

A Story of Faith

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During the last World War a Chinese woman decided to make a pilgrimage to P'u-t'o Shan, the most important shrine to Kuan-yin¹ in the whole of China. Her mother had been greatly devoted to Kuan-Yin and she learned from early childhood to call upon the great Compassionate Ones in time of trouble. Now she was going to make the "journey of her life" to the very house of the Holy One. So, leaving her husband and children at home and in the company of several other pious women, she set out for P'u-t'o Shan.

Along the way the women would stop at each temple to pay their respects and to pray for a good and fruitful journey.

Upon arrival at P'u-t'o Shan the women separated to make their private devotions at the various temples.

This woman went to a small side shrine to pray undisturbed. She lit incense and began her devotions. Suddenly, there was noise in the outer court and a group of Japanese soldiers stumbled into the room. They were drunk. They came towards her. With a cry to Kuan-yin for aid she tried to run but was unsuccessful. The soldiers raped her and then left. She picked herself up slowly and, when she was able, went out to find the other women. She did not tell anyone of what had happened and returned home. She died many years later, her last thoughts of what had happened in that temple. All the while it was going on she saw the face of the Kuan-yin statue looking down. The scripture was wrong, Kuan-yin did not come to save her. She had believed, yet in that moment there was no "great holy power" – only her, the soldiers and the pain. She died in doubt and confusion, leaving an impurity that was passed down to this collection of karma I call "me".

In the process of converting this karma my understanding of faith has changed. This woman did not see that her prayer to Kuan-yin was indeed answered but not in the

way she expected. She did not know that what happened to her was the result of past karma – she could have accepted it on that basis but she did not.

Sometimes Infinite Compassion means allowing karma to work itself out. Sometimes we need to know what pain is like before we stop inflicting it on others. It is not the fault or the problem of Infinite Compassion that beings do not learn but become angry or go into despair.

At all times Kuan-yin tells us to look up, as the statue did to that woman. Indeed that is one of the purposes of a Kuan-yin statue – to tell us to look up. “I am sick.” Look up! “I am alone.” Look up! “I am weary of life.” Look up! “I am in great pain.” Look up! Look up!

The beginning of the religious life for me was the belief “There *must* be something” and the refusal to believe that there was nothing, no meaning to life. Looking up is as this. There *is* an Unborn, Uncreated, Unformed, Undying, Indestructible but I would never have known it if I had not looked up.

Looking up has for me also meant forgetting my judgement of myself when I do so.

Looking up must be pure. We must never be so ashamed that we do not raise our eyes, for no matter what we have done or what has been done to us that Kesa of Gold Brocade embraces us all in its exquisite folds and nothing is outside of it.

Therefore, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift *them* up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he *is* the King of glory.”²

¹ Chinese: Kuan-yin; Sanskrit: Avalokiteshwara.

² These verses are from the King James version of the Old Testament of the *Bible*, in the book of Psalms, Ps. 24 : 9-10.