

Flash News TenBoRin April 2020

Message from Guy Mokuhô Mercier



My dear friends of the Way.

Sickness is present everywhere in the world, this is a fact. We all know about so many sufferings which result from it, and feel ourselves to be totally powerless in such a situation. At this moment, we see true acts of generosity appear spontaneously, and exemplary conduct just like that of bodhisattvas, who symbolise the Buddhist ideal, but at the same time, really horrible attitudes and an inextinguishable thirst in some who try to profit from this suffering.

It's a very opportune moment to remember the teachings of the sutra of Inconceivable Freedom, subtitled "*The teachings of Vimalakirti*" a major text and one of the most beautiful pearls of Mahayana Buddhism.

What lesson can we draw, each one of us, in the face of the painful intensity of this epidemic which is affecting all people now, obliging them to live in confinement, separating them from each other.

What does the Sutra of Inconceivable Freedom say?

"The layman Vimalakirti, a model of Buddhist accomplishment, worked for the good of beings by suggesting innumerable expedients for salvation. He was gifted with all the qualities of a Buddha. He had realised patience in respect to the non-existence of birth and death, the emptiness of all things, and his eloquence was a match for all obstacles. He had adopted the majestic bearing of the Awakened and his heart was vast as the ocean. His only concern was for the good of all beings."

Is there any person in the world today who could match these characteristics?

The innumerable qualities of the bodhisattva Vimalakirti are also ours. But how can we use these virtues to assist all beings? This is the great question that has its answer in the heart of the practice of the Buddhist Way.

How can we stop lying to ourselves, only thinking of ourselves, of our appearance, our security and our comfort at the expense of others?

No being can have an existence without the presence of others. Recognising this interdependence frees the hidden qualities of the bodhisattva within us, to put them to the service of others. It is just as much a personal liberation as a collective one.

It was very clever of Vimalakirti to make people think he was ill. For, because he was ill, the king, ministers, householders, lay adepts, brahmins, princes, functionaries and many thousands of people came to see him, to get his news and benefit from his teachings.

Buddha begged his disciples , successively, to go to Vimalakirti's bedside to get news of his health.

All the great disciples, Shariputra, Maudgalyana, Kashyapa, Subhuti, Purna, Katyayana, Aniruddha, Upali, Rahula, Ananda, Maitreya and many other bodhisattvas, who had already met Vimalakirti, expressed their reluctance, and refused the Buddha's request. Each one of them had previously received criticism from Vimalakirti about their understanding and practice of the teachings. And each one of them was very afraid of once more coming face to face with such a being and being thought ignorant. This is to show how insignificant and ashamed they felt at the very idea of meeting Vimalakirti.

The exchanges that took place with each one of the disciples in turn with Vimalakirti are of shining depth and mind blowing. As the sutra explains, Vimalakirti's answers penetrated " the real appearance of things" a synonym for the word emptiness, which makes one single Truth from Impermanence and Reality. This is also the essential theme of the Sutra of Great Wisdom, Hannyā, the Heart Sutra.

Each one of us should study these mondos deeply to understand the correct attitude to cultivate in order to manifest our spiritual life in our everyday life, to develop our understanding of Reality and to allow our bodhisattva nature to emerge.

Eventually Manjushri, who was braver than the others, agreed to go to Vimalakirti to ask after his health and to take him the sublime thoughts of Buddha.

After a welcome that in itself shows the magnitude of Vimalakirti's realisation, the exchange begins:

Manjushri asked Vimalakirti:

" Tell me if your sickness is bearable, if it becomes less with certain treatment, or if it gets worse? The Venerable One has asked me to get news of you. So, lay adept, what is the cause of your sickness? Will it last a long time? How will it end?"

Vimalakirti replied:

" My sickness comes from ignorance and thirst. I am sick because all beings are sick, and my sickness will only end on the day that all beings are cured. It is on behalf of beings that the bodhisattva plunges into the circle of death and rebirth (Samsara) Between birth and death, that's where there is sickness.

When beings get better, so does the bodhisattva.

You ask me the cause of my sickness. Truly, the bodhisattva's sickness has only one cause, that is compassion."

The exchange between Manjushri and Vimalakirti is extremely transparent and clear, ceaselessly expanding the limits of our understanding towards the Source, the Origin of things and their appearance as real. Every practitioner, every disciple of Buddha, should read and re-read these 'Sermons' as each reading makes us discover a new facet of the sparkling diamond of the Great Wisdom and penetrate into the splendour of the bodhisattva mind.

It is in the heart of meditation that, suddenly or progressively, we develop understanding of what the Great Wisdom is, an intuitive understanding and a vision of emptiness. The true end of suffering that we call Nirvana, results when we see that the 'me' which we believe to be real, is just a dream, an illusion, that things have no real nature, that is to say, they only appear due to causes and conditions, which in their turn have no beginning or end, and that trying to seize and own things is to suffer in vain.

The bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, speaking to Shariputra in the Sutra of Great Wisdom, as the bodhisattva Vimalakirti responding to Manjushri in the Sutra of Inconceivable Freedom, teach the Prajnaparamita, transcendental wisdom or the perfection of wisdom. Maka Hannya in Japanese. This wisdom is the legitimate terrain and true nature of every being.

To be understood on a daily basis, this Wisdom is broken down into several paramitas, practices of perfection or virtues that each being should cultivate to achieve liberation.

The paramitas "*practices to reach the other bank*" are the foundation of life of all beings in the continuum of existence. The 'other bank' is liberation, things are seen as they are, illusion is seen to be an illusion.

They indicate appropriate conduct for each circumstance, each relationship, right conduct for reaching the end of suffering.

