

The following section on sympathy is an excerpt, page 176-181, from the newly published book, *The Roar of the Tigress*. This book is drawn from the many lectures of late Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett that had been taped and transcribed. Rev. Master Daizui MacPhillamy did a masterful job of editing these talks into this book and a wonderful job was done of capturing the tone and rhythm of her spoken words onto the written page. This book is an excellent introduction to Zen Buddhism and to the core teachings of this Sangha.

## **SYMPATHY**

**by Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett**

Scripture: "If one can identify oneself with that which is not oneself, one can understand the true meaning of sympathy: take, for example, the fact that the Buddha appeared in the human world in the form of a human being; sympathy does not distinguish between oneself and others. There are times when the self is infinite and times when this is true of others: sympathy is as the sea in that it never refuses water from whatsoever source it may come; all waters may gather and form only one sea."

"If one can identify oneself with that which is not oneself--the danger in this is of leaving oneself out of it altogether and only seeing others. A lot of people do this and think they are identifying with others, whereas they have not really seen that what they've done is become do-gooders instead. To identify with another is to see, "There, but for the grace of Buddha, go I": to recognize identically the same thing in yourself that is going on in another person. I can remember someone being very horrified to realize (and this was someone who had been very much against gay people) that what he was afraid of was that he might be the same way--to be able to identify with them, as a possibility: "Oh my God, I could be that way." Yes, you could, and there's nothing wrong with it, because your job is finding the Eternal. Sympathy is based on knowing oneself intimately: "Yes, I have aspects of bigotry." And, given the right circumstances, "I could murder somebody." Think about it from that angle: have a good look at yourself, and see the potentials within yourself. Then when you see someone else you won't judge that person, but realize that you could be in the same situation.

Understand his situation: look well at his situation, or hers, and realize, "Yes, I could be that way, and would I want this to happen to me?"

Judgmentalism is the big opposite of genuine sympathy: judging others. "I am not like that" can be a judgmental statement, but if you say, "I pray that I may not be like that", you are recognizing that you could be. There's just a different, tiny, little shift in mind in the way in which you look at wishing to help rather than to judge and push out of the way.

I believe in the old King James version of the Bible what is said is, "Judge not, lest ye be judged" rather than "Don't judge others." And it is much more important (this "Judge not, lest ye be judged") if you would understand Buddhism, because what Buddhism says is there is absolutely nothing preventing you going straight to the Eternal at death other than the way you judge yourself at the moment of death. Now, we know that at the moment of death things that really worry people come up. We've seen it happen. Anyone who has ever been present at a death knows that this can be so, and the job of a Buddhist priest is to say, "Don't worry about any of this; just go straight on to the Eternal." Don't create clouds at the moment of death to hide you from the Eternal. Now, if you've cleaned up your karma, then you're not likely to produce clouds at the moment of death. This is one of the main reasons-- this is a terribly important point, friends--this is the main reason why people who want to make a good death meditate: to clean all of that up so there is no obstruction in the way when they die. But actually it is not the Eternal who puts up the obstruction, who does the judging: we judge ourselves. It is we who do the judging of us, and we who turn away from the Cosmic Buddha. And this is why you have the Buddhist exhortations during and after the time of death: we tend to think that things "go out like a light" and everything snaps off; Buddhism says it takes forty-nine days after death. And for those forty-nine days, the priest is constantly warning, "Don't turn away; there's nothing that can get in your way; go straight on. If you've made a mistake the first time, don't worry: you will have another chance on such-and-such a day." Buddhists in the East have actually proved (although no scientist here would ever accept such proof) that on certain days at certain times, these things come up again for the spirit. The important thing is: don't turn away, go straight on; don't let the clouds get in your way, go straight on! No, there's no judgment in that, and that is why this is such an important matter.

