
O N E N E S S

Quarterly Newsletter of BRIGHT DAWN: Institute for American Buddhism

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DHARMA ROCKS

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

Don't you just love the double meaning of this title? I don't know how or when the word "rock" started to have the meaning of something or someone being great—as in "That rocks!" or "You rock!" Indeed, the Dharma does rock. However, the present essay is about the conventional meaning of rocks; as in, pebbles and stones.

This past summer I participated in two funeral/memorial services. One service was for a long-time family friend who had retired to Peachtree City, near Atlanta, Georgia. The deceased was a 74 year old woman, survived by a husband, six children, and numerous grandchildren. The other service was for my aunt in Fowler, which is near Fresno, California. My aunt was 88 years old, survived by a husband, four children, three grandchildren, and quite a number of relatives as she came from a family of seven siblings.

In both services I introduced the use of Dharma rocks. I explained that, to the husband, children, and all the family members, the deceased was their solid foundation. She was their "Rock." I mentioned that it was similar to the meaning of that song in the Chevrolet truck commercial, "Like a rock." This brought a few smiles.

As part of the service, a basket of rocks was placed on the altar table.



The rocks came from various places, including where the deceased had grown up or lived. Some people brought rocks from their own backyard. During the service sutra chanting, each person offered incense, chose a rock, purified the rock in the incense smoke, and saved the rock for a future use. Earlier I had explained the background of how these Dharma rocks could be used. I described how in recent years

I started making what could be called "Pebble Offerings."

Whenever going on a vacation, I would take some small rocks from home and then leave one at a scenic viewpoint or throw one in a body of water, as a gratitude offering for nature's beauty. In this way, any trip can be turned into a spiritual pilgrimage.

Pebbles are great because they don't leak or break, and they don't pollute the environment. In my travels, I've left pebbles in many places—on the Mendenhall Glacier in Juneau, Alaska, next to a sleeping alligator in the Florida Everglades, and on top of Diamond Head in Hawaii.

I started using rocks in different ways. I've written an inspirational word on a flat stone and skipped it out into Lake Michigan. I made a spiritual vow and confirmed or testified to it by throwing a special rock into the Grand Canyon. Once when I was a guest speaker at a conference in Hawaii, I felt very thankful for all the

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Aloha hospitality I had received. One morning I strolled along Waikiki Beach at sunrise. I collected small pieces of coral that had washed up on shore. I later distributed these coral to the conference attendees as an expression of my gratitude. The conference program included a special service on the beach. I told the attendees they could make a “spiritual wish” and throw their coral back into the ocean.

Rocks can be used to represent any kind of teaching or internal reflection. One time my heart was heavy with concern for a troubled friend. I sent him a heart-shaped stone (pictured on page 1) that I had found during a walk in the woods. Somehow that stone lifted my spirits and I told my friend that I hoped it would do the same for him. Ever since then, I have recommended getting out in nature whenever one is troubled. Look around and find a nice stone. I found that such “stone therapy” works amazingly well. And don’t you like the double meaning of the word “stone”— as used in the song lyrics, “I’m stone in love with you.”

I also started using rocks as memorial offerings. On a trip to North Carolina, I buried rocks next to the graves of some friends. They were colleagues of mine when I taught at the university there some 30 years earlier. I recall that it is perhaps an ancient custom to place a rock on the top of a tombstone. Recently I started using rocks at cemetery burial services, having each family member place a rock in the hole before the urn is buried. This led me to start using rocks during funeral and memorial services too. In fact, for the family friend that had passed away in Georgia, I gave her the Dharma Name of MYOSEKI, which means in Japanese “Exquisite Stone.”

The service I conducted for my aunt in California was an informal service at the family’s home the night before the funeral. There was a sizeable crowd of about 50 relatives, including many children. As I mentioned earlier, there was a basket full of small rocks on a table in front of the family altar. I told everyone that they should save the rock they took, for the funeral service the next day. At the end of the funeral service when putting a flower into the casket, they could put their Dharma rock inside the casket too.

There is something nice about having a rock in one’s hand. At the conclusion of the home service, the children excitedly showed me the rocks they had picked. Indeed, each rock was unique and special. Since there was an abundance of rocks in the basket, I told everyone to take as many rocks as they wanted. Several people got rocks to put in the casket for people who were not able to attend; such as some of the spouses of out-of-town relatives.

The home service had such a warm feeling since it was all relatives. Plus, it took place after a delicious pot-luck dinner where everyone brought their favorite home-made recipes. After the service I overheard interesting conversations. One person had a rock the size of a golf ball. She said she traded several of her smaller rocks for it. Someone said, “Be careful when you put it in the casket. We’ll know who it is if we hear a loud ‘Thud!’” Then someone joked, “Yeah, what are you trying to do? Wake up Auntie?”

