

## **To those we've lost**

A dear young Spanish friend from Chile tells me that mourning the loss of his beloved grandfather, he feels so terribly sad and lost that he is unable to even do those things he loves doing. This is even more difficult for him as he recovering from schizophrenia and fighting it off. This reflection is built on my email to him.

The passing of our loved ones are never for nothing. They are telling and teaching us that nothing lasts forever. That is why they are so valuable to us. It also means that those whom we love and those who care for us, who are still living, are precious to us, and we need to spend with them some quality time, filled with random acts of kindness.<sup>1</sup>

In times of loss, we need to go back to where it all began, to nature – to see, to hear, to sense and to feel what is right there before us. See how the plants keep on living. See how the gentle grass and plants bow to the winds, and stand tall again after the worst storms.

The teaching of rebirth is a much better alternative to believing in an eternal heaven or hell, or some external agency watching and deciding for us. There's no one to blame for anyone's death. Rebirth means not only do we have the hope to change for the better, but for meeting our loved ones again.

See the plants. They die and enrich the soil. Their seeds sprout again as beautiful as before, or even more so; they live on as before. They reach upwards to the sunlight, and spread their arms of gentle leaves ever ready to embrace us no matter who we are. They give us fresh air and space to refresh us and heal our wounds.

Learn from the trees, and remember the Bodhi tree, under which the Buddha sits alone. We are never alone in our pains. The Buddha has gone through all that, and more. He tells us that is how our feelings work. We feel pain because we love.

As we take in our breath, we must give it back to where it comes from. We are made of earth, and to earth we will return. We are warm with the fire of change and decay; our pages must turn so that it is a book of life. We are mostly water, and to water we must return. To live means to come and go.<sup>2</sup>

The animals that we love and have cared for, who have always looked at us in the eye -- they come and go, too. But one thing in all of them that never changes: they accept us unconditionally. We always have them to turn to when we need someone close. Their lives may be shorter than ours, so all the more we should care for them so that they pass our lives happily.

Their sounds and touch, and accepting presence are a dimension we live in that no human can give us. We only need to love them, and when they breathe their last, they depart happily. Animals, too, go to heaven, so that they smile down upon us. We may not see them, but they are still happily present with us.<sup>3</sup>

Even if death comes not, we still may lose loved ones and friends even while they live. They stop reaching out to us, and seem to fade into the silence and distance. Maybe we have

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<sup>1</sup> The saying, "Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty" may have first been written (or noticed to have been written) by US writer [Anne Herbert](#), on a place mat at a Sausalito (California) restaurant in 1982 or 1983 (Adair Lara, "Random Acts of Senseless Kindness," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, 16 May 1991).

<sup>2</sup> This is a reflection on the 4 primary elements (earth, water, fire, wind): see [Mahā Hatthi, padô-pama Sutta](#) (M 28), SD 6.16(2) & [Mahā Rāhul'ovāda Sutta](#) (M 62,8-11) & SD 3.11 (4).

<sup>3</sup> See Reflection, "Animals go to heaven," R68 2009: [link](#).

done something that hurt them, we can never be sure. Perhaps we have failed to see or feel their presence. We see them only as their past, never alive to us.

Or perhaps they have fallen into a necessary silence and distance because of some difficulty that they simply are unable or unwilling to share with us. They just need time for themselves. Not everyone is able to share their sufferings, so they suffer alone.

When we deeply love someone, we feel that we are forever a part of that person. When we lose him, we feel as if a vital part of us is gone. We warmly recall the happy moments we shared, and the love and kindness he has shown, and we miss them. We feel the pain, because we love.

Yet the memories of good acts and great times are in themselves refreshing and healing. After all, we cannot be stuck together like Siamese twins with those we love. Love must be active, and face change, but it is itself unchanging. It is like the sun that rises and brightens our days, but it must set to end the day that we might rest and have time for ourselves.

Just as the silent spaces in between the sound-notes give us music, so too the silent spaces in our lives should be filled with the joy of love that was, is, and will be. We can never love just a body, but the whole person: his heart and goodness.

Love is a beautiful feeling. If we truly love someone, then that love empowers us to love others, too. Animal love brings us together in pleasure, and often moves us to perpetuate our kind. Human love is able to share the joy and good that we feel so that others might feel them, too, perhaps even in a bigger way: this is the way beauty is born, and the works of art, great literature, and things of joy.

Divine love is to accept others even when they fail us, even when they do not deserve any love or kindness. But who is to decide? It could be the other way around: we need love and kindness. But seeking love or kindness, we will never find them. For, love is only love when we give it away. Kindness is best when we show it first, without waiting for it.<sup>4</sup>

Despite all our efforts of love and kindness, often enough there are still those who dislike us, even hate us. Perhaps we have done something wrong in the past. We have passed all that, but they are still clinging to it, and so we are dead to them. But it is they who are burdened with our carcasses while we thrive here in our love and joy. In whom lies the rub, then?

So, we need to think kindly of them. Those who hate us are only hating a part of themselves. Maybe they do not even know this. Maybe they are never happy, or do not really feel it when they can be happy. Maybe they think we are happier than they are.

Notice how some people are simply happy and smiling no matter what. We have to learn from them, how hate-free they are, or just be with them and bask in their light while we can.

Time heals, people change, despite all that we think and say. Yes, thinking makes it so. Allow life to surprise us, then. If we think we are always right, we would be never be surprised, not so easily anyway. So it's all right to be wrong sometimes: it means that we allow others some space. Love moves happily and attracts more love in such a space.

If we think that we have loved and lost, that is because we are counting and measuring love. There are many others whom we have yet to know, or perhaps we have not really well known even those close to us.

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<sup>4</sup> See Reflection, "The greatest love," R148 2010: [link](#).

Life is not merely a parliament of friends and foes: there are those whom we have yet to know. There are no strangers, so to speak – only those whom we have yet to know, friends we have yet to make. Friends are not found, they are made.

So to you, my loved one, my dear friend, who was good and kind to me, I may have lost you. But I will remember you always by your love and good: these can never be lost. They are forever a living part of me. Just as the plants wilt away only to grow, flower and fruit ever again, and surely just as day follows night, we will meet again in happier times. Meantime, may you be well even when in pain, may you be happy even when hope seems to have left you – I will always accept you just as you are.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See Reflection, “Unconditional love,” R66 2009: [link](#).