

The Berkeley Buddhist Priory

Newsletter October - December 2008

Death of David Powers

David Powers unexpectedly died on July 13 due to a heart problem. Dave was 61 and he had been practicing with Shasta Abbey and the Priory since 1973. He had led our San Jose meditation group for the past 30 years with the group usually meeting in his house. When the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives began the lay ministry in 1981, Dave was in the first group who became lay ministers.

On Sunday, July 13, in the early afternoon, I received the call that Dave was in an emergency room in San Jose and had just died. From conversations with Dave, he knew a sudden death due to his heart condition was a real possibility. I drove to the hospital and did the part of the Buddhist funeral which is called the private funeral. A few of Dave's friends and Sangha members were with me in the emergency room and we all chanted some scriptures and offered incense and blessings for our newly dead friend. During this service, the head of the newly dead person is shaved, and they are given the Buddhist Precepts. The teaching of the Buddhist funeral was given to Dave, to let go of all desires and judgments and open his heart to the Buddha. When I looked at Dave's face, there was unmistakable peace.

David Powers

Dave's cremation was on Friday, July 25 in San Jose. We had a service with Dave in an open casket, in a chapel near the crematorium. Many Sangha members, friends and family offered their blessings to Dave. We all processed with the body to the crematorium and watched as Dave's body was placed in the

crematorium chamber. Many stayed in the chapel and the area for hours, meditating and sharing their remembrances of Dave. The next day, Saturday, July 26, Dave had his Buddhist funeral at the Priory. A Buddhist funeral is a way of helping the dead to find the Truth and liberation. As we gave Dave the Precepts and chanted the scriptures on great compassion, we pointed Dave and ourselves to the boundless compassion that embraces the newly dead and embraces everyone of us.

Procession of David Powers body to the crematorium

On Sunday there was a large public memorial in San Jose, attended by about 170 people. People talked of Dave's impressive work life, his deep devotion to Buddhism, and the deeply positive impact he had on so many people. A wonderful slide show was shown which covered most aspects of Dave's varied life.

Dave founded and ran a company with 25 employees that wrote environmental impact reports. It was moving to hear how Dave's kindness and compassion made his workplace such a positive place. One of his employees and good friend mentioned that Dave would end many conversations about a work problem by telling her not too worry but just try to let go.

Dave's deep commitment and devotion to his Buddhist training and his consistent practice made him a wonderful example of how to live as a Buddhist. Many people spoke with me on how much help Dave gave them and how much he meant to them. I know that I will miss Dave's bright and quiet presence, his smile and his willingness.

The Priory which has been without a cat since Jet died this past winter, now has a new cat, Muchi. She was David Powers' cat and she is about ten years old. Muchi is part siamese and has a paralyzed front paw. She is a very affectionate cat and Muchi has adjusted well to life as a temple cat. The Priory is very lucky to

have this old friend of Dave's.

Rev. Kinrei

Dave's Sister, Verleigh, offering incense at his funeral

Reading the "Kyojukaimon and Commentary." by David Powers

This article by David Powers was first published in the Berkeley Buddhist Priory Newsletter, Fall 1981. It has been reprinted a number of times in different publications and provides wonderful teaching on how to apply the Dharma to daily life.

One of the most useful and powerful parts of my training is the daily reading of the Kyojukaimon and Commentary, the sixteen Precepts, together with the commentary of Great Master Dogen and of Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett. When I first began reading The Kyojukaimon and Commentary, I must say I had only a very foggy idea of what it was about. But as I continued to read it and meditate, things began to become more clear. Sometimes one of the Precepts has seemed to come to life and stand out in relief as I went about my daily business. The two particular Precepts with which this has happened are:

"Do not speak against others."

Do not speak against the Lord of the House. Every person, every being is the Temple of the Lord wherein the Lord dwells, the still water wherein the Dragon lives. If you speak against others you speak against the Lord of the House. Do not try to divide the Lord of the House; do not try to cause war within the Lord; do not try to make the Lord make war upon Himself. "In Buddhism, the Truth and everything are the same; the same law, the same enlightenment and the same behaviour. Do not allow any one to speak of another's faults." Do not find fault with the Lord of the

House. "Do not allow any one to make a mistake in Buddhism." To speak against the Lord of the House is the gravest mistake of which I know.

"Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others."

It is enough for me to know the Lord of the House, to know that He dwells within all things. How can there be devaluation of others if they are the Temple of the Lord? How can there be pride if all possess equally within the Lord? "Every Buddha and every Ancestor realises that He is the same as the limitless sky and as great as the universe. When They realise Their true body there is nothing within or without; when They realise Their true body They are nowhere more upon the earth." There is nothing to be proud of and nothing to be devalued.¹

One day I began to realize that I was breaking these Precepts time after time during the day, so I started to make an effort to keep them. The first thing that happened was that I found I had about twenty-five to fifty percent less to say during my normal conversations when I quit judging, criticizing or making fun of others. Although dramatic, this change was not too difficult, once I made the effort. However, the next level in keeping the first of these Precepts was much more subtle and difficult. I would find myself listening to others criticize someone else and to some extent supporting them just by nodding my head slightly or rolling my eyes or with a facial expression that indicated consent. These little gestures of consent would frequently result in two or three minutes of breaking the Precepts with criticism. When I began to stop doing this the effect it had on my interactions was surprising, and after a while people tended not to run someone or something down when I was around.