The comfortable family atmosphere enabled the expression of therapeutic healing humor. Another humorous exchange was when I referred to a reading I had done during the service, of a passage I had written, “The Dharma is my Rock.” I said I hoped that in a few years it’d be nice if the passage became as popular among Buddhists as the Lord’s Prayer is for Christians. Someone quipped, “You should get royalties!” and I replied, “You’re my manager!”

The passage “The Dharma is my Rock” is printed in this newsletter issue. If you like it, save it and share it with others. Also printed in this issue, is another passage I wrote that I use at funeral and memorial services. It is titled, “A Meditation upon the Loss of a Loved One.” I offer these readings for all who have lost a loved one. I end this essay, bowing with palm to palm... in Gassho.

 *Dharma Glimpse* 

Several months ago I started to restore the Yamaha 250cc DT-1 dirt bike that I have had since 1969. I had bought it new when we were living in Foster City, CA. Shortly thereafter we moved to Maryland where we first rented a townhouse in Rockville and then bought our house in Olney where we lived for 14 years. I rode the bike in all the places we have lived (now in Fowler, CA).

I hadn’t worked on the bike since it has been so hot but with the cooler weather I started again. I took the engine off the frame and started to clean off the 37 years of accumulated dirt. It occurred to me that the dirt was from all the places where we had lived! It became a very moving experience to scrape off the dirt. The accumulated dirt became the “Oneness” of my life - it tied together all the people, experiences and places that the motorcycle and I had shared.

The bike is now all apart and all the pieces are scattered on my work benches. As I begin to reassemble the bike I cannot help but relive all the memories of the past 37 years. This project has truly become a spiritual adventure.

Don Kubose (CA)

The Dharma Is My Rock

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

Many things are happening
In my life right now.
Underlying it all
The Dharma is my Rock.

Beyond good and bad
Beyond sorrow and joy
The Dharma is whispering
Everything is Okay,
Even when things are not going okay.

Eyes full of tears
Heart heavy with pain
Stone therapy helps me see
The Suchness of all things.

Dharma rocks
No matter where
placed, dropped or thrown,
Are hugged by the earth
With respect and gratitude.

Yes, I will struggle;
Yes, things may not turn out
Exactly the way I would like.

Yet, I will keep going
Forward with a smile
Because I know
The Dharma is my Rock.

A Meditation Upon the Loss of a Loved One

by Rev. Koyo Kubose

Though our loved one is not with us in body;
He is with us in spirit always.

Into the spiritual world of Oneness
He has followed his loved ones.
Into that Oneness
Loved ones will join him in the future.
No one is ever alone.

Like currents in time
Lives flow together
And cannot be separated from one another.
You cannot see one life
Without seeing the influence of other lives.

This is the Oneness of Life;
It underlies all individual lives.

To lose a loved one
Is the saddest thing in life.
We ask not to be removed from our sorrow
But to find the courage to accept it.

Our response to sorrow is to cultivate wisdom.
May the seeds of wisdom, watered by our tears,
Blossom into compassion.

Only the eye of understanding
Can see into the heart of caring.
Thus we go beyond our individual sorrow
And find comfort amidst our tears.

Oneness Newsletter Autumn 2006

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The purpose of the Bright Dawn Institute is to offer a non-sectarian, non-dualistic approach, the Way of Oneness, to deepen individual spirituality in everyday life for people of all backgrounds.

TIME AND PLACE

by Dean Raffaelli

If you have ever stood at the edge of the Grand Canyon and looked out across the great expanse of air that separates one canyon wall from the next, you will know what I mean when I say it has a certain grandeur about it. It is one of the few places that make the immensity of geologic time palpable. This and other places of natural splendor make us hope to savor them time and again.

Closer to home, I spend a lot of time on my boat in Montrose harbor. The harbor slowly comes to life in May, peaks in mid-August and then quickly fades into September. I have come to cherish this yearly ritual. Seated in the pilothouse, I watch all the comings and goings, and allow my brain just to float. I do not interfere with or try to censor my thoughts. They just are and I suppose this is the Nothingness that Buddhist scholars write so eloquently about.

I have found the best time for “nothing” is Sunday afternoon when most of the weekend’s revelers have docked their boats and are clogging the exits out to the city. The wind gets a little cooler and the sun, still high in the sky, casts an ethereal glow over the boats downstream; lighting up the colors as if backlit.

