

Sermons

Joy of Giving and Sharing - Fuse 布施 by Rev. Shugen Komagata part 1

In the fourth chapter of the *Shushogi*, the modern compilation of passages taken from Eminent Ancestor Dogen's most important work, the *Shobogenzo*, there are the four integrative methods of bodhisattvas (*Shishobo*) that benefit all living beings: 1) giving (*fuse*), 2) kind speech (*aigo*), 3) beneficial deeds (*rigyo*), and 4) cooperation (*doji*). These are the practices of the bodhisattva vows, actions that one does for the sake of others without thoughts of gaining anything in return.

In this article, I will focus on the idea of "giving," or "*fuse*" in Japanese. According to Sotoshu's official translation of *Shushogi*, "giving" means "not to covet," but to share. People are encouraged to give, since "in principle... ..nothing is truly one's own." Everything in one's life is there to share, not possess for one's personal gain. When contemplating the seed of humankind's suffering, it is innate selfish attachment to things that fuels the vicious cycle of birth and rebirth. It is also humankind's seemingly uncontrollable and insatiable desire to possess things that often prevents people from giving and sharing things—both material and immaterial.

In *Shushogi*, it reads, "we should give even a penny or a single blade of grass of resources, for it will help establish good roots in this life as well as the next. Without seeking reward or thanks, we simply share our strength with others."

When people make the act of giving a part of their core identity, their actions naturally lead them to understand and appreciate the value of what they have. More importantly, it provides them the opportunity to enhance their awareness of their existence in this world of interdependence.

It is very difficult to live one's life void of interdependence. People are often under the assumption that they can live their day-to-day lives independently because they manage their own daily routine under their own power and ability. However, they are not completely independent in an interdependent world, for even one of the basic necessities in life—food—relies on interaction with people. For example, the bowl of baked beans on the table comes from the hands that cooked it. The hands that cooked the food bought the beans from the grocer at the market. The grocer at the market obtained the vegetable from a distributor. The distributor obtained the beans from a farmer that grew vegetables. The vegetable came from the plants growing on the farm. This is only one example of interdependence. Each individual will find countless ways they are dependent on others or even the environment around them. In truth, there are many people who are able to sustain their lives only at the mercy of others. Thus, it is easy to understand how the practice of giving is a positive and compassionate way to connect and interact with others.

To be continued.

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Translated from Sanskrit, giving is called "*dana*." In Japanese, "*dana*" means "*fuse*," or "with deep appreciation." This term is used when giving money called "*fuse*" or "*ofuse*." Therefore, giving generously in the form of monetary donations begins with deep appreciation.

Giving is of utmost importance not only in sharing material things like food, money, items of value, resources, or modern technology, but sharing the immaterial: the spirit of generosity. In the old Japanese tradition, a person who practiced *dana* was called "*Danna sama*." "*Danna sama*" does not mean a man who is lazy and does not do anything but give orders. Rather, the true meaning of "*Danna sama*" is one who shares and provides generously without any form of conditions, whether through thoughts, feelings, words, or actions. Without generosity, giving is not a true form of sharing. Generosity, therefore, is like a warm blanket that makes giving heartwarming.

However, giving with a heart of generosity is an all embracing selfless action people must practice in their everyday lives. Buddha did not command humankind to do or not to do something. On the contrary, Buddha, instead of commanding humankind, advised his disciples to practice good by doing something positive and meaningful, with warm thoughts and feelings originating from a selfless heart and mind. What people do for one another should be unconditional and should originate from one's own Buddha nature. To "give" without seeking reward, the essence of the bodhisattva's ideal, compels the individual to provide help to remove all forms of suffering. Compassionate giving moves a person's heart at the sight of others' suffering.

Giving one's warm thoughts of caring is likened to a mother's unconditional love for her child, even to the point of self-sacrifice. One's willingness to give without any hesitation comes with great compassion and love to save all people by any and all means. The true spirit of giving is not only directed towards others, but also towards oneself. This quality is born from the perfect realization of the oneness of life. And it is this quality which raises a human being above the brute. Life, without a spirit of giving, is indeed like a machine without oil.

