



Our speaker for September 16<sup>th</sup> was Jennifer Block, a Chaplain at the Zen Hospice Project, and one of the teachers with the Chaplaincy Training Program at the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies in Redwood City. Jennifer is rumored to be from New Jersey.

This talk was the third and last of a series on **Cultivating the Spiritual Path**

Vipassana meditation does three things: it opens what is closed; uncovers what is hidden; and balances the reactive mind. While mediating, it is useful to be mindful of these three activities. Ask yourself: What is being uncovered? What is being opened?

Enlightenment is the end result of cultivating a spiritual path. However, on the way to enlightenment is knowing what the truth is, moment after moment. On the spiritual path, you never get to ultimate perfection. The spiritual path is *not* a self-improvement program. It may actually make you feel worse, as you become more aware of yourself. We follow the spiritual path to live in our heart, not grasping or pulling away.

In *A Path with Heart* (<http://www.amazon.com/Path-Heart-Through-Promises-Spiritual/dp/0553372114/>), Jack Kornfield talks about spiritual maturity. He asks: “Is it realistic to think you will be a Buddha or Bodhisattva?” Probably not, but as we practice we do become more spiritually mature. Here are the qualities of spiritual maturity that are developed as we grow along a spiritual path.

### **Qualities of spiritual maturity**

#### **1. non-idealism:**

- not seeking a perfect world,
- no gain in spiritual life,
- only more freedom to love

#### **2. kindness:**

- self acceptance rather than guilt, blame, shame
- for the ignorant acts we have committed or the fears that still remain

- forgiveness

### **3. patience:**

- commitment thru the many seasons and cycles
- not grasping or gaining.
- According to Suzuki Roshi, *constancy* is a better description than *patience*
- being with whatever, moment after moment.

### **4. immediacy -**

- here and now
- every action
- alive and present now

### **5. Integration-**

- no compartmentalizing our lives, no dividing the sacred from the what is not,
- work, love, families, environment,
- understanding the personal and the universal are together in every experience,
- begin with ourselves

### **6. questioning-**

- no blind following, see for ourselves,
- discovering what is so without imitation to or following wisdom of others,
- includes respecting integrity of our own knowing

### **7. flexibility**

- to be responsive to changing circumstances around us
- staying present and letting go at the same time
- easy come, easy go

### **8. embracing opposites**

- no longer seek perfect parents, perfect teachers
- trying to find all that is good, as opposed to that which is bad
- comfort with paradox, ambiguity, embracing irony and paradox with the heart

- opposites are a part of the dance of life
- hold it all with peace, humor

### **9. relatedness**

- to something, always honoring all we relate to
- accepting life is in relationship to all things
- regarding all as sacred. Family, sex, money, community, politics
- relatedness is an expression of how things are
- how we relate to all that is measure of our practice maturity

### **10. ordinariness**

- simplicity
- awareness takes many forms, so what
- nothing mystical or extraordinary happens here
- without pretense we are rest with the universe
- nothing higher or lower, nothing to fix, nothing to desire
- simply opening in love and understanding to the joys and suffering of the world. There is power in ordinariness.

### **Spiritual maturity is:**

- **becoming more comfortable with paradox,**
- **more able to embrace the whole with its beauty and outrageousness, with a gracious heart.**
- **Not in India, not in the monastery, but right here.**
- **Home.**

Jennifer then read to us a text from the venerable Ajahn Seuss

### **Oh! The Places You'll Go! by the incomparable Dr. Seuss**

Congratulations!

Today is your day.

You're off to Great Places!

You're off and away!

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself any direction you choose.

You're on your own. And you know what you know. And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.

You'll look up and down streets. Look'em over with care. About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there." With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet, you're too smart to go down a not-so-good street.

And you may not find any you'll want to go down. In that case, of course, you'll head straight out of town. It's opener there in the wide open air.

Out there things can happen and frequently do to people as brainy and footsy as you.

And when things start to happen, don't worry. Don't stew. Just go right along. You'll start happening too.

Oh! The Places You'll Go!

You'll be on your way up!

You'll be seeing great sights!

You'll join the high fliers who soar to high heights.

You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed. You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead. Wherever you fly, you'll be best of the best. Wherever you go, you will top all the rest.

Except when you don't.

Because, sometimes, you won't.

I'm sorry to say so but, sadly, it's true that Bang-ups and Hang-ups can happen to you.

You can get all hung up in a prickly perch. And your gang will fly on. You'll be left in a Lurch.

You'll come down from the Lurch with an unpleasant bump. And the chances are, then, that you'll be in a Slump.

And when you're in a Slump, you're not in for much fun. Un-slumping yourself is not easily done.

You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked. A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin! Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in? How much can you lose? How much can you win?

And if you go in, should you turn left or right...or right-and-three-quarters? Or, maybe, not quite? Or go around back and sneak in from behind? Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind.

You can get so confused that you'll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles across weirdish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.

The Waiting Place...for people just waiting.

Waiting for a train to go or a bus to come, or a plane to go or the mail to come, or the rain to go or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow or waiting around for a Yes or No or waiting for their hair to grow. Everyone is just waiting.

Waiting for the fish to bite or waiting for wind to fly a kite or waiting around for Friday night or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake or a pot to boil, or a Better Break or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants or a wig with curls, or Another Chance. Everyone is just waiting.

No! That's not for you!

Somehow you'll escape all that waiting and staying. You'll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing. With banner flip-flapping, once more you'll ride high! Ready for anything under the sky. Ready because you're that kind of a guy!

Oh, the places you'll go! There is fun to be done! There are points to be scored. There are games to be won. And the magical things you can do with that ball will make you the winning-est winner of all. Fame! You'll be famous as famous can be, with the whole wide world watching you win on TV.

Except when they don't. Because, sometimes, they won't.

I'm afraid that some times you'll play lonely games too. Games you can't win 'cause you'll play against you.

All Alone!

Whether you like it or not, Alone will be something you'll be quite a lot.

And when you're alone, there's a very good chance you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.

But on you will go though the weather be foul. On you will go though your enemies prowl. On you will go though the Hakken-Kraks howl. Onward up many a frightening

creek, though your arms may get sore and your sneakers may leak. On and on you will hike. And I know you'll hike far and face up to your problems whatever they are.

You'll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go. So be sure when you step. Step with care and great tact and remember that Life's a Great Balancing Act. Just never forget to be dexterous and deft. And never mix up your right foot with your left.

And will you succeed?

Yes! You will, indeed!

(98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed.)

Kid, you'll move mountains!

So...be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray or Mordecai Ale Van Allen O'Shea, you're off to Great Places!

Today is your day!

Your mountain is waiting.

So...get on your way!