

## Which Ever Way

Susan Ji-on Postal  
January 31, 2010

The Verse:

The whole body is a mouth  
Hanging in space  
Not caring which way the wind blows  
east, west, south or north  
All day long it speaks  
of *Prajna Paramita* for everyone  
ting-ton, ting-ton, ting-tong

Last Wednesday, in our Introductory evening, we briefly looked at this famous poem, entitled Windbell, by Dogen's teacher, Rujing. Sensing that this bell is still ringing here, that this poem has more to tell us, I am picking up its teaching again today. We will start with Master Rujing's expression and in a while pick up Dogen's own verse, his response, which offers an expansion and amplification of his Master's teaching.

As you no doubt have noticed, Buddhist teachers often use analogies to point to what is in some sense indescribable - vast spacious mind is likened to the sky, open, clear, and not able to be soiled or spoiled no matter what flies through, no matter the storm clouds that gather. Hakuin, in his *Song of Zazen*, says that Buddhas and beings are like water and ice – both are H<sub>2</sub>O, same substance, but one flows freely around any obstacle and the other is hard, sharp and bumps and grinds its way along, often gouging and hurting others, even when well intentioned. In the *Lotus Sutra*, in the chapter called Medicinal Herbs, the Buddha's teaching is seen as a giant rain cloud covering the earth,

sending down a soaking rain providing needed moisture to all the dried out beings. So many poetic word-pictures have been given to inspire us, to give us a clue about what the Buddha's teaching actually means for us, now.

So today we have this bell, hanging like an open upside-down mouth. I looked at a few translations, one says "The bell looks like a mouth, gaping." This certainly gives us strong sense of the wide-openness, the receptivity. When we are completely surprised, completely clueless, we might say "my mouth fell open" – this is gaping. A kind of physical not-knowing. However, I have gravitated to this translation, "The whole body is a mouth hanging in space." I appreciate the reminder of whole-body-presence in our practice. I also appreciate that it says "is" not "looks like", and finally it is clearly out there, hanging in space. Not some internally contained little bell that rings in our heart, but out there – freely functioning in space.

And then the pivotal point – not caring from which direction the wind blows – north, south, east or west. Not holding to preference, not sticking to agenda, not holding any gaining idea, not investing in any point of view, any belief –in short, no clinging. And also there is no aversion - no rejection out of fear, no pushing away with criticism, no turning away with dislike. This wide mouthed bell simply continues to ring, to respond, to give expression to what is true no matter what kind of winds are swirling. This is the realized life. This poem offers us encouragement and guidance for our practice. Can we see how often we actually "ask" the wind to please blow in a certain way? Can we begin to hear how our own "ringing", our response, is in reaction to conditions and heavily governed by preference?

It says here “All day long it speaks of *Prajna Paramita* for everyone.” We can catch a glimpse here of the functioning of Compassion. It is said that when our own Wisdom, or *Prajna*, begins to manifest, it cannot help but flow outwards in boundless compassion for all beings, all life. This is the functioning of the Bodhisattva.

So many examples of Bodhisattva functioning appear in Zen stories – we all explored the character in the 10<sup>th</sup> Oxherding picture – the loveable fellow with a big bag of gifts, freely giving what is needed to all he meets. And do you remember Hakuin’s own real life example of continuing on no matter which way the wind blows? There was a knock on the temple door and there was mother, father, daughter with a baby in her arms. She accused Hakuin of being the father of her child. “Is that so.” He bowed respectfully. And they thrust the child at him and demanded that he care for the infant. Hakuin bowed deeply and simply took care of this child for two years, with help, no doubt, from his temple’s community. After two years there was again a knock on the door, the same family stood there, and the daughter admitted to lying. “Is that so,” said Hakuin as he bowed deeply and returned the child to its mother. Which ever way – he simply responded with equanimity, kindness and compassion.

And then there is this Bodhisattva who appears in the *Lotus Sutra* whose name is The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. What a story. This Sutra, unlike the Heart Sutra or Diamond Sutra or Kanzeon Sutra with which you may be familiar, reads a bit like a fairy-tale, like a great mythological saga with huge leaps through time and space into some other reality. If we can let go of our normal critical reasoning thinking mind and just enter this world, my experience is that we can be profoundly nourished and inspired and encouraged. There are two written Dharma Talks given some years ago on two chapters

of the Lotus on our website: Homecoming and Water of a Single Flavor. These are among the 4 or 5 parables in this volume. Today's story is simply the recounting of what happened once-upon-a-time. It seems a perfect illustration of the Wind Bell poem, of not caring from where the wind comes, which ever way it is blowing is just fine. I will summarize –

Long ago, beyond incalculable unlimited kalpas, not subject to reckoning or discussion, there was a Buddha named King of Imposing Sound, a Thus Come One, worthy of offerings, a world-honored one whose realm was named Great Coming into Being. That Buddha, King of Imposing Sound, in that world preached the Dharma for a life span of kalpas equal to a number to the sands of forty million of Ganges rivers. His true Dharma abided in the world for kalpas.... When the first Thus Come one named King of Imposing Sound had passed into extinction, and after his true Dharma had perished, in the midst of his Counterfeit Dharma, monks of overweening pride had great power. At that time there was a bodhisattva named Never Disparaging. (Sadaparibhuta)

Whomever this monk saw, whether monk, nun, layman or lay women, he would bow down to them and utter praise, saying “I profoundly revere you all. I dare not hold you in contempt. What is the reason? You are all treading the bodhisattva path and shall succeed in becoming Buddhas.”

Some in the multitude gave way to anger, some reviled him with a foul mouth. Where does he come from, We have no need for such idle prophesies. In this way through many years, he was constantly subjected to abuse. Yet he did not give way to anger, but constantly said, “you shall become Buddhas!” When he spoke these words, some in the multitude would beat him with sticks, with tiles and stones. He would run

away and stay at a distance, yet he would still proclaim in a loud voice. “I dare not hold you all in contempt. You shall all become Buddhas! Or, as the song written at Tassajara a few years ago for skit night says,

“I will never disparage you or keep you at arms length  
Where you only see your weaknesses, I only see your strength  
I would never despise you or put you down in any way  
Cause its clear to me, I can plainly see,  
You’ll be a Buddha some day. I love you.”

Do you see how he used the winds that were blowing to express for others, to express the profound Wisdom that penetrates everywhere?

Dogen added his own version of this poem, I think it appears in the Eihei Koroku, he says:

The whole body is just a mouth defining empty space  
Ever playing host to the winds from east, west, north, south  
Equally crystalline, speaking your own words  
Ring, ring, ring.

Can you sense the subtle refinement here – the whole body is just a mouth, not “like” one. And in place of “it does matter” he uses “ever playing host” – taking in the winds, letting them be the source of ongoing continuous practice. And “speaking your own words” with crystalline clarity – pure, clean, transparent – no filters, no clouding, nothing hidden.

Both poems allow a penetration into the functioning of *Prajna*, our own intrinsic intuitive wisdom. The bell hosts the wind, takes in all winds, and responds directly. Let's be like that with each other here – empty bells hanging in space. Leaving the Zendo, let's be with our life in this way, whole body ringing, giving out our own intimate expression.

Here we often talk about the two truths – ultimate and conditioned, absolute and relative, sameness and difference. Here, with this windbell, both are given together – the emptiness of the wide open mouth and the movement, the stepping out, with the ring of our own distinctive voice. This is us. This is how our wisdom has life and serves us all.