

A Contemplation of Avalokiteshwara Bodhisattva: Things-As-They-Are

by Rev. Master Seikai

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Just today we are celebrating the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshwara, Quan Yin or Kanzeon, the Bodhisattva who represents compassion—*she who hears the cries of the world*. “His life is the completion of meaning; it is pure, it is that which makes all beings victorious, and cleanses the path of all existence.” These words come as close as any to explain the meaning of practicing compassion in my life. Without it, I could not hope to find meaning in my life, or be even remotely happy and contented.

Quan Yin can appear in any form in any given situation. For example, once upon a time about 30 years ago I was watching television in the monastery, as we often did in the evening. One evening we were watching a film; I cannot remember the film or anything about it other than one comment made by one actor: “Show me a cynic and I'll show you an idealist who cannot accept the way things are.”

Rev. Master Jiyu had spoken of the dangers of idealism before, so this wasn't an entirely new idea to me, but just at that moment, the time was ripe for the full impact of it to hit me: I was an idealist, and my unwillingness at times to accept the way things are was expressed as cynicism. This was a lesson for life: to the bottom of my being I knew it to be true, and that I had to take it utterly to heart. I was not converted once and for all right then and there; I've had to work on my idealism and my cynicism ever since, and it is still a work-in-progress.

Quan Yin embodies total acceptance of things-as-they-are. It is actually that simple; the problem arises when the brain brings in all the ifs, ands and buts to the overall picture of accepting things as they are. Often, if I find myself complaining about some situation in my head, thinking of how I would like it do be different, the voice of Kanzeon says, “Well you know, that just isn't going to help. You might as well just accept things as they are and go from there.” This means dropping my ideas, and just accepting. Then, practicing a bit of patience and waiting to see if there is something I can do which actually will help. Sometimes, all I really need to do is let go of my thinking, and that's that.

It isn't that the idealism of helping living beings is wrong; it is, after all, the pure idealism of being a Bodhisattva. On the other hand, if we get in there with too many of our own ideas about what it means to help and insisting that it happen in exactly the right way, then we're courting disaster. To help living beings we need 80% patience; the other 20% is wisdom which comes about as a result of sitting still. Being patient allows the mud of human sentiments to settle to the bottom of life's jar, so that we can see clearly. Patience and loving kindness turned inwards are what is needed to help myself. I can't imagine being happy or content without them – I would be involved in a futile struggle to impose my own will upon the world.

Avalokiteshwara is things-as-they-are. There is no separation. The universe is compassionate, and assists all beings at all times. When we put down our idealism, learn to sit still and accept life as it is, loving kindness flows naturally from this deep acceptance in all directions to all living beings.

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