
OZENESS

Quarterly Newsletter of the Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose Dharma Legacy

Vol. 4 No. 2 Summer 2000

In Memoriam

Rev. Gyomay Kubose passed away on Wednesday, March 29, 2000 at St. Joseph Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. He was so fortunate to have had a lifetime of good health. Never before in his 94 years had he been hospitalized until he was afflicted with severe pneumonia. His family is grateful that his passing went peacefully.

Rev. Gyomay Kubose was born "Masao Kubose" in San Francisco on June 21, 1905. When he was only 3 years old, his parents divorced and he was sent to Japan to be raised by his grandparents. After finishing elementary school, he completed studies at a newly opened agricultural school. Then at the age of 17, he returned to the United States. He learned English by enrolling at the Piedmont Elementary School in Oakland, California ("I was the tallest in my class!"), graduating in 1924. He went on to graduate from the prestigious Piedmont High School in December, 1931. He started out supporting himself by being a "school boy" and lived with the Pusey family in Piedmont. He later started a thriving landscape gardening business in the Oakland area.

While attending his grandmother's memorial service at the Oakland Buddhist Temple, the minister, Rev. Taigan Hata, gave him a book written by Rev. Haya Akegarasu, a famous Jodo Shinshu minister. Reading this book turned the young Masao Kubose's life completely around. When Rev. Akegarasu toured the United States in 1929, Kubose accompanied him as his interpreter. This was the beginning of a long and meaningful relationship. Rev. Akegarasu counseled Kubose to complete his college education and invited him to study at his temple in Japan. Kubose attended the University of California at Berkeley and graduated in 1935 with a B.A. in philosophy. In January,



Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose
1905 - 2000

1936 he married Minnie Taniguchi of Fowler, California and went to Rev. Akegarasu's temple, Myotatsuji, for ministerial study in Buddhism. The Kubose's first son, Don, was born at the temple, where they lived for five years. During this time, Kubose accompanied his teacher on lecture tours throughout Japan, China and Korea. Rev. Akegarasu gave Kubose the Dharma name "Gyomay" which means "bright dawn."

Before Rev. Kubose left Japan, Rev. Akegarasu advised him to start an independent temple in the United States so that he could freely present the Dharma teachings in a way that could be understood by Americans. He returned to the States in July, 1941 just prior to World War II. After a brief stay in Los Angeles, he was interned for two years in the Heart Mountain Relocation Camp in Wyoming. He came to Chicago in 1944 and established The Chicago Buddhist Church. He

established the American Buddhist Association in 1955 and later a Buddhist Educational Center as well as a meditation group.

Among his many honors and awards are: The 5th Class Order of the Sacred Treasure Gold and Silver Rays from His Majesty the Emperor of Japan; World Buddhist Mission Cultural Award from the Japanese Buddhist Mission Cultural Association; Senior Citizen Hall of Fame Award from the City of Chicago; Distinguished Service Award from the 15th generation Grand Tea Master, Sen Soshitsu, of the Urasenke Tradition of Tea; Silver Beaver Award from the Boy Scouts of America; Honorary Life Member of the Uptown Lions Club and Uptown Chamber of Commerce; Brotherhood Award from the Japanese American Citizens League; Outstanding Community Service Award from the Japanese American Service Committee; and the Chicago Nikkei Community Father of the Year Award from the Japanese American Association of Chicago.

Although Rev. Kubose was kept very busy with temple and community activities, he always had time for his family. There are many treasured memories of him enthusiastically sharing life with his loved ones: wrestling with his grandchildren, playing basketball with his children at age 70 in his dress shoes, going horseback riding in Moab, Utah at age 87 with wife Minnie and family. He constantly found WOWs in life, and showed others wonders that they would not have noticed otherwise. "WOW, look at those dandelions!" "WOW, look at the traffic!" "WOW, this tastes delicious!"

Rev. Kubose lived fully every day of his 94 years and was a true example of how to live the Dharma teachings. His life is a tremendous inspiration for us all.

