



AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies

67/1 Jan-Feb 2022, ISSN P-2249-1503 E-2582-791X | 15-32

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5769184

Stable URL: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5769184>

When *The Bible* Encounters *The Gateless Barrier*

Youngseog Lee, SJ

Jesuits Community, Sogang University, Seoul, 04107,
South Korea

Abstract: There is a long way, annoying and wishing to avoid, but at the same time and unavoidable and fruitful, that might be leading the faithful from an anxiety for going astray on our own path of belief to hope for reciprocal learning that the mutual change and growth through dialogue with religious other can occur. How we can learn from the faith of the other, how both sides can change and grow mutually? We can get help from interreligious dialogue accompanying an intrareligious dialogue, being often reiterated by the “apostle of interreligious dialogue” Raimon Panikkar, which is inner dialogue within ourselves. However, we often hear more talk about controversy regarding interreligious dialogue itself than actual dialogue. Here I attempted to dialogue within myself by questioning myself and reflecting on my daily life, getting help through both the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and *The Gateless Barrier* of the Chinese Zen master Wumen Huikai: two

Cite as: Lee, Youngseog. (2022). When The Bible Encounters The Gateless Barrier (Version 1.0). *AUC: Asian Journal of Religious Studies*, Jan-Feb 2022 (67/1), 15-32.
<http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5769184>

different traditions have shed rays of new light on my daily life, and have helped me to arrive at a better understanding of the heart of both Jesus and the Buddha.

Keywords: Interreligious dialogue, Reciprocal illumination, Grammar of religions, Truth and daily life, The Gateless Barrier

“ Into the Narrow Gate ...” “ There Is No Gate...”

What distinguishes interreligious dialogue from interreligious debate is each party’s sincere effort not to detect the weak and potentially false points in the other’s belief and grammar of its expression, but to discover its strengths and truths in order to learn from them. In sincere dialogue the motivation of reciprocal learning is ideally found on both sides in accord with what Leonard Swidler long ago counted as the first commandment of “The Dialogue Decalogue” (Swidler 1983: 1-2). The aim of the interreligious dialogue is mutual change and growth through reciprocal learning. Be that as it may, no one can avoid the religious challenge in the dialogue: how we can learn from the faith of the other without going astray on our own path of belief? how both sides can change and grow mutually? how my faith can embrace another’s belief without being required to accept his or her faith or deny my own? We can get help from the notion of “intrareligious dialogue” which was often reiterated by the “apostle of interreligious dialogue” Raimon Panikkar. He stressed that if interreligious dialogue is to be real dialogue, an intrareligious dialogue must accompany it. By this he means inner dialogue within ourselves, an encounter in the depth of our personal religiousness after having met another religious experience on that very intimate level (Panikkar 1978: 40). This means that interreligious dialogue must begin by questioning myself; it requires a self-reflective attitude and so must start from the existential situation where I happen to be.

I begin this paper from my own personal situation as a Catholic priest and at the same time a student and professional teacher of Buddhist philosophy. I have done spiritual practices in accord with both the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola and *The Gateless Barrier* of the Chinese Zen master Wumen Huikai (無門慧開) (Shibayama 2000), jotting down my feelings and insights little by little in the form of a diary. I would sometimes write once a day, sometimes once a week, other times once a month; and sometimes months passed by before I made further notes. The results became a sizable volume.

How fruitful it would be if the wisdom of silence manifested in *The Gateless Barrier* can provide a fresh ray of light on the words of the Bible and if the words of love expressed in the Bible can provide even a small amount of water of life to the forty-eight teachings (*koans*) of *The Gateless Barrier*? It is not religious belief, doctrine, or grammar of expression that connects people, but religious faith and experience. I here share some examples from my own experience of what Arvind Sharma has aptly called “reciprocal illumination” (Sharma 2005: ix-x). Two different traditions can reciprocally shed rays of new light on one’s daily life; and the Christian and Buddhist traditions have helped me to arrive at a deeper, wider and therefore better understanding of the life and mercy of both Jesus and the Buddha. The essence of the teachings of Jesus and Buddha points to the heart. The heart is something that cannot be conveyed grammatically, but I try here, rather light-heartedly in my everyday language, to write down the insights that I experienced in my personal journey to the heart. Since each of us has a different place in life with a different personal history, another person’s experience and language may be very different from mine; but please be generous in your judgment, taking my writings for light reading as you live your way. I frame each section with a pair of brief expressions from the Bible and *The Gateless Barrier*.

