

Perfect Faith

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The following is Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's closing lecture to trainees attending the Denkoe or Transmission of the Lamp retreat in the spring of 1980. During her earlier talks, Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett spoke of Great Master Keizan's Denkoroku (Record of the Transmission of the Light) as "that by which the perfection of faith may be clearly understood... It is a series of road maps with signposts. As a result of having perfect faith, even for only a fraction of a second, the road map will appear." She pointed out how perfection of faith requires going beyond the opposites: "I am saddened by the number of times I am asked, 'How do I get beyond the doubt? How do I get beyond the fear?' The day that I shall really rejoice will be when people ask, 'How do I get beyond the certainty and freedom?' Doubt and certainty are just as much opposites as are fear and freedom; and certainty and freedom, although they sound so desirable, are mere opposites... The Denkoroku tells us not merely how to live beyond the opposites but how to find the perfection of faith, how to see all things as absolutely possessing Buddha Nature— man or animal, animate or inanimate." Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett's talk of May 18th, 1980, appears here in a slightly edited version. [Ed.]

Homage to the Buddha,
Homage to the Dharma,
Homage to the Sangha.

During this Denkoe the one very important point I have been endeavouring to make clear is the difference between perfect faith and absolute faith. Far too many people feel that, if you come to a monastery, you have to give up your will and blindly follow everything you are told. Perfect faith, however, does not require this. What it does require is that you accept everything with a positive attitude of mind. Absolute faith, which is a requirement of many religions, differs from perfect faith in that "absolute" implies a hardness, with no means whatsoever of allowing for softness or change. It is absolute— there can be no differences or movement within it. Absolute faith is rigid and results in bigotry, fear and frequently in the giving up of the will.

In perfect faith there is a give-and-take on the side of both master and disciple, a willingness of the master to ask the help of the disciple and a willingness of the disciple to ask the help of the master, all with a positive attitude of mind. If it becomes hard or heavy, it is not perfect faith.

Perfect faith is full of lightness and acceptance. It is softer than a cloud yet harder than a diamond. It is all of these things and changes constantly in a positive direction. The law of anicca applies, as well as the law of no-self and, since there is no-self, there can only be a mutual sharing. In absolute faith the residual hardness is as some-thing rather than no-thing. It is extraordinarily difficult to explain how the master-disciple relationship works but, as a rule of thumb, it must be understood that if the master requires the disciple to give up his will and/or surrender his body to him, then he is no master and there is no spiritual relationship. If the master tells the disciple that he must have perfect faith in that which is greater than both master and disciple, which is indeed the true master, the disciple is in a totally different situation; this true master should not be understood as a god or other entity; it is the essence of all things; totally empty, the fullest emptiness. When you leave the Abbey you must be very careful of any person who wants to give up his will to you (there are many who believe that this is the way of Buddhism and, in particular, the way of Zen, but this is not the case). The master neither collects “souls” nor takes away wills. If he wants to or tries to, beware of him; you must keep your individual will, to surrender only to the greater master if it be required of you (I have yet to see it required of anyone although I have seen it freely given in perfect faith). There is absolute free will in Soto Zen. Please be very careful of this point.

Perfect faith is always changing and always the same, always interesting and always joyful, never seeing an opposite because it has indeed gone beyond opposites. Opposites can only exist when we have not yet transcended them; when they have been transcended, every day is a good day, as Keizan says, and all work is the work of the Buddha. At this time there is no such thing as good and bad, like and dislike; there is only the positivity that lies beyond these opposites. Remember also it is a positivity that does not require positivity, a truth that does not insist upon truth. It is a love that does not insist upon being loved but loves for the sake of loving. This is why we

should be very careful of not judging ourselves. Since the Lord of the House does not judge us, why are we so stupid as to live within the opposites and judge ourselves? We need to have a faith that does not insist upon faith—this is what the master must teach. That the disciples do not yet, and perhaps never will, believe what the master says is not the master's problem. He has shown what he knows to be the truth—a truth that does not insist upon truth. The master's rightful occupation can be likened to his holding out his arm to the disciple, who is trying to swim in a river; the disciple can hold onto that arm if he fears he is going to sink. As soon as the disciple can swim, it is the master's duty to retract his arm, allowing the disciple to swim on his own. If the disciple bumps into a rock and asks for some salve for his head it is the master's duty to give it to him but not to get in there and make sure that the disciple bumps his head into the rock so as to be able to give the salve. Please be clear on what I am saying here. Once the disciple has truly entered the stream there is no more master and disciple in the old sense and yet the master and disciple will always exist in the old sense. There is a giving and receiving, a sharing and being shared, an acceptance and being accepted. When we enter into this state, which is known as That Which Is, the Lord of the House, the Cosmic Buddha, then we know that the perfection of love requires nothing, wants nothing and knows nothing. It just is and gives constantly, requiring nothing. Pure faith is the same thing—existing constantly and giving constantly; it is and that is all. It does not say, "Give me your will, give me your body, give me your faith, give me proof of your faith." These things are as foreign in perfect faith as are dross and gold. Be very careful. So many people want you to take their wills, saying that in Zen you must surrender to the master, but they do not know who the real master is. They worry and cry, "How do I find a master? How do I recognise someone to whom I can surrender?" As the Ancestor Kabimora told Nagyaarajyuna, "Do not worry whether I am a true saint or not. Just have faith." Do not play tricks with or rob yourselves. Just have faith and learn together with all living things. The master that is a true master does not insist upon his mastery, any more than the truth that is real truth insists upon itself.

This is all I have to say to you for today... I have enjoyed having you here very greatly and hope you will come back soon. Thank you for sharing the Denkoe sesshin with us.

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