

The Four Wisdoms II—Tenderness

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My [last article](#) was the first in a series on the Four Wisdoms described by Great Master Dogen in [Shushogi](#) (“[What is Truly Meant by Training and Enlightenment](#)”): charity, tenderness, benevolence, and sympathy. In this article I continue with the second Wisdom: tenderness. Observing, and experiencing, this teaching in action in daily life continues to be very helpful in my spiritual practice.

The dictionary defines tenderness as *being kind or sympathetic; gentleness and affection; warmheartedness*

In the *Shushogi*, Dogen writes of tenderness:

To behold all beings with the eye of compassion, and to speak kindly to them, is the meaning of tenderness. If one would understand tenderness, one must speak to others whilst thinking that one loves all living things as if they were one's own children.

In her commentary on the Four Wisdoms in [Roar of the Tigress, Volume 1](#) Rev. Master Jiyu says, “Tenderness, then, is being able to look at everyone and anyone and see the potential of the Buddha Mind...”.

Where I see tenderness manifested in its fullest in my daily experience is at the assisted living/long-term care facility that I visit. I see the staff constantly offering their wholehearted kindness and tenderness to the residents. It can be very challenging, because many of the residents are experiencing pretty extreme physical and/or mental difficulties. But no matter what the residents are going through, most of the time the caregivers continue to respond with tenderness. It is obvious to me that they can see the deeper nature—the Buddha Nature—of the person and

remain gentle and kind. It is a joy to be there and see the teaching in action.

In my own life, a particular area where tenderness has been shown me is my dyslexia. When I was young, it was undiagnosed. I had great difficulty in school, unable to learn many things. I could not understand what was wrong with me and was frustrated and really self-critical. But many of my teachers, family members, and friends looked past this shortcoming and treated me with tenderness. They could see that I had a problem but that it did not define me—that there was more to me than that, something deeper and truer. The tenderness shown me was a critical support in my life, helping me be more tender to myself when I was really down on myself and helping me see that I was more than my problem.

Dogen writes that “tenderness can have a revolutionary impact upon the mind” of a person. I am eternally grateful for all the tenderness that has been shown towards myself and to see it in action in the daily life of others.