“Do You Not Know Where the Lord Was Placed?” “Nothing”

Whenever I moved from one place to another, I realized that I possess so many things that I don't necessarily need for my daily living. I usually move every four or five years to a different religious community. Each time I move to a new place, I try to sort out what to take, leave or throw away. When we move to the place of death, what will we take, leave behind and throw away? In fact, when we leave for our far-off destination of death, there is nothing we can take or throw away. We only leave something behind. The moment we leave a place never to return, what we will leave behind will clearly show what kind of life we lived.

In John's Gospel, Jesus's tomb is empty. The stone blocking the tomb has been removed, and the tomb is empty except for the coverings and linen that covered the dead body of Jesus. Seeing the empty tomb, Magdalene and Peter cannot accept Jesus's resurrection; but John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, sees, and believes. How could an empty tomb be a sign that Jesus has risen? The reason is that it is empty but full. The empty tomb is filled with the life of a man who has lived an empty life. Literally, it is "Empty fullness." Jesus's life was an empty life from beginning to end. He was born by borrowing the empty womb of Mary, spending his first night in an empty manger, and he was even buried in an empty tomb upon his death. In his daily life, he always set aside the stones of self-will, self-interest, and self-love and lived only with God's love and mercy toward his neighbors. His disciple John reads the life of Jesus filled with love in the empty tomb. That's why he can see and believe. He understands that Jesus died the way he lived and was risen the way he lived.

All human beings die the way they lived and are risen the way they lived. Entering into further intrareligious dialogue within

myself as a Christian with Buddhist experience, I recall that in Buddhism, everyone is believed to be reincarnated. Being seen by others according to how they lived in the world, they are resurrected or reincarnated in the hearts of those who were left behind. If a person lived in the form of a dog, he or she will be resurrected in the form of a dog. If one lived in the form of a snake, he will be reincarnated as a snake. Jesus died the way he emptied himself during his life in the world, so John believes in his resurrection when he finds his tomb empty. To John, the empty tomb is a sign of the full life that Jesus lived.

Early that morning, Magdalena, who was the first to visit the tomb where Jesus was buried, sees the empty tomb and weeps. “Someone took the body of the Lord out of the tomb. I don’t know where he was placed” (Jn 20:2). She does not look for the living and breathing life of Jesus, but the cold and dead body of Jesus. Although she loved Jesus, she could not read the life and message of Jesus, which filled the empty tomb to the full. Love can open one’s eyes, but blind them at the same time.

Like a blind Magdalena, a monk asks Master Joju. “Do dogs have Buddha-nature too?” Master Joju responds: “Nothing”(無), which is the first rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. The monk’s question means “Where is Buddha-nature?”, “Show me the Buddha-nature.” He asks to show the Buddha nature right before his eyes, like Magdalena weeping for the body of Jesus who was dead. There is no such thing as Buddha-nature that can be found, just as there is no physical body of Jesus to be found in his empty tomb. Before reflecting on what our eyes see and our ears hear, our heart is empty. However, an empty heart can be filled with Buddha-nature just as the empty tomb is full of the life of Jesus. Buddha-nature has no beginning and no end. It is incomprehensible, invisible, and untouchable; but It can be abundantly experienced in our daily living together. Buddha-nature is not to be found, but to be experienced and lived in person. However, only those who have

experienced empty fullness can recognize it. We cannot grammatically describe with language where the essence of the experience is and what it is. That is why it is nothing.

The reciprocal illumination that can be gain from pairing Biblical teaching with Buddhist teaching leads us to recognize that this ‘nothing’ does not mean non-existence or absence as the opposite of ‘being’ or ‘existence.’ We cannot say that truth exists just because we say it exists and give grammatical expression to it or that the truth does not exist because we say it does not. In the same way, we cannot say that the truth exists because we positively assert its existence nor that the truth vanishes just because we deny its existence or cannot express it. The fact is that freedom itself is far away from the conceptual thought process and grammatical logic that we concoct within the relative space of existence and non-existence. The truth is free from any illusory discernment (*vikalpa*). Moreover, whether one refers to it as “existent,” “non-existent,” or by any other term, truth has no effect on the Buddha-nature itself and does not cause any change. Buddha-nature is the truth itself that transcends existence and non-existence, the way itself transcends existence and non-existence. It is the very thing that cuts off the conceptual thought process represented by discriminating discernment. The mind being locked up in discernment over the existence and non-existence can never come close to the truth. That’s why the word ‘nothing’ became the first barrier to Zen.

