

## **Wisdom X Compassion = Freedom (with action)**

Good evening,

Like many do I suffer at times from a strong work-a-holic tendency. I can feel uneasy during that society calls a "work day" if I'm not busy, immersed in tasks. And there is so much to do always.

I do feel grateful that my work is all connected to the practice - all connected to meditation and the path to freedom it supports. I serve both as the Guiding Teacher here where I'm grateful to receive a generous stipend, and I'm the Executive Director at Mindfulness Northwest that I founded in 2011 where I receive a salary. Bringing the practice out into the broader world in a more universal framework.

And in both capacities I receive many emails and requests and have long task lists which are never done. And feel obligated to quite a few different people for all kinds of things.

Sometimes I feel grateful and really happy about this state of affairs. And the work is a joy.

For example I did a public event on mindfulness today at Village Books. Susan in our sangha, John Gee's wife, was there and a few other folks. We spent an hour together. I introduced something of mindfulness practice and we did three short practices over the course of the hour. They seemed to really appreciate the time. Felt so good to be there. My judgmental mind did wish for a bigger group - just 6 of us present - but my wiser mind was content: 6 people spending an hour at a bookstore practicing meditation together! Woah.

Sometimes I am tuned into the joy and blessing of this work. Are you tuned into the same in whatever you're doing at times? We are so fortunate in so many ways.

And yet other times I feel anxious and a bit overwhelmed. My motivation to keep pawing through these endless task lists flags. I feel withdrawn. It's hard to focus. I've been trying to study the patterns of this mind, how it comes and goes, and of course I prefer not to feel that way but it seems like sometimes I do.

I had a touch of that this morning and did a little practice with it. I tried to engage with it instead of just starting to crank away.

Do I really have to be so chained to the task list? Of course I want to take care of things and people and respond to requests and do a good job, but.....there's a quality of mind that arises that's just not helpful. It seems to be an emanation of a kind of endless desire to please others. Which tips beyond healthy regard and care, being responsible, tips into a kind of neurotic state.

Do you identify at times as a "pleaser" in a way that tips into unhealthy?

So this morning I decided instead of tasks to start with some calligraphy during my "work time" and remind myself that that's part of my "work" as a priest, to explore the Dharma in it's many forms not just to answer emails and make decisions and initiate new programs and so on.

It felt like a kind of therapy to devote myself to calligraphy as part of my Dharma "work" as Guiding Teacher.

And I think part of it was to help me feel anew that the Dharma isn't just about ideas and words and things I can read and think about and type up and explain. Dharma is also in the hands brushing these characters. In the shapes of them. In the feeling of them.

Not that my version of Chinese characters has some special and particular magic but that all things do if we can tune in and appreciate them. And that Dharma is something we do, something we live, something we experience not just a bunch of ideas.

As I set down to work I was thinking about how wisdom and compassion are such a core pairing in Buddhism. Sometimes called the two wings of the bird that takes flight towards freedom when we practice deeply. Without either one we can't fly straight. So I learned from my Kaz Tanahashi book how to brush these two. Wisdom and compassion.



It's an extra delight was to create a few pieces for these two beautiful frames Neil Engledow created for us. These are actually for a future zendo. The calligraphy piece is a separate board in the middle you can pop out - so we can rotate different pieces in. Later take a close look at the intricate woodworking he can do. He has fancy machine for sure but also a lot of skill.

The etymology of these characters is interesting. Compassion here is zi on top "to nurture lovingly" and shin "heart/mind" below. Shin is a character we refer to constantly. It's the heart of Heart Sutra. In Modern Japanese it's pronounced kokoro which I just love to say.

So nurturing lovingly with the heart/mind. Maybe that's what I was giving myself springing free from the computer for an hour or two to get out brushes and ink. And of course that's what we can do for each other.

The other piece of the usual definition of compassion is to feel suffering. In my little example here to feel the anxiety and fear that was burbling down there - to greet it lovingly. I did okay there, trying not to push it away or reject it or solve it but to meet it. To be in relationship with it. The zi on top also has to do with caring for the family. So to care for all of the aspects of ourselves - this inner family - not rejecting any family members within or without.

And as we attend to each other and our burning, shooting, world - to be willing to feel the suffering everywhere and turn towards it with loving hands as best we can.

That said, here are the names of the confirmed victims of Tuesday's shooting in Texas and I was so saddened to see the death count just keeps growing:

## **Confirmed Victims of the Texas Shooting**

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*Uziyah Garcia*

*Nevaeh Bravo*

*Amerie Garza*

*Jackie Cazares*

*Xavier Lopez*

*Annabelle Rodriguez*

*Tess Mata*

*Eliahna Torres*

*Ellie Garcia*

*Makenna Lee Elrod*

*Rojelio Torres*

*Lexi Rubio*

*Jose Flores*

*Eva Mireles, teacher*

*Jailah Silguero*

*Irma Garcia, teacher*

*Jayce Luevanos*

[pause]

Wisdom is seeing clearly, free from the distortion of clinging and confusion. There are a few different words than can be translated as "wisdom" - this character is actually for "bodhi" - called satori in Japanese which can also refer

to an experience of awakening but the wisdom of awakeness is better I think. Here the top part has two sections - the square is a mouth: speaking truth, speaking wisely, and these shapes here is an arrow somehow that represents "continuously" and it's all over the character for the sun: for light.

