashes, but with Kisa Gotami ashes become pure gold."

And Kisa Gotami had an only son, and he died. In her grief she carried the dead child to all her neighbors, asking them for medicine, and the people said: "She has lost her senses. The boy is dead. At length Kisa Gotami met a man who replied to her request: "I cannot give thee medicine for thy child, but I know a physician who can." The girl said: "Pray tell me, sir; who is it?" And the man replied: "Go to Sakyamuni, the Buddha."

Kisa Gotami repaired to the Buddha and cried: "Lord and Master, give me the medicine that will cure my boy." The Buddha answered: "I want a handful of mustard-seed." And when the girl in her joy promised to procure it, the Buddha added: "The mustard-seed must be taken from a house where no one has lost a child, husband, parent, or friend." Poor Kisa Gotami now went from house to house, and the people pitied her and said: "Here is mustard-seed; take it!" But when she asked Did a son or daughter, a father or mother, die in your family?" They answered her: "Alas the living are few, but the dead are many. Do not remind us of our deepest grief." And there was no house but some beloved one had died in it.

Kisa Gotami became weary and hopeless, and sat down at the wayside, watching the lights of the city, as they flickered up and were extinguished again. At last the darkness of the night reigned everywhere. And she considered the fate of men, that their lives flicker up and are extinguished. And she thought to herself: "How selfish am I in my grief! Death is common to all; yet in this valley of desolation there is a path that leads him to immortality who has surrendered all selfishness."

Putting away the selfishness of her affection for her child, Kisa Gotami had the dead body buried in the forest. Returning to the Buddha, she took refuge in him and found comfort in the Dharma, which is a balm that will soothe all the pains of our troubled hearts.

The Buddha said: "The life of mortals in this world is troubled and brief and combined with pain. For there is not any means by which those that have been born can avoid dying; after reaching old age there is death; of such a nature are living beings. As ripe fruits are early in danger of falling, so mortals when born are always in danger of death. As all earthen vessels made by the potter end in being broken, so is the life of mortals. Both young and adult, both those who are fools and those who are wise, all fall into the power of death; all are subject to death.

"Of those who, overcome by death, depart from life, a father cannot save his son, nor kinsmen their relations. Mark I while relatives are looking on and lamenting deeply, one by one mortals are carried off, like an ox that is led to the slaughter. So the world is afflicted with death and decay,

therefore the wise do not grieve, knowing the terms of the world. In whatever manner people think a thing will come to pass, it is often different when it happens, and great is the disappointment; see, such are the terms of the world.

"Not from weeping nor from grieving will any one obtain peace of mind; on the contrary, his pain will be the greater and his body will suffer. He will make himself sick and pale, yet the dead are not saved by his lamentation. People pass away, and their fate after death will be according to their deeds. If a man live a hundred years, or even more, he will at last be separated from the company of his relatives, and leave the life of this world. He who seeks peace should draw out the arrow of lamentation, and complaint, and grief. He who has drawn out the arrow and has become composed will obtain peace of mind; he who has overcome all sorrow will become free from sorrow, and be blessed."

The dharma talk began with a discussion of the four teachers, or the four divine messengers:

"The traditional legend of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment tells us that throughout his youth and early manhood Prince Siddhattha, the Bodhisatta, lived in complete ignorance of the most elementary facts of human life. His father, anxious to protect his sensitive son from exposure to suffering, kept him an unwitting captive of nescience. Incarcerated in the splendor of his palace, amply supplied with sensual pleasures and surrounded by merry friends, the prince did not entertain even the faintest suspicion that life could offer anything other than an endless succession of amusements and festivities. It was only on that fateful day in his twenty-ninth year, when curiosity led him out beyond the palace walls, that he encountered the four "divine messengers" that were to change his destiny. The first three were the old man, the sick man, and the corpse, which taught him the shocking truths of old age, illness, and death; the fourth was a wandering ascetic, who revealed to him the existence of a path whereby all suffering can be fully transcended...

If in this process of awakening we must meet old age, sickness, and death face to face, that is because the place of safety can be reached only by honest confrontation with the stark truths about human existence. We cannot reach safety by pretending that the flames that engulf our home are nothing but bouquets of flowers: we must see them as they are, as real flames. When, however, we do look at the divine messengers squarely, without embarrassment or fear, we will find that their faces undergo an unexpected metamorphosis. Before our eyes, by subtle degrees, they change into another face -- the face of the Buddha, with its serene smile of triumph over the army of Mara, over the demons of Desire and Death. The divine messengers point to what lies beyond the transient, to a dimension of reality where there is no more aging, no more sickness, and no more death. This is the goal and final destination of the Buddhist path -- Nibbana, the Unaging, the Unailing, the Deathless. It is to direct us there that the divine messengers have appeared in our midst, and the good news of deliverance is their message."

Meeting the Divine Messengers by Bhikkhu Bodhi

We are seeking a place of safety, a shelter from fear of the divine messengers of old age, sickness, and death. We seek this shelter and refuge in The Three Jewels:

*Buddham saranam gacchāmi
Dhamman saranam gacchāmi
Sangham saranam gacchāmi*

I go for refuge in the Buddha
I go for refuge in the teachings
I go for refuge in the community

“Communication” and “community” come from the same Latin root, *communicare*, meaning to share, or to give or receive gifts. A community is a sharing in which everyone brings their gifts. Gifts may be knowledge, the ability to listen, serenity, practicality, or the ability to make others laugh. We each have our own special gifts we bring to the community, and we receive the gifts of others.

Jennifer led us in discussions in which we shared what we each gifts we bring to the community, and what gifts we see others bring. We shared our thoughts about the gifts that Ed brought to our community; his inquisitive mind, probing questions, alertness and acuity, his wry and quirky sense of humor, and his support and commitment to the community. We shared our wishes and gratitude for Ed and the influence he had and will continue to have on our Sangha.