

# Dharmette: Deep Letting Go

**Transcribed and edited from a short talk by  
Gil Fronsdaal on March 6, 2013**

One of the important questions that some people face is: “If you really let go deeply, what is next?” What do you do then? Some people are afraid that if you let go deeply, there is nothing left. You’ll end up being a spiritual blob – a couch potato: free, but with no motivation, no reason to do anything, no self to do anything, nothing to do.

But when we let go fully, we are still left with a heart. The heart responds; the heart can have wishes. Some people have tried to express what the responsive heart is like when practice goes deep, and there is deep letting go. In a sense, there is no more concern about oneself.

What does the heart want?

I want to read two poems that I think express this heart. Both of them are in the form of aspirations or intentions. The responsive heart

can have an intention. In Zen there is one's vow, based on the idea of intention. When you let go deeply, then you live your life through this vow. The vow is your deep intention. My sense is that the vow is not something that is assumed, but something that gets expressed in the heart. Here are the two poems of aspiration.

*May I be a guard for those who need  
protection,  
A guide for those on the path,  
A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to  
cross the flood.  
May I be a lamp in the darkness,  
A resting place for the weary,  
A healing medicine for all who are sick,  
A vase of plenty,  
A tree of miracles.  
And for the boundless multitudes of living  
beings,  
May I bring sustenance and awakening,  
Enduring like the earth and sky,  
Until all beings are freed from sorrow  
And all are awakened.*

This was written by Shantideva, an Indian Buddhist monk in the Mahayana tradition, "May I be a guard for those who need protection."

This next poem is from a very different religious tradition. Maybe you will recognize it.

*Make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.  
Where there is injury, pardon.  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Being,  
Grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.  
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

This is by Saint Francis, a Catholic monk.

The heart's aspiration is to offer itself: to give, to support others, to respond to the suffering of the world. Saint Francis puts it in the context of an instrument of *your* [God's] peace, as his is a theistic religion. It's as an instrument of peace, of letting go. Then there is the wonderful

mutuality at the end, “In pardoning, we are pardoned. In giving, we receive.”

Some interesting questions for people whose practice involves letting go is, “To what degree is there something to receive the letting go – into which you can let go? Do you trust your heart? Do you trust what is there? Do you listen to what's there? And do you trust it enough that you are willing to live your life from that place?”

My guess is that not a lot of you are interested in living the life of Saint Francis – a life of deep letting go and poverty. But both of these monks let go in a deep way. It isn't that you are supposed to become a monastic. But is there a deep aspiration for you to live by, which is not about yourself, but about the world and others?

That aspiration is so deeply a part of who you are. It is not giving up who you are, or a sacrifice of yourself to give, and support others. It is who you are. It is the opposite of a diminishment. It is giving life to who you are in the heart.

*May I be a guard for those who need  
protection,  
A guide for those on the path,*

*A boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to  
cross the flood.*

*May I be a lamp in the darkness,*

*A resting place for the weary,*

*A healing medicine for all who are sick,*

*A vase of plenty,*

*A tree of miracles.*

*And for the boundless multitude of living  
beings,*

*May I bring sustenance and awakening,*

*Enduring like the earth and sky,*

*Until all beings are freed from sorrow,*

*And all are awakened.*

Thank you.