
Bodaisatta Shishobo by Master Dogen

Teisho by Silvia Leyer - Godinne, July 2021

Master Dogen is a great Japanese master who lived in the 13th century. He introduced Zen in his country and wrote many texts, including his main work, the *Shobogenzo*. During this *teisho*, I would like to talk about a chapter of the *Shobogenzo* called the *Bodaisatta Shishobo*. *Bodaisatta Shishobo* is usually translated as "The Four Beneficial Actions or Practices of the Bodhisattva".

In one of his first kusen of this camp, Roland told us about *Hannya*, a term taken from the *Hannya Shingyo*. *Hannya* means "wisdom". It is not an intellectual wisdom, but a wisdom that is put into practice, actually practised. And the four practices mentioned by Dogen are absolutely the expression of this wisdom, *Hannya*.

These practices are:

1. *Fuse* - generosity, giving freely
2. *Aigo* - words of love
3. *Rigyo* - to be of service, to have a useful conduct
4. *Doji* - cooperating, acting together.

The ways of behaving and acting are a very important part of a bodhisattva's life. They are the concrete implementation of what he has experienced and realized during zazen. According to Master Dogen, these four practices are the essence of a Buddhist's life, the true meaning of Buddhism in daily life in relationships with others. For them to be beneficial, they require wisdom, a wisdom put into practice.

Fuse

The first practice is *fuse*: generosity, giving freely. Giving is one of our daily actions: we give food to our children, we make material or monetary donations, or we give to the environment when we are careful with what we consume. A gesture, a smile, a teaching, everything can be a gift. There are many ways to give.

But what does it mean to give freely? According to Dogen, it means not seeking fame or gain, not seeking benefits for oneself and not seeking popularity through flattery.

In daily life, giving is often accompanied by an ulterior motive. If I lend my hammer to my neighbour, I expect him to lend me his saw when I will need it. And when I give a gift to someone, I expect a reaction of joy or - at least - thanks.

To give freely is to give without expecting any reward. As long as we expect something in return, we remain attached to that gift and that's exactly what prevents us from being free.

As you know, it is always interesting to observe ourselves, to observe our motives for giving, and also to observe to whom we give. Generally, we find that it is easier to be generous with people we like than with people we don't like or don't know. To give freely, on the other hand, is to act beyond our likes and dislikes. The bodhisattva doesn't just see the surface of the other person, or the differences, he goes beyond them. He sees what he shares in depth with each being and this allows him to stop creating separations.

We also have a tendency to take what we like and not want to separate ourselves from it. But in reality, nothing really belongs to us. Everything we think we own is only borrowed. Even our bodies do not belong to us, this notion of ownership is an illusion. And this is what Dogen expresses when he says: "If we do not consider our wealth as our property, it becomes a gift."

But giving freely does not mean giving anything at any time: that would be meaningless. A gift must be useful to the other person and not addictive. Instead of constantly giving money or food to someone, it is better to teach them to garden (for example) and help them earn a living. It is good to help others, but it is even better to help them free themselves.

Let's not underestimate the effects of even a small fuse. Dogen says, "Sometimes it takes only to share one sentence or one blade of grass and they can become a seed of goodness". A true *fuse* expresses the mind of the Buddha and can change the mind of the recipient.

By practising *fuse*, we naturally create a way of life where we do good. And the greatest *fuse* is practising zazen with a *mushotoku* mind, without purpose, without object, without ulterior motives, without wanting to achieve anything.

Aigo

The second practice that Master Dogen talks about is *aigo*: kind words or words of love. For us, there is nothing more natural than to speak. It is the first means of communication that we learn as children. It is so natural that we often speak without thinking, without paying attention to who we are speaking to and what effect our words have.

Aigo means to speak with compassion and kindness, i.e. to choose your words according to what the other person needs and what will make them feel good. Dogen advises us to avoid using rude or unkind words, but to speak to beings with affection, 'as if they were our children'.

Often also, our words are completely useless. Telling a "bad guy" that "he is a bad guy" is of no interest to him, because - deep down - he knows it. Dogen advises us to treat with compassion the one who has no virtue. Because a bad guy is not just a bad guy, it is just one of the facets of his personality in which he has settled. It is better to address him with kind words to help him discover other facets of himself, other aspects that will enable him to live in harmony with others.

We must also be careful not to practice kindness by falling into the bias that can arise when we give: "If I am kind to you, I expect you to be kind to me. And if not, I will stop being kind"... On the other hand, words of love expressed freely, without ulterior motives, have a much more powerful effect. As Dogen says: "Words of love have the power to move the sky".