In Genesis, God creates the world out of nothing. Far from being the opposite of ‘existence,’ this ‘nothing’ transcends the concept of ‘non-existence.’ Since God is Being itself and the Whole of everything, nothing can exist outside of God; nor does the reality of ‘nothing’ exist separately. Creation is from nothing in the sense that nothing can exist apart from God. In God, moreover, the distinction between existence and non-existence loses its power; so it does not matter whether creation

is from ‘nothing’ or from ‘being.’ Creation is not an act that takes place ‘outside’ of God, but an inner activity within God.

Creation within God is possible because God is essentially an empty existence. Because divinity is empty or void, all things can be placed therein. Emptying oneself and giving up one’s space is called “Love”. People call it unconditional love; and because it is unconditional love, there is no distinction between existence and non-existence, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, big and small. Everything in God is full. It is literally an empty fullness and creation out of nothing.

Jesus could live a life of emptiness because he was so fully captivated by the unconditional love of God. Christians who have been baptized to become one with Jesus (Gal 3:27) must also be captivated by that love and become one with self-emptying love like Jesus. All discrimination must disappear and become one with unconditional love, that is, “nothing.” As someone said, a gram of action matters much more than a ton of ideas. It is much more of a burden to learn and live out the life of enlightenment than to conceptually think about what self-emptying life is or grammatically express what the Buddha-nature is and where it is. The living and breathing life in each of us is far more precious than a dead body. It is empty but full. Do dogs have Buddha-nature? Where is the dead Jesus? It is the truth of life and the truth that cannot be tasted by conceptual thinking trapped in the relative space of existence or non-existence. If we cannot experience empty fullness in ourselves, we might not find it anywhere else.

The grammar of Christianity is quite different from that of Buddhism. However, there is quite an overlap in the art of life (*ars vitae*), on how to live here and now. Of course, just because two religions have overlap, it does not necessarily mean they are the same teachings. While Christianity uses its own subject and predicate, Buddhism uses its own object and complement to unravel the content and form of life. However, it is easy to miss the point if we get too caught up in concepts and grammar. When it comes to

communicating in one's native tongue, a person can freely express all one's thoughts; but when it comes to communicating in a second language, everyone must have experienced the feeling of being stuck while trying to express one's truth. One needs to stand above concepts to achieve free expression and concomitant illumination and get out of slavery to grammar.

“Let Me See, Again.” “Did You Have Breakfast?”

When a group bears fruit abundantly, it means that someone has fallen to the ground like a grain of wheat that has decomposed after the fall. On the other hand, lack of fruit in a group means that no one has been willing to become the grain of wheat. Whether at home, at work, in a temple or church, there are no exceptions. I once had a chance to stay in a Catholic monastery for about six months. It was a fairly large monastery with a retreat house for visitors to pray and a convent where twenty or so nuns lived. The monastery building was always kept very tidy and the hallways so clean, almost shiny. There were beautiful pictures and decorative script hanging in every corner of the hallways; and the flower beds were carefully cared for, with no weeds in sight. Even the garbage dump in the far corner was always well kept. This was all because some persons fell to the ground and became grains of wheat.

A grain of wheat that has fallen to the ground is not clearly visible; it is buried deep in the ground, has rotted and died. Even people with the best eyesight cannot discern it well. Only persons with enlightened eyes who become grains of wheat themselves like those they see can recognize it. The place where the grain of wheat falls is the time and space of our daily living. A grain of wheat cannot fall to a place apart from daily life. Many of us, however, tell our neighbors that we will become grains of wheat in faraway places and give pledges and make plans to become grains of wheat for our country and people, for the whole world and other grand entities. There are many who

raise their voices to become grains of wheat, willing to sacrifice their lives for the democratization of society; but only a few are willing to put up with small sacrifices for democratization within their own family or and ready to serve friends living right next door. There are many 'religious people' who run around evangelizing or for promoting the ultimate Buddha land, but there are few 'faithful' who are willing to become grains of wheat in daily living in their own community.

