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# Bodhisattva and Scout

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Years ago, my sons got interested in scouting and through them, me too. After a period of informal help, I participated to a short training course and I became a scout, complete with uniform and scarf. Besides the respect for the general principles of scouting, two main reasons led me to this choice: the pleasure to be amongst young and less young people, of various religions, cultures, economic statuses, etc. all different, but united in solidarity, with a positive and selfless aim. And I had - as well - the grateful wish to give back to this community all the positive things I had received from them through my children.

Our association (CNGEI) is laic and thus has no religious orientation. Nevertheless, a constant attention is given to the spiritual development of the young people who, by the means of the games, outdoor life, sobriety, contact with the nature, are educated to perceive and to cultivate their deepest nature.

To stay silent around the campfire, under the sky full of stars, with the crackling of the wood and the sounds of the forest, is an almost unique opportunity for children and young people, girls and boys.

Activity is structured and follows the scout method, method constantly updated to aim at a better practice, after checking to activities that have been achieved. It is a "school of life" for children, teenagers and adults: everybody learns together.

Not having enough spare time to be "Chief" of a unity, my work consists in logistic help, participation in maintenance works, organizational meetings and as cook during the weekends outings. In this case, during the weekend group outings, I cook the Saturday evening meal, the Sunday breakfast and lunch, as the outings are almost always outside the city. The menu is decided by the Chiefs (those who lead the various groups); I have to prepare everything and cook as expected, meeting the deadlines.

I have never found adequate to talk about my Zen practice to the children and teenagers and I avoid making zazen during these outings. I have nothing to hide, but I think that it would be drawing the attention to myself and I don't want "to steal the show" while they do their activities. My Zen practice, however, is not a secret and when the opportunity occurred, I talked about it, but mainly with other adults.

My task is to provide well-prepared meals. So I try to *"manipulate even one vegetable leaf in such a way that it manifests Buddha's body, to allow Buddha to manifest himself through the leaf."*

In my activity, I try to be concentrated, silent, in harmony with the others, attentive and empathic, as in the kitchen of a sesshin. If it is particularly cold, I prepare also some hot tea in the middle of the morning, to warm all the numb hands.

The menus are always simple, sober and not expensive. During a recent outing, the evening menu was a broth with pastas. In this case, I had added it some potatoes and zucchinis (very

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little, to be honest) to improve the taste. The best compliment, I received it from a child, who told me: "*Sir, this is the best soup I ate in all my life!*" Ah, the power of hunger ...

I try to take great care of the preparation of the meals, even for simple and basic menus. I also prepare some hot water with some cleaning fluid and kitchen towels, to allow everybody - at the end of the meal - to wash quickly his mess tin. The way of being "in" the situation (how we move, how we act, etc.) creates an empathic relation with the girls and boys, relation which generates a mutual respect and benevolence. And this even if, sometimes, I nearly don't speak to any of them.

Of course, for the starving young people, the cook is always a nice person! But it is not only that ... Young people are often careless and distracted, but at the same time, they are very sensitive and quickly perceive the "nature" of somebody. Sometimes, each in his in turn, somebody comes to help me in the kitchen ... I try then to give simple and clear instructions: "*clean your hands, hold the knife this way, take the vegetable this other way, be careful not to cut yourself, etc.*" And, with this silent work, during which useless chatting is avoided, the action is shared in full concentration. When they arrive, they immediately want to go to work without thinking further: therefore to stop to wash the hands is similar to enter the zendo with the left foot.

I try to put great care in the communication: at the end of the work, I thank them simply for their help and it amazes them, because a child is rarely thanked. And especially because it is the same thank you that I could say to an adult: simple and direct.

I am aiming at a relation of mutual respect and, in the scout context, it is easier, because the young people are there out of the usual hierarchical context (family and school) and can act with a great freedom, combined with a strong spirit of responsibility; in this situation, indeed, the peer-to-peer relation is simpler. Furthermore, we belong to the same world and carry the same uniform, and it involves that we share the same experience, the same rules, and the same principles.

There is one fine rule I would like to use in other circumstances: when the Chief wants silence, he only raises his hand with his fingers making the Scout sign and quickly, everybody do the same and keep quiet... Of course, sometimes children are more agitated than usual and the method does not work, but often the result is amazing.

That's all I wanted to say, nothing more, nothing less.  
This is a great experience.