

# Kwannon

A teisho by Ven. Anzan Hoshin roshi  
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At the end of every morning or evening block of sitting we chant the Four Great Vows.

*All beings without number, we vow to liberate.*

*Endless obsessions, we vow to release.*

*Dharma gates beyond measure, we vow to penetrate.*

*Limitless Awakening, we vow to unfold.*

We vow to penetrate from mind moment to mind moment, we vow to attain the Great Way of the Buddha, the Great Way of Waking Up.

These Four Great Vows are very precious because they very concisely express what we have been doing for over 2,500 years from day to day, from moment to moment. Waking up in the morning, having a cup of coffee, going to work or a monk being woken by a wooden clap at 3:30 in the morning.

On Sunday we were chanting the mantra of Kwannon Bosatsu or Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva. Avalokiteshvara is the traditional symbol or embodiment of compassion and can be seen in many different forms. Guanyin, the little porcelain lady that you often see in Chinese stores is a form of Kwannon. Then, there is the form with three heads and eight arms that we read about in Dogen zenji's Uji or Being-Time. And there's also a form with eleven heads and a thousand arms.

But Kwannon doesn't just have eleven heads and a thousand arms. Kwannon is all eyes, all arms, all hands. It's nothing else. Just seeing. Just reaching out. Who is this embodiment of compassion? What are these eyes, these hands? They're your entire body. They fill the ten directions, the three times. There's nothing else but this. There can't be anything else but this when we realize our lives as the Buddha did.

Everywhere we turn, everywhere we look, there's so much confusion and suffering and deluded desires. People go up and down, and the world gets hungrier, and the world gets more bloated.

But when we say "compassion" we're not talking about running out and saving the world like some sort of fanatic missionaries. Instead, through looking at how we live our own lives, understanding our own minds and bodies from moment to moment, and through noticing the people that we know and the people that we meet we are beginning to unfold those hands, beginning to open those eyes of Kwannon.

As we continue our practice, our hearts begin to become a bit more tender, a bit more open. So the scar tissue of our defensiveness begins to fade. And so the more that our hearts heal, the more open they are to wounds. Our confusion might become much more vivid so that we can recognize it as confusion. All of the things that we had thought to be us might begin clamoring a little bit more loudly, playing themselves a little bit more vividly, and might drag us up and close down a bit more frequently.

So the first place for these eyes and hands of Kwannon to open is towards ourselves. Seeing our confusion, seeing our strategies, our hopes and our fears, we begin developing some sort of patience towards them, some sort of understanding and wisdom and compassion. And then we can find ourselves standing free of judgements and condemnations and indulgences.

To be compassionate towards our habitual tendencies does not mean to accept them as inevitable, just as much as it means to not reject them. Compassion isn't soppy mindedness. It is mindfulness and insight, seeing clearly what needs to be done. And doing it again, and again and again. No matter how lost we become in confusion, sooner or later we wake up again and again.

And so the eyes and hands of Kwannon begin to open. And the more that we see, the more we begin to recognize that all time and space are these hands and these eyes. Just reaching out, just opening up.

Upstairs, before the sitting we had been looking at a picture of the "starving Buddha". The picture is of a statue of the Buddha as a rack of ribs and bones with a little bit of flesh stretched over it, the veins standing forth on his brows, on his forearms. This is a depiction of the Buddha when he was still engaging in various typical Hindic ascetic practices, in this case extreme fasting. It's said that the Buddha explored and endured these exertions, due to his great compassion so that he could understand and transcend them. Just because he was so damned good at everything, he was a lot better at fasting than most of the other sadhus, and he was able to subsist on just a couple grains of rice and a sip of water. He was very, very good at this. But sooner or later, he recognized that no matter how good he became at this, there was no real purification going on. He was just endangering his body and mind. And if he died without waking up, then he would not have found the way to end suffering. And so eventually he began to eat. In fact, it's said that a woman named Sujata saw him and offered him some milk mixed with ghee and honey and he drank it and started to feel better. And so then he went off and sat up under the bodhi tree and woke up.

But the point of that picture wasn't that the Buddha was doing something wrong here, something "fucked up". The Buddha's exertion in compassion was such that he would do whatever needed to be done, without limit. So, all of those ribs standing forth, they're hands reaching out. All of those veins are eyes.

The compassion which we extend towards ourselves has to be without limit, has to be without preconceived strategies, without judgment. And the compassion with which we begin to reach out towards and understand others has to be in the same way. Working for their benefit, without pity, without a sense of being superior. Just a sense of one hand bandaging the other hand that's been cut.

Compassion isn't just a "bleeding heart". It's an intelligent heart.

During the Dharma Assembly on karma and death, we talked about compassion being inseparable from wisdom and wisdom being inseparable from compassion. But as Daian pointed out, when we begin to see that the ten directions and the three times are free of our biases, even if it is somehow an ethical universe, then it's a universe that doesn't operate according to our own personal ethics. Therefore, "compassion" does need to be stressed. We do not need to focus on and over emphasize "compassion" because it is a loaded word for people. True wisdom, true seeing, porajnap is itself compassion and true compassion is itself true seeing.

If we see an habitual tendency and see it clearly, then there's just that seeing. There's no judgment. There need be no sense of anxiety about it. There's no need for embarrassment. There's no need to chalk up a

white mark or a black mark as the Tibetan Kadampa masters used to do. It's just there. There's just seeing. The more than that seeing is surrendered into then the more wisdom arises, the more compassion arises. The clearer we become, the clearer the environment that we create for others becomes. From moment to moment, we liberate all beings. All of the thoughts and images and preconceptions within us are naturally Kwannon.

The Three Pure Precepts say: there is no wrong action, there is only the arising of benefit, there is only the benefit of all beings. Who are these beings? Who is Kwannon? Where are these eyes and hands?

I would give a katsu but I think everybody is so foggy at the moment, it wouldn't particularly matter at this point. Can we be compassionate towards this foggy, without judging it and without indulging it but just seeing clearly what it is, how it arises? Seeing how habitual it is? The word habitual isn't a condemnation. It's merely an acknowledgement of a fact. It's also a fact that we can stand free of this. But we can't stand free of the states we fall into by trying to suppress them or trying to pretend that they're not there. Standing free means to clarify them from within.

As practice deepens then every time they come up, there's seeing. This seeing itself transforms confusion into wisdom. The Buddha is born nowhere but from the womb of the three kleshas, from passion, aggression and stupidity. It's only here. Otherwise being Buddha would be a stranger to you, an impossibility for you. Buddha is here as this seeing, this hearing, this very deportment of the bodymind.

The more that we begin to recognize clarity, the more we begin to recognize its taste, the more the bodymind begins to unfold. The body begins to unfold its own natural dignity.

Again and again and again, confusion arises, laziness arises, resentment arises, lust arises. And again and again and again, we wake up.

You know, this moment of waking up to reality does not have to take too long.