

Spring 2009

Dharma Talk

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based on a dharma talk given July 22, 2007 at Clouds in Water.

“Buddha’s eye and the spontaneous response of compassion”

Edited from talks given during a sesshin working the *Book of Serenity* case #54, Yunyan’s Great Compassion. (*Blue Cliff Record* 89 and Dogen’s “Kannon” fascicle)

We all come to practice looking for ways to release our suffering. The Buddha taught in the first noble truth that life is unsatisfactory and filled with the tumultuous ups and downs of humanity ending with old age, illness and death. As our mindfulness grows and becomes more subtle, we can actually see the minute suffering that occurs everywhere, all the time, in this transient world. Part of being a Buddha is seeing that the vibration of suffering is right there with you. The trembling of the earth is always right here. Our practice is the question: what do we do with that trembling? How does suffering become love?

The Legend of Avalokiteshvara is an ancient story that guides us with our work of being compassionate humans. One image of Avalokiteshvara is of a bodhisattva with one hundred or one thousand arms and many heads. The story goes that she came down to the world and as she experienced the world’s suffering, her head blew right open. Understanding the word “*shin*” which means “heart-mind” together, one could say, her head and her heart burst open. Her spiritual father, Amitaba Buddha, saw his child with her head burst open and he put her back together with nine new heads. These heads see all the way around, the whole circumference of any situation. Out of her torment, bloomed a new view of the world. She got larger than herself. She discovered something – universal perspective or unconditional love.

We say it so easily – unconditional love – but do we really understand what that means? Zen is based on experiencing the truth of this unconditionality, this vast view. Without opening up to this huge perspective of life, the DNA’s perspective of life, how can we say we know unconditional love? Usually, in ordinary mind, we filter our loving responses through the screen of our ideas, opinions, expectation and self-centeredness. We have a presupposition of where we want our love to lead. But Avalokiteshvara sees 360 degrees around and her responses are not premeditated but spontaneous and wise through the seeing of her Buddha Eye.

A simplified version of Yunyan's koan from the *Book of Serenity* is:

Yunyan asked Daowu, "What does the Bodhisattva of Great Compassion do with so many hands and eyes?"

Daowu said, "It's like someone reaching back for the pillow at night."

Yunyan said, "I understand."

Daowu said, "How do you understand?"

Yunyan said, "All over the body is hands and eyes,"

"All over the body is hands and eyes" or from another point of view, "All through the body is hands and eyes", these are expressions of this 360 degree sight, or panoramic view, as Katagiri Roshi used to call it. It is way beyond our selves and our likes and dislikes.

Avalokiteshvara not only had a tool in each of her one hundred hands but in the palm of each hand is Buddha's eye. This Buddha eye sees the panorama of life and sees in each phenomenon the whole universe. *The Blue Cliff Record* (case 89) expounds:

When reaching for the pillow at night,

There's an eye in the hand.

When eating, there's an eye on the tongue.

When recognizing people on hearing them speak,

There's an eye in the ear.

This understanding goes beyond discriminative thought. In this realm, the senses interchange with each other. There are eyes in the back of your head and all throughout your body; you can see. Through this kind of sight, you can respond unconditionally and spontaneously, as a person does reaching back in the night for his pillow. Your compassion comes out with ease, is particular and appropriate to the situation, and is without attachment to results.

Katagiri Roshi explained the "Diamond" eye like this:

When you see a rock, you can see the ocean a thousand miles away as well.

To see one thing is to see the whole world.

To see the rock is also to take care of the rock exactly as it is.

To take care of it along with all beings

You have to practice this seeing moment by moment, day after day.

This seeing of the rock is the manifestation of all beings.

Dogen had another way of saying this in “Kannon”:

Examine everything with night eyes.

What are night eyes? What is time?

You should study night during the day and night.

You must also ask how does he use his manifold hands and eyes?

“How does he use” is the functioning of ultimate reality.

The question enlarges to: “What are night eyes?” and “How does he use them?”

Unless you experience the night, the vast, dark emptiness, the unity of all things, you cannot understand unconditional love. You cannot understand unconditional love unless you break open our feeling of separateness. Avalokiteshvara’s heart and mind burst open and she saw the unity of all things, way beyond her separateness. As we feel our own suffering and the suffering of others, it breaks us open and we feel the tenderness and rawness of life. From this tremendous tenderness, Avalokiteshvara’s love comes forth.

I am you and you are me. We are all one body, actually, and this “one body” is “looking at everything from night eyes.”

Katagiri Roshi says, “To see the rock is also to take care of the rock exactly as it is. To take care of the rock along with all beings.” We can feel the unity and inter-being of the night (ultimate reality), and be able to bring that awareness into the differentiated world. We can take care of that world with kindness and understanding. It is “like reaching back for a pillow in the night.” Reaching for a pillow at night is completely unpremeditated and full of ease.

Can we give like that?

This is why it is so important to stop and digest our suffering in meditation. You are tenderized by sitting in the middle of the fire of suffering without escaping. And the lotus which blooms in

this fire, responds with tenderness, accuracy, without agenda and with ease. Compassion comes from our experience of our own wholeness and the surety that we and all beings are included in Indra's net.

About ten years ago I wrote a capping verse for this koan that is a reflection on Dogen's sentence: "You should study night during the day and night." I share it with you here, now.

Capping verse:

***I saw Andromeda Galaxy in the telescope last night
In the darkest part of the night
Galaxies and nebulae blooming inside and outside the great body
Flowers in the sky
Mind crystal clear
Flows into the daybreak
And makes breakfast for the children.
Is there any obstacle?***