

Heart Sutra 2
1

WHOLE BODY

This sutra is difficult to understand because it's not clear who is speaking. There are two versions of the Heart Sutra. The version at the beginning of this book is the shorter of the two. The longer version describes the situation more completely. The opening lines of the larger version translated from Sanskrit by Edward Conze are:

Thus have I heard at one time.

This is the traditional beginning of a Buddhist sutra. The "I" is Ananda, a long time attendant of Shakyamuni Buddha who memorized all of his sutras.

The Lord dwelled at Rajagriha on the Varja peak together with a large gathering of both monks and bodhisattvas. At that time, the Lord, after he had taught the discourse on dharma called "Deep Splendor" had entered into concentration.

"Lord" refers to Buddha. I question the use of the word Lord for Buddha. He would never call himself Lord. He said he owned nothing. But this translator chose the word Lord. "Concentration" means zazen or samadhi. After he gave a talk called "Deep Splendor" he stopped talking and started to sit in zazen. This sutra takes place within Buddha's zazen. This is a very important point.

At that time also the Holy Lord Avalokita the bodhisattva, the Great Being coursed in the course of the deep perfection of wisdom.

"Great Being" is a translation of Mahasattva or Bodhisattva. "Coursed in the course" is a Sanskrit expression for "to practice". So Avalokiteshivara was practicing deep prajna paramita.

And from within his practice of deep wisdom he looked down from on high on this world in which all sentient beings are living.

This is a translation from Sanskrit to the Japanese "*shoken*". "*Sho*" means to illuminate and "*ken*" to see or view. So *shoken* means to see very clearly as if the scene is illuminated with a bright light. The Sanskrit expression is "he looked down from on high". When we are on the same level as all other human beings we can't see very clearly but from a high place, like a mountain, one can see the whole clearly.

And he saw the five skandhas.

From his zazen he saw that all beings are collections of the five skandhas and that there is nothing but the five skandhas. Skandhas means the five elements that make up all beings. The first one form, or "*rupa*", means all material things. In the case of human beings, this means our body. The other four are the functions of our mind. So Avalokiteshivarra saw that all of this world is a collection of the five skandhas.

And he surveyed them as empty in their own being.

Bodhisattva saw that all beings are collections of the five skandhas and nothing more. He further saw that these five skandhas are empty.

And then there was the venerable Shariputra.

Shariputra was one of the ten greatest of Buddha's disciples. It is said he was the most sharp witted.

Through the Buddha's mind said to the holy Lord Avalokita, the Bodhisattva, the great being....,

Shariputra asked Avalokiteshivarra through the Buddha's mind. So it's not really Shariputra speaking. Shariputra's question was,

How should a son or daughter of good family train themselves if they want to cause in the course of this deep perfection of wisdom.

His question was how people should practice if they aspire to prajna paramita. Avalokiteshivarra's answer to Shariputra's question is the teaching of the Heart Sutra. The person who gives this speech is Avalokiteshivarra but this question and answer both take place within Buddha's zazen. This is a very important point to understand. This is a description of Buddha's samadhi or zazen. This is part of our zazen.

When I first visited MZMC in 1989 I attended the morning service and we chanted this translation of the Heart Sutra. I was surprised by the translation of the last line of the following paragraph.

Avalokiteshivarra Bodhisattva

When practicing deeply the prajnaparamita

Perceived that all five skandhas are empty

And was saved from all suffering and distress.

This last sentence was completely different from my understanding. This translation implies that he was in trouble, he was suffering and distressed but because he practiced prajna paramita he was saved and released from suffering.

It is important to understand who is Avalokiteshivarra really is. According to Mahayana Buddhism there are two kinds of bodhisattvas. We ordinary human beings who aspire to study, practice and follow Buddha's teaching are one kind. We are all called bodhisattvas. The other kind of bodhisattva like Avalokiteshivarra, Samanthrabhadra or Manjushri are called great bodhisattvas. They are not ordinary human beings. They are the same as Buddha. They choose to leave nirvana in order to help other human beings cross over to the other shore. They work to ferry other sentient beings to the other side.

In the chapter of Shobogenzo titled *Kanono*, Dogen Zenji said that Avalokiteshivara is the father and mother of buddhas. Avalokiteshivara was in a past life he was a Tathagata called Shobomyonori. Shobo means

true dharma. Myo is light. So he was a Buddha called the light of true dharma. But because of his vow to save all beings he became a bodhisattva and appeared in this world. He wasn't in trouble.

I don't think this translation is accurate. I found Katagiri Roshi's translation of the Heart Sutra in a magazine. He translates this paragraph as follows:

Avalokiteshivara when practicing the profound prajna paramita by virtue of illuminated vision [shoken] saw the five skandhas as empty and passed beyond all sufferings.