This is nature’s high-definition TV without the monthly cable bill. I used to leave early, mistakenly trying to beat the traffic. Then one day, realizing I was missing out on the best moment of the weekend, decided to let everyone else ruin their weekend stymied in the congestion.

We would all like to repeat these special times and places, and not just reminisce about them. One of the basic tenants of the Tea Ceremony, *ichigo-ichie* (one meeting-one time), in its simple way describes the impossibility of truly achieving this goal, but try we will and often come close to succeeding.

Chanoyu, the Tea Ceremony, creates a special time and place. As incongruous as it may seem to spend a

lifetime of study to make a bowl of tea, the practice transforms time and place. Wherever it occurs, be it at a large recreational complex for Japan Day, at the Japanese Cultural Center tucked away in a large high-rise on Chicago Avenue or in a rustic thatched hut in a Japanese garden (a rarity for us), Tea alters time and place.

Ordinary as the venue may be Tea consecrates the surroundings. Why is this the case? It might be the intensity of study, similar to the thrill the Olympics brings to sports seldom seen outside of the four-year cycle. While we concentrate on football, baseball and basketball, the adherents of esoteric Olympic sports are hard at work quietly honing their skills. Tea practitioners spend a lifetime doing the same.

Practicing all over the world, guided by their teachers, waiting for the right constellation of event to come together for their inner skills to be publicly manifested. I remember my inaugural outing only six months after my first Tea lesson. It was at the annual meeting of the Urasenke Chicago Association that was held that year in a Japanese steak house. Not at all my idea of an ideal setting.

But as the time and place came together with the first drawing of water from the singing iron kettle a greater truth entered my soul and never left. Just like the Grand Canyon, there is a feeling of geologic time in Chanoyu. Maybe cultural time is a more fitting description. Chanoyu provides a sense of the immensity of Homo sapien’s time and cultural development on earth. A sense that with the hurried pace of change is becoming more fleeting day-by-day.

(Dean Raffaelli, D.O. is president of the Chicago Urasenke Association. This article appeared in the Chicago Shimpō, August 18, 2006; and is reprinted with the author’s permission.)



Reader Reply

Greetings!

I just wanted to send an e-mail to state how much I appreciate receiving and studying the Oneness newsletter. As an isolated Buddhist far away from many Buddhist sanghas, I often have to find my own personal sangha in unique ways. I have become interested in folk music and dance from my cultural heritage and particularly in contra dancing. Contra dancing is a type of folk dancing related to English country dancing and American square dancing which is an excellent example of interdependence and oneness. At a contra dance, every person contributes to the dance and during the dance each person ends up dancing with every other dancer on the floor. Overall it creates a unique pattern based upon the interaction and steps of the dancers as given by the caller. Participating in the dance and following the calls can certainly be an exercise in mindfulness!

As a social worker, I experience the workings of interdependence in people's lives on a daily basis. Last year I gave some dharma talks at the local Unitarian Universalist fellowship and taught short classes there on basic mindfulness, meditation practices, and chanting (as my primary Buddhist influences prior to being introduced to Kubose Dharma Legacy was Shin Buddhism, Soka Gakkai (SGI), and Nichiren Shu). I'm looking forward to Rev. Koyo's book that he is working on as I am sure it will provide new treasures to mine.

Don't forget about the practices that might appeal to those of us who are musically inclined and learn through hearing and seeing. This is why I was initially attracted to Jodo Shinshu and Nichiren Buddhism as practices - the combination of chanting a rhythmic phrase (Nembutsu or Odaimoku) and/or sutra recitation to a visual object (a scroll of Amida or a Gohonzon). One practice that I find helpful in the vein of the Way of Oneness is to chant "Be One, Be Peace" in a position of gassho to an object such as a Dharma Wheel or a drawing of enso (a circle) as used in Zen. Five minutes of this every morning before work does wonders for my blood pressure and stress level (which can be quite high working as a social worker in child welfare).

David Salyers (Lancaster, CA)

We requested permission to use his personal chant in the YES section on our newsletter's back cover. Mr. Salyers responded:

You are more than welcome to use the chant in the newsletter if you think others may find it possibly useful. I use two forms: "Be One. Be Peace." for those who prefer a four syllable "mantra" like "Namandabu." Or "Be One. Be Love. Be Peace." for those who prefer the pace of a six syllable "mantra" like "Nam(u) Myo-ho Ren-Ge Kyo" or "Na-Mu A-Mi-da Butsu." People who like (or are drawn) to chant are attracted to the rhythm.

