

Sermons

Kind Speech – Aigo 愛語 by Rev. Daigaku Rummé part 1

The expression "aigo" (*priyavacana*) is an old Buddhist term that originated in India, but in the Sotoshu the context that we are most familiar with is the reference found in Dogen Zenji's text *Bodaisatta Shishobo*. *Bodaisatta Shishobo*, which means "The Four All-Embracing Methods of a Bodhisattva", is one chapter in his masterwork the *Shobogenzo*. "Aigo" literally means "kind, affectionate speech" or some might translate it as "loving words." I think it's fair to say that most Japanese people have not read the *Shobogenzo*, but all Japanese people associated with the Sotoshu, are familiar with the *Shushogi* ("The Meaning of Practice and Verification"). The *Shushogi* is a compendium of quotations taken from the *Shobogenzo* to form a sutra primarily for lay people that was composed by Ouchi Seiran in the early twentieth century. The *Shushogi* is comprised of five sections. The fourth section is titled "Making the Vow to Benefit Beings." The greater part of this section is a direct quotation from "The Four All-Embracing Methods of a Bodhisattva." It is in this context of the teaching of benefitting other people that most people have come across Dogen Zenji's teaching about "Aigo." Whether we translate this term into English as "kind speech" or "loving words", this is a notion that most people probably don't think of as being particular to the Buddhist religion, but rather see it an ethical concept we could find in any culture or religion. What is the significance then of this term in Buddhism? What did Dogen Zenji mean by it? These are questions I can't promise to answer, but I would like to write about some of the connections I see between this teaching and the larger context of the Soto teaching in general. I would like to begin by writing first about the significance of the term "Shobogenzo."

"Sho" in *Shobogenzo* means something that is eternal, something that will never change. The Chinese character for "sho" (正) means "true" or "right" and in this case means unchanging. "Ho" (法), which is elided as "bo" when it appears in *Shobogenzo*, is the Dharma. The Dharma is everything we see with the eyes, hear with the ears, taste with the tongue, smell with the nose, feel with the skin, and think with the mind. Human beings are also the Dharma. "Gen" (眼) means "eye." In this case, the eye represents each of the six sense functions: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. The eye doesn't judge whether something is clean or dirty, big or small; it merely reflects what is seen. The tongue doesn't make the distinction between sweet and salty. All things in our lives appear through the condition of the five senses of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching. It is within the mind that discriminations such as sweet and salty, like and dislike arise. The tool which makes those discriminations we call "consciousness." No discrimination is made in the sensations that are received by the eye, ears, or tongue. Discrimination is only within the function of consciousness. This means that it isn't bad to think of various things and such thoughts are not delusion. The function of the mind is nothing other than a tool for thinking. This is explained in the "gen" (eye) of *Shobogenzo*. "Zo" (蔵) is a storehouse or treasury. The meaning here is that by letting suffering be suffering as it is, letting anxiety be anxiety as it is, and by letting all discriminations be as they are, we function freely. Collectively, the four components of "Shobogenzo" mean that we ourselves are an eye that sees things correctly. It means to see all things as essentially one.

Many people think that "Shobogenzo" refers only to a book by Dogen Zenji, but if we trace the etymology of this expression we find it appears in the well-known story called "Shakyamuni Buddha Holds Up a Flower," (a story which Dogen Zenji refers to three times in the *Shobogenzo*.) Shakyamuni Buddha had wanted to resolve by any means possible the basic sufferings of human life: birth and death, old age and sickness. For that reason, he entered a place of ascetic practice. Speaking later about the nature of that practice he said, "No one either in the past, the present, or the future has practiced, is practicing, or will practice as severe ascetic practices as I have." However, no matter how much he punished his body, he was unable to attain true satisfaction. Realizing that he wouldn't be able to bring an end to the basic sufferings of human beings by means of ascetic practice, Shakyamuni Buddha regained his strength by accepting the food of a young village girl and then he sat. Some years later, at the instant of seeing the morning star, he realized that certainly there is a time when the self awakens to the self. He verified this for himself. For 49 years following his awakening, the Buddha traveled throughout India expounding the teaching that all things including mountains, rivers, and grass have been, are, and will be Buddha. However, the true meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching cannot be expressed in words. Toward the end of his life when it was time to decide who would be his successor, while on top of Mt. Grdhrakuta, he suddenly held up a flower and then let it fall. His disciple Mahakashapa broke out in a broad smile. Seeing this, Shakyamuni Buddha said "I have the treasury of the true Dharma eye ("Shobogenzo"), the marvelous mind of