It's terribly important that a person should truly have faith in the Unborn at the time of death, because if they do, then they are not going to judge themselves. But some people still judge themselves: "No, no, I've done too much; there's nothing I can do." Do you know Marlowe's *Faust*? Have you ever seen (there's a wonderful film of it done by the Oxford University Dramatic Society) --have you ever seen Marlowe's *Faust*? Very interesting! At the very end as *Faust* is going down to hell the angels are exhorting him: "Look up, look up! You don't need go down there." And he says, "I'm damned, I'm dammed: I have to go." So he goes. And the angels are saying, "He's mad. What's he doing this for?" But he is the one that turned away. And Mephistopheles, in that particular version, is equally beautiful in that when he is asked what it is like to be in hell, he says, "To be in hell is to be cut off from God by one's own will." The willingness to cut oneself off.

This is one of the big dangers of coming out of a Christian-Judeo background because you feel you've got to be judged, because of guilt. Buddhism say, "No, you weren't guilty by being born in the first place: all you did was just pick up some karma. So what are you judging yourself for now? Since you weren't guilty in the first place, why do you need to be judged later on?" But if you don't clean up the karma, yes, then you're going to come back again, or something will come back again. Keep on cleaning the stuff up. Buddhism's very beautiful in that sense, quite totally different, but it all comes out of not having original sin.

To continue with the last of the signs of enlightenment that Dogen mentioned, sympathy: take, for example, the act that the Buddha appeared in the world in the form of a human being. Sympathy does not distinguish between oneself and others. At all times, Shakyamuni Buddha had the form and figure of an old monk. He was born and He died. At all times He was human; He was never a god. There have been many attempts, both by the Chinese and the Indians, to deify Him, but at all times He had the form and figure of an old monk; Zen makes this very clear.

You read the *Denkoroku*,\* the story of the Transmission: at all times every one of them, every one of the Ancestors, had the form and figure of an old monk. And at some point in their lives each one of them was a good candidate for the job of world's prize rat! It's very encouraging to find that out: that they were all incredibly human. One was definitely the world's prize drunk. It is a most fascinating book to go through; those of you who have got copies, I suggest, read the *Denkoroku* with great care. There is no

way you will not find one of those Ancestors who does not become your particular "patron saint", because every one of them was as we are now. As the ceremony which you do for Jukai says, when you take a thorough look at yourself, you become one with the Buddhas and the Ancestors, "for they were as we are now, and we will be as they in the future." The promise of Buddhism: if you do something about yourself, yes, you are as they were but you will be as they in the future. So, have a look at yourself, and find which one you are in the *Denkoroku*, and recognize it honestly. They were all very human, but they all had one thing in common: they all had this little thing that told them, "There might be something better than what I'm up to right now." They heard that little voice which said, "You could do better." And when they saw it, they grabbed it and they did it: they didn't sit around and wait; they got on with it. In other words, they were in a mess because they couldn't see anything better right then, and as soon as it was put in front of them, they got on with it. As I said to you on the first day, there is no excuse for anyone to remain in the state that he or she is in; if you really want to change, you can do so. Do not be satisfied with the brick wall. Go on beyond it. Don't be afraid of it: go on beyond. The Buddha Nature is everywhere! It does not discriminate between male-female, black-white, rich-poor, old-young. Yes, go ahead.

*Monk's comment:* "I wanted to say something more on one of the comments I heard awhile ago, the comment that someone had noticed that the same people who are capable of incredible good are also the people who are capable of committing a crime. As that was being said, I was thinking, 'Yeah, those people are you.' If you truly accept the proposition that everyone is capable of doing the ultimate good, guess what: everyone is also capable of every atrocity known to man."

Yes, and that's the meaning of sympathy: the recognition that "I could be Hitler.:

*Same monk's comment:* "And the more you meditate, the more you realize that's true."

That's scary. It is the fullest and deepest acceptance of the meaning of sympathy, and therefore you can never blame anyone. That doesn't mean to say you shouldn't do anything about it, but do not pretend to be superior. "Do not be proud of yourself and devalue others" ...along those lines.

These signs of enlightenment are four very important things, and there isn't one of us who can't make use of them in our daily lives: with our families, with our friends, with our employers, and with our employees. If you really want to follow the Buddha's teachings, if you really want to find the Eternal, you have to emulate the Eternal before you become totally one with it. And this is how it's done: by awakening and following the mind of the Bodhisattva.