

RO'RUI: A Melting Candle's Tears

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There is a word, "ro'ruai," a word that likens to the wax melting and dripping from a burning candle to tears. The word is so beautifully poetic and also echoes sadness. The purer the candle wax, the more the tears of melting wax, tend to run. There is a similarity here with humans because it is said that the more a person is pure in heart, the more that person is easily moved to tears.

We all know that there is no way that an inorganic substance can shed tears, but we find at times that the expression is so meaningful and filled with sentiment. There is a verse by the "haiku" poet Fujio Akimoto who used this word.

"You have gone away to a higher plane; the melting candle sheds its tears of wax in drips and drops."

Akimoto is said to have composed this verse when a friend of his passed away. He conveyed his sorrow, in verse, at the loss of a friend who had gone away to a different plane higher than his, by likening his tears to the melting drops of wax of the burning candle standing between him and his friend.

Having been raised since birth in a Buddhist temple, my days were intimately associated with candles and incense, which are used in all Buddhist events, such as during chanting of sutras and doing zazen. Many were the times that I felt candles appeared to depict human life. A candle has a life span. If the candle is lit, it is going to burn out, of course at some point in time. Only at the final moment before burn out, the flame erupts brightly. In the case of a human being, could this be analogous to a person who has lived out his or her natural span of life? Some candles will be blown out by a gust of wind before burning down completely, like in the case of an unforeseen accident. To this day, I have lit thousands of candles. Sometimes when I replace a shortened candle with a fresh one, I find myself wondering, how far down has my life's candle burned down?

The passage of time is a one-way road; it does not care about what sort of circumstances you may be in. The remainder of your life span will decrease but never will it increase. A one-way nonreversible road is what time is. And, if the flame flickers out, that's it. Life has ended. Such were the thoughts that came upon me. So what is the sense of a flame of life that leaves nothing behind? It was quite a long time ago that I pondered over this question while staring at the candle in front of me.

My point of view was, however, off target. It was not, that when a life ended, that was the end of everything. I gradually came to that realization when accompanying my religious master to numerous Buddhist memorial services. The principals of the homes that I visited, in other words, the deceased, were no longer there, of course. Many had been

gone for 10 years; but I listened to the comments of the people who had gathered for the memorial service.

"He liked to drink," "His laughter was so loud," "He was usually quiet," "He looked good in his maroon jacket," "He liked to fish," "You had to look out when he got mad," "He was soft on his grandchildren," "He couldn't stand dishonesty," etc. These are varied comments from a number of people who were reminiscing about the same one person, as if they were face-to-face with that person.

Even if I did not know the deceased, a perception of that person's character and personality would come through to me. And the strangest thing is that the image, which emerged from the various impressions and perceptions, was that of a naked human being devoid of social status, positions and titles. The resultant image was definitely the existence of a unique human being whom no other person could replace.

Normally people can only give a somewhat hazy description of the deceased because they cannot see him or her, but they can come up with a vivid description when they use their spiritual eyes.

The torch of life continues to burn, like the flame of a candle, to dispel the darkness and illuminate the heart and mind, and give off warmth despite the number of years that may have passed since death. The torch of life continues to burn within the hearts of those who live or who were loved by the decedent. I found that I need not worry.

We can burn our present life, one that no one else can live for us nor we live theirs, to our utmost ability.