Nirvana, the true form of the Formless, and the subtle Dharma gate independent of words and transmitted beyond the teachings. I entrust it now to Mahakashapa." This expression "Shobogenzo" was used at that time. So, please know that Dogen Zenji's *Shobogenzo* has the same contents as Shakyamuni Buddha's Shobogenzo. At the same time, please keep in mind that you also are nothing other than this Shobogenzo. The main point that Dogen Zenji emphasizes again and again in the *Shobogenzo* is "How is it possible to really know oneself?" In general, we can say that Zen practice is the matter of getting to know the Self; it is the intention to know the Self that is one with all things.

Perhaps Dogen Zenji's best known teaching is "To study the Way of Buddha is to study the Self. To study the Self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be enlightened by all things. To be enlightened by all things is to cast off the body and mind of the self as well as others. All traces of enlightenment disappear and this traceless enlightenment continues on and on." In this teaching, which also appears in the *Shobogenzo*, Dogen Zenji is clearly saying that practice (studying the Way of Buddha) is to realize the essential nature of things (Self). This is to realize fundamentally that there is no separation between oneself and others by forgetting the ego and that all things are part of one's body (enlightened by all things). When there is the realization that there is no need to compare outside of one's functioning right now (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking), the seeking mind ceases and great loving mind flows forth. Then, the true nature of the Self is manifested. The sense of the separate ego-self which is the source of dividing the essential nature oneness of things into self and other, pain and pleasure, increase and decrease, is the source of all delusion and anxiety. When the source of this delusion disappears completely, this condition is called liberation. It is also called "nirvana" or "enlightenment." When the self is forgotten, then the joyous activity that is free of the ego is born (all traces of enlightenment disappear) and verifies yourself at every moment, in every place, in any situation (continues on and on endlessly.)

Again, when we consider Dogen Zenji's teaching about "kind speech", I think it's important to see the larger context of his teaching.

To be continued.

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Section Four of the *Shushogi*, "Making the Vow to Benefit Beings", begins with a quotation taken from the *Hotsu Bodaishin* ("Establishing the Bodhi-mind") chapter of the *Shobogenzo*,

To arouse the thought of enlightenment is to vow to save all beings before saving ourselves. Whether lay person or monk, whether a deva or a human, whether suffering or at ease, we should quickly form the intention of first saving others before saving ourselves. Though of humble appearance, one who has formed this intention is already the teacher of all living beings. Even a girl of seven is a teacher to the fourfold assembly, a compassionate father to living beings.

This matter of arousing the thought of enlightenment may seem overwhelming to many people; even making the vow to benefit other beings may not seem that easy. And yet, our task as Buddhists is to accomplish those things. We regularly make the Bodhisattva Vows to save all beings, to cut off all delusions, to master all Dharma teachings, and attain the Way of Buddha. A bodhisattva is a being who vows to awaken to his/her own mind as well as to work for the benefit of all beings. But how are we going to do this? In "The Bodhisattva's Four All-Embracing Methods", Dogen Zenji very kindly refers us to four kinds of wisdom that we can practice in our everyday lives as a way of manifesting our vows as bodhisattvas. They are: generosity (also one of the Six Paramitas), kind speech, beneficial actions, and cooperation. These four things are, as well, not necessarily easy for us to carry out because of our attachment to the idea of a separate self (ego) and yet, these four methods point the way for giving up the ego.

The following is a fairly literal translation into English of Dogen Zenji's comments on "kind speech" in "The Bodhisattva's Four All-embracing Methods."

"Kind speech" means, when meeting living beings, first of all to feel compassion for them and to offer caring and loving words. Broadly, it is there being no rude or bad words. In secular societies there are polite customs of asking others if they are well. In Buddhism, there are the words "Take care of yourself!" and there is the disciple's greeting "How are you?" Speaking with the feeling of compassion for living beings as if they were babies is kind speech. We should praise those who have virtue and should pity those who lack virtue. Through love of kind speech, kind speech is gradually nurtured. Thus, kind speech which is ordinarily neither recognized nor experienced manifests itself before us. While the present body and life exist, we should enjoy kind speech, and we will not regress or deviate through many ages and many lives. Whether in defeating adversaries or in promoting harmony among gentle folk, kind speech is fundamental. To hear kind speech spoken to us directly makes the face happy and the mind joyful. To hear kind speech indirectly etches an impression in the heart and in the soul. Remember, kind speech arises from a loving mind, and the seed of a loving mind is compassion. We should learn that kind speech has the power to turn around the heavens; it is not merely the praise of ability. (Translated by Gudo Nishijima)