Most of us fail in our daily life, but go on living unaware that we have failed. So Lao-tzu says paradoxically, "He who treasures his body as much as the world can care for the world. He who loves his body as much as the world can be entrusted with the world" (*Tao Te Ching*, ch. 13). One shouldn't call oneself selfish because one values and cares about one's own body. Abstract ideologies and 'great entities' like world, country, and our people are high or far away. They are not by my side, not living and breathing beings in my daily life. In a word, they are dead. Our bodies and the lives of our neighbors are alive, breathing with us. That is why Jesus says, "He who is faithful in little things is also faithful in great things" (Lk 16: 10) and, "You must love your neighbor as yourself" (Mk 12:31). A person who does not cherish and love himself, cannot love others. Everyday life is the owner of a clothing store in *Dongdaemun* Market and the woman who runs a stall in *Jagalchi* Market. Everyday living comes alive and moving with life force. A person who cherishes life is a person who values concrete daily life, and such a person is a person who opens his or her eyes to life and sees the world directly.

We are often blind because everyday life seems so trivial or demands too much of us and gets so annoying. The man who cried out to Jesus and asked, "Let me see, again" (Mk 10: 51) could see at once. Master Joju would ask him instead, "Did you have breakfast?"

A monk comes to Joju say. "I would like you to teach me." Joju asks, "Did you eat porridge for breakfast?" "Yes, I did." "Then, you

should wash your bowl,” which is the 7th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. Some people may criticize Joju’s response as being bland and unkind, but there is no one more kind. Kindly, Joju spreads his teaching twice: “Eat” and “Wash your dish.” The truth and *Tao*(道) breaths and pervades everyday lives.

To a blind man’s request that he can see again, Jesus replies, “Go,” then kindly adds, “Your faith has saved you.” Where should he go? This is an invitation to enter the daily scene of eating and washing dishes. It is a call to enter into the life where one now stands, into the life of one’s neighbor. When we commit ourselves to the faith that the truth lives and breathes in our daily actions, we can rot and die like a grain of wheat and bear much fruit. The grammatical expressions that Jesus and Joju use stand out for their stark differences, but this is the salvation that I and any Christian or Buddhist can taste in our daily lives. Interreligious and intrareligious reflection on their different modes of expression in tandem can contribute to change and growth through reciprocal illumination.

We need to reopen our eyes and cherish our daily life. Jesus is a person who values and cherishes everyday life, who is adept at finding God in everyday life. Jesus’ basic message to God is always the same: our daily lives and encounters with others are the house where God dwells, the place of God’s presence. Similar to Joju’s koans, all of Jesus’ parables are stories of encountering God in our daily lives. Sowing seeds, plowing fields, finding lost sheep and money, meeting the sick, attending weddings, eating and washing are all part of our daily lives. We can go on a treasure hunt today, seeking those who are the grains of wheat that have fallen to the ground in the daily life of our local community.

**“You Do Not Believe Me Because I Speak the Truth.”
“Three Pounds of Flax Roots!”**

In the community where I live, about thirty priests live together. Some have been priests for over fifty years, while others have just been ordained. All are dedicated to their respective fields of study to realize the truth and the value of life that Jesus taught in words and deeds 2,000 years ago. The truth Jesus showed us is one. The Bible has recorded it, and various commentaries and documents supplement it. Probably each of the priests’ conceptual explanations of what the truth is is almost identical, not far from the scope of the commentaries. However, specific expressions of the truth lived by each of them in their daily living varies widely.

A person in love chooses melons and apples with the other person in mind. If I love myself most, I put the best melons and apples in my mouth. If I loved another, I would save the best for that person.

One day, there were as many Korean melons as the priests eating at mealtime. Some looked good, some not. I unconsciously sought one that had a bright yellow colour and clear white bands. I picked the one that looked the ripest and most delicious and returned to my table. It tasted fragrant and sweet when I took a bite after peeling off the skin; and I happily finished one whole melon, satisfied with my excellent choice. I guess I have always lived my life making

choices like picking a melon with the intention of taking the best for myself. Most of us have our own criteria when it comes to making choices, no matter how trivial. We seem to make unconscious choices, but we habitually follow the standards and values ingrained in our bodies and minds.

