

ARTICLE

A Woman's Koan

Rev. Master Koten

When I first heard about Prajnatarā, Bodhidharma's master, being a woman, I spoke with Rev. Hubert Nearman about it. He told me that not only did it resonate as true with him (He changed Prajnatarā's gender to female in his Shobogenzo translation) but when he was translating the Denkoroku he suspected that the third Chinese ancestor, Kanchi Sosan (Seng-ts'an), was also a woman. This was partially due to the way the Chinese was written but also to the spiritual question (koan) of the person in the story.

To paraphrase the story in light of the above:

Bear in mind that one of Bodhidharma's Dharma heirs, as well as his Teacher, were women.

Bodhidharma's disciple Eka was giving a Dharma talk when a lay woman in the assembly suddenly came forward, bowed and said to him, "I have a fundamental flaw, impediment. Can you help me to get rid of it?"

Eka replied, "Bring it out and show it to me and I will help you."

The laywoman replied, "I have searched for the real nature of it for all of my life but I have been unable to find it."

Eka replied, "There, I have helped you with it!"

"A little girl of seven even may be the teacher of the four classes of Buddhists and the mother of True Compassion to all living things. One of the greatest teachings of Buddhism is its insistence upon the complete equality of the sexes."

—Dogen

How to Meditate Without Sitting Down

Rev. Master Koten

I've been asked to write something about meditation for those who are unable to sit physically in any comfortable way or who have to spend a lot of time in bed.

In considering this I found myself, much to my surprise, wanting to talk, first of all, about Precepts - that is starting with "Do no harm". While you are lying there or trying to go about your day, make a determination - begin the morning with a commitment to try and do no harm, speak no harm, think no harm, wish no harm. When you are distracted, worried, in pain, discouraged, come back to "Do no harm". Remind yourself that whatever else you are unable to do, you can do that and that is, in itself, something useful.

Next, try to let go of the unnecessary such as worry over the news: the world will go on without you - leave it be when it gets overwhelming. Let go of family quarrels - you can't take them with you into the next world.

Try practicing this for several days. There should be more calm. Explore this calm. When you experience a calm moment throughout the day, stop whatever you are doing and rest in it - take refuge in it, trust it. It is a door.