

The Compassion Teachings

I. Noah's Wife

Wednesday, July 7, 2010

Beloved, unknown Teachers. Is this a moment to begin the summer work? I am quite rested now, and Kwan Yin says, this might be a good time to begin.

Good morning, faithful student. Yes, we can begin now. We have many things we would like to teach you, but today, we will start with a teaching about the relationship between compassion and suffering, or, as you named it last month, the dark face of the goddess. What is the other side of the compassionate face? We will speak about gods and goddesses, male and female, the rule of the fathers, and the essential equilibrium that must establish itself. There will be guidance here for your community and your society, but more on that much later. Consider this now as a gentle start on a longer project, that may well last into the fall. The important thing this week is just to begin, so we stretch your doorways and make this a comfortable and indeed, even nourishing process for you.

Your world faces an intense crisis: the very survival of civilized human life as you know it is at risk. Many thinkers are deeply aware of this. They argue passionately on behalf of environmental consciousness, the needs of the poor and the marginal, and the deep gulfs opening between those with much and those with nothing. Time and space have become claustrophobic, as more and more recognize the limits pressing in on them. Some respond in horror and fear; some respond with denial and escape; and some respond with violence and greed. Never has it been more important for many of you to stand still in your place, open your minds and hearts to the fullest consciousness you are capable of, and then to begin to create a world based on reality. Never before has humanity faced such a decision point. We will speak more about this later, but it is critical you remember at all times there is no need for everyone to come to this awareness. All that is necessary is that there be enough of you, aware, fully conscious, to be able to shift the balance of the world mind, the world energies. One fully conscious person has much more impact on the world around her, energetically, than she can possibly imagine, whereas the unconscious person has little impact. After all,

that is one meaning of “unconscious,” disconnected from the world systems of mind and energies.

The Silence of Noah’s Wife

You have in your religious tradition the old story of the Great Flood, when God wearied of people and decided to clear out the planet and start over with “his” project. This crisis is perhaps of similar mythic scope, but this is not a time for Noah or a Noah solution. Noah invited only his own family to join him on his ark. It is precisely that kind of thinking which has led to your current crisis: save the near and dear, and the rest be damned! Noah may have saved a tiny sample of creation with that gesture, but it was a gesture of ego, of little mind. His guilt for surviving the devastation has permeated the karmic inheritance of all his descendents; he remains the image of ego-limited solutions to planetary problems.

And the human task ever since, as every religious tradition testifies, has been to break open that tightly constricted heart and mind until all of life can flow in. This has been the theme of human history, the work of the world’s teachers and holy ones, and the spirited quest of all the seekers of the world. Every real story about the human condition probes this issue. Noah is the emergence of ego, and ever after humans have wrestled with how to civilize ego, with all the meanings that might have. Please note: ego is not to be destroyed, for that is also a moment of new consciousness. Noah had heard the voice: prepare for the flood, and he responded, as requested. The journey of consciousness cannot, must not go backwards. One may yearn for Eden or Shambhala, but one shall not struggle to return there. The way is out, forward, towards ever more consciousness, not backward to immersion again in species life. Few wish to take up that task, for the way towards more consciousness is arduous and often painful. But let us say again: enough of you are walking that path, that subtle and very significant energy shifts are well under way.

So why would we suggest a teaching on the “dark face of the goddess?” What we have said so far is a brief summary of the main point of your first long teaching from Manjushri. The problems facing humans were sketched there with a very broad stroke. It is crucial for the students to have the largest possible understanding of the entire context of their own immediate worries about their world. What is needed now is a deeper discussion of the medicine, if you will, for these problems. In the first volume, we taught of the current situation. In this next volume, we will discuss some of the deep

causes of this nexus of world threatening problems and then tell a story that might help you to re-imagine ways of moving forward, of opening up the heart-center to more fruitful ways to engage. If the first volume was the Wisdom Teachings, then this one will be the Compassion Teachings. For wisdom and compassion must balance and join. Ignorance must be dissipated and heart-mind must fling open all its windows and doors. This teaching is the next step of that large understanding.

