

## **Ruth on scattering her ashes**

Ruth said, "don't let anyone keep any of my ashes, scatter them all. One day, when the sun expands into a giant red star, the earth will be consumed by the sun. Then the sun will one day explode into a nova and scatter my ashes around the galaxy along with those of everyone else, too. Then, eventually they will clump together by gravity until there is enough mass to ignite it into a nuclear reaction and form a new star. Around that star will form a new proto-planetary disk that will form new planets and perhaps there will be people that will live on some of them. We'll all be there together."

## **Zen story**

Student: Master how do we learn to live?

Master: That is easy, prepare for death.

Student: Then how do we prepare for death?

Master: That too is easy, learn to live.

## **That which makes my life good makes my death good also** by Chuang Tzu, circa 350 BC:

Four men, Tsu Szu, Tsu Yu, Tsu Li, and Tsu Lai, were having a discussion, saying, "Whoever believes Nothingness to be the head, Life to be the backbone, and Death to be the tail; whoever can know life, death, being, and non-being all as one, shall be our friend. The four looked at one another and smiled. And since they were in complete agreement, they became fast friends. Not long after, Tsu Yu fell ill, and Tsu Szu went to see him. Tsu Yu said, "Great is the Maker of Things that he should make me as deformed as this! "

His crooked spine was curled round like a hunchback; his five organs were upside down; his chin rested on his navel; his shoulders rose up above his head; his neckbone pointed to the sky. His body was sick, yet he was calm and carefree. He limped to the well and looked at his reflection and said,

"Ah! The Maker of Things has made me all crooked like this!"

"Does this upset you?" asked Tsu Szu.

"No, why should it? If my left arm became a rooster, I would use it to herald the dawn. If my right arm became a crossbow, I would shoot down a bird for roasting. If my buttocks became wheels and my spirits a horse, I would ride them. What need would I have for a wagon? For we were born because it was time and we die in accordance with nature. If we are content with whatever happens and follow the flow, joy and sorrow cannot affect us. This is what the ancients called freedom from bondage. There are those who cannot free themselves because they are bound by material existence. But nothing can overcome heaven. That is the way it has always been. Why should I be upset?"

Shortly, thereafter, Tsu Lai fell ill. He lay gasping for life while his wife and children gathered around crying. Tsu Li came to see him and said, "Shhh! Get away from him! Do not disturb the transformation!" Leaning against the door, he said to Tsu Lai, "Great is the Maker! What will He use you for now? Where will He send you? Will He make you into a rat's gizzard or a snake's leg?"

Tsu Lai replied, "A son must go wherever his parents tell him to go! East, west, south, or north. Yin and Yang are no other than one's parents. If they brought me to the verge of death and I do not obey them, then I am only being stubborn. They are not to be blamed. The great earth burdens me with a body,

causes me to toil in life, eases me in old age, and rests me in death. That which makes my life good makes my death good also. If a skilled smith were casting metal and the metal should leap up and say, 'Make me into a famous sword like Mo Yeh!' the smith would surely consider it an ill omen. Now, if by chance I were being cast into a human form and I were to say, 'Make me a man! Make me a man', the Maker of Things would certainly consider me an ill omen. Now, if I regard heaven and earth as a great melting pot and creation and transformation as a master smith, then where can I be sent and not find it fitting? Thus, calmly I sleep and freshly I waken."