

Inka Speech

BY JO POTTER JDPSN

Inka Speech by Jo Potter, May 3 2008, Berlin Zen Center in Germany

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

Kindness and cruelty are opposite sides of one form.

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

Originally no kindness, no cruelty, and no form!

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

Kindness is kindness. Cruelty is cruelty.

Which do you choose?

KATZ!

About 15 years ago I took the five precepts here in Berlin Zen Center. One of the precepts was especially important to me: I vow not to kill. It was the beginning of a salvation adventure. I went home and began to save everything; I would carefully pick up every insect which I found in the house, take it outside and set it free. Then my life-partner Sush started to do the same thing grumbling at the start. Sush is German which meant that we started to save every single snail in the garden with great Prussian discipline. We don't boil them or cut them in half or otherwise torture them like the neighbours do. We take them to the park late at night and release them. We catch every sentient mouse that the cats bring in at 4:30 in the morning and save them along with every bird and every spider. Gradually out of this saving action a direction for our life started to form. Today I am extremely grateful to my Zen practice for the appearance of this direction which is evolving into establishing a foundation with the purpose of helping to alleviate the suffering of animals upon our earth.

A few years ago I was chilling out neck deep in a swimming pool in sunny Arizona. Suddenly a wasp came barrelling into the pool and landed upside down right in front of me. It was struggling ferociously but couldn't get its wings out of the water. My work was clear; save the wasp and so I carefully pushed the wasp towards the edge of the pool. This was dangerous because I am extremely allergic to wasp bites. Upon arrival at the edge of the pool I firmly flicked the wasp over the edge of the pool. What I did not see was that

there was a bird practicing Yong Maeng Jon Jin at the edge of the pool. We call our Zen retreats Yong Maeng Jon Jin and it means something similar to: Sitting like a tiger before it leaps on its food! I saved the wasp and the bird immediately ate it!

It was good insight into the teachings of the Buddha. Actually it is the little things in life that teach us so well. I realized that I had better open my eyes when helping others because maybe my help might make their life hell.

This means cultivating awakened eyes, ears, smell sense, taste and tongue, touch sense, and becoming aware of our thinking processes - in short all six gates as we call them in Zen.

When I was about thirteen years old, my father would come home after work and tell my brothers and me really dumb jokes. We were his captive audience! I loved his dumb jokes and stories because something would awaken in me when listening. He once told us a story about Don Pedro. Don Pedro was sobbing one day when his neighbour came by. The neighbour asked; "Don Pedro! Why are you crying? Is your wife sick?" Don Pedro replied:

"No! It is worse than that! My donkey has died!" The neighbour looked at the donkey and said; "Don Pedro, it looks to me like your donkey died of starvation. He is so skinny!"

Don Pedro said; "Ya! That is the point! I was teaching him how not to eat and then he went and died!"

Buddha taught that everything — just as it is — is complete. But is this how we live? How much do we really notice as our lives pass away? Our lives starve away without us realizing our true nature or acting out our work as true human beings.

A short time ago we received a letter from Animals Angels, an organization whose members accompany animals like cows, pigs horses and other animals to slaughter and check to make sure that the animals receive the minimal on care during the transport like water and rest periods. The letter was about one woman in Canada who was asking for donations. She needed money to bring to the public attention the plight of the male boars in the forests of Canada called "boar bashing". The boars would be injured by their human captors before transport so that the boars would not fight with each other during transport because they were in such pain. So we sent a donation and later she wrote back telling us that she had successfully brought the situation to the public and to officials. The public was extremely upset. As a result of her efforts the situation had stopped. That was the work of one true human being. It only takes one person. Who is this person? Whose suffering was stopped? Did she only alleviate the suffering of the boars or didn't she also alleviate the suffering of the people who were hurting the boars?

Once I was explaining to Bon Shim SSN about our wish to help animals. She asked me the following very wise question: “Jo, what is more important to help: a human being or an animal?”

So how can we help? How can we develop skilful means to work with the people who were hurting the boars? For sure those people don't want to be judged as being bad or wrong by us the “good Buddhists”. Surely helping those people would also help the boars! How can we be more attentive to what our tongues say?

I would like to share with you my favorite Zen story which illustrates the use of skilful means. Long ago in the deep forests of Korea a young man and a young woman fell deeply in love with each other and decided to marry and together start a home. They were happy and everyone benefited by their radiant love. One day a knock came on the door. It was the groom's mother and the bride's mother-in-law. The mother-in-law asked if she could live with them because she was old and alone. They agreed.

But as soon as she moved in she began to make the young bride's life hell. Nothing was good enough for her son: a long list of complaints began, including the food being terrible and the house not orderly enough. The young bride became extremely unhappy and decided she would kill her mother-in-law. She ran to the temple and pleaded to the Abbot to help her to kill the old woman. The Abbot agreed to help her. He ran into his personal room and brought out a small pot. “This is poison lotion” he said. “Every night take some lotion and massage your mother-in-law's feet thoroughly with it. Do this for one month and without fail she will die!” The young woman was extremely grateful and began that very night with the foot massage. She massaged each of her mother-in-law's feet with complete attention. Then suddenly a strange thing started to happen. After a few days the mother in law started to help make the meals. And after two weeks, the old woman started to make special tea and cake and praise her daughter-in-law. And after three weeks the young bride began to realize that she cared deeply for the old woman. Horrified she ran to the Abbot. “How is the lotion working?” he asked. “You must help me again!” she gasped. “My mother-in-law has become the most wonderful person. I don't want her to die!” So the Abbot calmed her down and said: “Don't worry, there was no poison in the lotion. It was the love and kindness in your actions. It was what you made.”

To me that abbot was a very good abbot. He could have been judgmental and angry with the young woman and her wish to kill. He could have condemned her by saying: “You will break the precepts! It is wrong and immoral to kill!” We all know that Abbots take precepts seriously. But in this case the Abbot used very skilful means and responded to the real cry of this young woman's pain and desolation and he truly helped her.

This story points to awakening to everyday situation and developing skilful means to really help each other in a clear way. There is a great Arabian saying: “When the mind is blind the eyes cannot see.” So please, let us awaken our minds, so that we can see clearly and let us develop our practice to help us go in that direction. I end this Dharma talk by expressing my

gratitude to Zen Master Seung Sahn, and our very good teachers, to my beloved Sangha and to my life partner Sush. Thank you for listening!

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

A human being is an animal. An animal is a human being.

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

Originally no human being and no animal!

(Raises Zen stick overhead and hits table)

A human being is a human being and an animal is an animal!

So I ask you: which is more important to help?

KATZ!

After the ceremony there is food and drinks for us. Later our cats are waiting for us to feed them.

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