Why the goddess and why her dark face? That will take many sittings to explain fully, but very briefly here, so you know how to orient yourself to this work: Noah's wife did not want to get on the ark. She argued long and hard for other ways – argue with God, for example. But her main point was that they must remain with their people and work out responses together, as a community. Stubborn Noah refused, insisting better to save themselves than to all go down in the promised flood. That is male thinking – focused, intentional, responsible for those dependent upon him, and pragmatic. Very pragmatic. Noah's wife (and note that we do not even know her name) is silenced; her voice does not appear in the story. But we know she was not silent. How could she be? She faced leaving her friends behind, her rich network of community, her gardens and the neighborhood children, bird song, the elders she visited. How could she be silent? But Noah did not listen, could not listen, or he would have been unable to focus and build his great ark and gather in the species he would protect. Many creatures pleaded with him for a berth. He refused each one.

We wish now to retrieve the voice of Noah's wife: the compassionate one, with a different kind of courage, in her willingness to face the wrathful deity and argue for a change of course, and her willingness to remain embedded in her community fully aware of its suffering and danger. That is the fearless heart in the story, not the frenzied building of an ark to ride out the storm. Wall Street is not the answer. Technology is not the answer. Stealing the resources of others is not the answer. War is not the answer. Compassion is rooted in one's own suffering. Pity is the response to others' suffering. Only when one realizes there is no separation between self and other, and so another's suffering is also one's own, only then can there be compassion. Boarding the ark is separation. This time, there is no ark. This time, the only response possible is that of Noah's wife. That is what we call, "the dark face of the goddess." And so we begin.

Thursday, July 8, 2010

(It is an absolutely gorgeous morning; the great lake is calm and the air is sweet. I have dragged myself to the sofa and my laptop, to start receiving the new material. It is always so difficult at the start. The energy is challenging; there is so much else I would rather do – clear out some brush which blocks my view of the lake, weed a year’s worth from the peonies, or go for a kayak ride. But I promise myself, in the only exercise of will power all day, I will sit down quietly and listen. It is hard, the combination of alert listening and holding my mind as calm and empty, undisturbed, as I can. Otherwise my language interferes with reception. Language, always language. What separates us from other species, and what can so often separate us from each other.)

Good morning, dear Teacher.

Good morning, dear student. Yes, the first days are always difficult for you. We are grateful you keep trying to do this. May it fill you with energy and blessing as well. This can be a short teaching today; it is important to keep the channel open and available. We ended yesterday pointing to Noah’s wife’s desire to stay with her community, and if necessary, suffer together. In its simplest meaning, compassion means, to suffer with. That is the female way. The male way is to treat the sufferer as an object, “over there,” and then to offer sympathy or pity. That distances the suffering, rather than bring it close. There are moments when that is appropriate; one cannot always choose to suffer with. Limits reflect the range of emotional and psychological capacity of each person; it is a crucial task to learn one’s own limits and respect them. No blame in that. In fact, it reflects discernment and good judgment, aspects of wisdom.

One other preliminary issue. Please note, we are not going to discuss the “dark goddess,” but the “dark face of the goddess.” They are in the end related, but let us begin with a clear focus on the latter. The goddess, the feminine aspect of Source, or how humans have imaged that, to be more precise, is the receptive pole of the circulation of the Great Energy or Great Mind. She receives all energy and then sends it back out, in the great and unimaginable pulse of all that is. She is “before form.” Because all forms return to her as well, humans have understood her or imagined her to be dark, the receptacle of forms, the place of invisibility and darkness and formlessness. Fear of her, fear of formlessness, is engraved in the very DNA of humans, with its association with death, decay, and dissolution. But those

are simply one portal into her realm, and surely not the only one. Humans see only this aspect of her, and because they fear death, they color her dark and fear her. Little mind, ego, recognizes her own formlessness, her brief appearance in an embodied life, and fills with terror. Some of that is projected out onto the goddess, and she becomes the dark goddess: Kali, the witch, the dangerous shaman, Erishkagal with her eyes of death, and all the others.