We usually choose something based on ourselves, for we tend to put ourselves first. So of the thirty melons in the basket, the one that looked the most delicious disappeared first, then one after another. If so, who chooses the least tasty-looking melon? When I was growing up, my mother always chose spoiled apples for herself, because she put other family members first. Sometimes she even gave up a spoiled one. She wanted to put a little more in her children’s mouths. That’s how my mother

made her choices. A person in love chooses melons and apples with the other person in mind. If I love myself most, I put the best melons and apples in my mouth. If I loved another, I would save the best for that person. If I asked my mother, "What is truth?" she would silently point to a spoiled apple. To my mother, truth is that apple. Hers is a life truth that is unacceptable and even unbelievable for persons who have never chosen a bad apple out of unselfish love, losing themselves.

Jesus always speaks the truth. That is why people don't believe him. They cannot accept Jesus' truth because they have never thought of or lived the truth even once in their life. Jesus first chose the poor, reached out to them, and stayed with them. As seemingly foolish as my mother choosing rotten apples, Jesus chose the poor; and he himself was poor. The poor also chose Jesus, but the people he dealt with were hesitant to choose the poor. Similarly, the poor choose the church these days, but Catholic and Protestant churches hesitate to choose the poor, because a non-poor church cannot choose poverty. So Jesus says, "You do not believe me because I speak the truth" (Jn 8:45).

For most people, the truth is not the poor who live among us; and most will never prefer to choose the poor. For most, the truth is thought of as existing out of reach, 'up there' or 'far away.' Since they think truth is eternal and infinite, only the truth that is out of their reach is worthy of its name. Such an unchanging and infinite world is only possible in the world of concept and thought. The world of experience that Jesus and Buddhist masters point to is always changing and finite. That is why people tend to seek the truth as firmly set conceptual thoughts in their heads, not in the shift of concrete, empirical realities. What they are looking for are plausible views, claims, and explanations of what truth and poverty should be. The reason people seek the truth through conceptually grammatical explanations is that conceptual truth does not interfere with their lives. Its only value, however, is as a kind of decorative accessory that satisfies intellectual vanity.

A monk once came to Master Dongsan and asked, "What is Buddha?" Dongsan answered, says: "Three pounds of flax roots!" which is the 18th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. The monk who posed the question

was probably expecting a nice conceptual explanation that could provide answers to such questions as what Buddha should be and how we should understand Buddha. But Buddha cannot be known by asking questions or understood in one's head. So Master Dongsan introduced the truth of the world called Buddha simply by saying the seemingly meaningless words, "Three pounds of flax roots!" How can three pounds of flax roots be Buddha? On the other hand, how can a person who does not know what Buddha is think that three pounds of flax roots are not Buddha? Likewise, how can one who does not know what the truth is think that rotten apples and poverty are not the truth?

What constitutes Buddha lies not in the realm of thought, but in the realm of experience; it is not a matter of dogma, but of faith. We can teach what Buddha is, but if we do not have faith in the Buddha, we cannot experience it. Without experience, Buddhist or Christian, we may never be able to know what it is. Faith is not an unconditional acceptance of a particular teaching. It is an adventure where one leaves the known world and moves toward the unknown. Faith is courage to break the mold and take a leap into a new world. It is a challenge that disclaims the familiar and throws oneself into the unknown. My own intrareligious self-reflection has led me to begin to realize that if one's heart is not here, there is no courage to take on religious adventures and challenges; and faith and experience will not follow. For faith and experience are matters of the heart.

As long as a person is caught up with the grammatical phrase "Why are three pounds of flax roots a Buddha?" and seeks discernment in the head, one will never escape delusion. As long as we study apples and analyze poverty entangled in the question of how rotten apples and poverty can be truth, we can never enjoy freedom and enlightenment. As long as the non-poor church shies away from the poor and thus from Jesus, as long as we move away from the hearts of Master Dongsan and our mothers, the truth will always be eons away.

"I Am the Vine and You Are the Branches." "The Whole World Is One with You."

My uncle, a farmer, used to go out to check on the rice field every morning and evening. One day, I heard, my aunt shouting out a rather bitter question behind his back, "Why do you go out to the fields every day when there's nothing to do?" My uncle went on out to the fields without any

reply. After dinner, just out of curiosity, I asked him why he had to go out every day when there was nothing to do like my aunt said. He replied, "All crops grow at the sound of a farmer's footsteps." God, like a farmer, also comes to us every day, morning and evening. God wants us to grow in his presence as we listen to the sound of his footsteps every day. Not everyone can hear the sound of his footsteps; there are probably more people who cannot hear it than those who can. Nonetheless, God always comes and stays with us.

