

Dharma Talk on Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo

Gene Bush, March 29, 2020

Now that the Board has decided to assure that all cautious steps are being taken to minimize the spread of the virus, we have to ask, Now what? I began to search for alternative 20-second recitations in order to support my new habit of washing hands frequently. Seeing that I also need to cultivate new habits of mind, I began to turn towards Kanzeon.

Frequently for well-being we chant the 10-line verse, calling upon Avalokiteshvara (aka Kanzeon, Kannon) the archetypal figure who evokes boundless compassion. She is often depicted with 10,000 arms and hands, each hand with an eye in it, an indication of her capacity to perceive widely and deeply and thus find an appropriate response. Literally, Kanzeon can translate as “deeply perceiving world sound”; and because of her archetypal nature we know that she represents our own compassionate hearts. So we arrive at the more poetic, “Hearer of the cries of the world.”

Zazen itself is the great teacher, leading us to stability, clarity, generosity, loving kindness, patience and gratitude. Physically, emotionally, socially together we are all engaged in responding appropriately to new information and new conditions. We are noticing the absence of things normally done out of habit*, and the presence of a new practice – only the activity of responding to circumstances as they arise. There is great medicine in this time of disruption. We need to be able to deeply perceive the world right now. We cultivate the capacity to see and hear this way – being grounded in attentive presence – through our practice of zazen. We begin to recognize our own true Buddha Nature, and the truth of there being nothing outside of this.

One of the resources we have in Practice is to turn toward the chants and recitations we use in the temple setting**.

Here are the 10 lines of this chant:

Kan ze on
Na mu Butsu
Yo Butsu u in
Yo Butsu u en
Bu Po So en
Jo raku ga jo
Cho nen Kan ze on
Bo nen Kan ze on
Nen nen ju shin ki
Nen nen fu ri shin

And my rough translation with interpretation:

Great open compassionate Self
With gratitude for our collective true nature
True nature is my already-present home
True nature is nourished by my activity
The triple treasure is my foundation.
Finding great joy in ease and pure motivation,
In the morning my first impulse of mind and heart is compassion
In the evening my last impulse of mind and heart is compassion
Present moment awareness arises within big mind
Present moment awareness is expressed within big mind

Please take up the practice of chanting this wonderful teaching – one time if you are washing your hands. Or chant it 7 times, in ever-widening spheres of intention. This is not a magical wish; this is a very ordinary way to return to our deepest vow, relying upon gratitude and compassion to inform the choices we make throughout each day. Please also study the ways in which this chant reflects and emphasizes the teachings of the Metta Sutta, our focus of study in class.

* many thanks to Ed Brewster for this phrase

** acknowledging Ancient Forest Zen for their study of Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo