

# Sermons

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## November 2014 - Hotsugan Risho - Making the Vow to Benefit Beings by Rev. Shiju Sakagawa

I began practicing *kendō* when I was ten years old. One thing that was not allowed was a "fist pump" when you won. In all cultures, it is the common practice that the loser, forbearing from chagrin, praises the winner. However, one of the significant characteristics of Japan's martial arts is the practice of the winner giving consideration to the loser by not doing a fist pump or other show of victory, or even letting it appear in his or her facial expression. In ancient times, there was nothing like the fist pump in *judo*, now an Olympic event, either.

This consideration of "care for others" is not limited to sports, and can be found in every region of the world. However, in Japan's case, the teachings of Buddhism have had a significant impact on it.

I would like to speak about something I read in the letters-to-the-editor column of a newspaper the other day. The writer was a woman in her sixties. She described an incident that occurred on the bus as she was returning from shopping at a supermarket. At a certain bus stop, a young mother pushing a stroller was starting to get on the bus. At that point, the bus driver said "It's against the rules to ride the bus with a stroller. Please fold it before getting on." The young mother was also carrying her full shopping bags, and appeared troubled as to what she should do. Just then, the woman who wrote the letter got off the bus and said, "I'll hold the baby for you so you can collapse the stroller and get on." The young mother folded the stroller up, got on the bus, and sat down in an empty seat. The older woman asked "By the way, how far are you going?" The young mother answered "I'm getting off at the third bus stop." "Well then, when you get off, I'll hold the baby for you. You can get the stroller ready and put the brake on. Then I'll hand you the baby," the older woman said. "Really? Thank you so much," replied the young mother.

The bus stopped at the young mother's destination. The older woman asked the driver to wait for a moment, and then handed the baby to the young mother after she had gotten the stroller ready. When the older woman returned to the bus after handing off the baby, the bus slowly pulled away and moved down the street.

A woman in her seventies had watched the whole event from the back of the bus. She said to the woman who had helped the young mother, "Thank you! Because of you, everybody on the bus became happy!"

The letter writer finished with these words. "My heart became full at this woman's words. When we get old, it gets harder to move around even when we want to do something for someone. However, she taught me that we can give joy to others with our words. I'm the one who should be grateful."

What the letter writer did was *rigyō* (beneficial action), or in other words, "doing what I can for people other than myself." The woman watching from the back, who said "Thank you! Because of you, everybody on the bus became happy!" was practicing *aigo* (kind speech), "using kind words" that expressed a loving heart that thought of others.

In addition, the woman watching from the back said that "everybody on the bus became happy," I'm sure that everyone on the bus—people of different sexes, different ages, with their own errands to run, together by mere coincidence—broke into a pleased smile, happy for the young mother with the stroller. This is *dōji* (identity action), in other words, thinking without discriminating between oneself and others. Further, I think we could say that these three things change the form of *fuse*, "generosity." *Fuse* refers to sharing with mental and material generously. Dogen Zenji further defines it as "non-greed."

Generosity in words is *aigo*, generosity in actions is *rigyō*, and generosity of the heart is *dōji*. Generosity means showing through our actions a heart that is striving to get as close to the Buddha as possible.

Stirring up the heart to move closer to the Buddha is referred to as "arousing the Bodhi-mind." The concrete workings of that heart are the actions of *fuse*, *aigo*, *rigyō*, and *dōji*, but what is important is to "put yourself aside and first act for the benefit of others." Of course, this does not mean that you "sacrifice" yourself, but merely that you put others before yourself.

However, blindly fulfilling the worldly desires of others does not constitute doing things for the benefit of others. So that there would be no misunderstanding, Dogen Zenji taught that "vainly fulfilling the world's desire for pleasure does not benefit sentient beings." In addition, these four actions of *fuse*, *aigo*, *rigyō*, and *dōji* are methods of encouraging many people to arouse the Buddha heart, the "Bodhi-mind," and the destination is to guide them to the Buddha's path and invite them to walk it together with us.

The final goal of Buddhists is to become a Buddha, but even if we are not able to become Buddhas, it is my deep desire to walk and act together in order to move closer to the Buddha.

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