

ENMEI JUKKO KANNON GYO

The title can be translated as the ten verse sutra of Avalokiteshvara on endless dimensions or less literally as the sutra of boundless compassion. *Enmei* connotes endless dimensions or boundlessness. *Jukko* means “ten phrases.” *Kannon* is Japanese for the Sanskrit, Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. *Gyo* means “sutra.” Sutra comes from the Sanskrit word for suture, so it is a sewing together of the Buddha’s words. Buddhism teaches that all the sutras were spoken by Buddha, but in fact they were written four hundred years after his death as part of an oral tradition. So they are less an expression of the *Nirmanakaya Buddha*, the historical Shakyamuni Buddha and more an expression of the *Sambhogakaya Buddha*, or the spirit of Buddha.

Kanzeon: We begin the sutra by invoking Kanzeon, understood not as an external figure in a Buddha heaven but as the spirit of compassion within ourselves. It is our compassionate heart. *Kan* means perceive or contemplate and has the sense of penetrating or illuminating. “*ze* means “world,” and *on* means “sound.” So Kanzeon is the part of ourselves that is penetrated by the sounds and cries of the world. Here, listening is more than just hearing with the ears. It is being so open to a sound or a cry that we are saturated to the core of our being. Another way of putting it is to say that this kind of listening means to be actively present to the world and ourselves. This is also an expression of what we do when we sit quietly; we became attentively present to ourselves.

Namu Butsu: *Namu* literally means “pay homage to,” and *Butsu* is Buddha. Another way of translating *namu*, which is more in keeping with Zen, is “at one with.” We are one with Buddha. Our original nature is Buddha Nature. There is nothing outside of our original nature—no Buddhas or bodhisattvas or sentient beings. So here we are paying homage to the deepest part of ourselves.

Yo Butsu u in: *Yo* means “with,” and *in* implies a direct or seed cause. So the third phrase is saying that we are directly Buddha Nature. This further emphasizes what was said in the preceding phrase. Our original nature or true self is not some special, mystical state; it is not something external to get or develop. It is already here. When we take our seats in meditation and let go of everything that arises, we are left with our true self. So the third phrase of the sutra expresses our experience of zazen.

Yo Butsu en: *en* is an indirect cause. If the direct cause referred to in the preceding phrase is a seed, then the indirect cause is water and sun. Without these elements a

seed will not be able to grow. Just as we tend to our back yards with water and other nutrients, we must attend to our inner gardens with practice so that the seed of our Buddha nature can blossom.

Bu po so en: *Bu* is “Buddha,” *po* is “Dharma,” and *so* is “sangha.” *En* again is an indirect cause. The three jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha evoke our original nature. They are a context for understanding who and what we are. In another sense they reflect different expressions of our true nature. We are Buddha Nature and the dharma expresses the truth of our nature. Sangha shows us that we are essentially connected to all living beings in the ten directions and three times. There is nothing really that separates us from anything else. We do not have an independent I. Understanding and experiencing this, leads to a feeling of great equanimity, even in the most difficult situations.

Jo raku ga jo: *Jo* means “permanent” or “eternal” or “endless dimension.” *Raku* is “happiness” or “joy.” *Ga* is “self” and *jo* is “purity.” This phrase refers to the endless dimensions of joy when we experience our true selves. As Jesus said, this is “the peace that passeth all understanding.” When we let go of everything that arises, when we let body and mind drop off and experience our true selves we have joy and purity.

Cho nen Kanzeon: *Cho* is “morning.” *Nen* means “mind,” or “individual consciousness.” So, in the morning we should put our thought on Kanzeon. Our first thought in the morning is very important as it often informs a good part of our day. Often, our morning thoughts have to do with worries about work or family or money or time. We have all experienced how these kinds of thoughts affect our days. What would happen if the first thought of our day was Kanzeon or compassion? And what would happen if we keep this thought, this perception, with us until we take our seats in Zazen?

Bo nen Kanzeon: *Bo* means “evening.” We start our days with Kanzeon and we end our days with Kanzeon. Moment by moment, we try to remember our true nature.

Nen nen ju shin ki: *ju* is “follow” and *shin* is mind, *big* mind. Each thought following the preceding thought is *big* mind. That is, moment after moment, small mind is an

expression of big mind. Small mind is not really separate from big mind, which is all inclusive. As Suzuki Roshi said, we need to see our lives as “unfolding of big mind.”

Nen nen fu ri shin: This is another way of expressing what was said in the preceding phrase. *fu* means “not” and *ri* means “separate.” Thought after thought arises from *big* mind; our thoughts are not separate from *big* mind. Kanzeon is not separate from big mind. We are Kanzeon just as we are Buddha nature just as we are the life force of the universe.

Historically, this sutra has been chanted to prolong life. For example, Hakuin told his Japanese lord: “Give this [sutra] to those who are seriously ill or have met with disaster for their consolation. If it is recited with sincerity, miracles will be accomplished and the person who recites it will be free from disease and attain a long life.” This kind of attitude may be the reason why it has been used in Zen well-being ceremonies. But if you pay attention to exactly what is being chanted you can see that it is not an evocation of a supernatural force. The ten verse sutra of Avalokiteshvara is an accounting of how to make contact with, and actualize, our original nature. It is an evocation of our original nature expressed as compassion. Compassion is part of reality. When it comes down to it, what could be more helpful for those in need of our help?