

*Zen Master Bon Soeng*

*Adapted from a one hundred day baby ceremony  
at Cold Mountain Zen Center*



It is a pleasure to be here with you all today, celebrating the new life of Gabriel. Look around the room and see the face of Gabriel's community. Each of us has a different and important connection to Gabriel and his parents. We come together today and represent the community into which Gabriel has been born. None of us are really alone in this world. It is easy to get lost in our notion of individuality, but in truth we are each connected with, and dependent upon, the community of beings that supports us.

The Buddha taught that all things, all of us, are completely interconnected. Nothing remains outside the web of life. The tree cannot grow without soil, sunlight, and rain. Without rain falling to the ground there is no tree. Without the sun's heat evaporating water from the earth there can be no rain, and without trees dying and decomposing there can be no soil. This building that we are meeting in today would not exist without the efforts of

many labors to turn the raw materials used in its construction into building materials. Trees need to be turned into lumber, lumber fashioned into cabinets. The metal used in nails and pipes needs to be harvested from the earth.

So, too, is Gabriel a part of this web of life. We say he is born into this world alone, but actually, without the combination of his parents' genes there would be no Gabriel. Now, at two-and-one-half months, Gabriel is totally dependant on his parents for food, clothing, love, and nurturance. In turn, Gabriel's parents, Cristina and Rich, are completely interconnected with their own communities. Without the support of friends and family, they would be crushed under the new burdens of parenthood. Without the love and support of all of us, their family cannot thrive and prosper.

Our belief in the myth of our individual independence leads us to the fundamental mistake of separating the world into self and other. This mistaken view creates many negative consequences for ourselves and others around us. Our ego-centered view of the world leads us to feel alone and afraid. In order to deal with this fear, we not only separate ourselves from others, but we also objectify the world around us. Survival is our primary goal and, we use the people and things around us as tools to ensure that survival. We manipulate the objectified world in order to satisfy our own perceived individual needs.

Because I believe that I am separate from the whole, my needs seem more important than your needs. Once you have become merely an object in my world it is easy for me to justify using you to get what I want. If you have what I want, I can take it. If I have more power than you, I can use that power for my personal advantage. And, I will rationalize my behavior to justify my actions. The name for this is delusion. The result of this delusion is suffering.

While we are celebrating Gabriel's birth I would like to offer a cautionary note for all parents. In my work with people over many years, I've seen something I believe is universal and very important. It is clear that the correct relationship between parent and child is that it is the job of the parent to take care of the needs of their child. Often though, parents are still struggling under the burden of their own unmet needs. The wounds of childhood still haunt us in adulthood. Unconsciously, we too often use our power over the child in ways that hurt the child. These hurtful parental demands range from the seemingly benign emotional support that a child can offer a distressed parent to the painful, but not uncommon, use of physical or sexual abuse. This incorrect relationship very often leads to psychological and spiritual problems for the child, and for the future adult he will grow up to be.

The heart of this hundred day ceremony is the placing of water on Gabriel's head three times. As I placed the water on Gabriel's head I chanted great love, great compassion, and the great bodhisattva way. Living the Great Bodhisattva Way means leading a life in which these values of Great love and Great Compassion are the intention behind our behavior. It means meeting each of the millions of moments of our life with this intention to bring love and compassion into the world around us. These are the tools we use to break the stranglehold of the selfish self-centeredness that compels us to use the world to satisfy our needs. Love and compassion are the well-known antidote to the suffering in our world.

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They allow us to treat the world as our self. Each of us, moment to moment, can bring love and compassion into our everyday activities. By living this kind of life, world peace becomes not a distant fantasy, but something we can create in each moment of our lives.

In order to pass on these values to Gabriel we must all find a way to manifest Great Love and Great Compassion. So easy to say, so hard to do. Almost all religions and life philosophies hold these same values at their core. The golden rule, "do unto others as you would have others do unto you," is the well-known biblical example of this. "As ye sow so shall ye reap" is another. If we are honest with ourselves, we know how difficult it is to manifest these simple truths. Because our fears and desires overwhelm us, we end up being slaves to our passions, causing us to behave in ways that are the exact opposite of these important values.

The beauty of Buddhism is that it offers us a path of practice. Buddhist practice helps train our mind and heart in order to work with our tendency to separate ourselves from the world. Meditation practice offers us a direct way to see ourselves. With calm awareness we can see the ways that our passions cloud our view. We catch glimpses of our true self that shines just beneath the fog created by our desires and fears. The practice of living mindfully allows us to be present and aware of our own actions and the actions of the people around us. Just as the actions of our ancestors have created the world in which we live, our own actions will help establish the course of the future for our children.

May we use this celebration of Gabriel's birth to rededicate ourselves to these essential qualities of Great Love and Great Compassion. May we treat Gabriel and each other with love and compassion. May Gabriel learn the joy of a life of service to others. And may Gabriel attain the wisdom that love and compassion will lead to a better life for all beings. ❁



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