

A Legacy of Goodness

July 13, 2016

Today's the hundredth anniversary of my father's birth. So we're making merit for him.

When you make merit for someone it's both for their sake and for your sake. For their sake, you hope that, whatever merit you can spread to them, they're in a position to know and appreciate it and gain merit themselves. For your sake, you try to think of the goodness of the person because you want to keep that goodness alive.

In my father's case, one of the lessons I learned from him very early on was that there are a lot of jobs that need to be done in the world that nobody wants to do. So there's plenty of opportunity to do good for the world where no one else is going to push you out of the way.

One of my early memories of him was that we had a cesspool near the house. It was getting filled, so he was going to dig a new cesspool. He made the mistake of digging the new one too close to the old one. And as he was digging down, digging down, all of a sudden all the contents of the old cesspool came into where he was. He said a few words I didn't understand, but aside from that he didn't seem to be too fazed by that. I thought that was a fate worse than death at that time.

There were a lot of things he would do around the house and he was always looking for things to do, the things that nobody else was paying attention to. That's a good lesson to bear in mind.

I remember when I went to stay with Ajaan Fuang in Thailand, I found out later that one of the things he'd liked about me very early on was that I saw nobody was cleaning his spittoons so I just started cleaning them myself. I guess that's when he figured this was somebody he could train.

So this is a lesson I'd like to pass on: There's a lot of good to be done in the world that nobody is doing, so look for your opportunity. There's no one standing in your way. And this can be little things around the monastery or larger issues: whatever you see that needs to be done. That's your opportunity to leave your mark of goodness on the world.

People may not remember your name. I was just Googling my father to see what was left of his existence on the Internet. There's not much. But his goodness lives on.

So when you think about people who've passed away, think about the goodness that they taught you, either through their words or through example.

See what you can do to keep that goodness alive in the world, because there's so much that's going against the survival of goodness in our day and age. People hardly even talk about it anymore.

You search for books on "goodness" in Amazon and what you get are books on recipes for food, and baked goods in particular: That's the goodness we have left.

So try to have goodness of character, goodness of your desire to do something well for the world, to leave a gift for the world. Try to keep that kind of goodness alive.