

Tsunami Talk by Sarah Powers

Napa, CA – January 2005

Greetings!

In light of the recent catastrophe in South Asia I feel especially grateful that we can all be together like this.

No doubt it has had personal repercussions for many of you.

When I heard the news, my first thought was of my 18 year old sister who just left for S. Thailand by herself. My panic inside was immediate. Thankfully, she has emailed that she hadn't gone to the Indian Ocean side, but for some reason had chosen to visit the Sea of Siam first.

And just last April, Ty and I were on a beautiful small island that we had planned to revisit next year. It is now wiped out. Another island where we held a yoga retreat last year was also devastated, but is still there. The manager emailed from Bangkok saying 7 people had died, one of which was a man I remember who served us. He was found washed up on the beach. Another man, Burmese they think, washed up onto their island, alive, but he couldn't speak Thai and is traumatized so they don't know who he is or where he came from.

And my daughter Imani told me the story of a woman who was asleep next to her husband when the first wave hit. They managed to grab some roofing and hold on until the second wave tore them off. She then clung to what looked like a small plant and it actually rooted her there. When the water receded, she found herself at the top of the highest palm tree—naked. Her husband was still missing.

Like 9/11 these calamities awake us to the immense precariousness of this dream like existence. If we can say anything useful comes from such tragedy, it is that it shakes us out of our complacent sense of assumed permanence.

The essence of the Buddha Dharma is to cultivate a keen sense of precious impermanence. These events make such teachings shockingly relevant.

I've just returned from an intensive Chan (Chinese Zen) retreat. The Zen master gave us the sad news of this event just yesterday, knowing how it would disturb our contemplative atmosphere if he spoke about it earlier. And as this retreat was mostly comprised of Asians, the news was devastatingly real in our group. The translator was barely able to continue sharing the news with us as her sobbing was escalating, along with everyone else's in the room.

Being with this elder Zen master while digesting this reminded me of the day we were all together at Deer Run with Dr. Motoyama when the war in the middle east broke out.

He spoke sensitively about it from both his direct experience of the devastating effects of war having been trained as a Kamakazi fighter in Japan, and from his advanced spiritual insight.

Similarly, the Zen master reminded us that this tragedy is a shared collective karma of all of ours, and those people who died and suffered carried the burden for the rest of us.

I think if anything we're focusing on here these 10 days has any value whatsoever, it's that these practices help us not only recognize the unity of our body and mind, but also aligns us with the inseparability of our hearts.

Since we have the benefit of a group gathering, I would like to take a moment to send out a Buddhist prayer and then spend a little time in silence, sending our love to all those suffering.

*Throughout our many lives and until this moment
Whatever virtue we have accomplished,
Including the merits generated by these practices this week,
And all that we will ever attain,
This we offer for the welfare of all sentient beings,
May sickness, war, famine and suffering
Be decreased for every being
While their wisdom and compassion increase
In this and every future life.
May we clearly perceive all experiences to be as
Insubstantial as the dream fabric of the night
And instantly awaken to the pure
Wisdom like display arising in every phenomenon.
May we quickly realize enlightenment*

*In order to work ceaselessly
For the welfare of all sentient beings.
SILENCE*

May our blessings be received by all the victims of this recent tragedy,
Like a gentle wind of soft reassurances that none of us are truly alone.

Thank you.