

Phil Treloar / Feeling to Thought

Sudhana Cycle No. 27

Avalokiteshvara

Kivannon Bosatsu

KIDŌ Moriuki in memoriam

For solo alto flute
this piece was premiered by
Hisae KIDŌ at a concert in Tokyo
March 29, 2008.

KIDŌ Moriuki passed away on January 18, 2005. He was the eldest son of a large family whose home is in Komatsu City. His wife, Hisako, and three children, Miki, Shigeru, and Hisae, hold him in their hearts with tenderness and respect. Some time ago my sister-in-law, Hisae, expressed to me the wish to have a work for solo flute written in his memory. For me, writing this piece is an honor.

From our first meeting Tō-chan had me feel at home and a welcome member of the KIDŌ family. Due to my poor ability with the Japanese language, this was mostly communicated through feeling and gesture, indeed, an indication of Tō-chan's warm and open heart.

Avalokiteshvara has been written so as to express the gratitude and love we hold for KIDŌ Moriuki, a man whose positive spirit will live on in the hearts of all who knew him.

Phil TRELOAR, Kanazawa, March 4, 2008
Program note for the premiere performance.

When, at Fukakusa in 1233, Zen Master Eihei Dōgen (1200 ~ 1253) – the founder of Sōtō Zen in Japan – took up residence in a building erected on the grounds of Gokuraku-ji, a temple dedicated to Kannon Bosatsu (*Avalokiteśvara*), he named the temple precincts, Kannondōri-in (*Avalokiteshvara's* Guiding Power). It was in these environs that Japan's first full-fledged Zen monastery, Kōshōji, would be established in 1236. Such was the significance of *Avalokiteshvara* to this visionary, utterly dedicated monk.

In 'Avalokiteshvara' the 34th fascicle of Dōgen's *Shobo Genzo* ("Treasury of the True Dharma Eye") he writes:

The *bodhisattva of great compassion* is *Avalokiteshvara*—"One who perceives the cries of the world," also called "One who has complete freedom in perceiving." This *bodhisattva* is regarded as the parent of all buddhas. Do not assume that this *bodhisattva* has not mastered the way as much as buddhas. In fact, *Avalokiteshvara* was True Dharma Illumination Tathagata [*Tathāgata*: synonymous with *Samyak-sambuddha* – a fully awakened one] in a previous life.

Treasury of the True Dharma Eye, volume one, p. 397.f.
Kazuaki TANAHASHI, ed. Boston & London: Shambhala, 2010.

Dōgen also observed that:

Making one brief utterance, beyond understanding and beyond knowing, is the expression of the dream within a dream. As the expression of the dream within a dream is the thousand hands and eyes of Avalokiteshvara that function by many means, the power of seeing colors and sounds, and hearing colors and sounds, is fully maintained.

Fascicle 39, *ibid*, p. 435

In Section IV – Self-Enlightenment – of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, in a sub-section entitled *Meditation on the organ of hearing*, it is stated:

‘Thereupon Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva rose from his seat, prostrated himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha and declared: “I still remember that long before numbers of æons countless as the sand grains in the Ganges, a Buddha called Avalokiteśvara appeared in the world. When I was with Him, I developed the Bodhi Mind and, for my entry into Samādhi [non-dualistic state of consciousness], I was instructed by Him to practice meditation by means of the organ of hearing. ...

“World Honored One, as I (followed and) made offerings to the Tathāgata Avalokiteśvara, He taught me to use my illusory hearing and sublimate it to realize the Diamond (Vajra) Samādhi which gave me the same power of mercy of all Buddhas and enabled me to transform myself into thirty-two bodily forms for the purpose of visiting all countries in saṃsāra (to convert and liberate living beings).”’

The Śūraṅgama Sūtra. 3rd edn. pp. 135 ff.

Charles Luk, trans. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.

Avalokiteshvara goes on to enumerate the thirty-two transformation-bodies realized in his practice of sublimating the faculty of hearing, followed by the fourteen kinds of fearlessness which emanate from his body and mind, then the four inconceivable absolute virtues he acquired.

Interestingly, in a translator’s footnote, we read: “This is a very profound meditation which readers should not let pass without careful study if they wish to know why Avalokiteśvara is so popular in Far Eastern countries where he is the merciful patron saint. By discarding the sound to look into the meditator himself, that is into the nature of hearing, he disengages himself from both organs and sense data and thereby realizes his all-embracing Buddha nature which contains all living beings.” (*Ibid*, p.139)

In his *Zen and Japanese Culture* Daisetsu Teitaro SUZUKI observes that “Faith is another word for intuition of the Unconscious. The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Kwannon Bosatsu) is the “giver of fearlessness,” and those who believe in him are given fearlessness, which is faith and intuition. All the *haiku* poets are worshippers of Kwannon and in possession of fearlessness, and therefore they can understand the inner life of the cicada and of the butterfly, which are never fearful of the morrow and of things belonging to it.” (p. 252.f.)