Passing of the Torch

Rev. Gyomay Kubose touched many lives during his long, productive life. The family has received many expressions of sympathy, a number of which have included nice remembrances. We would like to compile and print a collection of these remembrances in a booklet to be titled, "Remembering Sensei." We are in the process of obtaining people's permission to print their remembrances. We make an open invitation to anyone who wishes to submit a remembrance of Rev. Kubose to be included in this booklet. As an expression of appreciation, this booklet will be given to the many people who have expressed their sympathies. This collection of individual remembrances will give a concrete historical perspective as well as a great personalized tribute to Rev. Kubose's life.

During his active life of over 60 years as a minister, Rev. Kubose kindled a flame that has provided light and warmth to many people. It is the intent of the Kubose Dharma Legacy to maintain and build this flame to an even greater brightness that will help future generations to nurture and deepen their spiritual lives. The Kubose family is very appreciative that the Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose Dharma Legacy has been established. Without such an organization, Rev. Kubose's influence could gradually become just a warm memory of a past time in history. After such a productive life, it would be sad if his contributions did not continue their influence. Many donations in memory of Rev. Kubose have been made to the Kubose Dharma Legacy. These donations will help in the reprinting of Rev. Kubose's books, the publishing of new works, and also will go towards the printing of the "Remembering Sensei" booklet.

Looking to the future, beyond those whose lives Rev. Kubose directly touched, the Kubose Dharma Legacy asks for your help in expanding our communication network. We would like to keep you on our mailing list to receive our free quarterly newsletter,

"Oneness." In addition, we would like you to ask your relatives and friends if they'd like to be on our mailing list. We feel all people can benefit from Rev. Kubose's teachings regardless of their religious orientation. Rev. Kubose's approach goes beyond the usual idea of religion; his teachings are so open and easily applicable to everyday life that they can help someone become a better Christian or even a better atheist. In short, to become a better human being, a person who lives his or her own true and real life. The most important thing is to live a meaningful, creative life— living with inner peace and in harmony with others. A spiritual life is to live joyfully— with genuine acceptance of life's realities and deep gratitude for all that one has received.

The whole purpose of the Kubose Dharma Legacy is to help people by perpetuating Rev. Kubose's Way of Oneness. The Kubose Dharma Legacy is not a membership organization but is an educational resource. We can work towards fulfilling our purpose only by reaching out to others by word of mouth. We ask for your help. We invite you to become an "ambassador" for the Kubose Dharma Legacy. Being a new, small and independent organization, we need your help in actively spreading the word— by doing things like: adding interested persons to our mailing list, buying Rev. Kubose's books for friends, telling others about our website (brightdawn.org) or our Dial-the-Dharma "Inspirational Hotline," which consists of daily taped telephone mini-teachings (Call 847-677-8053 and hear Rev. Kubose's voice!). Help us to help others. In this way, our purpose will be fulfilled as the impact of Rev. Kubose's life expands in ever-widening circles. This is how we can best honor and remember Rev. Kubose. Thank you very much.

In Oneness,

The Kubose Dharma Legacy

The purpose of the Kubose Dharma Legacy is to offer a non-sectarian, non-dualistic approach, the Way of Oneness, to further individual spiritual growth in everyday life for people of all backgrounds.

EVERYDAY IS THE LAST DAY

Rev. Gyomay M. Kubose

A group of students was visiting the temple recently and I talked to them about Buddhist teachings. Afterwards there were questions and one student asked what the Buddhist way of life was. I said that it was to live each day most beautifully and most meaningfully. Then he asked what happens when we die. I explained that Buddha did not talk about such unknowable things as what happens after death. Philosophers may speculate about such things, but Buddha always said that the most important thing is here and now, how you live the present moment. This is important because all things are subject to change. Life is transitory; we should live each day the best we can. Then if anything happens there is no regret. Each day is complete in itself. Live every day sincerely because each day is the last day.

The reality of this truth really hit me because last week several friends passed away. One was only 20 years old. He was a straight "A" student in his second year of college. His father was very proud of him and expected a great future for his son. The son

developed liver trouble and was sick only about a week before he died. Death came unexpectedly and the father took it very hard. His sadness was so deep. There were no words to comfort him. However, this is the reality of life. Time is the only thing that will heal his wounded heart.

Another person, one of our older members, was 90 years of age. Her husband also died about six months ago. After her husband was gone, she was so lonely. Although she had no prior health trouble, she suddenly died. It often happens that when one's life companion passes away, the other person does not live too long. This aged couple was one such example.

When we hear about the death of someone, we are saddened. It also makes us think more deeply; we realize we are subject to death too, regardless of age or health. Suppose you were sentenced to death next week by your doctor, you would think about life. Unless we think and remind ourselves, our lives become monotonous and our lives will just pass us by. Each day will be just another day. However,

when a friend passes away, particularly a young person, the reality of death hits close to home.

A very good friend and a charter member of our temple moved to California many years ago. About a month ago he called me and said, "Well, Sensei, I have cancer. The doctor says that it is terminal. The first thing I thought about was you and I had to call you." Yesterday somehow I thought of him and called to see how he was doing. He spoke in such a small voice and said, "Please remember me. I think my end is coming soon." I couldn't help but shed tears. We spoke for a while and said good-bye. It was such a sad good-bye. This is the reality of life and it always comes back to me and it comes back to you.

I am reminded of Buddha's teaching, "*Ichigo, ichie.*" *Ichigo* means "one Life" and *ichie* means "meets only once." So the teaching means that we meet only once in a lifetime. That is to say, every time is the last time. I meet you today but who knows if we are able to meet next Sunday. So, Buddha said, "Every day is the last day." We should live accordingly.

From Kubose, G.M. *The Center Within*. Union City, CA: Heian International, Inc.; pp. 124-126.

Oneness Newsletter Summer 2000

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Fall issue deadline: October 15

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Dharma Talk in Memory of Rev. Gyomay Kubose

(Adapted from Talk by Rev. Koyo Kubose at the April 8, 2000 Memorial Service.)

It was back in the 1920's when a young man read a certain book and said to himself, "Wow, a life like this is possible!" He was inspired and wanted to live the life described in the book, which was written by Rev. Haya Akegarasu, a well-known Buddhist leader in Japan. The young man, Masao Kubose, had his life turned completely around by this book. He became an earnest spiritual seeker. He enthusiastically became involved in local Buddhist activities. Sometimes his progressive views were controversial. Much later, at family gatherings, he would reminisce and say, "In my youth I was kind of a radical."

Such reminiscing was not common. If we tried to interview him about his younger days, he wouldn't say much. So, we learned the best way was to offer him some wine and then casually ask, "How was it in those old days?" One time he told us how oratorical contests were often held at temples. He was to speak at one and there was a flyer announcing the event posted inside a store window. On the outside of the window, someone had smeared dog feces over the flyer. He must have been quite an out-spoken radical in those days.

After finishing college, he married his "lily of the valley" and they went to live at Rev. Akegarasu's temple, which was located in northern Japan. It was cold in the winter and sometimes snow would pile up quite deeply. During their first winter there, I imagine this young couple snuggling under the futon covers in the early morning hours, talking as couples often do after waking up. Expecting their first child soon, they talked about their dreams for the future. Being inspired by Rev. Akegarasu's teachings, they shared a vision of spreading the Buddhadharma in America. When their baby was born in December, 1936, he was named Dawn Akeru. Akeru means "to open up." Their dream and vision was the opening up of a new dawning of Buddhism in America.

They stayed in Japan for five years. The young Masao Kubose received from his teacher the Dharma Name of "Gyomay" which means "bright dawn." The sun symbolizes the Buddha's teachings, and represents light or wisdom and also warmth or compassion. The sun can be considered the source of life itself. Just as the earth would be a cold, dark place without the sun, so human life would be cold and dark without the wisdom and compassion of the teachings.

The sun theme would be continued in how the young couple were to name their next two children. Leaving Japan in July, 1941, they caught the next to the last ship

back to America before World War II broke out. While staying in Los Angeles, their second son was born in December, 1941. They learned that the medieval English word for sun was "sunna." To make it sound better, they put an "n" at the end, to make it "Sunnan." The middle name given was Koyo, which means "to face the sun." Along with many Japanese Americans, they spent several years in war relocation camps. Then they relocated to Chicago, where a daughter, Joyce Terumi, was born in September, 1946.

There is a story behind how the three children were named. First, there is the dawn, and then one naturally turns and faces the sun. The sun brings happiness and joy (Joyce). The sun shines beautifully, which is the meaning of "Terumi." So, there is a new dawning of the Dharma teachings in America—and in oneself. As the sun (Dharma teaching) rises, you turn and face the sun. You rejoice and your life shines beautifully. With their three children's names reflecting their vision of Buddhism in America, Rev. Gyomay and Minnie Kubose started their new life in Chicago.

The Chicago Buddhist Church was established on the south side in the Hyde Park neighborhood. The family lived in a two-flat behind the church at 5487 S. Dorchester. The telephone number was Plaza 2 0966. Following the advice of Rev. Akegarasu, his teacher in Japan, Rev. Kubose started an independent movement in America. Being politically independent from any administrative headquarters in Japan, Rev. Kubose was free to express and emphasize a non-sectarian, non-dualistic approach to the Buddhist teachings.

What do the words "non sectarian" and "non dualistic" mean? What kind of definitions do different people put on them? For Rev. Kubose, there was always the recognition of the richness of one's roots, lineage and tradition; yet, being progressive and starting an independent movement was difficult at times. It was difficult because sometimes people are not comfortable with new ideas or new ways of doing things. As a religion develops in a new culture, there is always a challenge of what to keep and what to change. If "non sectarian" is a confusing word, "all sectarian" could be used to describe Rev. Kubose's openness to teachings across sectarian boundaries. For example, he started a meditation group in the early 70's. In the Jodo Shinshu tradition, meditation is commonly frowned upon as a "self-power" Zen practice. Now, Shin Buddhist temples in America are more open to meditation but in earlier years, it was a radical thing to do any kind of meditative prac-

tice. Rev. Kubose was ahead of his time and it wasn't easy because doing something different elicits criticism and pressure from conservative sectarian elements.

In addition to "non sectarian," the word "non dualistic" is used in a statement of his temple's founding principle. What does "non dualistic" mean? In a religious context, it means that Buddha and I are not two. The Buddha is not a savior and I am not the saved. The statue of Amida Buddha is not a deity to be worshipped. The concept of Amida can mistakenly be made into an object of worship. This is an example of subject-object duality; that is, I (as subject) worship Amida (as object). A statue, being an external object, tends to foster this kind of subject-object duality. This is why Rev. Kubose rarely talked about Amida Buddha in his Dharma talks from the pulpit. He did not want to objectify Amida as something outside oneself. Instead, if asked to explain what Amida means, Rev. Kubose would often say that Amida was Life itself. This means that you and Amida are inseparable. You and Amida are not two things in a relationship but there is an identity that transcends subject-object duality.

It is difficult to communicate this kind of non-dualistic viewpoint. Yet, even when talking to children, Rev. Kubose never said things like, "Amida loves you." He never used phrases like, "Amida's compassion" or "Amida's Light." Rev. Kubose would put his hands together in *gassho* quite frequently; however, he would not advocate doing *gassho* to Amida as though Amida was something "over there," outside of oneself.