You are confused. This may be too much coming too fast and too early in our work together. Let us stop and clarify. Let us begin with “there is form and there is formlessness,” though even that is not the true beginning. The true beginning is that there is only One, and it divides into form and formlessness. Neither of those is substantial, however; each continually transforms into the other. All is process, all that is moves into form and then out of form, on and on. They are “moments” captured as if with a camera, but in the capturing, form has already shifted towards formlessness and formlessness has already begun to emerge into form. This pulse, this cosmic pulse which IS the cosmos, has long been a foundational insight of eastern wisdom. Now very advanced western scientists probing the fundamental nature of matter grapple with language to describe what they too now can see, if not really understand: that matter is, only in an instant, and then it is the potentiality of a bit of energy to dissolve and then to form, to dissolve and then to form. At every level of matter, from deep within the heart of the atom to the very circulation of galaxies, there is only this pulse.

Ancients around the world intuited some aspect of this pulse, and named its two poles male and female. That reflected the structure of their brains and the nature of their bodily experience, of course; it was a naming system right at hand. And it pointed to the mystery of opposites joining to create a new being. How better to express complex energetic transformations?

But it is a poetic naming, at least initially. Male and female is a metaphor for a dimly grasped insight about the fundamental nature of reality. But nothing lasts so briefly as the caution to recall it is only metaphor. The dichotomy hardened conceptually in two ways: what was first grasped as continual movement, indeed, as a pulse, solidified into opposite poles, firm and eternal. And what was named via a simplified sexual system became the oldest system of projection and re-identification. The projections too solidified into firm “realities” of male and female governing the universe, deities requiring propitiation, and increasingly rigid social structures and habits of mind.

Now humans find themselves living within a set of enclosed structures, each one contained within another, and then another, all reflecting the fundamental insight of the dance between form and formlessness, but named with ever with more fierceness the eternal dichotomies of male and female. The repercussions were legion. On one hand, it threw up nearly insurmountable obstacles to grasping the nature of reality, for millenia. On the other, it forced nearly every aspect of human life into a gendered structure; tasks, behaviors, moral codes, the division of labor, on one hand all the way to basic consciousness and self knowledge, on the other.

The division of the primordial One into two allowed for the explosion of human knowledge and human consciousness. That is a long story, and perhaps we will give that to you later. But we want to stay focused now on our task for you, which is how that came to be named male and female, and then, how that in turn has shaped human consciousness. Do not try to judge and evaluate these ubiquitous human processes and perceptions. At any historical moment, the gendered naming of reality facilitated some aspects of consciousness and inhibited others. The historical process has been what it has been. But the moment has arrived, in your lifetime, really, for thoughtful thinkers to peel back that first and oldest projection and to try to understand how it has shaped all dimensions of human experience.

Many others work on this project; scholars, activists, daughters, and wives struggle to name what is not “natural” but “conventional” about the profound gendering of human life, and when properly named, to begin to dissolve it where it obstructs the expansion of consciousness. This project with you will be a contribution to that larger process of de-gendering and re-naming much human behavior and mental life.

Essentially, there will be two parts to this project: in one part, we will probe the projections and namings of the great container of form/formlessness, the unformed goddess. We will examine her dark aspects, as humans experience her, and see if we can peel back some of human fear about formlessness, in order to catch a glimpse of the profound receptivity that lies behind it. She receives all that is, while giving birth to all that is, or allowing all that has potential form to emerge into form (to use a non gendered set of phrases). Nothing is to be rejected or discarded. All is process, and all transforms, literally, crosses forms or go across forms. There is no stasis; there is nothing permanent except the processes of transformation from form to

formlessness and back again to form. The goddess, despite our prayers, does not protect us from this, but welcomes it; indeed, she is it. We pray to her in this aspect because we do not understand it nor can we control it. Her answer to that prayer is to teach us to see more clearly, and “us” is all beings moving between form and formlessness. That includes your Teachers.

Beings resist learning this. Why? Because beings in form prefer form to formlessness. What is gained from a stable center of consciousness and the accumulation of insight is infinitely precious. But our appreciation of that generates attachment to being in form, and then, the dance gets tricky. Again. On every level. One must learn more intricate steps, balancing lightly between the two views. Those who can, and they are many, earn the name “adepts.” Their very quality of mind and being is playful, for they know the truth of the dark goddess.

The other part of this larger teaching will be a more pointed analysis of the heavy weight of the gendered system. Some of this you already know, so that will be a compilation and review. Some you know about the world “out there,” i.e. you know analytically. That knowledge must be brought home, so there will be some discussion of the burdens of patriarchy, of the gendered world, in your own life and self understanding. And some pieces you simply have never thought about, and they must be added to your repertoire or catalogue.

