

## If you are really connected, what's all the fuss?

Once upon a time in Japan, there was a small temple with a large kabocha patch in the back garden. There were many kabocha of many differing sizes, shapes and color, depending upon where they grew in the garden, how much sunshine they got, etc., etc. In the evening, when humans were asleep, the kabocha got up and began socializing. But very soon the kabocha began to argue. The larger kabocha began to make fun of the smaller kabocha. Then the darker kabocha who grew in the direct sunlight began to belittle the paler kabocha who grew in the shade. Then there were the spotted kabocha who thought themselves to be unique and special – but not as special as the kabocha who were of mottled color and fancied themselves as more subtle than all the rest. These differences soon led to loud arguments, with claims of superiority over all the other groups.

One night, the arguments became so loud that it woke up the priest of the temple. The priest went to the garden, sized up the situation, and hit the temple bell to get them to be quiet. When they were all quiet, the priest told them to touch their heads. When they all touched their heads, the priest told them to follow the stem on their heads and see where the vine led to. To their astonishment, the quarrelsome kabocha discovered that they were all connected to each other. On discovering this, they all quit quarrelling and spent the rest of the night fascinated and delighted with the differences among them.

So the question is, if we are all one after all, why are we still at each other's throats? The kabocha answer is because we do not really see that we are connected, permanently, intimately, and in endless variety. We are not one, because we share the same shape, size, color, texture, values, child rearing habits, foods, aesthetics, music, dance, etc. etc. in common, we are one because all of this together comprises a single, unified reality. If you cannot feel the stem on your head that binds you

forever to your fellow man, animal, plant, and rocks – no amount of saying you are one with the universe will make it so.

We are the biggest kabocha on the block, deluding ourselves into thinking we are the biggest, strongest, richest, and therefore the best kabocha ever. And from that blind stance comes the need to categorize and rank all others below us. Such a stance cannot abide any criticism, any disagreement, any other way of looking at things except its own. People and kabocha who have a grasp of the absolute truth have no sense of Oneness, equality, comradeship, or affinity with others. They may control life – but they have no sense of life, nor do they know how to enjoy the beauty and all-rightness of life. They are Namō Namō Namō, Me Me Me to the end – with not a hint of Amida-butsu, much less of Namōamida-butsu.

Long live the stem-touching Kabocha

Gassho,

*Rev. Mas*