

## Mercy and Compassion

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*The following is a transcript of a Dharma Talk that was offered recently to the community. It has been lightly edited.*

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

Everything is impermanent. Everything is unstable and unsatisfactory, and there is no place to stand. This is great compassion, great mercy. The fact that there is no substance to selfishness, that everything is impermanent and passing away, is great compassion, great mercy. The teaching of emptiness is great compassion and great mercy.

The fact that there is no place where we can put our selfish grasping is great compassion and great mercy. That is why it is said that the substance of emptiness is great compassion.

When we leap beyond all fear; when we let go of grasping and having to have a place to stand, then great compassion, great mercy manifests itself. Kanzeon is that which is on the other side of realizing that everything has no substance. Kanzeon is when we truly understand that everything has no meaning, that no true meaning can be derived from the insubstantial and the impermanent.

When we go beyond our fears -- go beyond the place where there is nothing to rely upon, beyond having to control everything -- then we find great compassion and great mercy concrete and real. But it is a different type of real than what we are used to. We are used to attributing reality to that which is in fact continuously passing away and impermanent. We will all die, we will all become ill, and if we live as long, we will all become old. There is no place where that cannot happen. And whether we are cremated or buried, whether there is a nice monument set up or our remains are scattered to the four winds, our relatives and friends will grieve, and after fifty to a hundred years we will be forgotten.

This means that everything that is impermanent and unsatisfactory is not a refuge and cannot be a true refuge. Most of our time and most of our lives have been spent in trying to hold the self

together; which, as the old saying goes, is like trying to make ropes out of sand. It passes through our fingers. This is frightening. And beyond it is great compassion and great mercy.

If a substantial self did exist, if selfishness were real, then we would be stuck as we are, incapable of change. The fact that we can change is great compassion and great mercy. Particularly around the time when the seasons change, of winter into spring, is considered in Buddhism an excellent time to change. In the East they describe it as if two sections of a bridge come together at the equinox, and one can cross over easily. It's why those two times have a special festival significance; the two times of the spring and the fall equinoxes. And in Japan, they do the ceremony of Segaki, of conversion of the hungry ghosts. Like how we in the West make New Year's resolutions. I don't mean there's anything magical in it, but just that the symbolism of two equal parts of a bridge come together; not too long, and not too short. But they come together and we cross over to the other shore.

All of the teachings of the Buddha, all of the teachings of everything that points us in the direction of letting go and transforming our own selfishness, is great compassion, and great mercy.

Homage to all the Buddhas in all worlds,  
Homage to all the Bodhisattvas in all worlds,  
Homage to the Scripture of Great Wisdom.