He wasn't saved from suffering but rather he passed beyond it. The original Chinese words are, "Do issai ku yaku." Do is a verb and is sometimes translated as "to save". Another meaning of the Chinese character do is "to cross over from this shore to to the other shore". This do is not passive. So he wasn't saved but rather he saved or crossed over. He saved all beings who are in trouble, who are suffering and in distress. The meaning is quite different. In the original Sanskrit version this sentence is not there.

In the original version the point is that Avalokiteshivara came to the realization of emptiness and that's it. There's no statement as to whether it relieved suffering for him. It's not clear which is older. This sentence may be an addition by the Chinese translator, Genjo, who lived in the seventh century. The Sanskrit version we have now is newer than the version he used and does not include the last sentence. It

seems clearer and simpler without it. Avalokiteshivara saw the five skandhas are empty. This is prajna paramita, the perfection of wisdom.

The next question is who is Avalokiteshivara? In the Chinese Heart Sutra Avalokiteshivara is translated as *Kan ji zai bo satsu*. Avalokiteshivara is also called *Kanzeon bosatsu* in Chinese. *Kan ji zai* and *Kanzeon* have different meanings. "Kan" means to see or observe. "*Ji zai*" is the Sanskrit word "*ishivara*", a person who can see freely without obstruction. This means one who is free from egocentricity and ignorance; one who sees things as they are without distortion by intellect, desire or expectation. This is the meaning of Avalokiteshivara.

Another name of this bodhisattva that is more popular in China and Japan is *Kan ze on bosatsu*. "*Kan ze on*" means one who hears the suffering of the world. Human beings make sounds when they suffer. Avalokiteshivara hears these sounds of suffering and appears in various ways and tries to help. *Kanzeon bo satsu* represents the aspect of compassion and the work of helping others. *Kan ji zai bosatsu* emphasizes the aspect of wisdom or prajna; seeing things exactly as they are, free of distortion. In the Prajna Paramita Sutra, the Heart Sutra, the bodhisattva is called *Kan ji zai bosatsu*. In this case, he is a symbol of the wisdom of seeing the reality of our life clearly. He is, of course, a creation of the imagination of Mahayana Buddhists not a historical being.

This Bodhisattva was Buddha, and yet he came back to this world of delusion and suffering in order to help people. He made a vow that he would never become Buddha until all sentient beings are saved and become Buddha together. So Avalokiteshivara will remain in this world on this shore as long as there are deluded human beings. To the extent that we are deluded he is here now. This is a very important point. Avalokiteshivara is not a person but rather a force that keeps telling us to awake.

Today you have come to the Zen Center to sit and to listen to my talk. It's not necessarily fun. But you're here. You could go anywhere. This is such a beautiful morning you could be anywhere having fun but you decided to come here and sit in this posture. It's not necessarily a comfortable posture and my talk is not necessarily interesting. But you made a decision to come here. What made you decide to come to the Zen center and sit in zazen? Avalokiteshivara. This is the power that keeps us practicing and tells us to awaken. Avalokiteshivara is a power, not only inside of us, but also all around us that leads us to awaken to the impermanence and egolessness that is the reality of our lives.

New leaves are coming out on the trees. They show us time is passing and everything is changing; now winter to spring and soon spring to summer. Life is always changing, always new, always fresh. We see everything around us continue to change and yet we believe that we do not. We believe that "I am I", "I am the same person I was forty years ago, twenty years ago or yesterday", or "I will be the same person tomorrow." But the reality is that we are always changing. Our bodies

and minds are constantly changing. So the leaves, trees and birds sing in the spring to tell us, "Awake, awake to this reality. Everything is moving and changing." Everything is ever fresh each moment. That is Avalokiteshivara helping us see things clearly as they are.

Avalokiteshivara is both inside and outside of us. Everyone we encounter is Avalokiteshivara. Our parents who took care of us, our friends, everyone is Avalokiteshivara. They are here to show us the reality of life. We should be thankful. We should appreciate ourselves, all people we encounter and all things in this universe. All of this is Avalokiteshivara telling us to awake and to avoid being caught in egocentric delusion; to become free from illusion and see our life force straight on. That is Avalokiteshivara. This sutra is speaking from our life force.

Dogen Zenji wrote a chapter (*Kannon*) of Shobogenzo about Avalokiteshivara. In the beginning of this chapter he quotes a very interesting koan or question and answer between two Chinese Zen masters whose names were Ungan and Dogo. Ungan was Tozan's teacher. Tozan was the founder of Chinese Soto Zen. So Ungan was Tozan's teacher and Dogo was his old friend. They practiced together for forty eight years with various teachers at different monasteries. Many of their conversations have been recorded. This is one of them.