Then last, we will ask, how all this has shaped human understanding of both wisdom and compassion, the tasks and qualities traditionally distributed according to a gendered division of labor, both among the deities and among humans on earth. This deserves some careful thinking, for it will turn out to be the most powerful tool or intervention for shifting the fate of the human species and the well being of the planet as a whole. We want to excavate compassion, where it has been buried along with the threatening feminine and the dark goddess and return her to human society. We want to restore voice and agency to Noah’s wife. Only that can push back the flood.

This is all for today. Hopefully, you are less confused. It is of necessity not a linear argument, but rather a nest of arguments, one within the next. Just as you struggled with volume one, only relaxing when you realized each chapter or topic was another spoke heading into the empty center, so this one will develop its own complex logic and form. Please be patient with us as we try to separate what is a single piece to us into discrete parts, so your own

mind can receive and comprehend it. Then, we will help you reassemble it into a single whole. Please remember the complex form which is emerging is part of what generates resistance in you; your mind literally cannot grasp it in its entirety. Or better said: your mind actually does intuit and glimpse it in its wholeness, but is overwhelmed by the difficulty of translating it into human language, which by definition, because of sentences, must be reduced into a linear form.

We will continue tomorrow.

Thank you very much.

Friday, July 9, 2010

Good morning, honored Teacher. I would be happy to receive some more teaching this morning. It is calm and bright outside, and I dreamed I am being driven by a kind black man, he on the right and I in the left passenger seat. This is another image of surrender, I suspect. May I bring that quality to our work as well.

Yes, indeed.

I am wondering, what I shall call you. I can't quite describe or name your energy or presence. It doesn't seem strange or overpowering at all. I am tired after an hour of receiving, but not exhausted. May I ask, who are you?

Of course, you may ask. This is the Manjushri energy again. You don't recognize it because it has been a long time since we worked together. And despite your general fatigue, you are actually more receptive and easy with this than you were several summers ago, so it does not seem so very strenuous. This is good. We are glad. It will make this project go easily, and of course, we remind you, there are more projects awaiting you, when you have time and space. We also say to you, we are deeply grateful for your willingness to do this work with us; you help us bring very important messages into the human world. Though it may seem to you this is a very small piece, of little importance in the large scheme, it is in truth a potent and fertile seed, which is sprouting nearly everywhere it lands. It is worth continuing this work.

Let us begin with a story, one you tell when you speak with prospective students and their families. You say, to help them understand the deep value of living and studying in a women's college, that it will help them identify the structures of the prevalent gender system. Just as a fish cannot describe water until it is removed from its life-long environment, so humans cannot describe how gender works until they are in the midst of a different version. The contrasts are jarring, and very instructive. Changing contexts, as you know, is one of the most powerful mechanisms for shifting people's consciousness.

You are aware of how gender roles and expectations shape styles of behavior and relationship, in your immediate world. And you are alert to how gender systems constrict the choices of many of your international students, especially those from South Asia. You have thought long and hard about how gender worked in your family, and how it did and didn't pave the pathways of your life. You have followed the feminist critiques of traditional religious understandings and practices, seeking out those small cracks where women believers might recognize their own authority and dignity as spiritual seekers.

But, there is much more, much more for you to study and digest. We want to take you on a journey into the most fundamental origins of gender, the gendering of mental processes. We want you to see how the original separation of male and female was applied then to mind, first, and then to all derivative mental processes. This includes naming, categorization, concept-formation, and abstraction. It permeated the realms of the imagination, of narrative and dream, and of every impulse to touch the realms of the invisible, the unearthly, the Other.

There is no gender-free perception possible for humans. That said, we think we can open your eyes to deeper layers of your gendered world. That is our intention here. This may seem a very long way from a discussion of compassion, our announced theme for this extended teaching. We will arrive there, even though we begin at the far end of this long thread. It will be like going backward, generation by generation, through a family tree, tracing the line of ancestors back to where the evidence is faint and illegible. When we arrive at our destination, "the dark face of the goddess," we will turn around and retrace our steps, but with clearer minds and restored hearts. All of humanity groans under the weight of gender and its multitude of consequences. To heal the world, to save the world from human exploitation

and unconsciousness, we must restore the feminine. Humans must be able to envision wholeness. It is impossible now.