Rev. Kubose was a simple person. He lived a kind of life that can be called "everyday suchness." Suchness refers to things "just as they are" or "sonomama" in Japanese. One who lives such a natural life is a Tathagata. Tathagata is another name for a Buddha. Tathagata means "thus come" or "come just as you are," that is, live your life with no artificiality or pretense. One is a Buddha with all of one's human blemishes and limitations. How can these apparent opposites go together? In a way, it's simple; yet, it's hard to understand too. This kind of dualism is like a koan. Rev. Kubose was like a koan— simple and deep at the same time. He was a person who was more than meets the eye; he was not easily understood. One does not solve a koan by ordinary reason and logic. A koan is solved by accepting that koan as it is, by living that koan, by becoming one with it. Rev. Kubose's life and teachings were "sonomama," which is the suchness of "things just as they are."

Prior to Rev. Kubose's memorial service, a reporter called and asked me, "What did your father teach you?" I didn't know exactly what to say but I replied, "He never taught me anything... but I learned a lot." The way he

lived was his teaching. He never said, "I am the teacher, follow me." The life of oneness transcends the teacher-student duality. Of course, oneness does not mean sameness. Each of us is a unique individual of absolute value, and at the same time, we are interconnected. This is oneness. It is only by truly respecting one's own uniqueness that one can also respect another's uniqueness. This is a profound teaching. It is one thing to talk about it but it is another thing to really live it. This is why Rev. Kubose's life is so inspiring. He respected his own uniqueness and lived his own true and real life. It wasn't easy to be different and to start an independent movement of Buddhism in America. There's a saying, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." However, every once in a rare while, there's a nail that does not yield to the hammer. This should inspire one to respect oneself as a unique individual of absolute value. One does not have to find one's worth only in comparison to others.

It is easy to talk about respecting others but it is difficult not to be victimized by one's own pride and ego with regard to status and position. For example, "I am a Buddhist priest and others should pay proper respect to me." At most religious services, ministers sit on the *naijin*, the raised inner altar area. For Rev. Kubose's memorial service today, the ministers are not on the *naijin* but are seated on the same level as the congregation. The family arranged for this kind of seating because Rev. Kubose was a man of the people. His sincere humility went beyond the usual priest-layperson duality. Historically, Buddhism in 13th Century Japan started to become more lay oriented. Prior to this time, monks were required to cut ties with family and the secular world. They lived celibate secluded lives in mountain monasteries and came down only to teach to the aristocracy in large temples. However, particularly when Shin Buddhism developed, priests and lay persons were considered "fellow travelers" of the Dharma path. Buddhism came down from the mountains to the common people.

Rev. Kubose exemplified this kind of spirit of "going to the people." A minister from the Evanston Unitarian Church told me he once brought a group of students to visit Rev. Kubose's temple. Rev. Kubose came forward and greeted the group as they came in and he also went to the door and saw them off when they left. The minister explained to me, "Most religious leaders sit back and let the people come to them. It's a status thing; the less important should come to the more important; the big shot says, 'What can I do for you?' Some ministers have their noses up in the air and patronize laypersons. But your father went to the people. I only met your father this one time but I was impressed by

his sincerity and humility. I am sure he is especially loved because he was a man of the people and never considered himself above them.”

As I come to the close of my Dharma talk, it is worth noting that today’s memorial service is being held on April 8, Gautama Buddha’s birthday. “Birth” or “being born” has important spiritual meaning. I like the word “spiritual” rather than “religious.” There’s nothing wrong with the word religious and there’s nothing wrong with tradition and established rituals that have been passed on to us by virtue of the compassion of past generations. However, spirituality is something shining brightly in a person. It is not something in books or in the rituals. There is something alive and vital in spirituality. There is something universal that encompasses all religious traditions. For example, spring is a time not only of Buddha’s birth but is also when Christians observe Easter. The essential aspect of Easter for Christians is that when Jesus died and became mankind, it means Christ has to be born in oneself. Easter has no spiritual meaning unless it means one’s own resurrection. Easter is not

just celebrating an historical event. It is the same for Buddhists regarding the Buddha’s birth. It is not just celebrating something that happened 2500 years ago in India. Observing the Buddha’s birth has no real meaning unless it means one’s own spiritual birth.