Rigyo

Rigyo, the third action, is translated as 'rendering service' or 'useful conduct'. *Gyo* means 'practice' or 'conduct' and *ri* 'helpful'. Dogen says: "*Rigyo* means treating people kindly, without discrimination, regardless of their position or rank. It means using appropriate means for them to develop, whether in the near or distant future."

The bodhisattva, who follows the Buddha-Way, does not differentiate between sentient beings because he has realised that we all share the same nature. He acts with benevolence, even towards repulsive beings. A spider did not choose to be born a spider, a mosquito did not choose to feed on blood.

In order to act, the bodhisattva uses appropriate means, that is, skilful means, not only to "give a hand", but also to help the other person to take a further step in his or her development. Which skilful means should we use? There isn't a list of what to do or not to do in this or that situation, or with this or that person. The skilful means come from the wisdom of zazen, *Hannya*. They come from the intuition that develops itself through the practice of zazen. This intuition cannot be explained, but helps us to do the right thing at the right time.

But all this does not mean that we should not think: we do not need intuition to foresee the consequences of certain actions. For example, if out of impatience I push people around, I am only transmitting my stress and it is not at all benevolent. Or if I choose to buy steak instead of vegetables for lunch, the negative consequences are obvious.

You may have noticed that these practices that Master Dogen talks about have aspects in common. *Rigyo* is also about acting without ulterior motives, without profit for my ego. For example, Dogen talks about a man who buys a turtle from a fisherman and then puts it back in the water and sets it free, or about another man who takes care of a sick bird. Both have acted without expectation of reward.

Some people fear that their own welfare will be compromised if they are more concerned about the welfare of others. Dogen says that they are ignorant. They don't know that we are all part of the same cosmos, that we all share the same nature. So, to help others, whether they are friends or enemies, is to help oneself.

And if there are ignorant people, they should certainly not be left out, on the contrary. The bodhisattva can set an example, he can show that acting without seeking personal gain does not mean he is losing something for himself. The resulting happiness includes both the helper and the person helped. This is why Dogen, at the end of his commentary on *rigyo*, insists that we should strive to protect the ignorant.

Doji

The fourth action of *Bodaisatta Shishobo* is *doji*, to cooperate. *Doji* literally means "sharing the same goal" or, to use a more colloquial expression, "being in the same boat".

We live in a world full of dualisms, a world of diversity, of differences. On the surface we are all different, each with our own character, our own history and our own goals in life. Nevertheless, we have to adapt to each other in order to live in community.

A sesshin or camp like this is an example of a concrete experience of *doji*. Because during a sesshin, "we are all in the same boat". First of all, we have to build the boat, a kind of ship, and for a sesshin to take place, there is a group of people who are going to plan it and organise things in advance. Often, they have to overcome obstacles, like the current pandemic or the consequences of bad weather. The stronger the group, the more stable the boat is.

Then you need a captain and a team, who give their energy to help to the smooth running of the boat. These are the Godo and the participants. A boat with a captain but without a team cannot sail. A boat with a team but without a captain goes in any direction. To make the boat sail properly, the captain and the team must form a single unit.

Doji also means to look out for others. If a sailor is too tired, he will fall off the mast. So, you have to make sure that everyone can rest when they need to.

On a ship, there are many tasks to be done and the same goes for a sesshin. It is an opportunity for everyone to let go of their own habits and experience different *samu*. Following the Way means staying on the move, stepping out of one's own comfort zone, to evolve in service to the community.

In zazen, we experience the vast mind that does not stagnate on anything. To put this vast mind into practice, a sesshin is a wonderful opportunity to trust the Dharma, the Sangha and ourselves.

Master Dogen says: "*Doji* means being in harmony with oneself and others. Through this, others can be connected to us and we can be connected to others." *Doji* is about never separating ourselves from others, paying attention to what is going on around us, at every moment. The more we experience *doji*, the more flexible our mind becomes and the more in tune we become with others.

The bodhisattva sees at all times that "we are all in the same boat", in a very, very big boat, the boat of life. It is the boat of interdependence, impermanence and emptiness. So, it becomes quite natural for the bodhisattva to help all sentient beings to liberate themselves.

Fuse, aigo, rigyo and *doji* are four compassionate practices, put into practice with wisdom, four practices of the same mind, the mind of the bodhisattva.