

Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo (Ten Phrase Life Prolonging Kannon Sutra).



Towards the end of his life, the great Zen Master Hakuin (1689-1769) (self-portrait, left) took an increasing interest in life outside the monastery and in the lives and practices of his lay disciples, government ministers and the aristocracy. In a letter dated 1754 to Lord Nabeshima he tells of the virtues required of a good leader and the merits attached to recitation of the Enmei Jukku Kannon Gyo (Ten Phrase Life Prolonging Kannon Sutra).

Along with the letter he sent a copy of the Sutra and told Lord Nabeshima of the miracles that were associated with its recitation, both in China and Japan. Hakuin expresses the hope that his lordship will recite it two or three hundred times each day and encourage his retainers, the uneducated and illiterate, to do so as well.

He goes on: 'The reason lies in the testing. Give this to those who are seriously ill or have met with disaster for their consolation. If it is recited with sincerity, miracles will without fail be accomplished and the person who recites it will be free from disease and attain a long life. This applies to anyone at all.'

Hakuin tells of a man in ancient China called Kao-huang, who was sentenced to be executed. He was a man of firm religious faith and around midnight of the day before his execution he was meditating upon Kannon, when the form of the Bodhisattva appeared before him. He was told that if he could recite the Kannon Sutra a thousand times in the night, his life would be saved. Pleading that this was impossible, he was told to begin nonetheless. The next morning, when he was about to be killed, the sword snapped and so did all others that were tried. The amazed executioner enquired as to the reason and was told the story, whereupon Kao-huang was pardoned. Ever since this Sutra has been held in high esteem and many have been saved or healed through reciting it.

kan ze on 觀世音

na mu butsu 南無佛

yo butsu u in 與佛有因

yo butsu u en 與佛有緣

butsu ho so en 佛法僧緣

jo raku ga jo 常樂我淨

cho nen kan ze on 朝念觀世音

bo nen kan ze on 暮念觀世音

nen nen ju shin ki 念念從心起

nen nen fu ri shin 念念不離心

The first six lines of this verse establish the bodhisattva Kannon (Kanzeon) as a being worthy of "mindful remembrance" (nen 念, S. smiti) and prayers for help, typically by calling his name in "mindful recitation" (nen 念): "Homage to Kanzeon Bodhisattva" (namu Kanzeon Bosa 南無觀世音菩薩). Lines three and four play on the term innen 因縁, which in Buddhist philosophy refers to "immediate causes (in 因) and enabling conditions (en 縁)," but in common Japanese parlance means something like "karmic affinity." "Permanence, ease, selfhood, and purity" (jō raku ga jō 常樂我淨) are the four attributes of nirvana, which is free from the impermanence (mujō 無常), suffering (ku 苦), lack of self (muga 無我), and impurity (fujō 不淨) that characterizes all things (hō 法. S. dharmas) in the round of birth and death (shoji 生死, S. sasāra). The final two lines turn away from Kanzeon as an object of devotion and focus attention on the mind (one's own mind) in which thoughts of that bodhisattva arise: that mind, in its essence, is nothing other than the buddha-mind (busshin 佛心) itself. This combination of devotional and introspective practice was typical of the Buddhism of Ming dynasty (1644-1912) China, which had a big influence on Japanese Zen.

There is a translation by Philip Yampolsky
Kanzeon! Salutation and devotion to the Buddha!
We are one with the Buddha
In cause and effect related to all Buddhas
and to Buddha Dharma and Sangha.
Our true nature is
Eternal, Joyous, Selfless and Pure.
So let us chant every mornong Kanzeon with Nen (attention)
Every evening Kanzeon with Nen!
Nen Nen arises from Mind Nen
Nen is not separate from Mind.

English translation by Maezumi Roshi
Kanzeon!
At one with the Buddha,
Related to all Buddhas in cause and effect,
And to Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
Joyful pure eternal being.
Morning mind is Kanzeon,
Evening mind is Kanzeon.
This very moment arises from mind,
This very moment is not separate from mind.