God comes to us every day, but he is clearly not a good farmer. We cannot call a person a good farmer just because he sows seeds. A good farmer chooses good soil and fertilizes the land well before he sows, but God does not. He sows seeds on the byways, on rocky ground, and into thorny bushes as well (Mt 13:1-9). Why does God do so? The Genesis creation story tells us how much effort God exerted for one man, Adam. God not only made the moon and the stars, animals, mountains, and seas for this one man; God also gave him a beautiful garden and a fitting mate. God sows seeds anywhere and everywhere because of his unconditional love and trust for the man he himself made with his own hands, shaped in his own image and likeness, and into which he breathed life.

The land where God sows seeds is the place where God breathes life, into the field of our hearts. God plants a vine in this field and always stays beside us twenty-four hours a day, watering morning and night. The farmer God has a son, who knows the heart of the Father better than anyone. The son tells us, "I am the vine and you are the branches" (Jn 15: 5). Vine and branches make up one tree. The tree cannot say to the branches, "I don't need you. Just go away." The farmer regards all the crops he planted as his offspring. The farmer and his crops are one body.

Carrying intrareligious reflection further, the Apostle Paul introduces a slightly different version of the expression "I am the vine and you are the branches." He speaks of "Christ as the head of one body, we as the members!" The head does not say to a hand or foot, "I don't need you. Get away from me." The head doesn't isolate or discriminate against the foot by saying, "You're so dirty. Get away." The thumb does not find faults with the little finger, saying, "Why are you so thin and small? I can't abide you." Jesus and his members are

one body, and all the members are equal. Some nuns who run social welfare facilities once told me, “We don’t feed the people who come, rather they feed us.” The sisters always refer to them, moreover, as ‘family members.’ They do not forget their gratitude toward those family members that come because they, themselves, always feel that they eat well thanks to those family members. We are all one family.

To the saying that we are all one body and one family, a virtuous old Buddhist monk once added as his shoulders were dancing with joy, “Even though a person sitting on top of a hundred-foot pole has entered realization, it is not yet real. He must step forward from the top of the pole and manifest his whole body throughout the world in ten directions,” the 46th rule of *The Gateless Barrier*. “Stepping forward from the top of a hundred-foot pole” (百尺竿頭進一步) is often cited in everyday life in East Asia. The saying could mean that even after reaching one’s lofty goal, one should not stop there, but work harder. One should not release the tension of guarding against indolence or take measures to escape a dead-end or unresolvable situation. In Zen, however, the highest level of enlightenment is expressed as “the top of a hundred-foot pole”; and the saying is used as a *koan* meaning, “One should step forward from the top.” Where can one take a step forward?

Zen practice does not end when one crosses over to the world of enlightenment. One needs to cross back again to where one originally came from, the world of everyday life. Only then will the first crossing become meaningful. In the end, we need at least two crossings. Usually, the first crossing – ‘moving upward’ toward enlightenment – is distinguished from the second – ‘moving downward’ back to everyday life. Sometimes the two crossings are described respectively as ‘centrifugal’ – gradual escape from the world of *samsāra* – and ‘centripetal’ – gradual return to the world of *samsāra*. The principles involved in the two crossings are also referred to as *prajñā* (wisdom), with a feminine character, and *karuṇā* (mercy) with a

Wisdom and mercy form one body. Confining wisdom and mercy within the grammatical framework of two mutually heterogeneous concepts, it appears that there is no direct relationship between them.

masculine character. Those principles are also compared to the two wings of a bird as self-centered and altruistic. These distinctions are made for a simple reason. If a person seeks genuine enlightenment, intangible wisdom is revealed in the world through the physical forms of mercy, like a lamp and the lamplight. Therefore, the person must “first attain enlightenment through cultivation, then save all beings” (上求菩提 下化衆生). In other words, on the true path we should all walk, “wisdom and mercy are one.”

Wisdom and mercy form one body. Confining wisdom and mercy within the grammatical framework of two mutually heterogeneous concepts, it appears that there is no direct relationship between them. Without the conceptual framework, wisdom and mercy are two different terms to describe the same reality. The difference, however, lies only in calling the reality ‘wisdom’ from an impersonal point of view and ‘mercy’ in terms of personal relationships. Wisdom is the love of truth, from which mercy overflows; and through the practice of mercy, we can experience the honey taste of wisdom. If we attain a certain level of wisdom, we should thus feel mercy toward our neighbors; and if we want to have mercy, we must acquire wisdom through experience.