‘The Gateway to Everywhere of the Bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World,’ chapter twenty-five of the Lotus Sūtra – *Saddharmaṃṣṭarīkasūtra* (The Sūtra of the Lotus of the Wonderful Law) – depicts Avalokiteśvara as having thirty-three transformation-bodies. In the opening of the chapter the Buddha explains to Akṣayamati (Inexhaustible Mind), “Good man, if incalculable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of living beings, suffering pain and torment, hear of this bodhisattva, He Who Observes the Sounds of the World and single-mindedly call upon his name, the bodhisattva He Who Observes the Sounds of the World shall

straightway heed their voices, and all shall gain deliverance.” The compassion of Avalokiteśvara is thus pronounced by the Buddha as being limitless.

(See *The Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*.
Leon Hurvitz, trans. Columbia University Press, 1976)

“Wonderful sound, Perceiver of the World’s Sounds,
Brahma’s sound, the sea tide sound—
they surpass those sounds of the world;
therefore you should constantly think of them,
from thought to thought never entertaining doubt!
Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, pure sage—
to those in suffering, in danger of death,
he can offer aid and support.
Endowed with all benefits,
he views living beings with compassionate eyes.
The sea of his accumulated blessings is immeasurable;
therefore you should bow your head to him!

The Lotus Sutra. Burton Watson, trans. Columbia University Press, 1993

Certainly, from the perspective of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*’s 39th book, the *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, it is the compassion of Avalokiteśvara that comes well to the fore. Sudhana makes his way to Mount Potalaka and, after searching for Avalokiteśvara, finds him on the West side of the mountain where he was expounding a doctrine called “light of the medium of great love and compassion.” This, the sūtra tells us, “concerns the salvation of all sentient beings.” As Sudhana approached, the Bodhisattva observed of Sudhana: “You are filled with the energy of great compassion, determined to liberate all sentient beings ... determined to sustain the energy of light of knowledge of buddhas, firmly rooted in the power of great compassion.” Then, after Sudhana paid his respects and requested Avalokiteśvara’s benefaction, the Bodhisattva told him: “I know a way of enlightening practice called ‘undertaking great compassion without delay’, which sets about impartially guiding all sentient beings by communicating knowledge to them through all media. ... [I] take care of them by means of generosity, kind speech, beneficial actions, and cooperation. I also develop sentient beings by appearing in various forms. ... Perfecting this practice of unhesitating compassion, I have vowed to be a refuge for all sentient beings.”

Then Avalokiteśvara said, declaiming a gāthā:

I know a gate of liberation, the embryo of knowledge
Of clouds of compassion of all buddhas,
Born of my own love and operating everywhere
To protect and care for all beings.

After several verses expressing a vast array of detrimental circumstances ordinary beings find themselves in and from which he can deliver them, he concluded with:

By this and infinite other means
I guide sentient beings in the world;
I have developed one liberation,
And cannot know all the virtues of the virtuous.

Sudhana has attended spiritual benefactors
In the worlds of the ten directions
And has not tired of hearing the teachings of the offering of Buddha;
Why would joy not arise while hearing the Teaching?

Avataṃsaka Sūtra. pp. 1277.f. Thomas Cleary, trans. Boston & London, 1993.

Avalokiteśvara then sent Sudhana on to his next spiritual benefactor.

Book 25 of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* is assigned to the fulfillment of virtuous dedication. Being a book of vast implication, it is one of the sūtra's longest, expounding in detail, the ten dedications. Its structure is paralleled identically in the context of Sudhana's journey – book 39 of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* – wherein the spiritual friends he meets – twenty-one through thirty – expound the very same ten dedications as found in Book 25, and in the same order. Where, for example, Book 25–5th dedication is described as that of “inexhaustible treasuries of virtue,” Sudhana's 5th encounter in the ‘dedication series’, Book 39–25 – *Vasumitra* – is described as being “an inexhaustible treasury of goodness and knowledge.” And pointedly, where Book 25–7th dedication is described as that of “equally adapting and according to all sentient beings,” in Book 39–27 – Sudhana's 7th spiritual friend in the ‘dedication series’ – *Avalokiteśvara* describes in his own words, the compassionate practice which sets about “impartially guiding all sentient beings to perfection.”

Enlightening beings' dedication reaches the other shore—
They open the gates of the pure, sublime teaching;
Their knowledge the same as the Buddha,
They analyze the true meaning and attain the ultimate.

Avataṃsaka Sūtra: a verse from Book 25–7th Dedication

Sudhana Cycle No. 27 – Avalokiteśvara : KIDŌ Moriyuki in memoriam
copyright © Phil TRELOAR, March, 2011
