

The Four Wisdoms III—Benevolence

Rev. Master Basil Singer

Seattle Dharma Refuge

This is the third article 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 third Wisdom, Benevolence. Observing and experiencing this teaching in action in daily life continues to be very helpful for my spiritual practice.

The dictionary defines Benevolence as “an inclination to do good; an act of kindness.” Dogen grounds this in daily life:

If one creates wise ways of helping beings, whether they be in high places or lowly stations, one exhibits benevolence.... The stupid believe that they will lose something if they give help to others, but this is completely untrue for benevolence helps everyone, including oneself, being a law of the universe.

In her commentary on the Four Wisdoms in *Roar of the Tigress, Volume 1* Rev. Master Jiyu says, “We accept the benevolence of all things so that we may find the Unborn, and we give benevolence so that all things, and all beings, that have not yet found the Unborn may find It.... Because it is the two-way thing, the feedback you get is joy.... Everything is doing the very best it can at all times to help us find the Unborn, and that is what makes it a Law of the Universe.”

Every day my life offers me compelling examples of others putting Benevolence into practice with practical acts of goodness and kindness. They are especially, and movingly, apparent in facilities I visit that deal with difficult people and situations. In the prison, and also the Federal detention center, where I offer meditation and the Dharma, the chaplains do their best “to create wise ways of helping beings” deal with the suffering they

cause themselves and others. And in the assisted living/long-term care facility I also visit, the staff show great kindness and patience as they go about aiding people with sometimes quite distressing physical and mental ailments. I feel great joy—and inspiration—in witnessing the benevolent efforts of the chaplains and caregivers to help suffering beings with kindness and compassion.

Great Master Dogen taught that “training is enlightenment” and that the Four Wisdoms are the “signs of enlightenment.” When we act from greed, anger, and delusion we block the flow of the Water of the Spirit—the nonjudgmental, unconditional love of the Eternal. When our life manifests the Four Wisdoms in our relations with other beings, we are bathed in that flow. Then, our training truly *is* enlightenment. And that is a beautiful and joyful way to live.