In ancient India, mercy was called *karuṇā*. The etymology of *karuṇā* is *kr̥* and *kr̥*, the former meaning ‘flow down’ and ‘scatter’ and *kr̥* meaning ‘make,’ ‘practice,’ ‘accomplish,’ ‘implement.’ Therefore, in mercy that is *karuṇā*, wisdom flows down for the sake of all beings, does something for all beings. Wisdom does not remain as just wisdom; it crosses back to where it came from and undertakes merciful actions for all beings. Wisdom overflows, practices and achieves accomplishments for all. It is like when a person who has entered an intimate loving relationship with God gets completely immersed and captivated by that love. He gets internally stimulated to the point where his love overflows toward his neighbors. That is why Paul says, “The love of Christ urges us on” (2 Co 5:14). The moment one receives inner stimulation and urging from the power of wisdom and mercy, discrimination between you and me disappears; and, of course, so does the distinction between right and wrong. The distinction between me and the mountain disappears, and so does the

distinction between me and my cat. The whole world becomes one body with me.

Epilogue

There were once two friends who set out on a journey to escape the life of slavery ruled by concepts and grammar. The Christian friend said that the way is narrow and the gate small (Mt 7:13); the Buddhist friend said the way is too wide and there is no gate at all (The Preface of *The Gateless Barrier*: “The Great Way has no gate.”). We all stand at the entrance to the truth and express ourselves differently. Why? Perhaps it is because Christians see the truth in terms of personal love and mercy, and Buddhists in terms of impersonal wisdom. But there is a hidden paradox here. People should see the way to a personal deity overflowing with love and mercy as wide and open to all. God’s love and mercy are far greater and broader than we think, so we should think that there is surely no gate. On the other hand, the way to disimpassioned and impersonal wisdom must be narrow, rough, and with a very small gate. The journey to enlightenment is not easy, but the two friends are at odds as to the way.

There are two kinds of gates in this world: a gate to truth and a gate to daily living. In entering the gate to truth, there is great competition, competition with oneself. The chance of winning depends mostly on how much a person can let go of his or her ego, empty and lower oneself. That is why it needs training and discipline. The more one can empty and lower oneself, the larger and wider becomes the gate to the truth. Though it be narrow and low, even a camel can easily come and go through this gate. It can become so wide open that it seems there is no gate at all. The gate to our daily living is also narrow and low. Enormous competition is also needed to enter this gate, mostly not with ourselves, but with others. That is why people work so hard to fill themselves, raise themselves, and display their achievements. This narrow gate thus becomes even more cramped. It becomes a wall with no gates.

Where can we find the narrow gate way and the no gate way that these two friends face? Whether it is narrow and difficult or broad and spacious, it is connected to the entrance to the heart. It is the same for everyone, but can be seen as large, small, or even no gate at all, depending on the beholder. The absence of a gate could mean that anyone can enter and exit because everything is the entrance to the heart, but it also could mean that

the entrance to the heart is completely blocked and no one can enter or exit.

References

Panikkar, R. 1978. *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press.

Sharma, Arvind, 2005. *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination*, Albany: SUNY.

Shibayama, Zenkei, ed. 2000. *The Gateless Barrier: Zen comments on the Mumonkan*, Boston: Shamahala.

Stenudd, Stefan, 2011. *Tao Te Ching: The Taoism of Lao Tzu Explained*, Arriba: CreateSpace.

Swidler, Leonard J. 1983. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20, no 1 Winter, pp. 1-4.



Dr. Youngseog Lee, SJ, is a former pastor of Korean Martyrs Catholic Church at Atlanta, USA, and a former acting professor at Sogang University in Seoul, run by the Society of Jesus. He holds a PhD in Indian Buddhist Philosophy at Dongkuk University, run by one of Buddhist branches in Seoul, Korea. He has actively involved in interreligious dialogue meetings, especially with Buddhists in Korea. He published a book regarding his own experience about interreligious dialogue. Email: 20seog@hanmail.net ORCID: 0000-0003-1100-5686

Article received: Sept 23, 2021; Accepted: Dec 07, 2021. Word count: 6330



© by the authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license. (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by>)