Reading the Kyojukaimon and Commentary has also had other effects. For example, there have been times when I was just about to do something (or in the middle of it) when one of the

Precepts would come to mind, like, "Cease from evil." At these times the Precepts have kept me out of a fair amount of trouble. At other times I have been pondering over a decision (like, should I write off this lunch as a business expense or was it social?), when I just stop and turn to the Precepts. There is "Do not steal," and the decision is suddenly easier. I do not have to think, "Will I be audited by the IRS, and if so can I prove that we talked about business?" The truth is it was just a friendly lunch, not business, and the decision is that simple.

It is important when putting the Precepts into practice to use them as a guide to avoid mistakes and not to use them to be unnecessarily harsh with oneself. For example, in the above case it is useful to recognize that declaring a lunch as a business expense, when it is not, would be making a mistake. However there is no benefit in going beyond this and saying that I am training poorly because I almost broke the Precepts and therefore I am bad. It can be a very severe mistake to misuse the Precepts in this way, and in fact one is actually breaking the Precepts by so doing. I have found the Precepts to be most helpful when used as a gentle guide to point the way when faced with the decisions and problems of everyday life. It is not possible to keep all of the Precepts literally at all times, but we must do the very best we can.

One of the things that surprised me about trying to keep the Precepts was that some of them actually get a little easier with practice. A good example is anger. When I started out trying not to get angry it seemed almost impossible. This was because when I realized that I was angry, the anger was already overwhelming. It was like trying to stop Niagara Falls. But with some persistence, I began to notice my anger as it started to arise. When I was able to see the anger arising, it also became easier not to get caught up in it. The anger did not disappear, but I did not necessarily have to do anything with it, such as yell at someone or defend

myself. Sometimes the anger just comes and goes very quickly when I recognize it and do not get tangled up in it and feed energy into it. This is like a large boulder sitting at the top of a hill. Once the boulder starts to roll down the hill it gathers momentum and becomes more and more difficult to stop. But if you watch the boulder very carefully at the top of the hill and see when it just begins to teeter, you can steady it without too much effort. Trying to keep the Precepts is like carefully watching the boulder. The more you practice, the better you get at keeping the boulder balanced and seeing when it starts to teeter. In this way one of the big problems that comes up for me is now much easier to train with than it was when I first started.

The thing that is most helpful to me about reading and taking the Precepts is that I can do it now. I do not have to wait until I have more faith, or until I decide if I want to be a monk, or until I go to a meditation retreat or until everything is just right. The Precepts are something that I can put into my everyday training now and they get straight to the heart of what I am trying to do. Reading the Kyojukaimon and Commentary takes me about twenty to thirty minutes. It is important to read in a place where there is as little distraction as possible and to give yourself fully to reading without the diversion of a cup of coffee or conversation. Reading just before meditation, or just after, also seems to be helpful. I try to read the Kyojukaimon and Commentary every day, or half one day and half the next if there is not time all at once. I am sure that it would also be helpful to read it twice a week or once a week if that is all the time one can find. The benefit seems to come from reading and practicing on a regular basis so that the Precepts weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday life in the same way that daily meditation does.

¹Quoted from Serene Relection Meditation, (Shasta Abbey Press, 1989) p. 80-82.

Priory News by Rev. Kinrei

Rev. Master Mugo, an English monk, based at Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey, very generously, took over as Prior for the month of August, providing me with a month of freedom from my usual work at the Priory. Rev. Master Mugo arrived at the Priory in time to be a great help with all the services for David Powers. I spent August visiting most of our temples in the Pacific Northwest and in British Columbia. I traveled much of the time with Rev. Master Seikai from Pine Mountain Buddhist temple and it was good to see so many old friends and witness so many expressions of deep Buddhist training. Having Rev. Master Mugo here for the month was a great opportunity for the Priory Sangha to learn from a very skilled, wise and compassionate monk. Great appreciation for her teaching and example were expressed to me upon my return. In addition for last two weeks of August, Rev. Scholastica was at the Priory and her kind presence here was also deeply appreciated.

On Sunday, September 15, the Priory had a booth again in the Solano Stroll, Albany's annual street fair. Our booth was manned by a number of different Sangha members. The fair attracted over 100,000 people and there was considerable interest shown in the Priory and Buddhism. It was a good to meet people in the local community and have the opportunity to discuss many of their questions about meditation and Buddhism.

We will have our yearly memorial for Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett on November 2. Rev. Master Jiyu died twelve years ago on November 6, 1996 and for the many longtime members of the Sangha it can be surprising how fast these years have gone by. Rev. Master Jiyu was the founder of the Priory and the source of our teaching. It is an important aspect of Buddhist practice that we express our gratitude for the Dharma we are given.

