
Kannon in us

Kusen by Roland Yuno Rech at Maredsous, July 2008

The *Kannon Gyo* sutra is an excerpt from the Lotus Sutra. Kannon is Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit, it is the Bodhisattva of Compassion. Its name was translated two ways, in Japanese and Chinese. In the *Hannya Shingyo* it's Kanjizai, the one who observes perfect liberty. The one who realizes this liberty through the understanding of ku, vacuity which does not mean non-existence or nothingness but rather, nothing substantial, nothing which exists alone. It is the Awakening of Buddha to total interdependence of all existence.

This implies that nothing can be possessed permanently or seized by oneself. We can deeply live this interdependence and thus find ourselves in harmony with cosmic order, with the Dharma ; practice *mushotoku*, practice without greed, by concentrating completely on each action, by allowing ourselves to be absorbed by the practice of zazen, by samu and thus experience liberation regarding attachment to oneself, to a limited idea, narrow, egotistical, and realize our true self which is not an entity but is rather a being in unity with all others. Seeing this is *kanjizai*, the source of wisdom. This immediately implies feeling completely connected to others, having empathy for others . The freer we are from ourselves, from the concepts we make of ourselves, the more open we can be to others. And that's where Kanjizai becomes Kanzeon : the one who clearly sees the vacuity of all makings of the mind becomes available to hear all the complaints and suffering of the world. That's the meaning of *kanzeon* : on, sounds.

In our relationship to the world, we mainly use two sensory organs: sight and hearing. Clearly seeing is the source of wisdom. It is always said « see reality as it is » but often if we only develop our sense of sight, then we might develop 'dry' wisdom ; at that moment we can very quickly detect others' faults and mistakes, we tend to make rapid judgments, categorize people. So often, it would be better to close one's eyes and open the ears to hear the expression of human suffering. That's what Kanzeon-Kannon demonstrates.

In the *Hannya Shingyo*, Kannon-Kanjizai is the one who teaches wisdom to Sariputra. It is very important to realize that the Bodhisattva of Compassion is the one who teaches wisdom. That is why the *Hannya Shingyo* is the main sutra of Mahayana Buddhism - to deeply stamp our minds with the fact that true wisdom does not exist without compassion. We should equally develop our capacity to see and hear.

When we read the translation of the *Kannon Gyo* we could have a first impression that it is about invoking someone else's help, and it is true that humans sometimes need to call on a superior force for help when they suffer ; children call their mothers, adults call on God, Buddhists call Kannon.

But Kannon just exists within each and everyone of us. This means that the dimension of compassion must become active and effective within ourselves. Each one must become Kannon and develop their ability to help others as they help themselves, with no difference. And the Sangha is where this can be experienced and developed.

Sometimes certain people ask me : How can I evaluate my progress on the Way ?

If you want to answer this question yourself, ask yourself how you practice compassion.