The other, more principal word for wisdom is prajna. Which is a different character and a quite complex one - I'll try brushing that later.

Wisdom and compassion.

I want to share two short essays on wisdom and compassion and then invite a little discussion/exploration time.

## Wisdom x Compassion = Freedom

BY DUNCAN RYUKEN WILLIAMS | AUGUST 31, 2020

In order to benefit people's lives and society effectively, it is vital to present the wisdom of Buddhism in ways that are skillfully tailored for this time and place and society. The Sanskrit term upaya is usually translated as "skillful means," but I prefer to render it as "skillful adaptation."

The 2,600-year history of Buddhism is replete with examples of skillful adaptations to specific individual or cultural situations. But the teaching of upaya is especially important during our current global pandemic moment—when the world has been revealed to be interlinked and we need to understand the wisdom of dharma more than ever.

For example, several years ago I was invited to speak to a convention of several hundred middle and high school students associated with a network of historic Japanese American Buddhist temples. During the Q and A that followed my lecture, one of the students said that when he told his Christian classmates he was a Buddhist, their question was inevitably, "What is Buddhism?"

Somewhat stumped at how best to answer the question, this high school student asked for advice on a simple way to articulate what the Buddhist tradition stands for, in a way that non-Buddhist Americans could understand, relate to, and hopefully appreciate.

Our times call on us to seek freedom in the midst of constraints.

The best I could come up with in that moment was this formula: Wisdom x Compassion = Freedom. Wisdom because so much of what Buddhism offers is perspective, seeing things clearly. Compassion because clarity of insight presupposes interlinked existence—life as a net of jewels, each jewel a precious being, enmeshed as an infinite mirror to see ourselves. Multiplying that insight with a sense that we are not alone leads to freedom. This freedom is not privatized, but recognizes that liberation is for all beings.

Subsequently, young people have told me they find the formula effective because most Americans, whatever their religious affiliation, instinctively respond to the idea of freedom. In English, we often use words like “enlightenment,” “awakening,” “nirvana,” or “liberation” to describe the goal of the Buddhist path, but for high school age Buddhists facing skepticism about their faith, “freedom” appears to be the better word choice.

More than that, this could be a helpful summary of Buddhist wisdom to offer to American society as a whole. Surely everyone would benefit from understanding that the powerful combination of wisdom and compassion—the very essence of Buddhism—leads to that all-American value, freedom. This is not just freedom in the purely political sense, though; it is freedom in the deepest, most profound sense, spiritual as well as personal.

A wisdom response to sadness, a compassionate response to loneliness, a freedom response to fear—these are what we must offer. Our times call on us to seek freedom in the midst of constraints, to imagine beyond conventions, and to feel the interlinked nature of suffering and its alleviation.

AND

# Peace Begins With Peaceful Actions

BY [JAN WILLIS](#)

Sharing this tiny planet amidst a vast universe, we are all interconnected beings, incapable even for a nanosecond of complete independence. Yet we conduct our lives as though we each possessed complete and ultimate control of our individual, isolated universes. We imagine enemies and competitors, and we fight for our share. Though we can sometimes envision a peaceful world, it becomes almost natural to see violence as inevitable and peace as impossible. But it is not.

We know in our hearts that violence does not bring peace, that hatred breeds more hatred, and that only with love and compassion can hatred ever truly be appeased. Many of us sometimes happily sing along with the words of John Lennon's song:

Imagine all the people, living life in peace.  
You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.  
hope someday you'll join us, and the world will live as one.

We seem to know innately, with our hearts, what is right, proper and just. We recognize that, as human beings, we all wish to be happy and to avoid suffering. If we could, we would change the world so that every being enjoyed respect, peace, happiness and ease. Yet often it seems we don't know how, or where, to start.

I believe we have to start with very small actions. We may not, by ourselves, be able to change the entire world all at once, but we can begin to change a tiny piece of it in our everyday environment.

We have many wise guidelines. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., for example, that African-American bodhisattva of our time, reminded us that we cannot truly be free until all human beings are free. He once noted that, "As long as there is poverty in the world, I can never be totally rich... As long as



people are afflicted with debilitating diseases, I can never be totally healthy... I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.” But Dr. King also knew—and demonstrated—that any war for freedom must be a war waged with love.

In 1963, as a teenager, I had the good fortune of participating in the “Birmingham campaign” for civil rights led by Reverend King. It was a hopeful time. Feeling part of a larger community of like-minded nonviolent protestors, I felt buoyed up by the possibility of triumph over injustice. When, later, after leaders like Malcolm X, King and the Kennedys had been struck down by violence, a period of hopelessness settled in.

For many of us today that hopelessness still seems to hold sway. And so, before we endeavor to change the world, we need to rekindle hope again. The thing I’ve learned about hope, however, is that it grows from action, not from thought. If we wish to see an enlightened world of peace and justice for all, we have to move beyond merely imagining it, to nonviolent actions, however small, that will help to usher it in. This goes for politicians as well.

Let's discuss this in groups of 3. How can you practice wisdom and compassion more? And what action, not matter how small, might you bring to help this burning world grow in wisdom and compassion? No matter how small. And please practice compassion with yourself around this if like many of us you feel like you aren't doing enough and so on. Be kind, be wise. And set intention. Wisdom x Compassion = Freedom says Duncan Ryuken Williams and Jan Willis might add that this Freedom manifests fully with wise, compassionate action in the world.