Each person could paraphrase this on his/her own, but one way to paraphrase these words in contemporary English would be:

How would we express ourselves as bodhisattvas in speech? A bodhisattva would speak kindly to all beings he or she encounters, as if the self was meeting self, for in essence all things are one. We would first of all have feelings of genuine affection for them and offer them words that express our pleasure in knowing them. To put it more broadly, we would not use language that is harsh or rude. Even in secular society there are respectful customs for asking others how they are. In Buddhism there is the teacher's expression, "Take good care of yourself," and there is the disciple's greeting, "How are you?" To speak with a feeling of genuine affection for sentient beings as if they were babies is kind speech. We should praise those who have virtue and pity those who do not. As we come to enjoy speaking kindly to others, this will only encourage us to continue to do so more and more. Even when others don't seem to appreciate our intention to be kind, there will be unseen results. Kind speech is the foundation for overcoming those who are angry and hostile, as well as for promoting harmony among others. When we hear kind speech that is spoken to us directly, we feel happy and the mind is joyful. When we hear that someone has said something kind about us in our absence, this makes a deep impression on our heart and spirit. Remember that kind speech arises from a loving heart, and that the seed of a loving heart is compassion. We should learn

that kind speech has the incredible power to do things that seem impossible, and is not merely a matter of praising someone's abilities.

To be continued.

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Kind Speech – Aigo 愛語 by Rev. Daigaku Rummé part 3

In the first part, I wrote about the larger context of Dogen Zenji's teaching of the *Shobogenzo* and the need to realize that we ourselves are "the treasury of the true Dharma eye." In the second part, we looked at the text from "The Four All-Embracing Methods of a Bodhisattva" regarding the matter of kind speech. In the third part, we will look and see how this can be applied in our everyday lives.

One of the things I love about the Buddhist teaching is that frequently one thing is divided into different parts to show that one thing from different angles. This is to say that these different parts, whether they are three or four or six, are actually different aspects of the same thing. In this case as well, I think that if we can truly practice one of these four all-embracing methods of a bodhisattva: generosity, kind speech, beneficial actions, or cooperation then we are also able to practice the other three. And if we are unable to practice kind speech, for example, then we are also unable to be generous. If we are unable to be generous, we are unable to cooperate with others. These four things go hand in hand. Each of these four methods is asking us to give up the ego.

I believe that all people wish to realize their true nature, which is free and unrestricted. The one thing that prevents us from doing this is our attachment to the ego, the sense of a separate self. While most people speak kindly to their friends and family, we often have difficulty speaking kindly to those we don't know or those people who we think speak unkindly to us. To the extent that we are unable to speak kindly to others, this is caused by this sense of selfishness, our attachment to the sense of self. A bodhisattva is a person who is able to speak kindly to anyone. This might also mean saying things that another person doesn't want to hear if that is what is necessary. To aspire to speak kindly at all times is the bodhisattva ideal. As Dogen Zenji says, "Remember that kind speech arises from a loving heart, and that the seed of a loving heart is compassion." Compassion arises from the wisdom of knowing that while things appear in different forms, in essence they are one.

Shikantaza is the quickest way for us to forget the ego. As Zen Buddhists, our practice is to sit with the intention of grinding up the ego and awakening to our true, compassionate nature. In this way, I think of Dogen Zenji's teachings of "The Four All-Embracing Methods of a Bodhisattva" as being both the way a person who has realized the Way of Buddha lives and acts in the world without intention, as well as the bodhisattva ideals for those of us who aspire to realize the Way of Buddha.

There is the following Japanese poem:

*A sweetfish lives in the rapids of a river,
A bird nests in a tree,
A human being dwells in the world of kindness and sympathy.*

Early summer is the season Japanese people associate with sweetfish or *ayu*, a fish that lives in the rapids of small rivers. Birds nest in trees and people live within kindness and sympathy. Everything is interconnected. However, because of causality, a fish, a bird, and a human being each live in different places. I think this song has an interesting way to express this. Essentially, everything is one, but through causes and conditions the places where things live as well as the shapes they take are different. Oftentimes, our world seems harsh and cruel. But let us remember and be grateful for Dogen Zenji's teaching regarding kind speech as it gives us a powerful tool to change that harshness into a world of kindness and sympathy, the place where all people wish to live.