For me, the purpose of any practice is to encourage self-reflection, internalizing Buddhist teachings, and wonder/gratitude/awareness of the interdependent forces of the Universe (Dharmakaya - in Shin this is symbolized as Amida Buddha which allows practitioners to perceive these forces as "compassionate" and "caring" thus allowing us to relate to them easier, or as the Gohonzon in Nichiren Buddhism which is a calligraphic representation of the "Ceremony in the Air" from the Lotus Sutra which is also a representation of the interdependent forces of the Universe). In Gassho, David

American Buddhist Services

The Heartland Sangha holds 11 A.M. Saturday services at Lake Street Church, 607 Lake Street, Evanston (use courtyard entrance on Chicago Avenue).

Rev. Kubose's upcoming Dharma Talk titles are:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| Sep 16 | Enjoy Your Suffering
The Teaching of Accept/Transcend |
| Oct 7 | The Teaching of Non-Self
Self as process; verb not noun |
| Oct 21 | Bodhisavattas in Disguise
Dealing with "negative" people is the best spiritual practice |
| Nov 4 | Dharma Smiling
Smiling as practice and the fruit of practice |
| Nov 18 | Self Reflection and Gratitude
Importance of self reflection; transformative power of gratitude |

Mind/Body Seminar at the Midwest Buddhist Temple

Saturday, September 23, 2006

(Guest Dharma Teacher - Rev. Koyo Kubose)

SEMINAR SCHEDULE

DATE: Saturday, September 23, 2006
 TIME: 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
 PLACE: Midwest Buddhist Temple
 435 W. Menomonee St.
 Chicago, IL 60614
 LIMIT 45 people
 FEE: MBT Pledge member \$20.00; Non-member \$40.00 (Includes vegetarian pizza lunch, fruit, and soft drinks)
 NOTE: Please wear comfortable clothes like a jogging suit. Also bring a mat or blanket. No smoking, alcoholic beverages, or non-prescription drugs are permitted.

08:30 a.m. - 09:00 a.m.	Registration
09:00 a.m. - 10:15 a.m.	Yoga Practice by Dr. Susan Gilkey
10:15 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.	15 Minute Break
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Meditation & Dharma Talk by Rev. Koyo Kubose
12:00 noon - 01:00 p.m.	Vegetarian Pizza Lunch
01:00 p.m. - 02:15 p.m.	“Ki” Energy Movement by Dr. Michiyo Chew
02:15 p.m. - 02:30 p.m.	15 Minute Break
02:30 p.m. - 04:00 p.m.	Meditation & Dharma Talk by Rev. Koyo Kubose

Registration and payment is due by Tuesday, September 19, 2006. Please make check payable to Midwest Buddhist Temple, and send with your name, address and telephone number to: Midwest Buddhist Temple, 435 W. Menomonee St., Chicago, IL 60614

NOTE: Because of the lateness of this notice in our newsletter, it is suggested you call the Midwest Buddhist Temple at (312) 943-7801, M – F, 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. to see if you can make a late registration and pay upon arrival.

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YES YES Your Everyday Spirituality YES YES	
SEPT	<p>Theme: A Chanting Practice Purpose: Chanting a recitation as a meditative practice Method: Devise appropriate place and time to chant “Be One. Be Peace.” or “Be One. Be Love. Be Peace.” Use a constant repetitive rhythm or experiment with different rhythms; e.g. start slow, speed up, end slow; etc. See Reader Reply for the source and background of this chant.</p>
OCT	<p>Theme: Three Treasures Breathing Purpose: To become “one” with the Three Treasures; calm the mind and think clearly; settle down emotions and relieve stress; promote a broad perspective and a present-centered serenity. Wow, all that? Yes! Method: Take three very slow breaths by consciously controlling and slowing way down the flow of air; yet, keep your breathing a smooth, continuous process, without holding your breath or gulping in a rush of air after a long exhalation. You could use the second hand of a watch or clock as a timing aid; find your comfortable length of each in and out. Remember to “belly” breathe; i.e., belly (not shoulders) rising and falling. To do the Three Treasures recitation: On the first breath’s inhale, say “Bu.....” and on the exhale say “da.....” On the second breath’s inhale say “Dhar.....” and on the exhale say “ma.....” On the third breath’s inhale say “Sang.....” and on the exhale say “ah.....” Extend each syllable recitation for the complete duration of the inhale or exhale.</p>
NOV	<p>Theme: Chanting Thank You Purpose: Expressing gratitude after a group gathering Method: At conclusion of a Dharma gathering, chant “Thank you” with someone leading the rhythm by clapping his/ her hands. Start slow, increase to fastest possible speed, then slow down and end with a final clap, with everyone putting hands together, bowing and saying a final “Thank you.”</p>