Once Ungan asked Dogo, "What does the Great Compassion Bodhisattva do with so many hands and eyes?" Great Compassion Bodhisattva means

Avalokiteshivara or Kanzeonbosats. It is said that Avalokiteshivara had one thousand eyes and one thousand hands. There is a Japanese temple with a statue of Avalokiteshivara which has a thousand hands. That's called Senjukannon or Senjusengen, the Bodhisattva which has one thousand eyes and one thousand hands. Eyes symbolize wisdom and the hands work with compassion to help others. So Ungon's question is, "What is the Bodhisattva doing with so many hands and eyes?" Dogo, his friend, said, "It is like a person groping for his pillow at night with his hands behind his back." We all turn over during the night as we sleep. Sometimes we lose our pillow. Dogo describes looking for his pillow in the dark with his hands behind his back.

Complete darkness is rare these days. Even if we switch off all the lights there is usually some artificial light from outside. But in the ancient times when it was dark it was completely dark. Once I had the experience of walking in complete darkness. There is a famous mountain outside of Kyoto called Mt. Hiei where Dogen Zenji was ordained. There is a huge Tendai monastery there. I was staying at Antaiji in the northwest part of Kyoto. We had a party after a five day sesshin and drank lots of sake and beer. After the party I had a lot of energy and decided to hike up the mountain to see the sun rise from the top. It took me three or four hours to walk up to the top. Since it is near the city of Kyoto most of the path was lit by the lights of the city. There was one stretch of several hundred meters covered by evergreens that was completely dark. I couldn't even see my hand. It was very frightening. My feet and my hands became my eyes. I took each step

very slowly and carefully because the edge of the path was a cliff. It was very dangerous.

Perhaps blind people have this experience frequently. It's amazing to me to see blind people walking on the street with a white cane. Their feet, hands and even the cane are their eyes. Their whole body is their eyes. When it's completely dark our whole body serves as eyes. This is the situation of a person in complete darkness, trying to find a lost pillow. Our whole being, our whole body and mind becomes our eyes or hands. Darkness has a special meaning in Buddhism. It means nondiscrimination. In daylight we can clearly distinguish between different things.

In the darkness we can't see anything and so we can't discriminate between things. We see only one darkness. This is nondiscrimination.

This is a metaphor for our zazen. In complete darkness there is no discrimination. Our body and mind work together as one. The Heart Sutra says there are no eyes, no nose, no tongue, no ears, no anything. Because they are not independent, they work together as one and there is no distinction between eye or nose or tongue. The whole body becomes an eye in the darkness. The whole body becomes a tongue when we eat. We don't eat and taste with our tongue alone. We see the food with our eyes. We touch with our hands. The whole body functions together as one in all our activities. So there are no eyes or ears independent of other organs. All work together as one. That is the reality of life. This is how our life functions, like a person groping for a pillow in the night.

Ungan said, "I get it. I get it. I understand what you meant."

Dogo replied, "How do you understand it?"

Ungan said, "Entire body is hands and eyes." Since eyes don't work in the darkness the whole body becomes eyes and hands.

Dogo answered, "Good, you expressed reality almost completely. But only almost. There is something lacking." He was saying that Ungan's answer was eighty or ninety percent right but not complete.

Ungan asked, "That is my understanding. How about you?"

Dogo replied, "Whole body is hand and eyes."

In Chinese Ungan said, "*hen shin*". *Hen* means entire. Dogo said, "*tsu shin*". *Tsu* means whole. Entire body and whole body mean the same thing. Their answers were exactly the same. This is Avalokiteshivara. We have many hands and eyes besides our own. Our hands and eyes are universal. Our hands and eyes, our entire body is part of the whole universe. The whole universe works as one just like our whole body. There are innumerable hands and eyes. What is this whole universe doing for us? It's telling us to awake from our dream of egocentricity, to open our eyes.

Avalokiteshivara is like a person groping for a pillow in the darkness, body and mind working as one. There is no distinction between eyes, hands, tongue, ear or nose. The universe functions as one. This is the meaning of egolessness and impermanence. Everything is always changing. But we are blind to all of this. We dream that "I" am here and that unless my desires are fulfilled my life is meaningless. We try to satisfy our desires, to be successful. We build a fence between our body and mind and other beings in the universe. We say, "This is me. This is my territory. This is my house." We try to keep good things inside our territories and things we dislike outside it. If we own a lot of good things we consider our lives successful. We keep track of what is outside and inside of our territory. Our lives are a constant struggle to increase our income and decrease our expenses. This is our way of life. It works because human society is based on artificial conventions that we all agree on to make our lives more convenient.

It doesn't always work outside social convention. When we face our death it doesn't work. No matter how successful your life, when you have to face death you have to leave everything. Your property, your fame, your accomplishments all disappear. Avalokiteshivara helps us keep awake. This conventional way of life is not reality. Until we wake to reality our life is like a building based on nothing. The Heart Sutra is about transforming our way of life. It is about waking up to reality and creating a way of life based on that reality before convention. For us, the practice of zazen is the turning point of this transformation. According to Dogen Zenji, zazen itself is enlightenment

or awakening. Of course, even in our zazen we have delusive thoughts, desires and emotions. And so we let go of them. This letting go is transformation. Our life is no longer personal and we live out the universal life force. This is the meaning of our zazen.