I would like to say that the same message applies here today. This memorial service is not just about commemorating the life of a great person. There is deeper meaning only if you are inspired to be reborn spiritually. The only true significance is if you see a “new dawning” in yourself. There is real impact only if you face that morning sun—and you can shine beautifully too! This teaching is the gift we receive and it is also the highest tribute we can give. So, do your own spiritual ritual every morning. Maybe you don’t get up early enough to see the dawn, but you can see the morning sun every day. Face and bow to the morning sun. Live each day as a new day. Do you want to remember Rev. Kubose? Do you want to bring wisdom and compassion into your life? Well, look at the morning sun— that’s “Gyomay,” the bright dawn—a bright dawn for your own life.

Acknowledgements with Gratitude

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Legacy Catalog

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EVERYDAY SUCHNESS. A classic collection of short articles first published in 1967, hailed as one of the most significant books in Buddhism because of its simple explanations and reference to everyday life. 142 pages.

THE CENTER WITHIN. This continues the approach of "Everyday Suchness" and speaks directly to the ordinary layperson. The collection of 58 essays reflects Rev. Kubose's unique, down-to-earth presentation of the Dharma teachings which offer to all people a richer, more meaningful life. 134 pages.

THE CENTER WITHIN audio cassette; 3 hours.

AMERICAN BUDDHISM. Covers a brief history of Buddhism in America, Four Noble Truths, Eightfold Path, problems in terminology and misunderstandings common to Westerners. 29 pages.

Translations by Rev. Gyomay Kubose

THE FUNDAMENTAL SPIRIT OF BUDDHISM by Haya Akegarasu (Rev. Gyomay Kubose's teacher). Translated by Rev. Kubose, this book gives an idea of Rev. Akegarasu's life (1877-1954) and teachings. 87 pages.

TAN BUTSU GE. (Translation and commentary). This sutra tells the story of Dharmakara who became Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light. 56 pages.

HEART OF THE GREAT WISDOM SUTRA. (Translation and commentary). This sutra deals with the teachings of non-self and nothingness. 35 pages.

Highly Recommended Books

INVISIBLE EYELASHES by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano. Combines time-honored Buddhist teachings and stories with examples from modern life to show how attitude affects happiness and how flexibility of mind helps us grow spiritually, making us more productive at work and better able to relate to others. 175 pages.

OCEAN: AN INTRODUCTION TO JODO-SHINSHU BUDDHISM IN AMERICA by Rev. Kenneth K. Tanaka. Uses a question and answer format to present Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism and to answer questions frequently asked by non-Buddhists. This book can help Jodo-Shinshu Buddhists understand their own religious tradition and also help in communicating it to others. 270 pages.

RIVER OF FIRE, RIVER OF WATER by Taitetsu Unno. Introduces the Pure Land tradition of Shin Buddhism using personal anecdotes, stories, and poetry. The Pure Land practice is harmonious with daily life, making it easily adaptable for seekers today. With spiritual insight and unparalleled scholarship, this book is an important step forward for Buddhism in America. 244 pages.

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THE MONK WHO DARED by Ruth M. Tabrah. A historical novel of Shinran, the founder of Jodo-Shinshu Buddhism. Set in 13th century, this story covers the drama and crucial inner changes of Shinran's life. 329 pages.

Kubose Dharma Legacy

Oneness Newsletter

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JUL	Theme: Patriotism Purpose: Be grateful for the freedom our country allows us. Method: Pause to Gassho whenever you notice an American flag.
AUG	Theme: Time Out Purpose: Mental time out exercise when you feel yourself getting consumed by your thoughts. Method: Clap you hands together and listen to the sound they make. Clear your mind. Clap your hands several times if necessary.

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