

The Scripture of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva

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On alternate Sundays at the Portland Buddhist Priory, morning service focuses on the *Scripture of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva*.¹ It is a wonderful opportunity to sing this beautiful Scripture and bring its important teaching to mind.

Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva, the Bodhisattva of Compassion in Mahayana Buddhism, is defined in the glossary of *Zen is Eternal Life* as follows:

AVALOKITESVARA BODHISATTVA (S), Kanzeon Bosatsu, Kannon (J), Kuan-shi-yin, Kuan Yin (C). He who hears the cries of the world. Avalokitesvara is the Bodhisattva who exhibits Great Compassion and Mercy.²

In addition to being an external symbol of the compassion of the Eternal, Avalokiteshvara also symbolizes the compassion that exists within one's own heart and that is developed through true training. This Bodhisattva is often depicted with many arms, expressing the different ways in which trainees must help other beings, and with many heads, symbolizing the total awareness of meditation.

The glossary continues with a brief explanation about the Scripture itself:

AVALOKITESVARA BODHISATTVA, SCRIPTURE OF, Kanzeon Bosatsu Fumonbon, Kannon-gyo (J). The twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Scripture (Saddharma Pundarika, S)* in which the Buddha explains the activity of Avalokitesvara in the world.³

This Scripture, along with elaborating on many wonderful aspects of Great Compassion, depicts many and varied life-threatening situations, teaching us to seek the Heart of Compassion within the most catastrophic of circumstances.

If, struck by cruel disaster's hand or tortured by
interminable pain, a being flees to Kanzeon's
gentle arms
He, being wise and full of mystic power, will save
him from all worldly grief and care.

In meditation, we come to know that our true self, which is found in the Eternal, cannot be harmed. In a real and practical way, this Scripture can help us face physical danger with the correct attitude of mind and alleviate unfortunate karma if, in fact, death were to occur.

Taken in a more figurative sense, these external events can be seen as representing our innermost fears brought about by the greed, anger and delusion that can arise in our everyday lives. Whatever the perceived source of our anxiety or fear, whether we see it as external or internal, the fear is the same. And it is through finding the Heart of Compassion in our meditation that our deepest fears are eventually laid to rest.

Hells, evil spirits, beastly creatures, all the
evil ways of living, all the pain that comes

from birth, old age, disease and death
Will, for eternity, all pass away.

By finding True Compassion within every situation we can, in turn, find the wisdom and skilful means needed to help ourselves and others truly. We, in a sense, become the eyes and arms of Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva helping all living things.

Whatever the situation, however hopeless it may seem, there is always an open door, always Avalokiteshvara is present, in all places, at all times, to help and to serve.

With all miraculous powers well endowed
And widely skilled in knowledge of all things,
In all the world, in all the quarters,
There is not a place where Kannon does not go.

We need only ask.

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Notes.

1. See Rev. P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett, Roshi, M.O.B.C., *The Liturgy of the Order of Buddhist Contemplatives for the Laity* (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), pp. 46-51.
2. Roshi P.T.N.H. Jiyu-Kennett (Mt. Shasta, California: Shasta Abbey Press, 1987), p. 278.
3. Ibid.