

JANET JINNE RICHARDSON
(VIA BRUCE SEIRYU BLACKMAN)

Glassman's Light in the Street

Prologue

We know the Zen Peacemaker Three Tenets and skillful means taught by Bernie Glassman Roshi: “Not-Knowing, Bearing Witness, and Taking Action.” This methodology for practice helps us see and respond to the needs of the world, including needs of the “least of us.”

Some twenty years ago, Bernie articulated a koan during winter sesshin at Wisdom House, Connecticut. This was back in the day when he installed Sensei Janet Richardson as roshi. From Bernie's presentations at sesshin, she and her successor, Bruce Blackman Sensei, compiled teaching notes. The teachings became Dharma Talks at ZCB/Clare Sangha. One of Roshi Janet's favorites was “Glassman's Light in the Street,”* which has evolved into a sesshin training koan.

The Case

Roshi Bernie addressed the assembly:

In Zen we hear of the All-encompassing Dharma and of the Interconnectedness of Beings and of the One Body—and all like that. Yet for most people, such notions are meaningless.

Every week in the streets of our cities, homeless people die of exposure. Rarely does anyone come forth to help or to claim them. It seems this is because no one knows them. In our nation's capital, unknowns have been known to freeze in winter. Likewise around the world. Backlogs of frozen cadavers build up in the morgues due to no funds for proper burial.

Roshi Bernie continued:

Downtown Yonkers last week, a sangha member saw this family in a dark alley. They were up against it in the night cold. Who are these people? Why is this? What can you tell me?

Commentary

Roshi Janet often said, "Our life is our koan," and "Glassman's Light in the Street" was one of her favorite teaching koans at Clare Sangha. It points to the Bodhisattva Ideal and calls for your direct demonstration of it. You are invited to demonstrate your grasp of it in dokusan, as well as that of a companion koan, "The Statue of Avalokiteshvara," from Senzaki's *Iron Flute* collection.

Verse

*The light shines in the darkness
And the darkness does not overcome it.
Can you show me your light in the street?*

*In the Yonkers alley,
At just such a time, what is your light?*

*Adapted from a dharma talk given by Seiryu Sensei
at Soji Zen Center, Philadelphia.