This is enough for today.

Thank you very much.
Sunday, July 11, 2010

(I just read everything so far. I am astonished at its richness and complexity. What an astounding blessing, and teaching...)

Very good. For this must first be a helpful teaching for you. You are a highly engaged channel, not an unconscious one who simply takes down the message like a scribe and passes it on. Your ability to engage with these teachings is a major reason why we chose you to receive them. As we have said before, you have prepared for this all your life, with your deep thoughtfulness and wide reading and teaching. The more you can inhabit your complex and intuitive mind, the more generative and satisfying your life.

You are carrying an image of an archeological excavation, the archeology of gender. It is a good one. One begins with the surface level, the most recently deposited layer, and examines it closely. Then, one can proceed downward, meticulously cataloguing the layers, understanding that one is also moving backwards in time, to earlier and earlier remains. On the surface one sees quite a bit of flux, as people negotiate shifts in their own personal relationships affected by gender. Men take care of children, and women practice law and medicine. Men nurse dying patients, and women travel the world as Secretary of State. The rigid division of labor, labor as work, has softened considerably in your life time, so much so that there are those that say, the work of feminism is accomplished. It takes only a few minutes of careful observation to see that is not true, but it is certainly true that some women (in the rich world, with ample access to education and training) have gained much more freedom to pursue their own life goals.

We see shifts in language, financial relationships, and popular culture, for example, and struggles continue within the denser realms of religious practices and institutions, conceptions of leadership, and all that relates to human bodies, especially sexuality. There is no need to catalogue all these shifts in your society today, as every observer is well aware of them.

Instead, go down one more layer, and brush off the surface material to glimpse what lies below. You will quickly realize that the fundamental structures of gender remain as robust as ever; what is changing is the marginal content of those two categories. A man “stays home” to care for his new born; a woman becomes the oft-remarked CEO of a large corporation. Why are we interested? Because they are such startling exceptions to what we all know is “normal.” The norm is clearly defined, non-permeable boundaries between men’s and women’s work. That the boundaries are becoming slightly more permeable under the enormous pressure of reformers and legal requirements does not undermine the categories or the divisions of gender. It has released some pressure for change, while obscuring the tenacity of the categories.

There is another very significant factor which we must add to this discussion. It probably should have been introduced earlier in this work, and that is hierarchy, the relative power of the two categories, their valuative ranking. Noah didn’t have to listen to his wife, and she had no choice but to join him on his ark. That is hierarchy, operative today as it was then. In a sentence, one might say, as long as the hierarchy of gender remains, small adjustments in the realms of gender can be tolerated. If the dominant gender controls the actual division of labor, and is able to reproduce its own dominance, there has been no real threat to nor any real change in the gender system.

There are now two salient dimensions to gender: the actual content of the separation of roles, activities, and responsibilities, on one hand, and the authority to shape and rank those categories. There is no extant society in the world today where men do not have the authority to maintain and rank the categories of gender. Certainly not all men, for other social categories split up the category of men, such as race, class, ethnic identity, religious practice, and many others. What we say here about how gender works is paralleled by those other systems of division and ranking. But gender is primary, and the “rules” and structures of gender are reproduced in other human arenas. In every case one can identify the ruling group by its ability to define the categories and punish those who would rebel against the boundaries and their implicit or explicit hierarchical ranking. It is Noah’s wife who is silenced, not Noah. And it is the goddess who must go into the darkness, not the god. And as we shall see, what is silent, what is in the darkness, what cannot be seen, is what is feared. The cycle of control and repress, control

and repress, has been launched, and human society begins its careening into ever more disequilibrium.

Probe down another layer. Take your soft bristle brush and remove the sediment of centuries. Here you find the dim outlines of mental concepts, of self images, of myth and sacred narratives. This layer teems with images of gender, if only they can be made visible to the human eye. We will begin here tomorrow.

Monday, July 12, 2010

“Teeming with images.” Yes, Sir, I can well imagine this is the layer of human culture, perhaps not its roots, but certainly its ground floor.

