

## February 2013

Greetings!!

I hope everyone is doing okay. I find for myself, after the Holiday season I move into a more reflective period. I realized that this January is the thirtieth anniversary of my coming out west and starting to meditate and train. I remember what rough shape I was in in 1983. I was very lost, and I was very overweight at about 230 lbs (I'm now about 180 lbs). When I came out west I stayed three months at Shasta Abbey, and at the end of my stay I became a lay Buddhist at the Ceremony of Jukai. I remember how I felt at the time. I felt as if I'd come to an oasis after being in the desert a very long time. Those three months were very difficult, and I can't even begin to explain all the internal stuff I went through. I have to say it was really, really worth it. I have an enormous amount of gratitude for all who helped me then and to the Eternal for guiding me when I yelled for help.

The last few weeks I have also reflected a bunch on my last year and a half in Seattle. The one thing that has come up is that it has been a very big learning time. I have tried a few different things - some have worked, and some have not. One big thing that I have learnt is how very hard it is for anyone to start a practice and meditate when they are very sick, old or dying. I have to say it has been difficult for me to learn this. It really came to me one day at one facility that I go to. We had a small meditation group and we started to meditate. Next door one of the residents started to scream very loudly. It almost sounded as if they were being tortured or something like that. I found out that this person died the next day. When I heard that, a couple of things came up for me. First, a wave of sadness for that person. I offered them merit (my love/the Love of the Eternal). The other thing that came up was a wave of gratitude for what I have learned and for the meditation and practice that I do. I could now see first-hand how very important the teaching of the impermanence/transience of the egocentric self is. If I was dying and this self was my big refuge I would get very scared and terrified just like this person did. If in our lives we have not made a habit of turning to something deeper (the Eternal) for help, then inevitably we will have attempted to rely upon, and take refuge in, the things of this world; such as our intelligence, our physical health and appearance, other people, wealth and possessions, reputation and so on. At death the impermanence of all worldly things is revealed as one feels them all slipping away. As this happens, a person who has habitually taken refuge in these things in life, will feel they have nowhere else to turn, and that is terrifying. In fact, anyone can, at any point, turn towards the Eternal. However, one's chances of doing so at death are vastly increased if in one's life one has made a habit of taking refuge in the Eternal through meditation and daily training.

So, my gratitude for this practice and the meditation we do was big at this time. I realized how important it is to do this practice now, while we are enjoying relatively good health. Then, when death comes we can be ready. Within all of us is the deeper

Place, the Place of the Love of the Eternal. We can live with It, get old with It, get sick with It, and die with It. It is always there, unchanging, and whatever state we are in, it really doesn't matter.

There are other things I have learned over the last year and a half. I think I will go into those down the road. For now though, I want to end with something from Ian. I told Ian, a long-term group member, what I was going to write about. He was in the facility that I referred to above. He said he would like to add his story to this email, so his story follows below.

Take Care everyone, and keep going and going and going

With all my heart

Basil.

From Ian:

"Rev. Master Basil asked me to write a few words about one of my experiences of training in daily life. I spent a period of time in a nursing facility to recover from surgery I had to have. The facility cared for people with differing levels of need; some people were there for surgical recovery like me, others for long term elder or chronic care and some others for hospice care. I will be writing a few words about two of the people who were there for the hospice care during my time as a patient. Like some of the old TV dramas, the names have been changed to protect the innocent and I will also be using gender neutral names and so, will call one Morgan and the other Sage.

Morgan was a patient for just over a month and was there for the final days of cancer. To my knowledge Morgan had no active practice or faith. During most of the day and night Morgan would be crying, screaming and yelling in complete abject terror and despair and sounded as if they were being physically tortured. About the only time that Morgan was not screaming was when Morgan had simply passed out from complete exhaustion. A person could not hear the sounds of horror in Morgan's cries and not feel the terror as a physical wall and you could not help but have your heart go out to Morgan. One of Morgan's siblings stayed in the room with them to try to be a comfort but unfortunately, that had little effect. Morgan's passing was as a relief from the unbearable terror that they felt.

Sage was also there for the final days of cancer, had already been a patient for months before I was admitted. Sage had been a practicing Buddhist for some years and was active with the Buddhist meditation group that we had weekly at the facility. You could tell that the meditation and long practice allowed Sage the faith to approach their death with great peace of mind and heart. Where you could feel Morgan's fear and terror; you could feel the serenity, peace and faith coming from Sage. I found myself very fortunate to have been able to chant sutras at Sage's bedside during Sage's very last days. Sage's passing was a very lovely and peaceful event.

We in this present day, have been fortunate to hear the Buddha's teachings, from both Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett and Rev. Master Koshin and on down through their disciples. One of the teachings of the Buddha is that of Impermanence or Change (annica) and from that teaching, I have hanging on one of my walls a small frame with the following words to remember daily, "This too will Pass! Look Up! Have Faith"

Gassho,

Ian"