

## Unconditional Love of the Unborn

Rev. Master Basil Singer

Seattle Dharma Refuge

For several years I have lead meditation groups at the SeaTac Federal Detention Center. I have found that quite a number of folks attending the groups belong to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

I have been struck by the spiritual dimension that AA and NA folks bring with them. I found out that this nondenominational spirituality was instilled in the program by the founder, Bill Wilson. He was a broker on Wall Street and a severe alcoholic. One night, in the depth of despair, he cried out, "I'll do anything! Anything at all! If there be a God, let Him show Himself!" His cry was answered with a deep knowing that there was Something greater than himself—Something that loved him unconditionally without judgment. He called this his "Higher Power." And he never drank again.

Bill's experience of trying to take refuge in something other than his Higher Power—whatever name is used for It—and that false refuge leading to rock-bottom despair, is testified to by many people (myself included). But as the *Sandokai* says, "In darkness there is light," and that despair—that powerful humbling of the ego—can open the door of the heart to that Reality of compassion, love, and wisdom. Indeed, it was the same for Shakyamuni himself. He took refuge in extreme and harrowing ascetic practices that left him nearly dead. It was when he took compassion on his wasting body and fed it, and then sat serenely beneath the Bhodi tree with an open heart, that he had his transformative enlightenment experience. He then spent the rest of his life helping others find that greater Refuge. And so, in his way, did Bill Wilson.

So when AA and NA folks talk about their Higher Power to me, I tell them that the Buddha called what He found under that tree the Unborn, Undying, Uncreated, Unformed. Buddhism has many more names for It, such as Dharmakaya, Vairocana (Cosmic Buddha), Amitabha/Amida Buddha, the Eternal. Different religious traditions call upon different names for this Reality, and "Higher Power" is as good as any. The multiplicity of names merely indicates that what is attempting to be described is, in fact, indescribable. But despite being indescribable it can be *experienced*. And this experience transcends religious boundaries.

Whatever name is used, descriptions of the experience of this Reality have a compelling universality. And that is that It is pure, unconditional *Love* that flows through everything and is the true refuge of our heart.

In recent years medical advances have dramatically increased the number of people who have "near death experiences (NDEs)." What is striking in nearly all of their accounts is how incredibly positive and life-transforming the experience is. Although most express frustration at being unable to describe the experience in words, the primary description of the experience is, again, *pure love*. And it is a Love that does not judge or condemn the mistakes that have been made in life.

The closest analogy that comes to my mind is that of a mother's love for her child. A child may make a terrible mistake such that society condemns them to prison. Even as the child must experience the consequences of their actions the mother's love flows on without judgment because she knows that her child is—in their *true* nature—more than their mistake. Like that mother's unconditional love, the pure Love of the Eternal flows to us even in the midst

of our confusion and the life mistakes we inevitably make. We may condemn ourselves—even hate ourselves for things we do—but the Eternal never does.

Many times I have seen and experienced the love of the Eternal myself in small yet compelling ways. I have a vivid memory of one period in my training of being totally consumed by bad thoughts toward my teacher. They were constant and powerful, and threatened my being able to continue as a monk. Then a memory came up in meditation that shone a light in the darkness of my attitude.

My teacher had a dog for many years who, despite having a challenging personality and being deaf, was very dear to him. The dog eventually became crippled and could not walk. The dog required a lot of care, and a lot of messy cleanup. I remembered a time when my teacher was carrying the dog outside as he urinated on my teacher who did not react with anger or disgust but just did what needed doing. The memory of this manifestation of love and acceptance by my teacher was like the Eternal's gift to me in that it cut through all my animosity toward him.

Many other times I have experienced the help of the Eternal in ways that I could never have foreseen. It confirms for me that the Love of the Eternal is ever-flowing regardless of what state we are in. We open ourselves to this Love when we keep our hearts open by our practice of meditation and Precepts. When we do, our lives are greatly uplifted and much more still and peaceful.