

# The Four Wisdoms

## Rev. Master Basil Singer

### Seattle Dharma Refuge

There are teachings that have been quite helpful in my daily practice and meditation. One teaching that has been particularly impactful is by Great Master Dogen. This is the teaching on the Four Wisdoms, found in “Shushogi:” **charity, tenderness, benevolence, and sympathy**. He wrote that they “are the means we have of helping others and represent the Bodhisattva’s aspirations.” Indeed, I have found for myself that when I live from the place of this teaching, I keep myself very open to the flow of the Eternal, Unborn Buddha Nature with its pure, unconditional love. And being mindful of the Four Wisdoms makes me aware when I “go off the rails” so that I can bring myself back on track.

Rev. Master Jiyu-Kennett, in various Dharma talks, expanded on the implications of the Four Wisdoms in our daily life. Highlights from some of these talks were transcribed in the book *Roar of the Tigress, Volume 1*. In this article I will offer quotes from the section on the Four Wisdoms regarding charity that I find especially illuminating; in future articles I will address the other Wisdoms.

My approach is to first provide a dictionary definition as the common understanding, followed by a quote from Rev. Master Jiyu’s commentary that provides a deeper spiritual meaning. I find both helpful.

**Charity:** *giving of help, a kindly attitude towards people.*

Do not be concerned about how small a gift may be, or how little a thing you may do for somebody else. It is important just to do it, and to do it wholeheartedly. That other people take no notice or are suspicious is not your concern.

If we look with the eyes of meditation, we can see simple acts of charity—generosity—all around us. It is important never to underestimate the merit that lies in such acts. Here are a few examples from my own experience of ways in which people have shown charity to me.

Recently, I was a little late for my bus. I waved to the bus driver and he stopped and let me on. Also, I have been offered a seat on a bus on numerous occasions. My neighbors in my apartment building bring packages up to my apartment from the lobby; also, they give me gifts of food. My doctor and therapeutic massage practitioner greatly reduce their fees for me. I am very grateful for their concern and gentleness. A local copy and print store gives me a reduced rate for their services. When I was very sick recently, the supervisor of the nursing home where I lead a meditation group sent me food from a Thai restaurant via a delivery service.

I can think of many other examples of ways in which other people have shown charity to me. Remembering a time many years ago, I recall the kindness of my sister and friends when I was going through a period of great difficulty. Without them, I do not know what would have happened to me.