The Priory will celebrate the great Enlightenment of Shakyamuni Buddha, on Sunday, December 7. We welcome everyone to join us for the ceremony and for a potluck lunch which follows the Dharma talk.

The New Year's ceremony provides an opportunity to reflect on the past year and establish a direction for the year ahead. Starting at 9:00 pm on Wednesday, December 31, there will be a series of meditation periods at the Priory until 11:30 pm. Then we will hold a New Year's ceremony to offer our gratitude and willingness to the Buddha for the upcoming year. After the ceremony there will be a festive tea in which the Sangha can celebrate the New Year in a peaceful and joyous way.

Helping the Priory and Work Days

Buddhist training is based not just on receiving the spiritual nourishment that the Sangha offers us, but also our own willingness to cultivate gratitude and to be willing to find ways to give. Offering our valuable time to help with the work of the Priory is very much needed if the Priory is to flourish. During the past few months, Sangha members came by the Priory and helped with many different tasks, such as gardening, cleaning, cooking, computer work, bookkeeping and laundry. Please contact Rev. Kinrei if you wish to help; the Priory always has plenty of work that needs doing.

In addition, the Priory has been having regular work days which have been a great help with fixing up and maintaining the Priory and its grounds. You are welcome to come to the Priory whenever you can and offer your help. The next work day is scheduled for Saturday, October 25 and Saturday, January 31, from 9:30 to 3:00, but we welcome everyone to help for whatever part of the day they can come. Working together as a Sangha is a way of both giving to the Priory and sharing in the

brightness of our fellow members of the Sangha. Work days include a lunch at the Priory which is a relaxed meal. Please let us know if you can attend as it is helpful in planning the work.

Meditation Instruction

Meditation instruction and an orientation to the practice at the Priory are offered each Thursday at 6:45 pm. Please arrive a few minutes early so that we can begin promptly at 6:45. The instruction is followed by a 7:30-8:05 pm meditation period. We ask all people new to our practice to attend this instruction. The meditation instruction is free, as are all the activities at the Priory. If your schedule will not allow you to come on Thursday evening, you are welcome to call the Priory to try to arrange a different time for the instruction.

Animal Funerals and Memorials

On July 1, Alice Van Geffen and Beth Gong had a naming ceremony for their new dog, Gizmo. Also, on the 1st of July, Allyn Romanow had memorial services for her two recently deceased cats, Ace and Abraham. We held the services for Ace and Abraham at David Power's home and the San Jose meditation group joined in the offering of merit to the two cats. Judy Brown venerable cat Zak, finally died on September 6 and we held his funeral that same day at the Priory.

Shasta Abbey Retreats

Attending a retreat at Shasta Abbey is an excellent way to deepen one's Buddhist life by living and practicing together with a large community of monastic and lay members of the Sangha. The introductory retreats are the recommended first step in practicing at the Abbey. For more information, you can go to their Web site at www.shastaabbey.org or contact the Shasta Abbey

Guestmaster at (530) 926-4208 or at
guestmaster@shastaabbey.org.

Introductory Retreats Oct. 17-19, Nov. 21-23 New Year's
Celebratory Retreat Dec.28-Jan. 1 Feeding of the Hungry Ghosts
Retreat Oct 30-Nov.2

Priory Membership

The Priory has no fees for participating in meditation, Dharma talks, Buddhist services, retreats, spiritual counseling or any other service we offer. We are supported by the donations of our congregation and friends. All gifts of any kind, whether money or materials or labor, are deeply appreciated.

One of the best ways to help the Priory is to make the commitment to be a Priory Member. What this involves is making a pledge to contribute a certain amount of money to the Priory each month. There is no set or recommended amount as we leave it up to each individual to offer what he or she feels is appropriate. This commitment is a tremendous help to the Priory because it gives us a stable financial base. More importantly, deciding to become a member has deep spiritual significance. It means you are choosing to help take responsibility for the continued existence of the Priory. Some of you may only be able to pledge a few dollars a month and think it is not worth making such an insignificant commitment. Yet it is important to offer whatever you can and be willing to make a formal commitment to be part of the Priory. The most important help members bring to the Priory and the Sangha is not their donations but their Buddhist training. By being willing to come to the Priory and train with others, we help make the Priory a true refuge of the Sangha.

However, we are not suggesting that everyone who occasionally attends the Priory or gives us donations should become a member. For many people, it is not appropriate to make such a commitment, and we welcome them to join us whenever they wish, to help us in the manner they feel appropriate, and to be valued friends of the Priory.

Spiritual Counseling

Rev. Kinrei is available to discuss your spiritual practice and to help you to better apply the Dharma to your life. Taking refuge in a senior member of the Sangha is an important aid in gaining a better perspective and deeper insight into our spiritual life. It is also helpful in learning to cultivate openness and trust. You are welcome contact the Priory and arrange a time to meet.