They are universal and we know them in two ways: from an intuitive understanding of what is true and correct, which each being is endowed with, and on the other hand, from our true nature, of which the paramitas are the light. Every being knows intuitively what are their virtues and values, but they don't want to see or practise them. They may even have forgotten them in seeking to satisfy their continual desire to find happiness in objects.

The paramitas are six in number:

Dana – giving, charity, generosity
Shila – discipline, morality
Ksanti – patience
Virya – determination, effort, perseverance.
Dhyana – meditation, peace and deep vision.
Prajna – wisdom, discernment.

Certain buddhist traditions add four more:

Upaya – correct action
Pranidhana – pious vows
Bala – resolution
Jnana – knowledge of the correct definition of all the dharmas, the phenomena.

Each paramita includes all the others, that is to say that in the practice of each virtue, we need to bring all the others in to perfect it.

In the actual circumstances of this pandemic-ridden spring, it seems more apt to talk about patience, a virtue that is often abandoned, but which we need so much just now, whilst living our daily life in confinement.

That will be for the next communication.

Take care of yourselves and others.

With all my best wishes.

Guy Mokuhô.

Tokyo testimony

Closely connected to China, Japan was first in line when the sanitary crisis started in Wuhan, particularly with the visit of hundreds of thousands of Chinese tourists benefiting from New Year holidays at the end of January.

Surprisingly, Japan did not cancel the flights coming from China.

Mid-february, first measures were announced : cancelling of flights coming from specific areas only (such as Wahan). And at work, instructions for hand-washing with alcoholic solution, for the wearing of masks during meetings, and for respecting social distancing rules.

At the beginning of March, schools were closed, but universities were not.



Teleworking was recommended to all Japanese who had to take the train.

Streets are still very busy with pedestrian without masks, all shops remain open although measures for social distancing between customers have become the rule.

Trains are overcrowded ; however the « just necessary measure » rule do wonders.

Two months after the beginning of the crisis, the percentage of dead per unhabitant remains one of the lowest in the world.

Then at the end of March, the second wave of the epidemic arrived from Europe. New cases were recorded and on top, there is the up-coming of the Hanami festival (cherry blossom) which brings the whole city of Tokyo in the parks.

At this point, I still don't understand what allowed the oldest country in the world where people still smoke in restaurants, to escape this crisis.

Is it the high degree of general hygiene ? Courtesies excluding all physical contact ? this remains a mystery !

But we are not at the end of the road yet !

Sebastian Mokusen

Barcelona testimony



Dear friends,

wife Maricarme and I have been confined in our apartment in Barcelona since the 13th of March. I would like to share this extraordinary experience with you.

As you will no doubt know, the situation in Spain is one of the most complicated in Europe, along with Italy. It's the result of a health service weakened by years of crisis, and also, I may as well say it, the anarchic and undisciplined character of the Spanish, who only followed the recommendations too late.

The situation is particularly grave in Madrid and Barcelona, where health workers haven't got enough protection, which has caused a great number of infections in that sector. At the moment, the hospitals in those two large towns are overwhelmed, to the extent that doctors are in the very difficult position of having to choose who to care for.

I now acknowledge more and more the importance of spirituality and our practice, which allow us some objectivity about the situation, finding a peaceful space, although we are not immune to certain fears and insecurities.

In all this chaos, there is some good news. It's obvious that this type of situation brings out the best and the worst in people. There are some solidarity movements, which each have their own sphere of activity (helping the aged or homeless, giving financial aid, artistic endeavours on line to make confinement more pleasant..) Finally, a very surprising thing : **clean air in Barcelona, silence, dolphins near the beach.**

At the level of practice in the Barcelona Dojo, there is a new initiative, thanks to Laura Llimona, a nun at the Centre, who has set up a link every evening at 7 pm on Instagram, which gives us the feeling of sharing our practice.

So, on a personal level, we are living with acceptance our confinement and feel sad and powerless in the face of so many deaths. Despite everything, the days go quickly, we have naturally fallen into a daily rhythm : meditation, working online, lots of cooking, physical exercise, limited news, and taking up some activities again that we had more or less abandoned, like reading and Tai Chi.

Sending you our warmest wishes. And hoping all is well with you.

Hope to see you soon.

Pere

Testimony from switzerland



Life is what happens to you when you're busy making other plans.

John Lennon, [Beautiful Boy](#)

The corona virus is the perfect implementation of this sentence by John Lennon. Since mid-March, the dojo has been closed, confinement obliges, and like many, we do zazen "together", at the usual hours. And the question arises: "what zazen should we practice? »

There is a lot of distress, suffering, fear all around us, and perhaps also within us. Practicing in this time of confusion is an opportunity to experience in our deepest being this beautiful reflection that opens the Essays on Zen Buddhism by DT Suzuki :

"Zen is, in its essence, the art of seeing into the nature of one's being; it points the way from slavery to freedom. By making us drink directly from the source of life, it frees us from all the yokes under which, as limited creatures, we constantly suffer. »

Zazen, in these difficult times, is more than ever an opportunity to experience the fact that Life is ONE, and thus to awaken us to our true Buddha nature, which is nothing but impermanence. To enter into the unity of life is at the same time to join all beings - since nothing separates us - and to open ourselves to true compassion.

Rejecting nothing, choosing nothing, seeing passions and letting them pass: it is both the cessation of suffering and the practice of compassion.

Of course, it is difficult!... Let us practice all the more assiduously!

Let's take care of ourselves, of our loved ones, and of our "distant ones".

If you want to walk

Towards final peace

Smile at the fate that befalls you

And don't hit anyone

Omar Khayyam

Groupe zen de Sion-Conthey



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