Yes, indeed. How to pick our way through this great storehouse of human imagination and creativity? We are looking for a thread to follow, which will take us to the foundations, the original well spring of gendered thinking. It began of course with human bodies, close at hand, but what led to turning those bodies into images of thought? It is an astounding “move,” if you will, indicative of the startling inventiveness of the emerging human mind. Why not plant and animal or day and night? Why not a triplet instead of a double, as the template for human concepts?

We see a fundamental duality built into the human organism. Consider how many organs are really dual: kidneys, eyes, ears, limbs, lungs, nostrils, adrenal glands, tonsils, and so many more. Perhaps originally a security system, with a back-up ready and close at hand, but eventually allowing for a certain flexibility and complexity. But probably most important is the double hemispheres of the brain, even as layer after layer of neurological development continued, the brain seemed to “insist” on double hemispheres, with their parallel dependent neurologies. Humans think differently than other species, or perhaps a more accurate way to say that, is that humans process information differently. All species have perfected particular kinds of sensation, of information reception, and then brain or mental processing. Some have particular wave lengths to which they are sensitive; some have visual abilities others lack, and so on. Humans, unlike other species, receive particular information in one part of their brain, and then place it in a category, or several, with another part of the brain. There are often further steps of processing: evaluation, discrimination, judgment. This draws on memory and learning, on one hand, and emotion on the other. It is the

complexity of these second processes which distinguish the human brain from that of other species.

It also distinguishes the human brain or mental functioning from that of your teachers, beings not in body. We do not exist in a three dimensional world, and this greatly frees us to receive much information simultaneously, independent of time and space. We have found it nearly impossible to communicate this to our students, and since it is not germane to our task here, we will leave it. Suffice it to say, because the parameters of our perception are significantly different from that of humans, we are especially puzzled by the dichotomous, gendered structures of so much of human perception and conceptualization. We realize the extent to which so much of human mental processing goes through the filter of gender, but we do not understand why it continues to this day, even if it were a significant evolutionary accomplishment or invention.

Modern thinkers, i.e. of the last century or so, have looked into the human past for some clues about this. Their theories each have a grain of truth: the anxiety about reproduction and birth, the power of human sexuality or sexual desire, acquaintance with death, and fear of the unknown, the dark, and the invisible. But they too stumble trying to reach beyond the written and visual record. Anthropologists and depth psychologists have been of some help, even as they recognize how intuitive their explanations are and how likely to be shaped by their own cultural assumptions.

Perhaps our second question is easier to answer: how did the dichotomy of gender become a hierarchy of gender, and what did that serve? There the simple answer seems correct: that men were bigger and stronger in important physical ways and they were able to translate that into primacy, first, over an individual woman. Later, it would generalize to men as a group dominating women as a group. That shift is certainly lost in the murky first millennia of human life.

Then begins the back and forth process, where earthly gender roles are projected upon non earthly images, and the developing understanding of the invisible beings that would be named gods and goddesses, the deities who ruled the worlds, tended fertility, and protected the group from harm. Those very gods and goddesses would then “rule” human life, legitimating human practices and emerging social structures. It is no surprise that the projected human values would return to earth, like rain, reinforcing those very values

as if delivered from on high. This constantly self-reinforcing process created the firmest structure in human cognition, apart from self/other (though it too came to be shaped and colored by gender). The constant experience of gender (and we really mean, sexual differentiation here) reinforced the sense that dichotomies are “natural,” given in the real world in some fundamental and substantial way, and that most dichotomies include a hierarchical ranking, in other words, an element of valuation, such that one part of the dichotomous pair is superior to the other.

By now, this pattern has been reinforced for thousands and thousands of years, replicated in language, in all human relationships, in social structures and emerging institutions, in the distribution of power and authority, and in the very constitution of communities and community self-understandings. And because what is below reflects what is above, and vice versa, the deities play out the same roles, the same divisions of labor, and articulate the same values and meanings, as are found in the earthly communities. It provided a stable equilibrium, a container within which great experimentation and ingenuity was possible, in the realms of agriculture, language, arts, technology, warfare, and ritual. Gender and its implicit privileging of the male became THE marker of human thought and behavior; no surprise it similarly permeated the realms of the gods.

Tomorrow, we will begin a discussion of human analysis, of the mental process of division and separation. This should begin a new section or chapter, as it will focus on the dual processes of separation or analysis and inclusion or synthesis.