It is interesting to note that here in Hawaii, the word "*aloha*," is an expression to convey many things, from "hello," "welcome," to "good bye" and "I love you." What is common in every expression of "*aloha*" is the inner feeling of an open mind and open heart, to give and receive wholeheartedly, free from prejudice or conditions. Similarly, in the spirit of Buddhism, unconditional giving must come from our open mind and open heart. In any given day, people have a great number of opportunities to put this into practice. An open mind and open heart must be tolerant, understanding, compassionate, and willing to share the dharma. If people share with an open mind and open heart, the "*Aloha Spirit*" will undoubtedly manifest itself.

To be continued.

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While it is very difficult to awaken to Buddha within oneself, every effort to do so should be made. Putting Buddha's teachings of love, mercy, and compassion into action is something everyone can do. It is not limited to the temple community, but open to the world. Everyone's life is precious and must not be wasted. Give, speak kind words, help others, and cooperate, not for personal gain, whether material or spiritual, but rather solely for the sake of the act itself. Rather than a means to an end, proper practice is, in essence, an end in itself. This is the true practice of Buddhism and the bodhisattva ideal.

It was six months ago while visiting a hospice that I was overwhelmed by an unexpected encounter with a terminal cancer patient to whom I offered prayers and words of encouragement. She was 70 years of age and was quite alert. She greeted and welcomed me, saying that she was most appreciative of my weekly visit. After a few minutes of conversation we recited together the *Three Refuges Prayer (Sanki Rai Mon)* and *Ten Verse Kannon Sutra of Timeless Life (Enmei Jikku Kannon Gyo)* with her *juzu* on her hands which were in *gassho*.

After reciting sutras she closed her eyes and several minutes went by; with a faint but happy smile she looked at me and said softly, "Thank you for praying for me. I now feel calm and all my worries seem to have disappeared. I feel much better and energized. I feel blessed and I don't feel alone. I am not afraid of being by myself even though I may have to go very soon. Now I feel I am together with the Buddha spiritually and also my family is with me. I am happy that I am alive today and I want to share with you this precious feeling of gratitude. I am so grateful for all the blessings I have received throughout my lifetime, from my parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren and friends. I am so thankful. I have no regret."

With her hands in *gassho* she nodded at me gently saying, "Thank you, I feel so *arigatai (so thankful)*." With tearful eyes, a few minutes of silence went by and she continued in her faint voice, "Reverend Komagata, I am so thankful for your weekly visit and prayers. Oh, I wish I could offer you something as an expression of my gratitude but I am sorry I have nothing to offer you. *Honto ni gomen nasai. (I'm really sorry.)* I don't know if I am still alive tomorrow but while I am living today, may I pray for you, now? That's all I can offer you." And in her calm tone of voice she prayed for my good health and happiness.

Overwhelmed but composing myself, I smiled and told her, "Thank you." With a soft charming smile she reciprocated and whispered, "Thank you." These were the last words she spoke to me. On the following morning the family called me saying she had passed on peacefully.

Life is precious. Every living moment of life is precious regardless of one's physical condition of life. This woman, however, lived to the fullest even though she knew that her life was coming to an end. Her unselfish desire to share with me her genuine thoughts of gratitude by offering me words of prayer was most appreciative. I went to see and encourage her to live positively for this very moment of life; instead, she demonstrated gracefully that, even under the extremely difficult circumstance of facing death and dying, she could find happiness by practicing giving with a selfless heart and mind. This was the most beautiful act of "giving" I have ever received from someone.

The fundamental essence of giving must be practiced in our daily life through our physical actions, the words we speak and the thoughts we have. This is a practice of the bodhisattva vow of giving and sharing. It is not difficult. All we must do is to practice giving wholeheartedly in an ordinary and natural way without prejudice or conditions.