

Shinji Shobogenzo Book 2, Case 5.

Written by News Administrator

Monday, 15 July 2013 17:42 - Last Updated Monday, 15 July 2013 18:25

Koan Commentaries

Master Ugan asked Master Dogo: *What does Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva do with so many hands and eyes?*

Master Dogo said: *It is like someone stretching out a hand behind their head at night, looking for the pillow.*

Master Ugan said: *I understand. I understand.*

Master Dogo said: *What do you understand?*

Master Ugan said: *Hands and eyes exist throughout the body.*

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Master Dogo said: *Your words describe the situations nicely, but only about eighty or ninety percent.*

Master Ungan asked: *What would you say?*

Master Dogo said: *The whole body is just hands and eyes.*

Commentary by Nishijima

Avalokitesvara is traditionally the Bodhisattva of Compassion. It is said that he has thousands of eyes and thousands of hands with which to save all beings.

Master Dogo said that Avalokitesvara was like a person stretching out a hand at night to locate a pillow behind the head. He thus saw Avalokitesvara as a very natural basic life force.

Master Ungan expressed his view as hands and eyes existing throughout the body, but Master

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Dogo thought this implied some separation between the hands and body, so he tried to express it more accurately with *"The whole body is just hands and eyes."* We can see our life itself as the natural functioning of Avalokitesvara's many hands and eyes.

Commentary by John Fraser

In this story, Avalokitesvara's hands and eyes are manifold. She does not have 84,000 hands and eyes. She does not have inexhaustibly many hands and eyes. They are manifold. And so, we can equate them with all of existence. The whole world is one of the functions of Avalokitesvara. And these 'hands and eyes' suggest an interfolding of doing, being, perceiving and intuitively knowing, within the one vivid whole.

It is as if what has been on the butcher's slab of western rationalism has abruptly risen up, illuminating everything.

The import of Dogo's simile is that Avalokitesvara, the expression of compassion, is not intentional, and is [the reference to 'darkness'] non discriminatory. The implication is clear: Compassion is one facet of Nonduality.

And likewise, compassion is one facet of zazen. It is not that zazen is the cultivation of gratitude or compassion, it is the expression. That is why we practice from the perspective of the Buddha, not from the perspective of a human being.

The topmost branch of a tree broke off in a storm. The lower branches held it up. They will not let it fall.

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