Consistency

January 9, 2008

Tonight, we’ve gathered again in honor of Yom Kippur. Grandma is everyone to her. The Buddhist tradition, when someone has passed away like this, is to make merit dedicated to them. The word merit, as the Buddha said, is another word for happiness. The goodness that comes from generosity, that comes from the precepts, observing the precepts, that comes from meditation, all of this is a very special kind of goodness, a special kind of happiness. Over the past days, I’ve been phoning people who knew Grandma. People whose lives were touched by her life. This is a comment that people keep making over and over again, how happy she was. I’ve even talked to people who didn’t even know her directly but had heard of her through friends. That was what they’d heard of her, that she was so happy here at the monastery and that she was such an important person in the monastery, one of the pillars that had kept the monastery going. And so it’s only fitting that we make merit in her honor, because she spent her life making merit, being happy. There’s a special quality to the goodness that she did. She did it because it was good to do. She didn’t do it to impress anybody. If she saw that something had to be done, she would do it. Whether you noticed it or not, she would still do it. Sometimes if you did notice, it was almost as if you had caught her in the act. She was doing it because it was good to do. She saw what had to be done. She wasn’t doing it to impress anyone, to win favor with anyone. It was because she liked doing what had to be done. Her life embodied several of the qualities that the Buddha said lead to happiness. Being industrious. Maintaining things. She was always looking after things to make sure they were kept in good shape. Consistency. Day in, day out, day in, day out. You could always depend on her, even the last day of her life. She got up, put the rice on the stove, and she passed away. I’ve read psychotherapists talking about how happiness comes from the little gifts that people give unexpectedly. It’s sort of out of the blue, but there’s a deeper happiness that comes from this quality of consistency. It’s like water that just gradually seeps in, seeps in, seeps into the ground. In a sense, you know that you can depend on it. That’s what makes it special. So tonight, let’s meditate in a way that’s really dependable. Really stick with your meditation for the hour in honor of this quality that Grandma had, her dependability. It’s only when you really stick with the meditation that it begins to seep into the mind and have a really refreshing effect on the mind. Otherwise, it’s just one more thing to think about, one more thing to flit to and flit to. Let the mind wander around. The mind’s always wandering around like this. As soon as it lands on something, it’s immediately tensed up, ready to pounce again. There’s no way anything new can seep in. It’s all tightened up, ready to pounce. But if you stay consistently with the breath, making up your mind that no matter what comes your way, no matter what thought, no matter what sensation, you don’t have to go there. No matter how interesting or important or whatever, it doesn’t have to have any claim on your attention. Allow the breath to have full claim on your attention. Get on good terms with it. Have this quality of consistency, and you’ll find that gradually the mind begins to loosen up. It begins to relax and settle in to the point where it can even be one with the breath, where it seems like the awareness and the breath become one thing. That way, the breath can soothe the mind, refresh the mind, and you have a taste of this special quality. The happiness. That’s meritorious happiness. I know a lot of us in the West don’t like the sound of the word “merit.” It sounds like Girl Scout badges, Boy Scout badges. But the meaning is something special. It’s a happiness that’s totally without any drawbacks. It doesn’t harm anyone. It doesn’t harm you. It doesn’t harm the people around you. Actually, it’s a benefit to you and the people around you. As you learn to find more and more happiness within, your weight on the world around you gets lighter and lighter. And you have more to offer, because you have more of your own strength inside. So tonight, try to develop this quality of consistency. Consistency in honor of Grandma, in honor of the example that she set for us. Her name “Gao” means jewel, kan-gao, crystal bowl, but also a jewel bowl. She was a real jewel of a person. So try to honor that quality by making a jewel of your own mind. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

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